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A THRILLING PUBLICATION

POPULAR DETECTIVE

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The **GALLOPING CORPSES**
 A Keene Madden Novelet
 By STEWART STERLING

YOU ARE THE NEXT TO DIE
 An Exciting Mystery Novelet
 By PHILIP KETCHUM

JAN. 1950



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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1

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JANUARY, 1950

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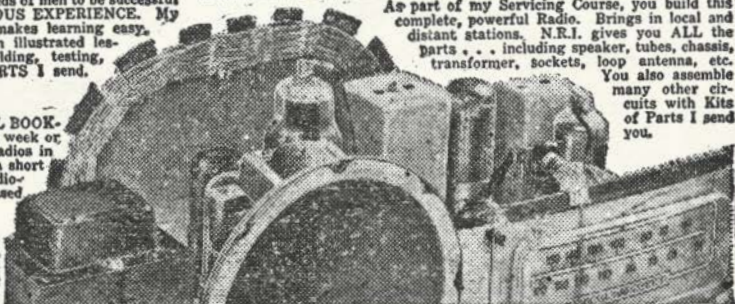


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A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

THE DOOR was closed, but light showed through the transom. Private Detective Michael Shayne inserted the key quietly and opened the door.

He heard a smothered cry of fright and stepped inside as a girl leaped up from a deep chair across the room and stood poised for flight, staring at him with round, violet eyes too big for her small face that was drained of all color. She was bareheaded, and her bright blonde hair fell in a tangled mass around the shoulders of a simple dinner frock that was wrinkled and showed a grass stain above one knee where she had apparently fallen.

The redheaded detective grinned broadly to reassure her, closed the door. "I'm Mike Shayne," he said pleasantly. "Who are you?"

"Mr. Shayne!" she gasped. She fell back into the chair like a limp rag doll. "I thought you'd never come," she sobbed.

An Amazing Tale

Shayne long-legged it over to the liquor cabinet and took down a bottle of cognac. He poured a little in a glass and made her drink it. She sat up straight and looked at him, and he had a feeling she was actually seeing him for the first time.

"I—didn't know what—to do," she stammered. "I should have gone to the police, but I was so frightened." Her voice trembled convulsively. "It's my brother. He's dead. Murdered."

"When? Where?" Shayne said quietly.

"At the Hibiscus Hotel. He phoned me to come there, to room four-twelve. He sounded upset. But when I got there, no one answered. Then I tried the knob. The door was unlocked. It was the sitting room of a suite, and he was lying there." She opened her eyes wide and her voice was

flat, devoid of all emotion. "His throat was cut. He was dead."

Shayne poured himself a drink of brandy. Sweat was streaming down his neck. "And?"

"I ran out to telephone."

"Wasn't there a phone in the room?"

"Yes. Of course. That is, there must have been one, but I knew it was murder and the police would want to take fingerprints. I found a phone in a room down the hall. I told the operator what had happened. Then I must have fainted. When I came to, I made myself get up and go back to my brother. I know I left the door open, but it was closed when I went back. I thought maybe the wind had blown it shut. It was still unlocked, so I went in. There wasn't anybody there. No blood. Nothing. . . ."

The Scarred Face

Shayne waited patiently and was about to ask a question when she blurted out:

"I thought I must be going crazy. I couldn't get my breath in there, so I ran out the door." She stopped and ground her teeth together to stop their chattering. "He was waiting there in the hall. He lunged at me the minute I stepped out the door."

"Your brother?"

She looked at him in round-eyed bewilderment. "I told you my brother was dead—murdered. This man was a stranger. I caught just one look at a scarred, ugly face as he jumped at me. I screamed and broke away. I made it here."

The telephone rang before she finished speaking. Shayne got up and answered it, frowning and rubbing his jaw as he hung up.

"Your scarred-face friend has traced you here," he said. "The desk clerk couldn't stop him. He's on his way up"

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 6)

The girl sprang to her feet, terrified. "Don't let him in," she screamed. "He'll kill me the way he killed my brother!"

"Nobody is going to kill you here," Michael Shayne said sharply, moving toward her and taking her arm. He thrust the girl toward the kitchen, pushed her inside—just as heavy, determined footsteps sounded in the corridor.

The Killer Knocks

A single hard knock sounded on the front door. Shayne crossed the room deliberately and pulled it open. The man with the scarred face confronted him . . .

That's the exciting beginning of **MURDER BEFORE MIDNIGHT**, by Brett Halliday, featured novel in our next gala issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**. You've all seen Michael Shayne on the screen at your favorite motion picture theatre. Now you can read about him at his roughest, toughest best!

The man at the door had an Army automatic in his hand, and he wanted to know where the girl was. Forcing the redheaded detective aside, he insisted on searching the apartment. But he hadn't reckoned with Mike Shayne! In short order Shayne acquired a gun of his own and disarmed the scar-faced intruder. And then the man told a strange story. He insisted the girl was his sister—and that he was the brother whom she had asserted was murdered!

Shayne was almost convinced that the corpse was purely imaginary—until it turned up floating in the bay just outside his window!

MURDER BEFORE MIDNIGHT is a yarn of whirlwind action, surprise and suspense. It will keep you puzzled—and chilled—right up to its last, dizzily-exciting page!

Dead Man's Request

And, speaking of corpses, we'll have a dilly for you in **THE \$100,000 CORPSE**, by Carroll John Daly, a complete novelet in our next issue. Fast-stepping Detective Race Williams usually didn't make deals with gangsters, but this was a little different. This professional criminal knew he was about to die, and he had a favor to ask of Race—one that would mean a lot to a sweet and inno-

cent girl living down on New York's lower East Side.

Race accepts the assignment—and then the fun begins. THE \$100,000 CORPSE really turns out to be a hundred grand worth of trouble, with Race Williams in it—right up to his neck! So for a fast and thrill-packed murder frolic, make a date with—THE \$100,000 CORPSE!

As always, we'll have an all-star assortment of other crime, mystery, and detective stories, both short and long, plus fact features in our next issue. Look forward to your next—POPULAR DETECTIVE!

LETTERS FROM READERS

THANKS for the many fine letters you have sent my way since our last time together. I see I have letters from just about every state in the union, and one from far-away Hawaii.

GUNMETAL FINISH, by Stewart Sterling, was far and away the best yarn in the issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE which I have just finished reading. That guy Sterling knows how to write a cops and robbers yarn like nobody's business, and waterfront sleuth Steve Koski gets my vote as the ace of them all.—*Chalky Evans, Westport, Conn.*

Thanks, Chalky. You may be interested to know that Steve Koski and his police boat will be prowling these waters soon again.

I agree with Fred J. LeFave of Louisville, Kentucky, who wants circus-murder yarns; on two conditions: One, Thomson Burtis writes them, and Two, the chief character is Rolph Burnham.—*Rex E. Ward, 305 E. Maple Ave., El Segundo, Calif.*

How do you other readers feel about cir-
(Concluded on page 98)

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by STEWART STERLING**



The GALLOPING CORPSES

CHAPTER I

DANGER—HIGH VOLTAGE

THE waitress leaned close. "Desert, Mister Madden?"

He stared up, startled. All the waitresses in their jockey costumes here at the Stirrup and Saddle were worth looking at, but the one who'd brought Madden his sirloin was some-

thing extra—small-boned, suggestively plump, with a pert elfin face under the long-billed jockey cap. Very cute indeed, in her scarlet satin blouse and shiny black riding boots. Under other circumstances, he might have patted the white, skin-tight breeches where

they fitted most snugly.

"I'll have apple pie," he said. "Did I meet you somewhere?"

She inspected him nervously, but didn't move away. "You really *are* a fast operator, aren't you!"

Keene shook his head. "I'm just asking where we met before, 's all."

"I never saw you until tonight, Mister Madden."

"How did you know my name?"

She glanced across the dance floor toward a smartly dressed young couple at a ringside table that must have set somebody back a tenspot to the head waiter. "One of the other girls heard Mister Larmin say things would begin to pop here at Saratoga now that they'd called you in."

"He said that, did he?" The expression on Keene's long, lean-jawed, weather-leathered features was merely one of mild curiosity. There was nothing in his voice to suggest his angry astonishment.

He'd been in Saratoga Springs less than an hour. It was his first visit to the sleepy old racing town. Only one person had known he was coming. As far as Keene could recall, he'd never run into any of the crowd he saw here at Stirrup and Saddle—certainly not at the West Coast tracks. Yet he'd been spotted before he'd even had a chance to look over the ground. It could be bad.

"Piece of cheese with the pie, sir?" She pretended to scribble on her pad. "Mister Larmin said you were here to put the chill on those sure-thing fixers."

"No sich animal as a sure thing." Crinkles deepened around his watchful gray eyes.

"That's what you think! Wait'll you see what goes on at the track here!" She bit her lip as if she'd said more than she meant to, and hurried away.

KEENE twisted in his chair, including the couple at the ringside table in his leisurely glance. He could have placed Clay Larmin without the waitress' remark. There was enough likeness to the famous portrait of General Larmin which hung in the august Jockey Club. The youth in the white dinner jacket had the same abnormally long,

sharp nose with the slightly upturned tip, the same bulging forehead above wide-set protruding eyes. But in the son's face there was something else—a petulance of the small, purse-mouth—which robbed his features of the character which showed so plainly in the portrait of the man who had been Mister Racing up to a decade ago.

The girl opposite Clay Larmin seemed to be annoyed with her companion. She sat stiffly erect with the high-bosomed carriage of a horsewoman. A frown puckered the warm tan of her boyish face. The agreeably wide mouth was tight-lipped. Even with the dim lighting of the Spa's smartest night spot, her smooth bob glistened like new copper wire as she bent forward to put her hand over the top of Clay Larmin's highball glass, shook her head pleadingly.

The waitress set a thick wedge of deep-dish apple pie in front of Keene.

"I think I'm going to like Saratoga." He gave her the slow up and down.

"It's a nice town—" she bent over so her lips were close to his ear as she set down his coffee up—"if you keep away from dark alleys."

"Oh." He smiled as if she'd just told him she'd cleaned up on a long shot. "Really?"

"I'm only kidding." She fiddled worriedly with sugarbowl and cream pitcher. "Will there be anything else, sir?"

"Some more dope." He used the cream. "If you have any . . . ?"

She bent her head, adding figures.

"Do you know anything definite?" he asked. She must have had a reason for letting him know she was aware of his identity. She hadn't been fooling about those dark alleys, either.

"I might." She put the check face-down on the table. "If it was worth something to me."

"When are you through?"

"One o'clock." She kept her voice low. "But I couldn't—"

Keene laid a bill on the table. When he took his hand away there was a small key on the greenback.

"Gray Buick, California plates. Far side of parking oval. See you there around one."

"No, no," she whispered, in a panic. "Not tonight. I couldn't possibly."

He moved away from the table. "Any trouble getting into there?" He pointed toward the ceiling.

She held the tip of her tongue between her teeth for a second. "I don't think so, sir. Through the men's room. But you'd better—"

"The change is yours." He sauntered on.

Twenty feet away he paused to light a cigarette, looked back. Money and key were both gone. The girl was going toward the cashier's wicket.

He headed for twin doors marked *Colts* and *Filhes*, pushed open the first one, went down a long hall, turned a corner. A short, squat-shouldered, bull-necked man in a bus boy's white coat was tossing silverware into racks. He eyed Keene stonily.

"Wash room's back there, bud," he said.

"Yeah. I'm a collector."

"Huh?" The man's eyes narrowed. He dropped his handful of knives and forks quickly.

"Of antiques," Keene said. "I'm interested in old spinning wheels."

"Ho!" The guard relaxed. "Spinning wheels, huh?"

"They tell me there are some fine specimens, upstairs." Keene held out a door bill folded lengthwise.

"That's right." The guard shoved the tip into his pants pocket. "They might be too expensive for you, though, mister."

Keene said solemnly, "I'll give 'em the once over."

The guard pointed to a door with a brass Yale lock and painted red letters: *Fuse Boxes. Keep Out.*

"Maybe you'll find something that suits you up there, at that."

Keene opened the door and went upstairs.

TWO wheels were in play, besides the crap table, a black-jack layout and a couple of chuck-a-luck cages. The biggest crowd was around one roulette table where everyone seemed to be rid-



Keene was pretty sure what he'd find even before he put his flashlight on it

ing on the swallowtails of a distinguished-looking individual, with a grizzled spade beard and shaggy eyebrows, who wore oxford glasses complete with black ribbon.

All the other white ties, doggy tweeds and strapless evening gowns waited for the bearded man to place his chips before making their bets. Most of the money went on the numbers where he dropped his chips. The description long-distanced to Keene had been surprisingly accurate.

"Who's the joe who looks like an ambassador?" he asked a chuck-a-luck girl.

"Calls himself Towbee." She was curt.

Keene watched the man haul in a stack of yellow ten-dollar counters. "He own a piece of the joint?"

The girl squinted at him suspiciously. "No, he doesn't. He's just having a run of luck. And the wheels aren't gimmicked, here. The blackjack dealer doesn't know how to second card. And you can test the dice in a glass of water before every pass, if you feel like it."

"Nice to know these things." He put a couple of greenies on the Low. The bird cage spun. The dice dropped High. He wandered over toward Towbee.

It would be difficult, he decided, to decipher the features hidden beneath that foreign-looking beard. The man might not have a criminal record, anyhow. All Keene knew about him was that Towbee wasn't known at any of the Eastern tracks. He'd come out of the blue and started to hit winners on the nose ever since the August meeting began here at Saratoga. His luck had been fabulous enough to make even the uppercrusters superstitious about his selections.

Of course horse-players did sometimes have winning streaks which defied all the mathematical laws of chance. But from the curious information in that urgent transcontinental call, which had brought Keene hurrying from Santa Anita, this Towbee wasn't even a regular follower of the bangtails. Nobody knew anything about him except that, from his familiarity with cards, dice and numbered wheels, he must be a professional gambler. In Keene's experience, professional gamblers didn't

have streaks of anything—except larceny—in their systems.

There was a little space around Towbee at the table. Apparently, no one wanted to crowd him. No one spoke directly to him, either, though there were frequent exclamations when other players won, following his lead.

Keene bought chips, ran a few bets on the black, doubling until he collected. Nobody paid any attention to him. Towbee gazed blandly at him, past him. Didn't even look at him a second time. After ten minutes, Clay Larmin and the copper-haired girl came upstairs:

The crowd paid plenty of attention to the heir of the Claybrook Stables:

"Rotten break in the fifth, Mister Larmin." . . . "Some days y' can't win a buck, boy." . . . "Better put Hy-wide up for claiming, Clay."

Larmin took it sourly, gave short answers. He bought a stack for the girl. She broke what was evidently a table custom by not waiting for Towbee to place his chips. She dropped a yellow on number 31, another on 5, one on 2. Her hand bumped Towbee's as she reached across the table.

Towbee smiled pleasantly, showing white, even teeth. "Pardon." He had the faint trace of an accent. Keene couldn't be sure whether it was phony or not.

The girl laughed uneasily. "Just trying to rub off some of your luck, Mister Towbee."

Young Larmin scowled at her, caught her arm.

Towbee shrugged, amused. "At roulette, I am not so fortunate. One cannot tell from the condition of the ball, how fast it will run or where it will stop, as with horses." He ignored Larmin.

The croupier called the spin, the ball rattled around the rim, stopped. Towbee won. The girl lost.

"Damn." She swore without vehemence. "I guess I'd do better to follow your lead, Mister Towbee."

LARMIN glowered, was about to pull her away from the table, when the chuck-a-luck girl who'd answered Keene's question came up, touched the youth on the sleeve. He bent his head to catch the message, turned to stare disagreeably at Keene for an instant,

then muttered something to his copper-haired companion. She made a face, cashed her remaining chips.

"Don't take it all," she called to Towbee agreeably. "Leave some for me."

The gambler waved a delicately manicured hand. She let Larmin escort her downstairs. Keene looked at his watch. It was five to one.

He'd better be at his Buick on the dot, or that waitress might get cold feet. She'd been scared to meet him at all. That could only mean she was afraid somebody'd be watching every step Keene Madden took. But nobody seemed to have any interest in his departure.

The guard downstairs merely grinned. "See anything you liked?"

"I made a down payment," Keene said, nodding.

The dining room was closed. There were no waitresses around. Neither Larmin nor the girl was at the check-room when he went out.

However, there were still plenty of cars in the parking oval.

He couldn't see into his Buick until he got close to it. The girl was already in the back seat, keeping out of the glare from the neons spelling out *Stirrup & Saddle*. He opened the door, saw the reflection of the neons on the rear fender dim momentarily as something cut off the light behind him.

He pivoted, throwing up an arm, lunging toward the back seat. He had a split-second glimpse of a bulky-shouldered figure—a rum-reddened nose beneath a low-pulled cap—before the length of pipe paralyzed his arm, exploded against his head.

He fell half into the car. His left foot caught the attacker six inches below the belt buckle. There was weight behind the boot, too. The man grunted, hit Keene again with the pipe across the knee-cap.

Keene tried to roll on his side to get at his hip pocket. The heavy-shouldered man smashed him across the mouth with the iron. Twisting further into the car, doubling his knees to get them free of the door, Keene reached up, grabbed the handle, jerked the door. There was an agonized yelp as the slamming metal caught the big man's fingers.

Keene snatched at the door handle again. From the darkness behind him, a bomb burst back of his ear. It was the last thing he remembered.

CHAPTER II

THE UNINVITED CORPSE

A TASTE of blood in his mouth. Teeth aching hideously. The top of his skull seemed to be alternately expanding and contracting. He had trouble focusing his eyes. It was the same nauseating sensation he'd experienced that time eight years ago, when his jumper had fallen at the hedge in the steeplechase.

Slowly, at the expense of dizzying pain, he pulled himself up off the floor of the car. His shoulders had been wedged between the back of the driver's seat and the front of the rear seat. His knees were doubled up, protecting his midsection. It must have been the only thing that had prevented his attackers from inflicting permanent injury.

Except for a light pickup truck and a station wagon with *Stirrup & Saddle* lettered on its door, the parking space was empty. He looked at his wrist-watch. That first smashing blow from the pipe had cracked the crystal, mashed in the works. The clock on the dash said ten past two.

He cursed himself for a stupe—letting himself be suckered into a trap like that. Yet if they'd only meant to wreck him within an inch of his life—to frighten him from Saratoga—how would they have dared use the waitress as a come-on girl?

Perhaps she would claim Keene had offered to drive her home after she'd finished working, then made a pass at her in his car—whereupon some club attendant had come to the rescue, beaten up her molester. If that kind of a story got into the papers, it wouldn't do Keene, or his chance of doing his job, any good whatever.

He got out of the car. The knee screamed at him. He gulped the cool night air to keep from being sick.

The Stirrup & Saddle was dark, upstairs and down. The neon sign was out. He tried to remember what car had been parked next to his. It didn't seem possible that anyone could have come as close to the Buick as the driver of the adjoining sedan must have, without noticing something was wrong. Still, he had been jammed down on the floor boards, pretty well hidden.

He slid in behind his own wheel. The rear-view mirror showed him a face masked with a smear of dried blood, puffy lips, a dilly of a shiner over his right eye. At that, he felt worse than he looked.

He found the flask in the glove compartment, soaked his handkerchief in bourbon, swabbed the blood off. The liquor stung his mouth. But he decided it might make his insides feel a little less shaky, and so he gave the flask a couple of good belts.

He rolled the Buick out onto the concrete, headed north toward Union. It took all his powers of concentration to handle the car, but jumbled questions kept doing nipups in his brain: Who had spotted him so swiftly? Why had somebody decided to discourage him before his investigation had even got under way? What was all that byplay up in the casino between Towbee and Clay Larmin's girl?

A red eye blinked in his rear-view mirror. He became aware of a siren. A cop! He slowed to twenty-five.

The motorcycle pulled alongside, waved him over. He braked to a stop. The state trooper came up to the window.

"Where's your tail-lights, Mac?"

"They out?" Keene's lips felt swollen up like a pair of frankfurters.

The trooper bent forward, sniffing. "Not so far from out yourself, are you?"

Keene opened the door, got out stiffly. From the whisky on his breath and the thickness of his speech, it wasn't surprising the officer thought Keene might have had more than he could handle.

"Couple of slugs too many, back at the Stirrup and Saddle." He touched his mouth "But from a fist. Not a bottle. I'm oke."

"Yeah?" The trooper peered at him, narrowly. "Let's see your license."

Keene fished out his wallet, held it open.

"Goin' far tonight?"

"Hotel. In town. Staying there."

"Better get those tail-lights fixed before you drive any more."

Keene stalked back into the glare of the motorcycle's headlight, banged one tail-light with the heel of his hand.

"Sure." Something red and shiny glinted on the white cement. As he stared at it, another drop fell from the rim of the trunk compartment. He put his shoe over it, quickly, as the trooper came around beside him. "First I knew of it."

THE trooper stood spraddle-legged, fists on hips, head cocked on one side as if listening for something. "You wouldn't of been in a smackup, Mister—uh—Madden?"

"Only with that poke in the puss." Keene pounded at the tail-light as if to jar apart a shorted connection, kept it up until the headlights of an approaching car were in the trooper's eyes. "But it's nothing a cold shower won't cure. I'll take it easy, to the hotel."

He took his time about getting back to the driver's seat. He started the Buick just as the oncoming car rushed past. He could see the trooper still standing there, eyeing him, as he gained speed, swung into Union Avenue. He lost the Cyclops headlight at the turn, waited for it to reappear as he circled Congress Park. It didn't.

When he reached Broadway he swung right. His hotel was off to the left. He wasn't familiar with the streets of Saratoga Springs, but the farther he got from the center of town, for a while, the better it suited him.

He drove for five minutes, found a dark side road, cut in, parked and switched off his lights. When he opened the trunk compartment, he was pretty sure what he'd find, even before he put his flashlight on it.

The waitress was lying face down, with her head on a spare tube, her knees curled up at her side, as if she'd just crawled in there to take a nap. She was wearing a white skirt and a dark red sweater instead of the jockey costume.

Somebody cried, "What West?" and everybody turned



The back of her head looked like something that had just oozed out of a meat chopper.

He made silent apology. *I had you wrong, babe. For them to cross you off the list, you must have really known something.*

The strap of her handbag was clenched tight in her fingers. The murderer hadn't bothered to remove it when he'd tossed her body in the trunk compartment.

Keene went through the bag while he tried to figure his next move.

It was a nice, tight frameup. After he'd been knocked senseless, somebody had fished the luggage compartment key out of his pants, unlocked the rear, put the dead girl in there and locked it up again. The wiring to the tail-lights must have been queered at the same time—with the expectation of having the cops stop him.

Unwittingly, Keene had put himself in an even worse predicament by swigging that whiskey, and informing a state trooper that there'd been "a little fracas" at the Stirrup & Saddle. Nothing to make a fuss about! Oh, no!

What he ought to do now was clear enough. He ought to drive straight to the Saratoga police station, report a corpse in the back of his car, and say he didn't know who'd put it there. Then they'd check up. Nobody at the night spot would know anything, except that Keene had been seen chumming up to the waitress. The trooper would testify Keene had been drinking. There'd be plenty of evidence of a struggle in the back seat.

They'd have to hold him for the Grand Jury. They'd release him on bail, on his record and character references. But his chances of finding out who'd beaten him up and killed the girl, would be gone. Even if the grand jurors failed to indict him, his usefulness as an investigator would be slightly less than nothing.

Put it the other way, he told himself, grimly. If you *don't* report the girl's murder, and if anything happens later to tie you in with her death, then where'll you be?

The best he could expect would be a guilty plea on "accessory after the fact."

Supposing he were lucky enough to draw a suspended sentence—still, the Protective Bureau couldn't afford to keep a convicted man on its payroll. . . .

The handbag contained the usual clutter: A purse with enough money to nullify any suggestion of murder for robbery, compact, lipstick, mirror, comb, matches, bobby pins, pencils, cigarettes, keys. In the zipper compartment at the side two envelopes addressed to *Miss Lola Gretsck, 917 Lake Avenue* and a couple of snapshots.

The envelopes contained one electric light bill, and one circular from a Saratoga store advertising an August fur sale. The snapshots were of a small, white frame cottage behind a picket fence. One showed the little waitress sitting on the doorstep looking demurely pretty in a polka-dot dress. The other had been taken in the winter. Snow was on the ground, with frosting on the eaves and on the long hood of a shiny Cadillac in the foreground.

He put the keys and photographs in his pocket, returned the rest of the stuff to the handbag. Then he used his flashlight until he found where the tail-light wiring had been cut. He made a temporary splice.

COMING out Broadway, he'd passed a Lake Avenue sign. He couldn't tell which way the numbers ran, or in how crowded a section 917 might be. When he got to the corner, he turned left, followed the numbers out a mile and a half. The houses became smaller, farther apart.

The darkened cottage he recognized from the snapshot was a good hundred yards from its closest neighbor. There was a big hip-roofed house diagonally across the road. No lights showed there, either.

He drove past without slowing, kept on for another mile before swinging around, coming back again. Nobody had tailed him. The nearest street light was at least a quarter of a mile from the cottage. The elm-arched avenue cut down that faint illumination almost to zero. There were no cars parked within sight. He drove fifty feet past the picket fence, pulled over to the side, cut his lights and sat motionless in the gloom

for the length of one cigarette, watching the cottage behind him.

One car sped past, heading for Schuylerville. He could see its headlights half a mile before it reached him. When it had gone, he took off his shoes, pulled on his driving gloves and went around back.

He opened the rear, picked up the body gently and then shut the trunk compartment.

Locating a gap in a hedge of lilacs, that almost sickened him with their sweetness, he stepped gingerly over a flower bed and swore softly as his stocking-feet found thorns from a rosebush. It was cloudy. Behind the cottage it was black as the bottom of a well. He didn't dare use his flashlight until he had to. He laid the corpse down beside a clump of hydrangeas.

There was no back porch—just a tiny stoop with three steps. He told himself that if there was anyone in the cottage they'd hear the pounding of his heart, before he knocked. His knuckles on the paneling sounded terrifyingly loud. At least, if there was anybody inside they'd be likely to challenge him before taking a pot shot at him.

But nothing happened.

He used the keys. The second one did it. The door squeaked when it opened, but the kitchen was silent and inky black. His palm over the lens of the flashlight let enough illumination leak out to show him past a refrigerator, a gas stove and a table—to a door. Sufficient light filtered in through curtained windows at the front of the cottage to show he was in the living room. Crossing to a door that evidently led into the front hall, he heard a board creak. He froze.

After a minute of holding his breath, hearing nothing except the hammering of his own pulse, he decided the creaking had been caused by the shifting of his weight on the floor. He listened at the door of the room on the opposite side of the hall. There was absolute quiet. It turned out to be a bedroom. With a double bed, neatly made up, empty.

There was a queer odor, something unpleasant. He couldn't give it a name, but it reminded him of New Guinea

where he'd spent those dreary months at the remount station. Or maybe it was the darkness and being keyed way up to there, that recalled the bad days to him.

He went out to the hydrangeas, brought the body in and put it on the rug beside the bed. The glimmer of light escaping from the lens in his palm reflected from a bureau mirror, glinted on a silver frame.

He moved past the dead girl, let a trickle of light fall on the photograph in the frame.

The prominent, bulging eyes of Clay Larmin stared arrogantly at him in the semi-darkness.

Down in the corner of the photograph was a scrawl: To Lola, with memories—Clay.

Keene whistled softly. Had it been that way? The only son and heir to the Larmin millions and the Larmin racing traditions—and a waitress in a none-too-respectable hot spot? That suggested a lot of possibilities—none pleasant. . . .

HE WAS still mulling over its possible significance as he picked his way back across the hall to the living room, out to the kitchen. The kitchen door was closed!

He knew he'd left it open. He'd had his hands too full, when he came in with the body, to do anything else. He hadn't heard the door close, either—so the night wind couldn't have slammed it. There wasn't enough breeze to rustle a leaf, anyway.

That creaking! There'd been somebody in there with him then—somebody who'd be able to identify him. Unless, of course, it had been the murderer himself.

There was also the chance the closed door was a decoy.

The unseen doorshutter might still be in there.

Keene felt his way along the wall in total darkness as he went back, let himself out the front door. He was cautious when he opened that, too. But he saw no one, heard nothing. The car was where he'd left it.

He took off his gloves, put on his shoes, drove back to the hotel.

CHAPTER III
FUNNY BUSINESS

THE SUN had just begun to gild the spires of the old Victorian cupolas on the grandstand as Keene crossed the clubhouse terrace. A light fog drifted lazily across the lake in the infield which losers called the Show Pool. The famous blue canoe tied to the bank swung slowly in the breeze.

A thin, harassed-looking man of about fifty, with a thick mustache dyed too black to match the iron-gray of his hair, detached himself from the little group of trainers and clockers watching the down gallops.

"Goshsake, Madden!" He opened his eyes very wide. "You have an accident, driving in?" He was Wesley Ottover, secretary of the local Racing Association.

"No." Keene shook hands with him. "What happened to me was strictly intentional."

Ottover studied the greenish eye, the criss-crossing of surgeon's adhesive at the corner of Keene's mouth.

"Somebody," Keene said, "sent a reception committee to greet me. At the Stirrup and Saddle."

The racing secretary made an O with his mouth. "Towbee?"

"Not in person. But he was around. I tried to reach you on the phone before I stopped in at his hangout. Young Larmin was there. He knew who I was. Whether Towbee did or not, I can't say." Keene didn't bother to add that Wesley Ottover was the only person who was supposed to have known the Protective Bureau man had been due to arrive last night.

The secretary took Keene's arm. "If you haven't had breakfast—"

"I'll have coffee," Keene said. "It's all I want. My face feels as if one of the Claybrook stallions had stamped on it. What I need is briefing."

Ottover picked a table near the rail, where they could appear to be watching the workouts. A waiter brought a white tablecloth, menus.

Ottover said, "Somebody must be getting worried, to give you a going-over like that. In a way, I'm glad, though I'm sorry you had to be on the receiving end. I was afraid they had things sewed up so tight nothing could bother them."

"Who do you mean?" Keene watched a colt breezing handily along the backstretch under an exercise boy.

"Towbee. And whoever's in the fixing with him."

"Young Larmin?"

"Lord, no!" Ottover was vehement. "He'd be the last person. Towbee's big coups have all been against Claybrook entries. Odds-on favorites, at that. That's the queer thing. All the mischief involves Larmin horses. I think Clay's been losing scads, betting on his own starters. I know the failure of the Claybrook silks to finish anywhere near their normal form is causing a lot of ugly talk."

"Jockey collusion?" Keene could see Earl Yolock—riding monkey-on-a-stick, high on his mount's withers—coming into the stretch, hand-riding a big black gelding. "Skit" Yolock was Claybrook's contract rider.

The secretary groaned. "Wish I could say. I can't put a finger on it, Madden. On the surface, Skit's as bothered about it as anyone. Frank Wayne, the Claybrook trainer, he's as near to a nervous collapse as a man of his disposition can get. Clay himself is jumpy as a waterbug—hardly civil to his own mother. She, by the way, is the only one connected with Claybrook who doesn't seem to be concerned about these cockeyed form-reversals."

The waiter said, "Eggs, sir?"

Keene shook his head. "Coffee's all." His teeth ached enough, without chewing. "Mrs. Larmin, now. She's hardly ever decent to anyone she doesn't consider her social equal, is she? And seldom meets up with anyone she admits to that classification?"

Ottover smiled, politely. "She can't help that high-toned lah-de-dah. It's bred in her. But under that crusty surface, she's a grand horsewoman, Madden. Up to this year, she's always been active in the management of the stables. She really ran them herself after the General died. Now she's beginning to

turn over the controls to young Clay. He's duty bound to carry on the Larmin tradition, you know—the first family of Saratoga—at least as far as racing goes. But he doesn't seem to be doing a very good job of it. Though I must say he doesn't interfere with Wayne, the trainer, much."

"And the mother? She doesn't interfere with Wayne?"

OTTOVER waved at a trainer who wandered past. "Not as far as the horses are concerned," he said carefully. "Apparently it doesn't trouble her at all when some Claybrook entry that's been made a two-to-one favorite loses by six lengths to some fugitive from a merry-go-round. It's ridiculous!"

"Yeah." Keene couldn't recall anything ridiculous about the way the back of the dead girl's head had looked. "What you find out about Towbee?"

"Next to nothing. Plenty of cash. No background we can discover. Lives alone at the Grand Union. Doesn't have any close friends. Spends his time here at the track from noon on—at the Stirrup and Saddle after the mutuel windows close. He must have taken close to a hundred thousand out of the tote pools—betting against Claybrook horses that were favorites in the morning line. Nowadays, no entry is a favorite unless he has some tickets on it."

"Pinkertons who police your track can't get anything on him?"

"No. Or anyone else. No point tracing his phone calls, of course. The operators at the hotel switchboard have been notified to keep their ears open, but they claim he doesn't get any tips via long distance. On the face of it, he's just a lucky larry with a fistful of dough who hits the jackpot once or twice a day. But—" Ottover gestured with his coffee cup—"he always make that big killing against a Claybrook horse. It's beginning to smell, Madden."

"What's the trainer say?" Keene noticed Skit Yolock's impatience with the mount he'd been exercising. The big gelding seemed logy, spiritless.

"Frank Wayne? He has plenty to say. He claims the horses that have beaten Claybrook entries in stake races must have been stimulated."

"Were they?"

"Our vet, Bill Sutterfield, says positively not. He and his assistants have been extra careful about samples. None of the tests have shown any narcotics."

Keene finished his coffee. "How've the Claybrook horses raced, compared with their time trials?"

Otover held his napkin to his mouth, coughed into it. "I haven't the figures here."

Keene waited.

The secretary fidgeted with salt and pepper shakers. "I don't want to go on record about it. You understand—my position—"

"I understand I had my face practically beaten off within two hours of hitting this town," Keene said quietly. "Don't nice-nelly around. What's the story?"

"The truth is, I believe the actual race times of Wayne's starters have been a second or two slower than the best workouts, in most of the—um—suspected races."

Keene stood up. "Let's look at those figures."

Ottover sighed. "They're in my office."

They walked across the dew of the paddock to the secretary's bungalow.

"I'm in an extremely difficult position, Madden."

"So was I. Last night."

"More precarious than mine, to be sure. But in my case—it's a question of my job. The Larmins are immensely powerful. I might say, they're in a controlling position in racing circles here. They can—uh—make you or break you."

Keene tried to walk without limping. The sore knee-cap made it difficult. "Maybe it was a Larmin who tried to break me."

"I'm not suggesting anything of the sort," Ottover exclaimed quickly. "It's only that we want to be extremely careful to have our facts, before we make any—actual accusations."

"I'm always careful, especially after I've had a bust in the jaw." Keene followed Ottover into the bungalow, stopped cold as a stenographer marched briskly out of the secretary's private office. The last time he'd seen that copper hair was against Clay Larmin's shoulder at the Stirrup & Saddle.

She halted abruptly at sight of Keene.

"Oh, hello, Mister Madden." She smiled, coolly. "I didn't imagine you'd be up this early, after seeing you at the Stirrup last night."

"Couldn't sleep," he answered. "Up all night. With a toothache."

She followed him with her luminous green eyes as he went into the inner office and closed the door.

KEENE took the chair by the side of the secretary's desk. The knee hurt worse when he was standing.

"Better fire that stenog, fella."

Ottover looked up from the file drawer where he was pulling out folders. "What? Jane? Goshsake, why?"

"Talks too much. She heard you long-distancing me and tipped off young Larmin about me, last night." It wasn't clear to Keene how she'd recognized him. There wouldn't be any photos of him in Saratoga. Maybe Ottover would have the answer to that one.

Ottover said, "You mean she recognized you?"

"Yep." It occurred to Keene that if somebody'd spotted the California license plates on his Buick, in the Stirrup & Saddle parking lot, a shrewd guess could have substituted for actual recognition. "I don't mind that. But I do mind her blabbing track business all over a night club. That's nokay."

Ottover agreed. "She didn't mean anything by it, I'm sure. She probably supposed Clay Larmin already knew you were coming. In any case," the official rubbed his forehead dejectedly, "I can't let her go."

"Why not?"

"What kind of a spot would I be in if I gave the bounce to the future Mrs. Clay Larmin now? I ask you!"

"No kidding?" Keene looked at the door, wondered if the girl was listening on the other side. "Has it been announced?"

Ottover wiggled uncomfortably. "Only by Clay." He spread his palms helplessly. "You see my predicament. Mrs. Kay Larmin is furious about the—affair. She's inclined to blame me for helping it along. Nonsense, naturally. I didn't know anything about it until Clay started dropping in here two or three times a day to see Miss Arklett."

"How long you known her? She a local girl?"

"Couple of years. Yes. Frank Wayne recommended her. Her family lives out near his summer place. Good solid farm people, but—"

"Not up in the bucks?"

"No. Or in the Social Register, either."

"Tough. Terrible handicap." Keene felt like adding that young Larmin hadn't been in the habit of checking the Blue Book when he picked his female acquaintances.

"Absurd, in this day and age, of course. Trouble was, the Dowager—that's what everyone calls her, here at the Spa—didn't mind her son's taking up with Jane at first. Only objection is to his marrying her."

"Okay for him to sow his wild oats. But not to raise a hybrid crop. Nice, sweet old lady, hah?"

"A darn fine woman, if you can overlook her—um—aristocratic prejudices, Madden." Ottover hesitated. "I'll have to admit I've wondered whether Jane will be a good influence on the boy, myself. I don't think it's any secret that he hasn't all of his father's—ah—integrity. All this—this fuss about Claybrook horses not running true to form, that's just cropped up since Clay took over the reins."

A buzzer sounded. Ottover picked up the phone.

"Oh!" he said. Then, after another exclamation, "Ask him to step in."

He racked the receiver, visibly upset. "It's Wayne. He's raising the roof. He's going over Clay's head—"

The door banged open. A heavy-set man with a face the color of raw steak and china blue eyes that blazed with resentment, filled the doorway.

CHAPTER IV

MORE TROUBLE

THE MAN wore a crumpled seer-sucker suit and a yellowed straw hat. The stub of a cigar jutted from the corner of his bulldog jaw like

the boom of a sailing vessel.

He didn't remove it when he growled, "I'm scratching Callie M., Ruy Blas and Friskaway, Wes."

Ottover said, "Frank, meet Keene Madden. Frank Wayne, Keene."

The Claybrook trainer held out his hand disinterestedly. "It's a pleasure." He turned to Ottover. "We won't start any entries today" He turned abruptly back to Keene. "Are you Madden? Of the Bureau?"

"That's right," Keene said. "What's wrong with your horses, Mister Wayne?"

"Don't know." Wayne was gruff. "Not certain anything is. But I'm darn well sure something will be, before the day's over, if we start 'em."

Ottover looked ready to burst into tears. "Now, Frank! You can't let us down, like this! We'd be all right in the third, with nine other starters. But there'll be only four, without yours, in the Adirondack Stakes. Show and place pools will be out. You know how that cuts down the Association's take!"

"Can't help it, Wes. I won't be a party to this rooking racket any longer. You know as well as I do that if the Stakes were to be run on the up and up, Skit would bring Friskaway down in front. But I just learned the word's been passed around Hubba Dub's fixed to come in first. I've had my name tied in to enough queer-looking races in the last couple of weeks. I—will—not—permit—Frisky—to—start! That's final."

Keene stuck a cigarette between his battered lips. "Who passed the word around, Mister Wayne?"

The trainer waggled the cigar stub

from one side of his jaw to the other. "You ought to know better than to ask me that."

"Who else would I ask?" Keene tilted his chair on its hind legs. "You made the crack. Where'd you hear it?"

Wayne spat out a shred of tobacco. He glowered as if he wanted to tell the representative of the Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau where he could go and what he could do when he got there. But the trainer changed his mind.

"My contract rider, Skit Yolock, told me. He picked it up in the steam room at the jockey house."

Keene let the chair come down on its front legs. "Where's Yolock now?"

"At the barns."

"Before we hop over to see him—" Keene stood up—"you might want to cancel the request for scratching the Claybrook entries."

"The devil I will!"

"You might. In the first place, the stewards probably wouldn't find you had sufficient reason—"

"Nobody can make me start a horse I don't think is in condition!" Wayne spat, without the excuse of a tobacco shred.

"In the second place, you'd expose yourself to suspicion you wanted to balk any investigation of fixing at this track." Keene opened the door suddenly. At her typewriter desk, Jane Arklett looked up, quizzically. "Let your entries start. We'll try to see they get a fair break. If they don't, we'll nail the party who keeps them from getting it."

Wayne grunted. "You must be a magician, then."

[Turn page]

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Keene touched the brim of his felt. "I pull something out of the hat every now and then."

The stenographer smiled sweetly. "See you later, Mister Madden?"

"Yeah," he looked at her steadily. "I expect so."

DRIVING to Horse Haven in Keene's Buick, Wayne sat grumpily beside the man from the Bureau. Ottover stayed at his office.

"Do you know Miss Arklett well?" Keene asked.

"Since she wore rompers." The trainer wasn't inclined to be chatty.

"Seems like a nice kid. Makes friends easily."

Wayne uttered an unintelligible gargon.

Keene Madden used the needle again. "She burned her boy-friend, being friendly-like with somebody else at that chi-chi joint out by the Lake last night."

"You talking about my employer, Madden?" Wayne's tone was definitely disagreeable.

"I'm talking about Clay Larmin. Yeah. Arklett girl started to get cozy with a gambler. Fellow with a beard, name of Towbee. Have you heard of him?"

Wayne swore like a seven-year Marine.

"Yeah," Keene said. "That's a good description of him. Young Larmin didn't care for her new acquaintance much, either."

"Jane's a fathead, speaking to that crumb at all. Towbee has cost the Larmins a sizeable fortune in the last three weeks. My personal opinion is, he's responsible for most of the monkey business that's been going on at this meeting. I can't understand Jane's attitude."

"Maybe she was just ribbing Larmin. Anything that Larmin loses will be her loss in the long run, won't it? She's going to marry him, isn't she?"

"'Fraid she is. She's too good for—" Wayne made a quick switch, glancing quickly at Keene to see if he noticed it—"for most any of that horsy set. She wasn't brought up on a bottle, not the way most of them seem to have been."

"When are those wedding bells sup-

posed to ring?"

"Ask her. Or him. I'm no yellow-sheet columnist!" Wayne meant it to sound rude.

Keene wondered why the trainer was so touchy about the subject.

At the barns, the smell of horses was sharp in the morning damp. The familiar stampings and nickerings were soothing to Keene's still-aching head. It was the slack hour after the colts had been cooled out. There wasn't much activity around the Claybrook stalls. There were a couple of grooms working with brushes and combs. No one about was small enough to be a jockey.

A short, blond man with a balding forehead and a lifeguard's tan waved greeting to Wayne. He wore a tee-shirt and faded levis tucked into rubber boots.

"I didn't find anything of any importance, Mister Wayne," he told the trainer. His voice had a trace of Texas. "That Ruy Blas might be getting a touch of coronitis in the right foreleg. It seems a mite sensitive. But it won't hurt him to get a race in him. The others look to be ready."

"Ready to get rooked out of a win purse!" Wayne retorted. "Thanks, anyhow, Bill. I just wanted somebody's opinion besides my own. I don't trust my own judgment any more. Shake hands with Mister Madden, from the Protective Bureau. Bill Sutterfield's our track's chief veterinary, Madden."

The vet scrutinized Keene slowly. "Glad to know you. I guess Frank told you we could use a little help around here."

"I'll need some, myself," Keene said, "if I'm to get to the bottom of this business. You got any ideas?"

"None I can back up." Sutterfield looked uncomfortable. "Frank thinks we've got an epidemic of stimulation."

"What do you think?" Keene asked.

"I have to go entirely by the records." The chief vet picked his words carefully. "Those records are our own saliva and urine tests, which are certified by chemists who don't know the identity of the horses from which the numbered samples were taken."

"No positives?"

"None at all. Of course, we only check horses that finish in the money, but

they're the ones that've been driving Frank and Wes Ottover out of their minds." The vet stooped to pick a piece of straw from a stall, chewed on it morosely. "More important, to me, are those cockeyed time records. The horses that've been beating Claybrook entries never run more'n a half-second or so better than their best clocked trials. That cancels out the hop-up possibility, y'see. There's no point stimulating a horse unless you can get more speed out of him."

WAYNE used his Marine vocabulary again. "That's a fact. The bitter truth is, our entries do worse than their speed trials show they should. Half a second, or even second slower. That's enough to lose any stake race, if the handicapper's on his job."

"Maybe," Keene suggested, "a bunch of the jocks have been holding pep rallies the night before a race to decide who deserves to ride into the winner's circle."

"Not Skit Yolock," Wayne snapped. "I know that boy as well as if I was his father. He'd rather cut off a hand than use it to pull a mount."

Sutterfield looked down at his boots. "I thought some of the poor showings might have been due to screwy shoeing. But Frank's had all his entries shod out at the Larmin place, the last week—and that hasn't improved matters."

"Yolock around?" Keene asked.

The straw between the vet's teeth stopped wiggling, but he said only, "I think he's gone."

One of the grooms called, "Mist' Yolock say he goin' home to take his nap."

"Why would he take a nap," a high, thin voice retorted shrilly, "when he isn't accepting any mounts this afternoon?" It was Clay Larmin.

Wayne grumbled, "Mister Madden insists—you met Mister Madden, Clay?—he insists we go right ahead and run all three horses."

The young man's small mouth twisted nastily. "Who's giving orders for Claybrook, Frank?"

Keene Madden pointed to the middle button of his coat. "I am, for the time being, if there are no objections, Mister Larmin."

"Darn right, there are!" Little splotches of red mottled Larmin's face.

"In that case," Keene shrugged, "I'll have to issue a statement that you're blocking an investigation into the—"

He didn't finish. A trio of men came into the cool gloom of the barn from the sunlight of the exercise paddocks. Two were in blue uniforms. The third had the stolid wariness of the police plainclothesman.

"Now what?" Wayne muttered.

Keene said to himself: *Here it comes, brother.*

The man in plainclothes touched the brim of his felt, respectfully. "Mister Larmin?"

Clay Larmin seemed to shrink within his neatly crisp white linens. "What's on your mind?"

"Would you mind coming over to the station with us, sir?" The detective was deferential. "It's probably something that can be straightened out right away."

The owner of the Claybrook Stables stiffened. "What needs straightening, officer?"

The detective cleared his throat. "It's the matter of a young woman, sir. A Miss Lola Gretsich. They found her dead this morning. Our information is that you used to be on pretty good terms with her."

"Lola?" Larmin gasped. And he sagged limply onto the litter of the barn floor.

CHAPTER V

ESCAPE—BY SUICIDE

BILL SUTTERFIELD lounged against the bench in the saddling shed. The veterinary was watching the horses in the paddock moving in slow circles around the well-worn paths ringing the great elms. The sunlight dappled the glossy chestnut and the glistening ebony of the colts' flanks as they moved daintily under the guidance of the grooms.

"That messy business about the girl," Sutterfield said. "That might clear up a

lot of things, Madden."

"For instance?" Keene watched a nervous filly dancing away from Yolock. The way Friskaway was acting up, the jockey might have trouble with Claybrook's entry in the Stakes.

The vet held out his hand, palm up. "Say Larmin wanted to get married to this kid in Ottover's office. There's been a lot of gabble about that. Suppose this other girl—someone he'd been playing around with before—wanted to hold him up for some kind of payoff."

"All right. Suppose that. Then what?" Keene Madden noted Wayne in what seemed, at a distance, to be an angry altercation with the jockey who was in the emerald-hooped blouse of the Claybrook Stables.

"Oh, I'm just shooting the breeze." Sutterfield wagged his head. "But if she had some kind of a hold on him—like maybe a secret wedding or even a kid nobody knew anything about—she might have been able to get him to handicap his own horses by having them over-exercised, or underfed or letting them drink before races. Like at one track where I worked, when an owner felt like betting on some other guy's entry when his own horse ought to be an easy winner, he'd load the horse in a van and have him driven around all night before the race so the animal wouldn't get any sleep and could hardly get around to the eighth pole without going wobble-legged."

The bugle gave out with *Boots and Saddles*. Keene watched trainer Wayne give Skit Yolock a hand up on Friskaway.

"Nobody could fool Wayne on a thing like that, Doc" Keene said. "It would have to be worked some other way than by mistreating the horse. If the races have been rigged, that dead girl might have been tangled up in the rigging. But it couldn't have been that simple."

"Maybe not." Sutterfield's eyes lighted up as the horses fell into file behind the red-coated lead rider on their way to post. "Whatever it was, though, I hope we've seen the last of it. Ruy Blas in the third was the first winner Frank Wayne's saddled in a fortnight."

"The fix will be in the Stakes. If any," Keene said, moving away. "Watch

those samples. See you."

He trailed the crowd streaming toward the grandstand and clubhouse. Old, young, thin, fat—open-necked polo shirts, low-cut print dresses, doggy sport coats with clubhouse tags dangling from lapels, bare midriff play-suits with binocular straps over naked shoulders. There were the two-buck Tims and Terrys whom Keene Madden was paid to protect. People who wouldn't know a mule from a hunter, who thought the race track was a mile-long slot machine with a nag coming up every spin, instead of a pear or a lemon.

He didn't go to the stands. The loud-speaker would give him the race, post by post. Right now the metallic voice was announcing, "The horses are at the post."

He pushed through the crowd milling to get out of the betting ring. The Selling windows were closed. The floor beside the pipe railings was cluttered with torn-up tickets, programs, copies of the *Telegraph* and *Racing Form*.

The odds board showed Friskaway at 3-2. But the filly, Keene knew, on the basis of her last three times out should be 1-2 against the other entries lined up in the starting gate now! Somebody had been pouring it in on Hubba Dub, Number 2, now at even money.

A gray-uniformed Pink saluted Keene, let him in through the unmarked door at the side of the \$50 Cashier windows. Behind the wickets, the boys were filling in totals on their check sheets, smoking, listening to the race-caster:

"They're off—and Popova breaks in the lead, My Hon, Friskaway, Can Doo, Hubba Dub—"

KEENE went into the totalisator room. Four shirtsleeved men in green eyeshades were working the accounting machines at top speed, on the double check. A white-haired man with thick gold-rimmed spectacles and chubby cheeks saw Keene and said hello.

"Anything big?" the race track detective asked.

"Same as per usual, only more so. Gent with the trick beard and upstage specs put twenty thou on Number Two five minutes before we shut the windows."

"Coming into the backstretch—" the hollow voice of the announcer was higher-pitched—"it's Friskaway by a length, My Hon, a head, Popova, half a length, Hubba Dub—"

"Twenty thousand fish?" Keene's eyebrows went up. "He's really trying for a score, isn't he?"

"I'd hate to have that much of mine on any animal's nose," the head cashier said. "I got a weak ticker. The goat could bust a leg. Throw his rider. Get disqualified. I couldn't stand it. Still, if you like that sort of thing, I guess it's good, clean fun."

"Not so clean." Keene looked up at the Win Pool total. \$88,612. What was it Lola Gretsch had said: "If there's something in it for me." There'd be plenty in it for Vince Towbee if #2 won. Quite a payoff.

"Coming around the far turn, Friskaway out in front by a length and a half. My Hon half a length. Hubba Dub, a head."

For a second, Keene wished he'd gone out to watch the finish. This was the moment that always gave him the big kick—the furlong before the head of the stretch. He'd never be able to get that out of his blood—the surging excitement from the thoroughbreds, the riders "hoo-hooing" to their mounts as they thundered around that last turn.

He went out, gave instructions to the Pinkerton captain by the clubhouse stile. "Into the stretch, and Friskaway's fading.—My Hon coming through on the rail, Hubba Dub making his bid on the outside.—My Hon is neck and neck.—He's leading.—No! No! Hubba Dub's closing with a rush.—He's up there.—It's going to be close—very close. A toss-up between Hubba Dub and My Hon.—It looks like a dead heat.—I can't call that one for you, folks.—It'll be— Yes, there goes the Photo up on the board—"

When the red Photo light went out and the Official went on, Hubba Dub was first, My Hon second and the Claybrook filly third.

"That Friskaway!" the Pinkerton captain muttered. "What a dog!"

Keene said nothing, waited patiently while disgruntled losers and exultant winners streamed through into the betting enclosure.

Towbee was one of the first at the \$50 window. The bearded gambler beamed affably at the cashier who counted out the fat stack of bills, was still beaming when the Pinkertons asked him politely to step into the manager's private office for a moment.

"What for?" There was no trace of an accent, then, that Keene could detect.

"Mister Madden will explain." The captain crowded Towbee ahead.

The gambler offered no resistance. "Am I to understand this is an arrest?"

"You're being held on suspicion." Keene followed him into the office, closed the door.

"Of what?"

"We'll start with 'conspiracy to defraud' and work up to the real charges later. I imagine the one you'll have the most trouble with will be 'murder.'"

Towbee showed his fine, even set of teeth. "You can't panic me, sir."

"We're not trying to panic you. We're trying to convict you. I'll give you six, two and even right now that we do."

The gambler's smile was a little less confident. "I know nothing of any violence, sir."

"Before we get through, you may."

Keene moved in on him.

THE horses for the sixth were already being walked around the paddock when Keene got there. All he was interested in, at the moment, were the three horses being cooled out by their grooms under the watchful eyes of Bill Sutterfield, Wes Ottover and a trio of husky Pinkertons.

Sutterfield said, "I waited till you got here to take the samples."

"Oke," Keene told the vet. "Take 'em."

"Haven't checked on My Hon." Ottover, the Racing Association secretary, waved toward the colt, that'd placed, its glossy black chest still heaving, its polished jet flanks steaming, "but I'd guess we won't find any positive in Hubba Dub's secretions. The colt won in three-tenths of a second slower than his last work."

Keene ignored the big, rangy Hubba Dub—a bay with a long, bony head. "Friskaway's the one was done."

Frank Wayne, striding across the lawn between the small-boy figure of Skit Yolock and the majestic bulk of a statuesque woman Keene recognized from her photographs as Mrs. Kay Larmin, heard the remark.

"You just exercising your mouth, Madden?" the trainer asked. "Or are you filing charges?"

Keene said, "No to the first. Yes to the second."

The Dowager stared down her nose. "May I ask against whom you intend to make this accusation, Mister—ah—"

Ottover mumbled a hasty introduction. Keene took off his hat.

"I'm not permitted to make charges public, Mrs. Larmin," the race track detective told her.

"I'm not asking you to." She was brusque. "I'm certainly entitled to know if any Claybrook personnel is involved."

The man from the Protective Bureau turned to Yolock. The jockey glared defiantly.

"I'll put it up to you, Skit," Keene said. "Couldn't you tell that Friskaway wasn't right?"

The rider spoke out of the corner of his mouth. "Funny thing. I ride fifteen hundred races a year, an' I never yet been able to get a mount to tell me when it feels like doin' its best. Maybe if I had one of them Protective Bureau badges, the gee-gees'd open up an' tell all."

Wayne growled, "Don't duck, Skit! Answer him!"

"Ah—" the jockey shrugged—"the filly wilted pretty sudden, head of the stretch, but—"

Keene said, "Know how it feels to be up on an entry that's been given a depressant?"

Yolock began an obscenity, cut it short.

"A depressant?" Bill Sutterfield swiveled to peer at Friskaway. "You mean phenobarbital?"

"Or something else," Keene nodded. "Your chemists would have analyses for that. But maybe something new has been added. Something they haven't found a twenty-four hour test for." He moved across to the filly, touched her forelegs. "There's no quivering, as there'd be if your entry had been raced

into the ground, Mrs. Larmin."

The Dowager touched her trainer's sleeve. "How about it, Frank?"

Frank Wayne squatted, ran his hands over the filly's hocks. "He's sweating properly. It could be. But—"

"Who?" The old lady thrust out her chin at Keene.

KEENE put his hand on Wayne's shoulder. "I expect your trainer has a notion about that."

"Damn it!" Wayne's face grew flaming red. "Don't put me in the middle, you—"

"Check," Keene said promptly. "You're right. You've been in the middle long enough. You didn't know for sure and you couldn't talk."

The Dowager's lips became a thin, straight line. "Stop shilly-shallying! Frank could talk to me about anything or anyone."

Frank Wayne held out his hands. "Take it easy, Kay—"

She ignored him. "You must mean Clay, Mister Madden. You can tell me that much. You have to tell me. Do you suspect Clay?"

"I think your son has known what's been going on, Mrs. Larmin." Keene wondered how much she'd heard about Lola Gretschn.

"I will not believe it." She was vehement. "There aren't many things I'd put past that boy, but manipulating horse races is one of them. He thinks more of the stables than he does of me."

Ottover chimed in, "I can't credit that, at all, Madden. I know for a fact the boy has been a very heavy loser, these last two weeks, betting on his own entries. Surely, if he'd known somebody was taking the edge off them, he wouldn't have put his money on Claybrook silks."

Somebody cried, "Wes! Wes!"

They all turned. Jane Arklett was running from the office bungalow—cutting heedlessly across flower beds, bumping into people, her coppery hair jouncing at the nape of her neck with every long-legged stride. She ran with her head thrown back, like a miler who is at the last gasp.

Wayne held Friskaway's nose, bend-

ing to examine the filly's eyeballs. "This is a hell of a time to come up with a charge like that against Clay, Madden. Kay—Mrs. Larmin—is worried stiff about him in connection with that other matter."

"Indeed I am," the Dowager said stonily. "But I have complete confidence in my boy. You're the second person today to make what I consider preposterous statements about him."

"It's easy to settle," Keene said. "Ask him."

Jane came to a panting halt. She glanced wildly around the group circling the filly.

"Clay? Nobody's going to ask him anything!" Her voice was flat. "He killed himself in the police station ten minutes ago. Slashed his wrists with a knife. Bled to—"

She held herself rigidly for a second, then burst into tears, flung her arms around the Dowager's neck, buried her head on the ample bosom, whimpering.

Ottover rushed to her. Wayne caught Mrs. Larmin's arm to support her. But the old lady put her hands up, disengaged Jane's grasp, pushed her away. The Dowager made no outcry whatever. Only the spasmodic contraction of the tired facial muscles showed the extent of her shock.

"At least," she pointed her chin at Madden, "there will be no further mention of the unsavory matter which you brought up, sir. And—" she blinked wretchedly at Jane—"I will not be subject to further humiliation on your account."

"Don't be so sure, Mrs. Kay Larmin!" the girl flared at her. She poured venom over every syllable. "You might be subject to a good deal on account of your son's widow! Yes—I'm Mrs. Larmin, too!"

CHAPTER VI

ONE MORE VICTIM

SITTING on the Gay Nineties bed in the high-ceilinged hotel room, his stiff knee stretched out on the

spread, Keene worked the portable in his lap. He clattered the keys at top speed, pulled out the sheet of paper, extracted the carbon, read the original, put it on the bed-table, signed it, stuck it in an envelope already stamped.

In the bureau mirror he examined his bunged-up features, gave his crew-cut a lick and a promise. He slipped on his Beverly Hills suede, went downstairs, found an empty old-fashioned phone booth as big as three of the 1949 models, standing in solitary grandeur near the taproom.

He called Information and was put through to a bored male voice.

"Who's handling the Gretsch thing?" he asked.

"Lieutenant Asmussen. Why?"

"Just wanted to know." He hung up, addressed the envelope against the glass of the phone booth, found a mail chute in the lobby, dropped it in.

He felt better, putting what he knew down on paper. If anything should happen to him in the next few hours—and all the signs indicated such a possibility—at least the record would be straight, for what belated good it might do Clay Larmin's reputation.

After a few years of professional investigation, you got so your conscience was covered with calluses, Keene reflected moodily. You got so all you considered was the job in hand and to the devil with the consequences as they affected other people. They'd affected young Larmin, all right.

Not that anything Keene might have reported would necessarily have absolved the Claybrook heir of involvement in the Gretsch girl's murder. But if Larmin should have had a rock-ribbed alibi for the time between one and two ayem—and if the police had known that was when the waitress had been bludgeoned to death—maybe Clay wouldn't have tried to short-cut himself out of his troubles.

The carbon copy in the pocket of the suede jacket set it all down, ABC. What had happened at the Stirrup & Saddle, the pussy-footing out at the Lake Avenue cottage, the stuff about the use of the depressant to kill the chances of odds-on winners, the results of that "closed session" with Towbee. If Keene

wasn't able to walk around to the police station in the morning, the cops could take it from there.

Going out, he crossed Broadway and followed the street that backed up against Congress Park. The red brick of the Casino glowed warmly in the late afternoon sun. Quite a change at the Spa since Canfield's day. Keene wondered what the old-time gambler would have thought of the establishment down the street, there.

From the sidewalk it was just a second-hand store. The sign above the door merely said: AUCTION TODAY. The window was a hodgepodge of shabby clothing, worn rubber boots, cracked crockery and battered stew-pans. A hum, like the buzzing of a bee swarm, came from inside. Keene pushed open the door.

Forty or fifty people—mostly men—were milling around in a smoke-hazy room, two sides of which were lined with blackboards bearing chalked-in headings: Jamaica, Rockingham, Saratoga, Bowie, Washington Pk., Churchill Downs. A third side was boarded up to within a foot of the ceiling. The partition had a row of small, steel-barred wickets spread about five feet apart, with a door at the far end.

A tinny public-address system announced: "Off time in the third at Churchill: four oh seven, Eastern Daylight. Fancy Gal, four-forty, three-twenty, two-sixty." It croaked on.

ONLY a few horseplayers were putting their money on the line at the moment. Keene waited until they began to crowd up to the wickets again to get down on the fourth. Then he strolled down the line of peep-hole wickets.

The openings were set just a little more than waist-high. They were only about six inches square, the steel grille coming down to within an inch of the horizontal sill on which the money and tickets were slid in and out. The hands of the men behind the peep-holes were visible, but unless a person stopped, put his chin right on the sill, it would be impossible to see their faces. Keene watched the hands.

At the fourth wicket he saw what he was after. The seller behind the open-

ing was dealing out slips of paper clumsily, with a big bandage on his right flipper.

Keene went to the door in the partition, rattled the knob. Nobody opened. A short, hard-eyed man with a blue fowl and a mean expression sidled over. He'd been studying a *Racing Form* a moment before.

"Trouble, pal?"

"No trouble," Keene said. "I just want to speak to a joe in there." He pointed.

"Speak to him through the window, why don'tcha?"

"Have to be sure he's the right joe." Keene reached for his inside jacket pocket. The man crowded against him, threateningly.

Keene pulled out the fat sheaf of banknotes he'd borrowed from Towbee. "I don't want to turn this bunch of lettuce over to the wrong grocer."

The hard eyes inspected the bankroll. "Y'got somep'n there, chum. Maybe we oughta let you in, if you got that kinda admission jack." He produced a key, fitted it into the lock, swung the door.

The alley behind the partition was no more than four feet wide—just room for cash drawers, high bar stools, ticket racks and a small safe. All the men on the stools looked up from beneath green eyeshades, their expressions blank.

The man with the bandaged hand only stared for an instant, then continued scribbling on slips. He had huge, muscle-bound shoulders, a bulge around his belt-line, a nose that could have been used as a night advertisement for a bar.

"Hey, Plumnose." The hard-eyed man was genial. "Pal here has a jarful o' cookies for yuh."

The red nose turned in Keen's direction. "Huh?"

Keene tossed the elastic-bound packet of bills up, caught them. "You Vince Towbee's partner?"

Plumnose got down off his stool, flattened himself against the back wall. "Never heard of the guy."

The hard-eyed man eased in behind Keene. The Bureau detective got the odor of garlic from his breath.

"He said a joe with a banged-up duke. From getting it mashed in a car door."

The eyes beneath Plumnose's eye-

shade were small and bright. The voice was low and ugly.

"I got this—" he held up the bandaged fingers—"movin' that damn safe, lettin' it drop. I don't know no Towbee. Nobody owes me that much moola. So—"

"I shaved off Santos' beard," Keene said slowly.

One of the other sellers laughed. "The car's off its trolley, Plumnose."

"Out, Buster!" the mean-eyed man said.

Keene stood still. The man grabbed his elbows from behind.

Plumnose took off his eyeshade. "This ginzo sounds like he's lost some of his marbles, Charley. Maybe I better go along with him. Just to humor him."

He took a Panama from a rack over his window.

COLD sweat was running down Keene's spine before they got out of the horse parlor. The mean-eyed man didn't want to let Plumnose go. He smelled a possible raid and a closing up of his place of business. But he didn't start anything.

Plumnose went out onto the street ahead of Keene. When he got to the sidewalk, he said, "How much you want?"

"Not much. Just a little leveling."

The scuffler was disappointed. "If you'd care t' listen to the nice, cracklin' noise of a few hunderd dollar bills, now—"

"No dice," Keene said. "Just the plain, unvarnished truth. Which one of you finished the Gretsch girl?"

"I got no idea what your git-gat-giddle's all 'bout, pal."

"There'll be a dozen of your prints on the door of my Buick, Plumnose."

"One'll get you fifty if you find any." The man smirked.

Keene steered him toward the brighter illumination of the main stem. "Look. I'll put it plain. I've got Santos. Once I got that Towbee beard and those glasses off him—saw that scar on his throat—he was a cinch. Guess where that leaves you."

"Maybe I been breakin' some local ord'nances, in the course of earnin' my livin'. But I ain't done a thing."

"You near ruined me. You beat the Gretsch dame's brains out, or helped."

Plumnose seemed to stumble. His hand rested on Keene's shoulder as if to steady himself. He shoved the Bureau detective off the sidewalk into the path of a speeding bus.

Keene grabbed at the scuffler's bandaged hand to save himself. Plumnose howled, jerked away, fell off the curb, lost his footing, lurched between the oncoming bus and a parked taxi.

The screech of brakes and tires was no louder than that from the mangled mess of flesh and broken bones which collapsed to the pavement as the bus backed away.

A dozen people popped up from nowhere. Another score erupted from the bus. Police whistles shrilled. Cries for a doctor, an ambulance, smothered the mangled bookie's moans.

Keene shivered. The man wouldn't live to reach the emergency ward, or if he did, wouldn't be able to do any talking.

A bluecoat bustled up. "One side, now. Keep movin'—"

Keene did. He moved to the nearest cafe, had a double slug of Kentucky catnip-juice, then used the phone book. But not the phone. *Arklett, Jane, res.* was listed at 9 Kimberly Court.

He inquired of the bartender. Kimberly Court was three blocks up the street.

"Right next the po-lice station." The bartender grimaced.

"Handy, huh?" Maybe he ought to drop in on his way over, Keene thought. Keep the boys up to date on the score. One murdered waitress. One suicided millionaire. One dying bookie. Plus a few assorted items of mayhem. "A nice town if you keep away from dark alleys." Yes, indeed!

CHAPTER VII

HERE COMES A BULLET!

KIMBERLY COURT was a new, smart, concrete and round-the-corner-windows building. Very snappy for a stenographer.

Keene Madden didn't honestly expect

the girl to be at her apartment. But when he pushed the button beneath the Arklett mail box, the clicking of the door latch came immediately. It was a walkup. She was on the second.

The door was open when he came up the stairs. She was dressed the same as she had been at the track, but she looked different. It took him a moment to figure out that she'd cried all her makeup off, hadn't bothered to put any more on.

"Mister Madden." She seemed surprised, but so dejected that it made no difference. "I thought it was that lieutenant. He said he'd be over."

"What about?" Keene followed her into a homelike living room.

There was a comfortable sofa in front of the stone fireplace, unpretentious easy chairs, one with a footstool and a smoking stand beside it. Keene wondered how many evenings Clay Larmin had sat with his feet on that stool and let her make a fuss over him.

"My mother-in-law demanded that Clay's body be taken to her house before going—" she made an effort to keep her voice steady—"to the mortuary. If that happens, she'll have all the say about his funeral, where he's buried, everything. I think I have some rights to my husband after his death. I didn't have many while he lived."

"What's the lieutenant say?"

"He doesn't know what to do. He's probably coming over to argue me out of interfering with the old—old biddy! As if she'd ever done anything but interfere between me and Clay."

"You think that might have something to do with his ending his life?" Keene stood by the mantel. A charcoal sketch of Clay hung over it, evidently the girl's work. Not bad, either.

"I know it did. He was so miserable. He didn't even dare tell her we were married!"

"That mess about the Gretsche girl. That didn't have anything to do with—what he did?"

"It couldn't have." She sat on the arm of a chair and poked at the dead ashes in the fireplace. "Clay couldn't possibly have been in any trouble because of that. I was with him all last night. He used to go around with her.

But that was all over. He—he was never out to her place after he proposed to me."

The smell which had brought back those New Guinea memories was strong in Keene's nostrils again. It made the hair on the back of his neck bristle.

"How do you account for his suicide, then?"

She tossed the poker on the hearth with a clatter. "I guess you know some of it, anyway, from what Wes Ottover said about you. But I'll tell you what I know."

"I might simplify matters." *It would have simplified them a devil of a lot more if you'd done your talking this morning, sister,* he said silently.

Was that familiar odor suddenly stronger? Or was he just getting more fidgety? He sat down on the sofa.

"Shoot when ready," he said.

IF IT hadn't been for the ringing ache between his ears and the lancing barb that slashed at his knee, he would have enjoyed sitting there, listening to her—in spite of that depressing stench. . . .

He relaxed for almost the first time in twenty-four hours. The chair was soft. She was good to look at with the sunset spilling rose wine and honey gold across her face and throat. She was easy to listen to, as well.

"A lot of people thought Clay was a weak edition of his father," she began. "Maybe he wasn't as much of a man as the General, but he was a pretty swell guy, all the same. The trouble was, his mother.

"You saw what happened last night, at the Stirrup. His mother'd telephoned to find out if he was there with me. Of course he tipped the attendants to lie for him, but still he was scared silly she'd learn we'd been there together, so we had to beat it. Simply because she'd forbidden him to go out with me! *Forbidden*, mind you! Naturally she didn't know we'd been married in Miami last March. He'd rather have cut his arm off, than tell her."

"So—?" Keene said.

Jane nodded, sniffing a little. "I'm telling you, so you'll understand the rest of it. We ran into a man named Morrison, in Miami. A cheap tout—fellow who

made his living selling those crummy tip sheets. He learned we were married, and when he saw how rattled Clay was about that, he began to put the bite on my husband, threatening to spill the news to Mrs. Kay. She wouldn't have minded if she'd thought Clay was just having an affair with me—but *marriage!* Horrible!"

"Yeah. This Morrison. Gent with a booze beezer?"

"That's right." She scowled. "Nickname's Plumnose. You know everything, don't you!"

"I'm learning all the time."

Jane got up, walked to the door of a bedroom, stood leaning against the jamb, her forehead turned toward the wall. "That heel followed us up here from Florida. Clay was his meal ticket, his pension. Sometime between the time Clay took over the management of the stables and the opening of the meet, Morrison schemed up this fixing so he could tap the till more heavily without Clay's having to explain to mother where the money was going."

"Where'd Towbee fit into it?"

"I never did know. I suppose he was someone Plumnose brought in, because he looked more respectable—or maybe because the Pinkertons had run Plumnose out of Tropical Park a couple times and he was afraid they'd do it again up here."

"Might have."

"Clay hated the fmagling with his beautiful horses. He was as proud of them as if he'd trained them himself, instead of Frank Wayne's doing all the work. But he used the stuff Morrison got for him, and he kept betting on Claybrook entries so the stewards wouldn't get suspicious. Though Wes Ottover did anyway."

"Was the waitress in on the deal?"

JANE pushed herself away from the wall. "She tried to cut herself in. She played around with Vince Towbee—got wise from something he let slip. That was just a day or so ago. Then she was going to the track authorities and spill the beans—*unless*. Clay wanted to pay her off, but I guess Morrison figured it would be cheaper to bump her off."

Jane began to sob, quietly. Keene stood up, went to the mantel, examined the charcoal sketch.

"This yours?"

"Yes."

"You're quite an artist. Not only with charcoal."

She stopped crying abruptly.

"That was a real work of art, that recital." Keene was sympathetic. "Fits most of the facts, in a general way. Two or three things wrong with it, but—"

"What?" she wanted to know.

"Dead people. Clay. Plumnose. Gretsch. Everything you said points the finger at folks who aren't able to talk back. Your husband was a horse-doper and a bribe-payer. Plumnose was an extortionist and a murderer. Lola Gretsch was a tramp and a blackmailer. None of 'em can deny any of it."

Jane said crossly, "You can't, either! It's all true. It might not be the whole truth. But it's all I know. . . ." She came close to him.

"Uh, uh." He managed to back away a little without making it too apparent. "Clay wasn't in on the dirty work. He found out you were in it, though. I wouldn't know whether he guessed how you were tipping off Towbee. I admit I didn't catch wise to those roulette chips you put on numbers five and two, until I remembered Hubba Dub was the Number Two horse in the fifth this peeyem. But of course you wouldn't have had to go through all those shenanigans to get the info across to Towbee, if Clay'd been in on the fix."

The pupils of her eyes contracted like a cat's. "You really do know everything!"

He grabbed her shoulder. He wasn't gentle about it. His nails dug into her flesh. He lowered his head, bull-like.

"Sure. Sure. I've got it all. Except a few little, unimportant items. Like—who tried to ready me for a hospital cot in that parking lot last night? Who beat out Lola's brains? Who—"

Bill Sutterfield came out of the bedroom with a forty-five that seemed to Keene to have a muzzle a foot wide.

"Who—who—who—" the vet mocked. "You sound like a noisy owl, Madden."

"Yeah," Keene Madden said. "It had to be you, Doc."

"Yeh. You certainly resemble one of those hoot-birds. You sound wise. But you're not."

"Want to bet?" the Bureau man said. "Or do you only bet on sure things?"

Keene knew there was no sense bracing himself against the blast of a forty-five, but he braced himself just the same. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

COME AND GET IT!

THOUGHTS streaked through Keene's mind faster than memories through a drowning man's. Probably he only stood there for ten seconds waiting for Sutterfield to pull the trigger, but it was long enough for the turf detective to review every mistake he'd made.

One big mistake was how he had failed to identify that evil odor so closely tied in with his recollections of the remount station at New Guinea—that was a toughie. It was horse medication—for body sores. Who but a vet would have carried a stink like that to the Lake Avenue cottage?

Sutterfield must have gone out there to make sure the waitress hadn't left any memoranda that might incriminate him. He'd been in the bedroom when Keene got there, and had slipped out while the Bureau man was looking at Clay's photograph.

The vet strolled toward Keene. "Came up to Jane's place to make advances to her, huh, Madden? Unwelcome advances, huh? Yeh, I know it's corny, but after they find out what happened to another girl in your Buick last night—and I'll see to it they do—it'll sound pretty plausible."

There was a way, Keene Madden reminded himself, to take a gun away from a man who walked smack up to you and stuck the muzzle in your middle. He'd seen it in movies, knew how it was supposed to be done, theoretically. The difference between theory and practice, now would be a couple of ounces of lead and some tons of dirt.

Yet there wasn't going to be any other way out. One look at Sutterfield's eyes verified that. The vet wasn't insane or hyped up with drugs. He was stone cold sober and set on shooting a tunnel through Keene simply as a precautionary measure.

You were supposed to be able to tell from a killer's eyes just when he was about to blast. If the vet's eyes said anything, they said the time had come. Sutterfield was still a couple of steps away. Too far for the hundred-to-one chance Keene would have to take.

"It may make you feel better to gun me," Keene said. "But it won't help you."

Sutterfield smiled dryly. "It's not goin' to do you a whole lot of good."

"No. And what's in my pocket isn't going to set you off into gales of laughter." Keene retreated a half step.

The vet did what Keene expected. He moved still closer. "What you got up your sleeve, owl?"

"Carbon of a statement to the authorities. Original's on its way to the police right now."

"K. Madden, Esquire. His last will and testament." The vet jeered. "Must be a fascinating document."

"It makes right interesting reading." Out of the corner of his eye Keene caught the girl's casual edging over toward the fireplace. Maybe if he couldn't dent Sutterfield's cast iron confidence, he could work on her. "It tells why a couple of thugs tried to put the blocks to me within a couple hours after I hit this town."

The vet came another step nearer. "Why, owl?"

Keene forced himself to keep from looking at the automatic. If Sutterfield had any idea he was going to make a play, it would really be fatal.

"Only reason that made sense was, somebody was scared I'd recognize him—and by doing that, get wise to the whole setup. Only person who wasn't vouched for by two or three other people was Towbee. Once I put the pinch on him, taped him in a chair in my office, used a pair of shears and a razor."

"This here owl—" Sutterfield spoke to Jane, but didn't turn his head to look at her—"his hoot is bein' to get on

my nerves. Bring me a pillah, honey.”
 “Don’t, please, Bill!” She was half-stooping to reach for the poker. “Not here! Not now!”

“All right,” the vet didn’t alter his tone in any way, “if you don’t bring me a pillah, it’ll be louder.”

She got her fingers on the poker. Keene spoke rapidly to cover any scraping sound.

“Towbee turned out to be Carlos Santos—a West Coast no-good who got six months in Mexico for organizing jockey connivance at Hippodrome del Tia Juana. Later on, according to the flyer in my file, he was convicted of using ephedrine as a seasoning for bran mash, down at the Fair Grounds. He worked with a crooked veterinarian there. Someone named—”

He jabbed with the heel of his hand at the muzzle of the automatic. It was only eight inches away. He’d done what he could, not to give himself away by any telltale flicker of the eyes.

If he could sock that muzzle hard enough, fast enough, jam it back in Sutterfield’s fist, the backward movement of the gun would loosen the vet’s trigger finger for an eye-wink, delay the pull just long enough for the barrel to be deflected downward.

If he couldn’t—

Keene never knew the answer. Jane swung the poker at the precise instant when he jabbed at the automatic’s muzzle.

The gun flared. The slug tore a hole as big as a quarter in the hundred dollar suede jacket. The poker caught Sutterfield where he parted his hair. He folded like a camp stool.

KEENE stuck the final inch of adhesive around Sutterfield’s wrists, spoke softly to the unconscious man.

“It had to be you, brother. It couldn’t be anyone else. Only Claybrook horses were acting up. That eliminated any jockey hocus-pocus except maybe on Skit’s part, and he wouldn’t have been dumb enough to keep pulling mounts. Anyhow, he couldn’t be sure, ahead of time, that trainer Frank Wayne wouldn’t yank him and put a new boy up on his entry.”

“Bill claimed it was fool-proof,” Jane said, dully. “He was the only person around the track who could get away with keeping drugs on him all the time.”

“That’s right. Nobody but a licensed veterinarian.” Keene gave the man’s pockets a look-see. “Important thing was, nobody else would be able to get at those saliva and urine tests, to learn what he’d been giving Claybrook horses on those morning inspection trips through the barns. He could substitute samples from other horses, and nobody’d be any wiser. He’d been working that deal down in Florida when they caught him before.”

“That’s where I met him. In Miami.” Jane wandered around the living room restlessly. “I got burned up about Clay’s being afraid to call his soul his own, on his mother’s account.”

“Must have been kind of rough, not being able to tell people you were man and wife.”

The girl nodded. “That’s how Bill came to get the idea he could—cozy up to me. Just to goad Clay into doing something about cutting loose from

[Turn page]

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those darned apron-strings, I began to act as if we weren't married."

"Do tell!" Keene murmured. "Then Sutterfield thought he had a hold over you, hah?"

"Yes. He followed us north. Kept coming to see me, those nights when Clay had to be at 'dear Mama's'." She flung her hair back from her forehead in a gesture of utter weariness. "I tried to break it up, more than once. Honestly, I did. But Bill had it all schemed out."

Keene sighed, stood up, straddled the veterinary's limp figure. "You wouldn't tell all that to the police lieutenant, when he gets here?"

SHE put her thumbs to her temples as if her head was about to burst. "I won't have to, now, will I? As long as you don't say anything."

"I will, though. I'll have to. There's a lot of gore to be accounted for. A lot of cash, too." He felt of the packet he'd taken from Santos-Towbee, wondered how thirsty the man locked up in his office would be.

Jane said, "I can't do anything about the money. I didn't get any of it. I didn't want any of it."

"That's the first thing you've said that I completely believe."

She pretended not to understand.

He put it plainly. "Girl from a nice, respectable middle-class family falls for a boy whose parents have laundry blueing in their aristocratic veins. Boy's mother balks at taking commoner into royal family. Girl, naturally, gets sore as the devil."

She came over behind him, put one arm around his shoulders. "I believe you actually do know everything!"

"Have to be a guesser in my line of

work. I'd guess she was mad enough to make mamma-in-law pay through the nose, after she did finally rope her blue-blooded mate into a ceremony. Might even have had some wacky notion she could slice enough off the Larmin fortune to cut her husband's mother down to size. Or at least bring her to terms."

She leaned her cheek against the back of Keene's coat. Her hair tickled his neck. "I didn't figure it that far. I simply wanted to hurt her. Instead, I hurt Clay."

"Hell!" He turned, so he had to step away from her. "You hurt everyone you touch. You'd have watched Sutterfield plug me a few minutes ago, without a squawk—only you were afraid I really sent in that report."

Tears streamed down her face. She didn't weep audibly.

"I had sent it in, too," he said. "You can read the copy if you want to, it puts the whole thing in your lap, Mrs. Larmin. Right from the beginning. Clay knew it. The Gretsch girl knew it. He wouldn't tell on you. He cared too much. But the girl who'd been in love with Clay before you got to him, she couldn't see him suffer without trying to correct it. What she wanted to tell me, there at the Stirrup and Saddle, was how you'd engineered the entire business."

She began to blubber.

"Don't bother with it," he said harshly. "Save all that salt water for the jury. Maybe you can soften them up, make them think you were the injured party." He touched his own scalp. "Me, I don't feel that way. I was an injured party once, myself."

There was a tap at the hall door. He raised his voice.

"Come and get it, Lieutenant."



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MURDER BEFORE MIDNIGHT

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Sue raised the gun
and aimed it

Blackmail for Two

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

CLAY WEAVER sauntered casually into the lobby of an apartment building in the East 60's. He was a lean, rawboned, sandy haired man who looked more like a farmer than a detective of the Blackmail Squad working out of Headquarters. His clothes never fitted quite right no matter how often he

had a new suit altered.

The elevator operator was sitting on a bench beside the open door of the car reading a newspaper. He glanced up, took a quick look at Weaver and then continued reading.

"No salesmen permitted above the ground floor," he said without raising

A man and a girl die—unless Weaver finds the answer!

his head. "Whatever you've got we don't want any."

"I'd like to see Mr. Wilson Hooker," Weaver said mildly. "He's expecting me."

"Don't give me that," said the operator, still looking at the paper. "Mr. Hooker never sees anyone before noon and it is only ten o'clock now. Go away!"

Weaver slapped the paper out of the man's grasp with his left hand and thrust his detective badge into the operator's face with his right. The operator's opinion of his own importance reached a new low as he stared at the shield.

"A detective," he muttered leaping to his feet and heading for the elevator. "Why didn't you say so?"

"You've been doing all the talking," Weaver said dryly. "On what floor is Wilson Hooker's apartment?"

"Apartment Four B on the fourth floor," said the operator as the door closed and the car started up. "Mr. Hooker lives there alone with a servant named Spence Kearney. Guess you'd call Kearney a butler though he does the cooking and everything. Funny I been kind of wondering about Hooker ever since I brought the girl down late yesterday afternoon."

"What girl?" Weaver asked.

"I don't know her name—I never seen her before. But she was blond and pretty and she looked like she had been crying. Her makeup was kind of tear-stained, if you know what I mean."

"I get the general idea," Weaver said as the car stopped at the fourth floor and the door slid open. "Mr. Hooker have many lady visitors?"

"Very few," said the operator. "That's why I specially noticed the girl. Say, why does he want a detective?"

"Termites," said Weaver. "We're gonna police them for him."

THE operator's face looked even blanker than usual. He just stood there gazing at Weaver as the detective walked along the hall, turned a corner and disappeared.

Weaver found the door of apartment 4 B and pushed the bell button. He waited a few moments and then the door opened and a stocky gray haired man stood glaring at him.

"What's the meaning of this?" the gray haired man demanded. "I thought it was distinctly understood by everyone that Mr. Hooker is not to be disturbed before noon."

"That's all right, Kearney," Weaver said. "I'm Weaver, from the Detective Bureau at Police Headquarters. Mr. Hooker is expecting me. He phoned and asked that a detective be sent here at ten this morning."

"A detective to see Mr. Hooker at ten in the morning!" Amazement and horror mingled in Kearney's expression. "Come in, sir. I'll have to see Mr. Hooker about this. Please wait here."

Kearney ushered Weaver into a small room at the right off the hall. It was expensively furnished and there were signed photographs of actors and actresses framed on the walls. Weaver had checked on Wilson Hooker before coming to the apartment building and knew that the man was a theatrical producer. He had also learned that it had been two years since Hooker had had a show that could be considered in the hit class. The musical he had produced a year ago had been a decided flop.

"Mr. Weaver?" A tall, distinguished looking man spoke as he entered the room. He was expensively dressed and had thick dark hair with a touch of gray at the temples, and a small dark mustache. "I'm Wilson Hooker."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Hooker," Weaver said as they shook hands. He dropped into a chair as Hooker sat down. "From our conversation over the phone I gather you feel there might be some work for the Blackmail Squad here."

"I believe so." Hooker frowned thoughtfully. "Though it is hard to be sure about it. During the past month or so I have received three letters, all of them in the same handwriting—which is obviously feminine. The first demanded that I leave five thousand dollars in cash at a certain spot, or secrets of my past would be revealed that would make me the laughing stock of the theatrical world."

"Did you do as ordered?" Weaver asked.

"I did not!" said Hooker. "I merely considered it a letter from some crackpot and paid no more attention to it. A

week later, I received another letter very much like the first one, but this time demanding ten thousand dollars. I ignored this second letter too. The day before yesterday I received the third letter. It was much more threatening in tone, warned me that this was my last chance and demanded twenty thousand dollars if I wanted to live."

"You suspect anyone of writing these notes?" Weaver asked.

"Yes, a young actress named Sue Shelton," Hooker said. "She came here to my apartment yesterday afternoon with some preposterous story of my trying to blackmail her. She said if I didn't stop writing her threatening notes she was going to kill me."

"Sounds like a violent young lady," Weaver said. "Then what happened?"

"I told her that I believed she was the one who was trying to blackmail me, and showed her the notes I received. Then she burst into tears and rushed out of the apartment before I could really question her."

Weaver drew out a small notebook and pencil. "You know where this Miss Shelton lives?" he asked.

"Yes." Hooker gave him the address. "You'll arrest her at once on a charge of blackmail, of course."

"I'll question her."

Weaver glanced at the open door of the room. He saw a shadow move. Someone was standing out in the hall listening. He wondered if it was Spence Kearney.

"Merely question her?" Hooker scowled. "I want her placed under arrest."

"She will be, if she admits the blackmailing angle." Weaver got to his feet. "But in a case like this, it isn't always wise to arrest someone merely on suspicion."

He leaped swiftly to the door and peered out. To his disappointment there was no one in the hall. Weaver frowned and stepped back into the room.

HOOKER sat staring at him in amazement.

"Thought someone was listening in the hall," Weaver said. "Guess I was wrong."

"There's no one here but Kearney, and

I doubt that he would bother," Hooker said, drawing the blackmail notes out of his pocket. "Perhaps you would like to see these, Mr. Weaver. I'm positive they're in Sue Shelton's handwriting."

"What makes you so certain?" Weaver asked.

"Sue had a part in the musical that I produced last year. The silly girl became infatuated with me." Wilson Hooker had such a fatuous expression on his handsome face that he looked a bit silly. "Of course I didn't take it seriously, but she wrote me quite a few—ah—shall we say, adoring little notes. I have compared some of those with the blackmail letters. The writing is the same."

"Seems foolish of her not to make any attempt to disguise her handwriting," Weaver said.

He examined the three blackmail notes. He noticed that a great many of the words in all three notes were written exactly alike. The first note read:

Leave five thousand dollars in cash in a plain envelope addressed to Miss Mary Smith with the elevator operator of your apartment building at once. If you fail to do this I will reveal secrets of your past that will make you the laughing stock of Broadway.

The second note read:

Leave ten thousand dollars in cash in a plain envelope addressed to Miss Mary Smith with the elevator operator of your apartment building at once. If you fail to do this I will reveal secrets of your past that will make you the laughing stock of Broadway.

The third note read:

Leave twenty thousand dollars in cash in a plain envelope addressed to Miss Mary Smith with the elevator operator of your apartment building at once. If you fail to do this, you will die.

"At least the third note ends a bit differently," Weaver said. "As a blackmailer, Mary Smith hasn't much originality." He glanced at the producer. "Have you the other letters you mentioned? The ones you received from Sue Shelton last year?"

"Only one of them," Hooker said, drawing it out of an inside pocket. "The others seem to have disappeared. Possibly I threw them away. I can't remember."

"If you don't mind, I'll keep these for the time being," Weaver said, thrusting them into the inside pocket of his coat. "I'll be back to see you at eight-thirty this evening, Mr. Hooker. I expect to have the blackmailer then."

"Good!" exclaimed the producer, rising to his feet. "I'll be here eagerly awaiting your arrival, Mr. Weaver."

As they stepped out of the room, Kearney appeared from the rear of the apartment and came toward them. The gray haired man's face was expressionless.

"At eight-thirty tonight then," Hooker said as he walked with Weaver to the entrance door of the apartment, and Kearney stood listening. "I'll be here waiting for you to produce the blackmailer."

"All right."

Weaver stepped out into the fourth floor hall and the door of Wilson Hooker's apartment closed behind him. He rang for the elevator, questioned the operator on the way down and then left the building. The address of Sue Shelton was a hotel in the 40's near Broadway. Weaver took his time getting there.

When he reached the hotel he asked the desk clerk if Miss Shelton was in, and showed his badge.

"So that's it," said the clerk. "She was here a little while ago, but she got a phone message and checked out in a hurry. Acted as if she was scared about something."

"How was she dressed?" Weaver asked.

"Wearing a red coat with brass buttons, green scarf, power blue skirt, brown stockings and black, open toed, high heeled shoes," said the clerk. "Blond hair worn in a short bob and no hat."

"Thanks," Weaver said. "That's a good description."

He left the hotel and on a sudden hunch took a taxi to Grand Central Terminal. He wandered around to the ticket offices on the upper level. Finally he was lucky enough to discover a blond girl, dressed just as the hotel clerk had described, buying a ticket at one of the windows.

WEAVER edged close enough to hear her ask for a ticket on one of the

late evening trains to Boston, and then moved away. She got her ticket and stepped out of the way of the others lined up at the window. She walked by Weaver and he saw the initials S. S. on her handbag. There wasn't the slightest doubt in his mind that this was Sue Shelton.

Clay Weaver spent the rest of the day trailing the girl. She had lunch and then spent the afternoon at one of the big Broadway movie theaters. Weaver also ate and saw the movie and left when Sue Shelton did. There were times when he was tempted to tell her who he was and question her, but he finally decided against it.

As they left the theater, Weaver found the girl was smarter than he thought. Evidently she had discovered in some way that he was shadowing her, for she suddenly gave him a frightened glance, hailed a passing taxi and stepped into the cab. The taxi drove off and swung around a corner before Weaver could work his way through the crowd on the sidewalk and get to the curb.

"No use trying to find another cab and try to trail her now," Weaver decided. "If she acts the way I think she will, I may be able to find her later tonight anyway."

At eight that night a slender figure slipped into the court at the side of the apartment building where Wilson Hooker lived. Sue Shelton was bound on a grim mission. She was determined to kill the theatrical producer before he killed her, as he had threatened to do in the last blackmail note he had written her.

She carried a fully loaded little automatic and she was going to use that gun on Wilson Hooker. She reached the fire escape at the side of the building. She put down her bag, thrust the automatic in a pocket of her skirt, and reached for the lower rung of the bottom ladder looming just above her head.

Her hands caught the rung and pulled the ladder down, its counterbalancing weight swinging up. Then she swiftly climbed the ladder until she reached the fourth floor landing of the fire escape. The lower part of the window was open, but the venetian blind was down. Light gleamed through it.

Sue knelt on the landing and drew the little automatic. She held it in her right hand ready to shoot as she silently raised the venetian blind with her left hand. Wilson Hooker sat in a chair in his ornate living room, his head turned toward the door leading into the hall as though anxiously waiting for someone. Sue raised the gun and aimed it directly at his head.

"Don't do anything foolish," a voice said out of the darkness above her. "Hooker hasn't been sending you those blackmail letters."

Before Sue could pull the trigger, Weaver came swiftly down the iron steps from the fifth floor landing, and grabbed the gun out of her hand.

"I've got to kill him," she wailed. "Let me do it before he kills me."

Hooker leaped up from his chair and came to the window as he heard the voices out on the fire escape. Weaver had dropped the gun he had taken from Sue Shelton into his pocket. Hooker had no idea of what had happened outside the window.

"You two have rather a novel way of arriving at my apartment," Hooker said dryly. "But come in."

SUE climbed in through the window and Hooker assisted her over the sill. Weaver followed the girl inside. Kearney appeared as Sue dropped forlornly into a chair.

"So you've got the blackmailer," Hooker said, looking at the detective.

"I have," said Weaver. "Though I am a bit puzzled regarding the motive." He looked at the butler. "Just why have you been sending the blackmail notes to Mr. Hooker and Miss Shelton? Would you mind telling me that, Kearney?"

"Beg pardon, sir," Kearney looked startled. "I think you must be mistaken."

"No, I'm not," said Weaver firmly. "Those notes Hooker received were made by someone tracing words from letters that Miss Shelton had written. That's why the wording and the way the words

were written are exactly alike in every note. Normally a person doesn't even write their signature exactly the same each time. Also your fingerprints are on those notes."

"That's impossible," said Kearney. "I wore gloves."

"So you are right, Weaver." Hooker glared at the butler. "And to think that I named you as the one who would inherit fifty thousand dollars in my will, Kearney. I've heard rumors that you have been gambling recently."

"That's it," Weaver said. "Kearney has been trying to blackmail you, Hooker, because he needed money to pay off his gambling debts. Since the amount demanded increased each time, it looks as if Kearney has been getting in deeper and deeper."

"I—I thought he was my friend." Sue stared at Kearney in horror. "He phoned me at my hotel today and warned me to get out of town—that Mr. Hooker was going to kill me. I was frightened and desperate. I got a lot of wild ideas."

"I'm sorry, Sue," Hooker said. "You poor child. How I have misjudged you. Of course Kearney sent you the threatening notes you were sure that came from me."

Weaver walked over, drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and snapped one on Kearney's right wrist, the other on his own left wrist.

"Let's go, Kearney," he said, heading toward the door with his prisoner. "The elevator operator here told me if an envelope was left with him for Mary Smith he was to get in touch with you." Weaver grinned. "As a blackmailer I'm afraid you are not too bright. You leave too many angles pointing to you that can be checked."

Weaver glanced back over his shoulder. From the way Hooker and Sue were looking at each other he suspected an old romance might be reviving. Weaver was glad this case was finishing up fairly early in the evening. Mrs. Weaver and the kids always worried when he got home late.

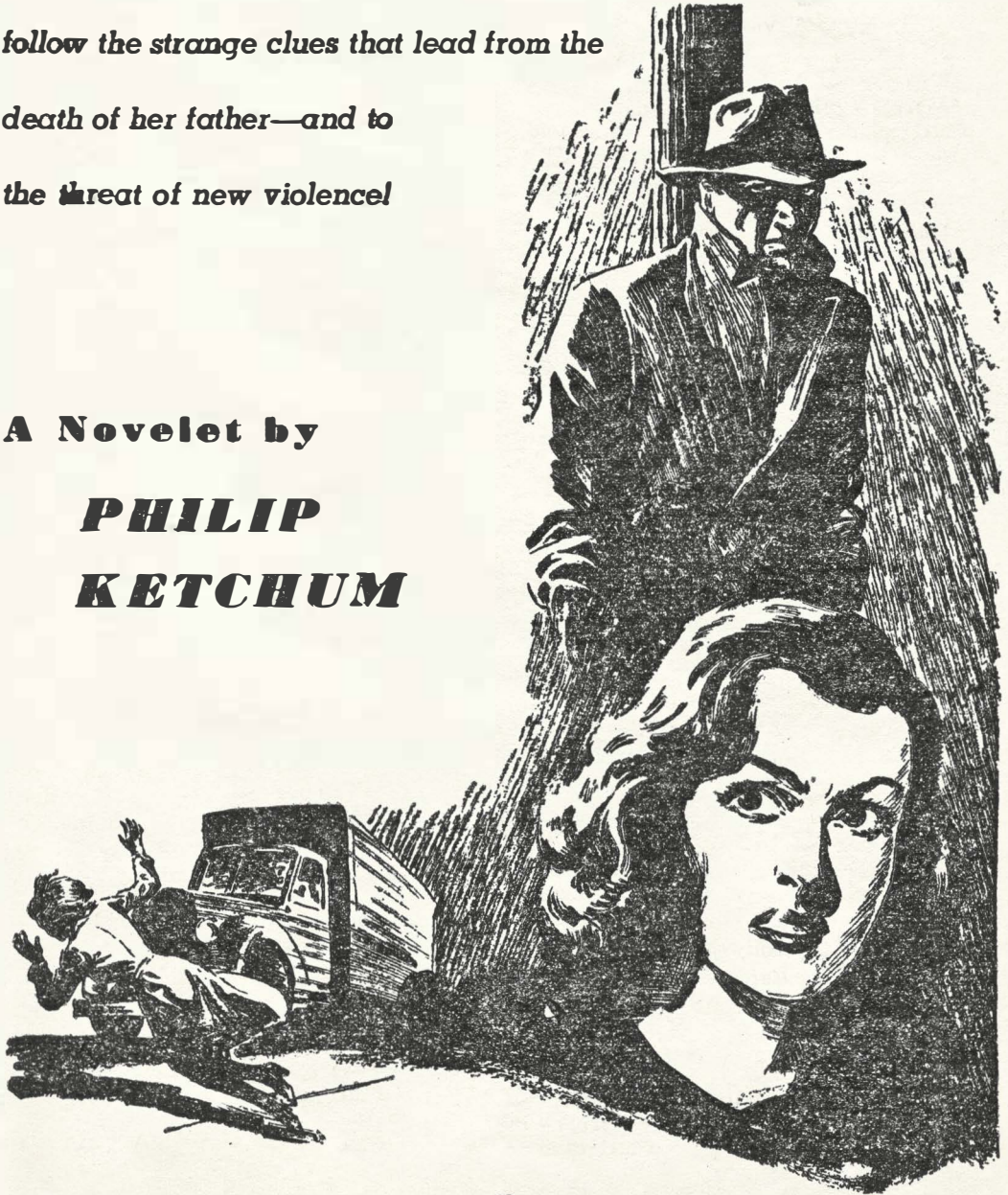
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YOU ARE

Fear stalks menacingly at her heels when Madeline Carter starts to follow the strange clues that lead from the death of her father—and to the threat of new violence!

A Novelet by

**PHILIP
KETCHUM**



NEXT TO DIE

CHAPTER I

DEATH DROPS A HAND

SHE was standing on the curb at the corner of Market and Powell streets, waiting for the traffic lights to change. She still felt almost numb from what had happened three days ago. The shock hadn't yet worn off. A crowd stood with her, waiting for a chance to cross the street, but she was hardly aware of this. A heavy truck was thundering up Market to beat the lights, but she didn't glance that way. There was a sudden movement in the crowd behind her. Hands were thrust against her back. She was shoved forward. She lost her balance and as she fell into the street her body twisted and she saw the approaching truck and the wildly startled look on the face of the driver.

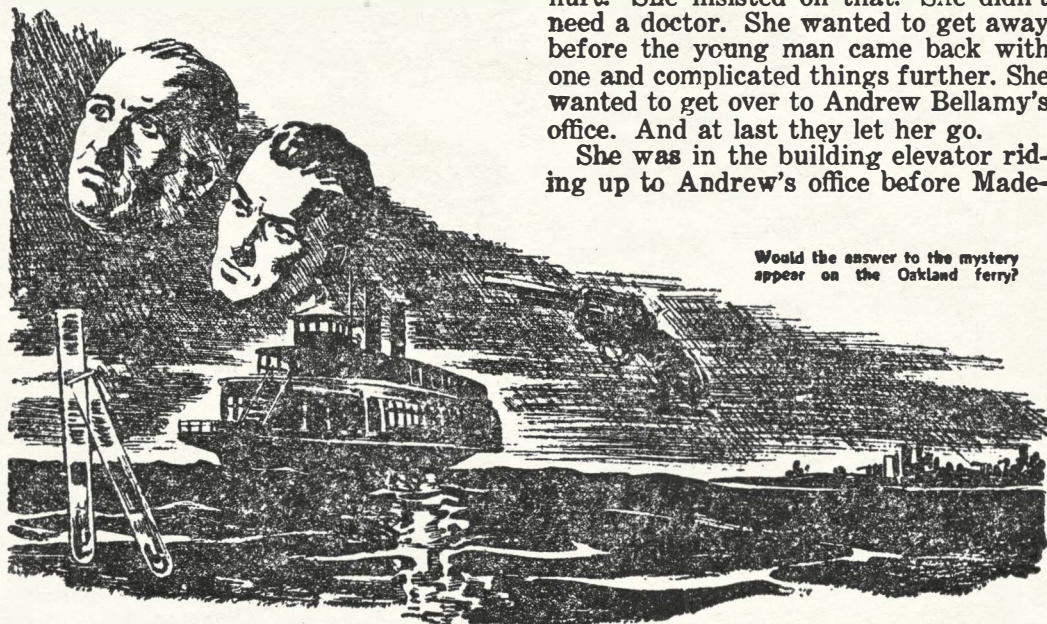
She screamed, then, and she tried, frantically, to roll away. She heard the grinding of the truck's brakes. And then

she heard voices, a babble of voices beating against her ears and people were standing over her; and so near that it almost touched her shoulder was one wheel of the truck. She could see the stones imbedded in its tread.

A man was on his knees behind her, a young man. She caught a glimpse of his face as he stood up, a thin, angular face made more severe by its tight scowl. "Stand back," this man was ordering. "She's all right. Give her air. I'll get a doctor."

The young man disappeared. Others helped her to her feet, among them the truck driver, a huge burly fellow who was trembling even more than she was and who certainly must have looked more frightened. A policeman was there and she had to give her name, Madeline Carter, and tell where she lived. She was shaken but she wasn't hurt. She insisted on that. She didn't need a doctor. She wanted to get away before the young man came back with one and complicated things further. She wanted to get over to Andrew Bellamy's office. And at last they let her go.

She was in the building elevator riding up to Andrew's office before Made-



Would the answer to the mystery appear on the Oakland ferry?

line remembered how she had happened to fall in the path of the truck. A sudden, cold chill ran over her body. She grasped the hand-rail in the elevator. She hadn't fallen. *She had been pushed.* Someone had come up behind her. Someone had deliberately shoved her into the street, shoved her so hard she had lost her balance. It was impossible, but that was what had happened. Someone had pushed her. Someone had tried to kill her.

MADeline stepped from the elevator on the eleventh floor. She walked down the corridor to Andrew's office. She stood for a moment at the door, adjusting her hat, the hat her father had jokingly called, "an ounce of precious fluff." She had brushed off her suit but there were grease stains on it from the street, stains which would probably never come out. But Andrew wouldn't mind the way she looked. There was a warm and friendly strength in Andrew Bellamy. And understanding. She was glad his office had been so near.

Miss Jennings, Andrew's secretary, smiled a welcome as Madeline came in. Miss Jennings was perhaps thirty-five. She seemed like a quietly efficient person, and was more than ordinarily attractive.

"You can go right in, Miss Carter," she suggested. "Mr. Bellamy is alone."

Madeline thanked her and crossed to the door to the inner office. She opened it and stepped inside. Andrew was talking to someone on the telephone. He grinned at her and waved her to a chair and Madeline was glad to sit down. Andrew continued talking and while he talked, Madeline studied him thoughtfully in an effort to keep from thinking of what had just happened, or almost happened.

Andrew Bellamy, who had been her father's attorney and close friend, was a man of about forty. He was short and almost fat. His hair was thin. His face was round. He didn't possess a very commanding appearance and Madeline hadn't particularly liked him until lately—until just the other night, in fact, and since then, when she had come to appreciate his steadiness and the gentleness which had been so com-

forting. He was an intense person and now, over the telephone, he was bluntly insistent about what he wanted.

He finished talking, hung up the telephone and pushed himself to his feet. Rounding the desk he came toward Madeline, holding out both his hands. And suddenly he was frowning.

"What's happened to you?" he demanded. "What's wrong?"

"I slipped and fell crossing the street," Madeline answered. "It was nothing important."

She wasn't deliberately lying to Andrew. She had said what she did because the true story would have sounded too fantastic, too impossible. And it would only have given Andrew something to worry about.

"Nothing important, huh?" growled Andrew. "Look here, young lady. I want you to take care of yourself. What, in particular, can I do for you this afternoon?"

Madeline bit her lips. She said, "Andrew, I still haven't been able to reach Joan. I'm worried. I couldn't reach her by telephone, remember? So I wired, then telephoned again. She must have received my wire but she hasn't answered it. I've had no word from her at all."

"Perhaps she is on her way to San Francisco right now," Andrew suggested.

"But why didn't she telephone, or wire?"

"She may have been too upset, Madeline. Or maybe she depended on someone else to send the wire and that person forgot. I wouldn't worry. It will do no good."

"But the funeral is tomorrow."

"She will probably be here," said Andrew. "Look at me, Madeline. You've got to keep that chin up. Let me get on the telephone and see what I can do. You run on home and take a nap. Just leave things to Uncle Andrew."

IT HAD been comforting to talk to Andrew, but she wouldn't nap. Madeline knew that as she took the street car home. She wouldn't nap and she would sleep only fitfully tonight. The shock of her father's death in an explosion which had wrecked his laboratory was

still too much with her.

The telephone was ringing when she let herself into the flat where she and her father had lived. She answered it, and on the other end of the wire heard a man's voice, a strangely hurried voice.

"Miss Carter," someone was saying. "I've got to see you. Tomorrow. It's very important."

"Why is it important?" asked Madeline, frowning. "Who is this?"

"My name won't mean a thing to you," the voice continued. "It's Fred McHugh, and I know you never heard it before, but I must see you. Alone. There's a restaurant on Turk street called the Green Lantern. Me there tomorrow afternoon at four. Your sister's life may depend on it."

The line clicked dead. Madeline caught her breath. She jiggled the telephone bar, but it didn't help. All she got was the monotonous sound of the dial-tone.

There was a package of cigarettes on the telephone stand. Madeline took one. She lit it and her fingers, she noticed, weren't very steady. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror on the wall, a glimpse of a tall, slender girl whose pale face seemed strange and unfamiliar. The eyes she saw were dark and wide. They were frightened eyes.

"Get hold of yourself, young lady," Madeline said under her breath. "Steady does it. There's an explanation for all this. Start using your head. Dad always said you had a good one. Now, prove it."

The door buzzer sounded and Madeline started that way. Then suddenly she stopped. Who would be calling on her now? Her only close friends knew she wanted to be left alone. It might be a neighbor—or it might be—someone else.

"Just a moment," Madeline called.

She hurried to the room which had been her father's study. From the bottom drawer of his desk she took his gun. It was a light .32 Colt, and several years before at her father's insistence, she had learned how to use it. She made sure, now, that the gun was loaded and then carried it back to the front room. Her hat was on the window table. She put the gun under it, under "the ounce of precious fluff."

Again the door buzzer sounded.

Madeline walked to the door and opened it. A young man stood just outside, a tall young man, so tall that he still seemed tall even though his body slouched. He was wearing no hat. He was grinning.

"I wonder if I could come in and talk with you for a minute, Miss Carter," he suggested.

Madeline made no answer. The sharp warning of danger had frozen every muscle in her body. She had seen this man before, though she didn't know him. She had seen him bending over her on Market street, scowling at her. He had said he was going for a doctor, and had disappeared. He must have been awfully close to her when she had been pushed into the street. He might even have been the one who had done the pushing. And now he was here and she was alone and he wanted to come in.

CHAPTER II

FAKE ON THE PHONE



THE young man was saying, "My name's Sam Delafield." "I'm with the Paramount Fire Insurance Company. Your father had a policy with us, covering as well as fire, the hazard of an explosion. I've got to ask you a few questions. It's purely routine, of course."

He was lying. Madeline was sure of that. She had never heard of the company he had just mentioned. Her father's insurance had been with a well known firm.

"I'll not keep you long," said Sam Delafield.

He had already stepped inside. He had stepped inside before Madeline could swing the door shut. He wore a top-coat with the collar turned up, collegiate style. His hair was sandy colored and under the tan on his face were faint freckles. He had mild, gray eyes and he glanced casually around the room and then looked at Madeline, the grin now almost gone from his lips.

Madeline had backed to the window table. She was leaning against it. Her hat was just behind her, and under it,

the gun.

"Didn't you usually go with your father when he went to the laboratory at night?" Sam Delafield asked.

Madeline nodded. She frowned. "Usually," she answered, "but that night, the night of the explosion, I didn't."

"Was there some special reason why your father went to the laboratory that night?"

"Eric Warren telephoned him and asked him to come. Eric Warren was his head chemist."

"Are you sure it was Warren who telephoned him?"

What was he driving at? What was the purpose of these questions? Was he just talking? Was that it? He had moved closer to her. His grin was now completely gone.

"There is a possibility," Delafield said slowly, "that the explosion wasn't an accident. If it wasn't, your own life might be in danger."

"Why?" Madeline asked, and the word was only a whisper.

"It's an open secret," said Sam Delafield, "that your father and Eric Warren had just discovered a new and inexpensive quick dye process for nylon fabrics. Such a process would be worth a fortune to you and your sister—if you live."

He was just talking, Madeline decided, though what he had said about the quick dye process was true. He was just talking to hold her attention while he moved ever closer to where she was standing. She felt on the table behind her. She found the gun. She brought it around and pointed it at him.

"Stand where you are," she heard someone saying. "Don't move." And the voice was her own. High and excited, but her own.

Sam Delafield scowled. He lifted his hands shoulder high and a curious look came into his face. "Hey, there," he called. "Careful of that gun. Bullets hurt."

"Get out," said Madeline. "Get out while you can."

Delafield scowled. He shook his head. He said, "Look here, Miss Carter, I'm trying to be of help. Put that thing down."

Madeline shook her head. "So you're trying to help. Where is the doctor you were going to bring?"

"So you saw me there on Market," said Delafield. "I didn't think you had. I got away as soon as I knew you hadn't been badly hurt."

"You pushed me too soon," said Madeline.

"Not me," said Delafield. "I didn't push you. And I didn't see who did. Until now, I wasn't even sure you had been pushed, though I guessed it."

"How could you guess it?"

"I told you your life might be in danger. This confirms it."

"Keep your hands up," said Madeline sharply. "Who are you? What is your real name?"

He was grinning at her. "I told you. Sam Delafield. Or to give you all of it, Samuel Delafield Warren. I'm Eric Warren's son."

Madeline didn't know whether to believe him or not. He might be telling the truth. Eric Warren had had a son, she knew, a son he often talked about named Sam. But Sam, since the war, had been working somewhere in the East. He had been out here once a few months ago. At that time Madeline had been away.

"Listen," said Sam Delafield. "I know what to do, now. I'm going to see a man, an old friend of mine. Until I get back I want you to stay right here. Don't leave for any reason at all. Don't let anyone in."

He sounded very earnest. He sounded as though he meant just what he said. He had lowered his hands and turned away and at the door, he stopped and looked back.

"Put the gun up, Madeline," he suggested. "With me, you don't need it. And lock this door after I'm gone."

MADELINE laid the gun on the table. She locked the door. She wondered if she had had a narrow escape or if Sam Delafield was really Sam Warren. Perhaps she should have held him here and called the police. She didn't know. She was confused. Confused and tired, more tired than she had ever been in her life.

An hour passed and part of another.

The afternoon light began to fade. Madeline made a cup of coffee and sat in the kitchen, drinking it and struggling with this problem. The telephone startled her and she hurried to answer it.

"Hello," said a voice she recognized immediately. "This is Fred McHugh. I talked to you earlier this afternoon but had to hang up before you said whether or not you would meet me. Can you be there tomorrow afternoon?"

"What do you know about my sister?" Madeline asked.

"That's what I want to tell you tomorrow afternoon. I can't get off until then."

"Where is she?"

"I can't tell you yet. I know, but you might do something unwise. She's in real danger."

"You'll have to tell me more," Madeline insisted.

"Listen," said the voice on the other end of the telephone. "If you want to save your sister's life you'll meet me. I'm not asking anything. Only a chance to help her—and it's not going to be easy."

Again the line clicked dead. Madeline sat at the telephone table, frowning, and more frightened by this message than she was willing to admit. Almost at once the telephone rang again. This time it was Bill Sands' voice which she heard. Bill was engaged to Joan. He had been trying as hard as Madeline to get word to her.

"I've just had a wire from Jean," Bill reported and there was a real lift in his voice. "She's on her way here by train. She's due in Oakland in two hours and wants us to meet her at the Oakland mole. She wants Andrew Bellamy to meet her, too. I've called him and he can make it. How about you?"

"Of course," said Madeline quickly. "Of course I can meet her."

"You'll have to hurry," said Bill Sands. "Can you make it to the Ferry Building by six?"

"Easily," said Madeline.

"I'll buy the tickets on the ferry boat," Bill offered. "I'll meet you at the gate."

"What else did Joan say in her wire?" asked Madeline.

"Nothing. She just asked us to meet her."

"Thanks, Bill," said Madeline.

She hung up. A great burden seemed to have slipped from her shoulders. Joan was safe. Joan was on her way to San Francisco. In two hours she would be here and tomorrow—tomorrow Madeline would meet Mr. Fred McHugh at the Green Lantern restaurant on Turk Street. She would meet him with two police officers. She would get to the bottom of this mystery.

She glanced at her watch, figuring the time it would take her to get to the Ferry Building. This was rush hour. Transportation would be slow. She didn't have much time to waste. She fixed her hair, put on her heavy coat for it would be cold crossing the bay, then moved to the door. Abruptly, she remembered her gun. She had left it on the table after Sam Delafield's departure, and now she walked that way and picked it up and slipped it into her handbag.

As she did this she happened to look through the window. There was still enough light from the sky to see the man across the street. He was lounging against a telephone pole, looking her way. He wore a dark coat and felt hat and was rather short and heavy. He wasn't doing anything at all. Just standing there.

Madeline's uneasiness came back to her. She left the flat and walked down the stairs to the street. The man she had seen from the window hadn't moved. Madeline started up the hill to the corner where she would catch the street car. She glanced back over her shoulder. The man who had been across the street was also walking up the hill.

There was no street car in sight when Madeline reached the corner. She waited, glad that several others were also waiting. The man she had noticed, joined them. He didn't look at her or seem interested in her. He was middle-aged. There was a dark scowl on his face, almost an ugly scowl. When the streetcar arrived he boarded it. He changed when Madeline changed. He got off at the Ferry Building, and was right behind her as she headed toward the waiting room.

CHAPTER III

FEAR RIDES THE FERRY



ANDREW BELLAMY and Bill Sands were there at the gate to the ferry, Bill Sands with his warm and friendly smile, and Andrew to grin at her and say, "Good girl. You made it. And you see, now, there was nothing to worry about. Everything's all right."

Madeline looked around for the man who had followed her from her flat. He had disappeared in the crowd. And probably, Madeline told herself, he hadn't been following her at all.

The ferry boat from Oakland had been delayed and they had a long wait. At one of the counters they had coffee and a sandwich. Bill kept talking about how glad he would be to see Joan. Bill was a contractor. He was tall, slender, dark haired. He hadn't known Joan long. Their courtship had been a whirlwind affair. Bill had tried to marry her before she had gone East. He promised, now, that she would never get away from him again.

The ferry at last arrived, discharged its passengers from the east bay and took on those for Oakland, many of whom would board the train there for Portland and Seattle. Madeline, Andrew and Bill sat together on the foredeck on the trip across. It was almost dark and was growing cold. The lights of Berkeley and Oakland were beginning to loom up through the early shadows.

For the first time since the near accident on Market Street, Madeline felt perfectly secure, and it was a good feeling. She leaned back and relaxed and closed her eyes.

"I'll be glad when she gets here," said Bill Sands. "I can hardly wait. The past few weeks have been long."

Madeline felt the weight of the gun in her handbag. It had been foolish to bring it. She sat up straighter and glanced from side to side. A man passing near where she was seated glanced toward her and moved on with no show of interest. It was the man who had followed her from her home, and all of Madeline's doubts suddenly crowded in

on her again.

"Andrew," she said slowly, "is there any reason you know of why anyone should want to kill me?"

"Kill you?" said Andrew Bellamy. "For gosh sakes, why?"

"That new formula father and Mr. Warren discovered just before the explosion is quite valuable."

"But what would anyone gain by killing you?"

"My interest in the formula would then go to Joan, according to my will."

"Well then, Joan might be interested in killing you," Andrew chuckled. "Or maybe Bill, here, who is going to marry her."

"Hey, what kind of conversation is this?" Bill demanded.

"I don't know," said Andrew. "Ask Madeline. She started it."

"Listen here," said Bill. "I'm making all the money Joan or I will ever need."

"But seriously," said Madeline. "Suppose that both Joan and I were killed."

"Then," said Andrew, "since you have no direct heirs, the state would benefit, and the state indulges only in legal murder which they term execution."

"Then let me ask another question," said Madeline. "Could the explosion at my father's laboratory have, possibly, not been an accident?"

"You mean, could it have been deliberate? Could someone have caused it to kill your father and Eric Warren?"

"Yes."

Andrew shook his head. "It was an accident, dear. The police made quite a complete investigation."

"Mr. Warren's son doesn't think it was an accident," said Madeline. "Or at least a man who says he is Mr. Warren's son, insists it wasn't accidental."

"A man who says he is Warren's son?" Andrew repeated.

"Yes."

"When did you see him?"

"This afternoon."

Andrew was scowling. He said, "Madeline, I don't like this. I tried to get in touch with Warren's son the morning after the explosion. They told me when I called the plant in Akron where he works that Warren's son had been loaned to the government and sent to Europe in connection with the European

Recovery Program. There isn't a chance he could have returned as quickly as this. The man you talked to is an impostor. Are you going to see him again?"

"I don't know," said Madeline.

"If you do," warned Andrew, "stall him and telephone me, or the police. I don't understand this. What did he want? Money?"

"No. At least he didn't say so."

"Well, I'm glad that Joan's coming home," said Andrew. "Now, at least you won't be alone in that flat anymore."

THE ferry boat was easing into its anchorage. People were crowding up toward the front and Madeline and Andrew and Bill joined them. When the gate was opened they hurried through and down the long ramp to the train sheds. Most of those on the boat headed for the Portland-Seattle train but Madeline, Andrew and Bill crossed to the opposite ramp. Here, the passengers from the train which was just arriving, would pass. Here they would watch for Joan.

It was windy and cold in this giant train shed and unbelievably dirty. The place always reminded Madeline of a factory. Wagon trains of luggage and mail were constantly moving back and forth from the train to the ferry. At times like this, with an arriving and departing train, the floor was thronged with moving people.

The first passengers from Joan's train reached the ramp and started up and more followed. Madeline kept watching for Joan, not sure how she would be dressed, but sure she would know her. The first rush passed, then came the stragglers, and there was still no sign of the girl for whom they were waiting. Bill puffed nervously on a cigarette, his face tense, scowling. "I'll go look for her," he said suddenly, and hurried down along the train.

"We might have missed her," Andrew muttered. "Folks were coming by awfully fast for a while. I think I'll see if she's in the waiting room upstairs. You wait here."

A few more people came from the train but not Joan. Madeline bit her lips. She had the abrupt conviction that Joan hadn't been on this train, and that

the wire Bill had received, if he had received it, had been sent by someone else. Not her sister.

They rode back to San Francisco on the ferry which carried the train passengers. Both Andrew and Bill, insisting that they might have missed Joan, were searching for her on the boat. Madeline had stopped looking. She stood at the rail and stared into the now black waters of the bay. She had asked Bill to see Joan's wire but he had said he hadn't brought it and she realized, as she thought of Bill Sands, how little she really knew of him.

It was cold out here on the open deck. Madeline turned to move inside. Turned and stopped. Near the door to the wide cabin stood the man with the scowling face whom she had first seen in front of her flat. He was talking to someone, to a tall, thin man who was hatless. Sam Delafield! There could be no question of it.

Madeline stood where she was, rigid. It was no accident that the scowling man knew Sam Delafield. It was no coincidence that they were here. She glanced from side to side and realized, abruptly, that hardly anyone else was outside the glass protected cabin. A few yards from her a man leaned over the rail. Beyond him stood a sailor with his arm around a girl. Across the deck were two other figures.

She looked back toward Delafield and the scowling man. Sam Delafield had disappeared, stepped inside, perhaps, but the man who had followed her from the flat was coming toward her. His face was now in the shadows and she couldn't see it but she remembered the scowl and the tight, cruel line of his lips.

Madeline backed against the rail, aware now of the rolling motion of the ferry boat. An icy fear closed its cold fingers on her heart. She watched the scowling man approach. A scream was building up in her throat, but she couldn't free it. She could picture what would happen, a sudden blow, a body, her body, tumbling overside. No one could live in the frigid waters of the bay. It was dark. Even if her fall was noticed there was little chance she could be picked up. The scowling man was quite

close to her now, so close she could make out his features.

"Oh, so there you are, Madeline," said the voice of Andrew Bellamy.

Never in her life had Madeline heard more welcome words. She turned her head and saw Andrew coming toward her and she felt suddenly limp. If it hadn't for the rail she might have fallen.

The scowling man glanced toward Andrew, then turned aside. Andrew was hurrying forward. He took Madeline's arm. "I've looked this boat over from one end to the other," he declared. "Joan isn't on it."

The scowling man had stopped some distance up the rail. He was leaning there, staring toward the lights of San Francisco. Perhaps his scowl was deeper. His chance was gone. And he wouldn't get another, Madeline decided. She clung tightly to Andrew's strong arm.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH TRUMPS AN ACE



MADLINE had stayed in a hotel that night. Andrew and Bill Sands had both insisted on it and she hadn't argued the matter. In the hotel she had felt safe. She had even been able to sleep.

And now in the early morning as she bathed and dressed she remembered the trip back from Oakland and the scowling man who had followed her and Andrew around the deck after Andrew had joined her. He had certainly been bold. So bold that even Andrew had noticed him.

As strange and terrifying, however, as the last twenty-four hours had been, the foremost thing in Madeline's mind this morning was the funeral. It was to be at eleven and too many people were probably coming to make a postponement possible. Perhaps, after all, Joan would make it. Perhaps she was safe. Perhaps the message from the man who called himself Fred McHugh, had had no meaning. Madeline hadn't told Andrew or Bill of the message. If Joan wasn't at the funeral, she meant to keep the appointment at the Green Lantern.

She would face no real danger in a public restaurant. Of that, she was sure.

Bill called her and offered to drive her home and then to the funeral, but she turned him down. Andrew telephoned to wish her a good morning, and Andrew also suggested that he take her to the funeral. She said no to Andrew. Both invitations she appreciated, but the funeral trip she would make alone. She wanted no one she might be tempted to lean on. Her close friendship with her father had been a very personal thing and she would say her farewells to him alone.

The service was brief, as John Carter would have wished it. The funeral chapel was crowded by many of his friends. Madeline sat in a separate room by herself. From there she could see the others through a thin curtain. She noticed many familiar faces, and among them, the man who called himself Sam Delafield. She wondered if the scowling man were present, too, but if he was she couldn't find him. And Joan wasn't there.

After the service and the long trip to the cemetery, Madeline returned home. She wasn't much surprised that both Andrew Bellamy and Bill Sands were waiting for her in front of the flat.

"You ought to get away for a while," Bill insisted. "Take a trip. Go someplace."

"Maybe," said Madeline. "Later on."

"You're not going to bury yourself in that flat," Andrew promised. "Why not stay in the hotel until you make up your mind what to do?"

THERE was more talk like this, but after a time Madeline sent both on their way and turned up the steps toward the front door. For some reason or other, she felt more steady, more sure of herself. The funeral was over. All that was mortal of her father, was gone. Joan was still mysteriously absent. The future lay in her own hands.

She unlocked the door, stepped inside, closed it, and stared tight-lipped at the man who leaned against the wall near the kitchen door, the man who claimed to be Eric Warren's son.

"No one should come from a funeral to an empty house," said Sam Delafield.

"You'll forgive me for being here, I know."

"How did you get in?" asked Madeline, sharply.

"Through the back door. I'm afraid I broke the lock. It can be bolted, of course, until the lock is repaired."

"What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you. You didn't stay here last night. Something could have happened to you on that ferry."

"Something very nearly did," Madeline answered. "If your friend had moved a little faster he might have pitched me into the bay."

"My friend?" said Sam Delafield.

"The scowling man."

"Oh. You mean Chris Tibbe."

"If that's his name."

"It is," said Delafield. "And as it happens, Chris Tibbe is a detective on the police force here."

"I don't believe it."

"Telephone headquarters and find out."

"I don't doubt," said Madeline, "that I'd discover there was a Chris Tibbe. You're probably a very clever man, Mr. Delafield."

"Mr. Warren," Delafield corrected. "Or Sam. That's a good name. Sam."

He was still leaning against the wall near the kitchen door. He had made no move toward her. He didn't seem tense or worried. In fact he appeared very much at ease.

"Here's the point, Madeline," he was saying. "I'm convinced the explosion which killed your father and mine, wasn't accidental. Both were cautious in handling explosive chemicals. I know that from my father's letters. The near accident to you, which I witnessed, convinces me you are in danger."

"Chris Tibbe agrees, and on the quiet, the police have reopened the investigation into the explosion. Meanwhile, you are being guarded, but it's hard to guard you when you charge off as you did last night. I want you to promise you'll say put for another twenty-four hours. Another day."

"Stay here, you mean?" asked Madeline.

"Yes. And incidentally, what do you know of Bill Sands, who is engaged to your sister?"

"He's a very fine man," said Madeline.

"Maybe, but also he's a very broke man and in need of money."

"That," said Madeline, "I don't believe either."

"If you were dead and he married Joan, your sister, the entire income from the new formula would be his."

"It would be Joan's."

"Who would be his wife. Think it over. And what about the promise?"

"I don't make promises, Mr. Delafield-Warren-Something-else," said Madeline.

"Then we'll just have to watch you," said Sam Delafield.

He grinned, straightened up, and started toward the door. Madeline stepped quickly away. At the door, Sam Delafield stopped.

"You know, if I were as bad as you seem to think," he said slowly, "I would grab you, knock you out, force a bottle of sleeping-pills down your throat and go off and leave you. Folks would think you had committed suicide."

Madeline was still carrying the gun in her handbag. She drew it out. "Try it," she suggested.

Again Sam Delafield chuckled. He shook his head. "No thanks. I'm allergic to things like bullets. I discovered that one cold morning in France. Be a good girl, Madeline. I'll be seeing you soon."

The door opened. He stepped outside and closed it.

Madeline crossed to the window. Through the curtain she saw him signal to a man who was parked in a car across the street, then start up the hill. She was frowning. What about him? What about this man who called himself Eric Warren's son? Everything that had happened warned her against him, yet she hadn't been afraid of him here in this room. Under other circumstances, she could even have liked him.

She turned from the window and switched on the radio. Someone, from some station, was reading news bulletins. She hardly listened, yet suddenly she was listening intently. "THE DEAD MAN," droned the announcer, "HAS BEEN TENTATIVELY IDENTIFIED AS FRED McHUGH, A MALE NURSE EMPLOYED AT THE PAULSON REST HOME IN SAN MATEO. THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING

THE SLAYING ARE STILL UNKNOWN." That was all. There was no more about Fred McHugh, but the bulletin she had just heard definitely slammed one door in Madeline's face. There would now be no meeting at the Green Lantern restaurant. The man who had said Joan was in danger and who had offered to tell what he knew, was dead.

CHAPTER V

THE MATTER OF THE MADHOUSE



ON SEARCHING the radio log of the morning newspaper Madeline discovered that there would be a newscast on another station in half an hour. She listened to it. There were more details, this time. There seemed to be little question but that Fred McHugh had been murdered. He had been supposed to be on duty at the rest home the night before. Apparently he had left, but why or under what circumstances, Dr. Paulson didn't know. His body had been found late this morning in a gully in the hills above San Mateo. His head had been crushed. The San Mateo police were of the opinion he had been thrown into the gully from a passing car. He was not known to have any enemies. According to Dr. Paulson, he had been an ideal employee.

Of course, McHugh was a common name. It might have been some other Fred McHugh who had called her. There was that chance. Madeline stretched out on the bed, closed her eyes, and tried to find in her mind some key to this entire puzzle. There had been first the explosion which had killed her father and Eric Warren, then the near accident on Market Street, the telephone call from Fred McHugh, the visit from San Delafield, the strange silence on the part of her sister Joan, the telegram from Joan, the fruitless trip to Oakland and her moment of terror on the ferry boat. How did this add up? What had happened to Joan? Who would gain if she and Joan were killed?

She sat up and looked at her watch. It was after three. The appointment at

the Green Lantern had been for four. She could get out the back way and thus avoid the man watching the flat from across the street.

She would still be able to keep the appointment.

She did. She sat in the Green Lantern restaurant on Turk street and had a cup of coffee, and then another. She was there from ten to four until four-thirty. No one but the waitress spoke to her.

The door which had been slammed in her face by McHugh's death was still closed.

But it wasn't. Fred McHugh had worked at a rest home. He had said he had word of Joan. Where was a more ideal place for holding a person than a rest home? Where was it more possible that McHugh could have met Joan? And if she had been held there against her will, McHugh's approach to her sister would have had to be cautious, would have had to fit the very pattern he had used.

There was a telephone booth in the restaurant. From it, Madeline called Andrew Bellamy. She held her voice low but she couldn't hide the excitement which gripped her.

"Andrew!" she said. "Andrew. I know where Joan is."

She could picture the puzzled look which must have come into Andrew's face. "Where is she?" he asked after a momentary pause. "On the way home? Have you heard from her?"

"I haven't heard from her directly but I know where she is," Madeline answered, and the words were rushing from her mouth now. "She's being held a prisoner in a rest home near San Mateo. I'm at a restaurant on Turk street. It's called the Green Lantern. Can you get away? Can you pick me up in your car? Can you drive me down there?"

"Are you sure she's there?" asked Andrew. "Why would Joan be in a rest home?"

"I can't explain it now," said Madeline. "It's all too involved. I'll tell you on the way down. Can you get away, Andrew?"

"I'll be right there," said Andrew Bellamy.

HE PICKED her up and they drove down the peninsula and on the way, Madeline told the whole story, everything. Andrew kept breaking in and asking questions.

He was scowling. He didn't seem to know whether he wanted to believe her or not.

"Who would put her in a rest home?" he growled. "How could she be kept there? What would anyone gain from it?"

"Joan will know," Madeline replied. "I can't answer those questions, but Joan will have the answers."

She had looked up the address of the Paulson rest home and had given it to Andrew. They found it without difficulty. It had an ideal location, high in the pine covered hills. Andrew drove through the entrance gate and parked near the broad, front porch of the low building.

"There may be trouble," Madeline whispered.

"I think not," said Andrew. "If there is, I'll handle it."

He sounded grim. He opened the glove compartment of the car and reached inside.

He frowned. "I thought my gun was in there."

"I have a gun," said Madeline. She drew it from her handbag.

"Good," said Andrew. "Let me have it."

He took it, examined it briefly, then dropped it into his pocket. "Come on," he said, climbing from the car. "Let's test this theory of yours."

Dr. Paulson was a short, stooped, gray haired man with sunken cheeks and deep-set eyes shadowed by bushy brows.

He shook his head at the mention of Joan's name.

"But she might be here under some other name," Madeline insisted.

"We have a complete social as well as medical background on every one of our guests," said Dr. Paulson. "I'm sorry not to be of help to you."

"Could we see the people who are here?" asked Andrew.

"I'm afraid that would be impossible," said the doctor. "Many of them, as you have probably guessed, are bor-

derline psychopaths. Your visit might disturb them."

Andrew's lips tightened. His hand dipped into his pocket where he had placed Madeline's gun. "Doctor," he said grimly, "may I see you alone—in your office."

"Of course," said Dr. Paulson.

"You wait here," Andrew said to Madeline. "This shouldn't take long."

He followed Dr. Paulson from the waiting room into which they had been admitted, to a small adjoining office. He closed the door. Madeline took a brief turn around the room. She was terribly disappointed. She had been positive they would find Joan here, but Dr. Paulson had seemed very honest in all he had said.

There was another door from this room, a door into a deeper part of the building. Madeline suddenly headed that way. She didn't know what Andrew would be able to force the doctor to tell him, but she didn't mean to leave here without being quite sure she had been wrong.

THE DOOR opened into a long corridor which ran the full length of the two wings of the building. On either side were rooms. A man in a white jacket, possibly an orderly, was coming up this corridor toward her. She waited for him.

"You shouldn't be here, miss," he said when he reached her.

"Did you know Fred McHugh?" Madeline asked.

"Of course."

"He tried to telephone me about a patient," said Madeline. "I think that's why he was killed. A girl younger than I. A girl with very black hair and dark eyes. About my size. Do you know which patient that was?"

The man facing her, frowned. "It might have been Mrs. Anderson," he said slowly. "She's in room 15, but why—"

"Where is room fifteen?" Madeline insisted.

"Down that way," said the man pointing. "But no visiting is allowed without permission of Dr. Paulson."

Madeline reached into her purse. She drew out some money. She held it to-

ward the man. "Please," she said swiftly. "Take this. I must see her. She is my sister."

The orderly might still have objected, but Madeline gave him no chance. She raced down the corridor. She found the room numbered 15. She opened the door and stepped inside and on the bed was Joan, a thin, pale, scarcely recognizable Joan whose eyes had a glazed and almost vacant look.

"Joan!" Madeline cried. "Joan!"

She hurried to the side of the bed and fell on her knees, her hands on Joan's shoulders. She called her name over and over.

"Maddy," whispered Joan. "Maddy, is it really you?"

"It's me, Joan. Yes, it's really me."

"And you'll take me away from here? I'm not mad, Joan. I'm not crazy, but they're driving me crazy. You'll take me away?"

Joan was crying. Her thin body was trembling. One of her hands clutched Madeline's wrist but there was no strength in it.

"Of course we'll take you away," said Madeline.

"And I won't have to see him any more?" said Joan. "I didn't marry him, Madeline. I know I didn't, but they say I did. They say I am his wife and that I was ill, but I'm not."

THE strange, vacant look had gone from Joan's eyes. She was weak, Madeline knew, but she was entirely rational.

She had perhaps been doped. What other horrible treatment she had undergone, Madeline couldn't even guess. But that wasn't important now.

The important thing now was to get her away.

"Where are your clothes?" asked Madeline.

"I—haven't any."

Madeline got to her feet. "Who brought you here, Joan? How long have you been here?"

There was a sound at the door. Joan's head jerked that way. Her eyes widened. Fear jumped into them. Madeline looked around. The door had opened and coming into the room was the man who called himself Sam Delafield-Warren.

"TO LAUGH AGAIN"



SAM DELAFIELD closed the door. He said, "Hello, Madeline," and there was no warmth in his voice and he wasn't smiling. He moved up to the bed and looked down at Joan and now his face softened. "Has it been rugged, Joan?" he asked quietly.

"Pretty rugged—Sam," Joan answered.

"Don't worry," said Sam Delafield. "It'll soon be over. Was your sister in on it?"

"Madeline?" Joan sounded surprised. "Of course not."

"Then how did she happen to come here?"

"I sent a message—by one of the men."

Madeline's eyes had widened. There seemed to be a perfect understanding between Joan and Sam Delafield and this confused her.

"Joan," she said. "Joan, who is this man?"

"Why it's Sam Warren," said Joan. "He's Eric Warren's son."

"He didn't bring you here?"

"I haven't seen him since he was here, visiting his father. You were away then."

Sam was grinning at her. "Change your mind about me, Madeline," he suggested. "I'm on your side. I always have been. And that scowling man who frightened you on the boat was really there to protect you. I must say you haven't helped me much, but both Chris Tibbe and I figured that if you left the flat at all, you'd leave by the back door. You weren't hard to follow."

Madeline was all mixed up. Someone had kidnapped Joan, claimed to have married her, had brought her here and was holding her here. This had been so important that the man who had tried to carry a message from Joan, had been killed. And someone had tried to kill her, but not Sam Delafield Warren. Joan's attitude toward Sam was proof of that, proof that Sam was just what he had said he was.

Sounds reached in from the hall, sounds of men's voices. Sam whirled away from the bed. He moved swiftly toward the door and stood against the wall. "Steady, Madeline," he called in a whisper. "Everything's going to work out right."

The door was opening. It was opening so that it hid Sam from the men who were coming in. One was Dr. Paulson. He was flanked by two broad shouldered fellows wearing orderly coats. Behind them was Andrew Bellamy.

"Here she is," said Paulson, "though how she got here I can't imagine. All right, Eddie. You and Joe bring her to the office. Pay no attention to what she says. She's in pretty serious condition. Dementia praecox."

THE TWO white coated figures moved into the room, straight toward Madeline. Dr. Paulson, just inside the door was watching her narrowly. Andrew Bellamy had moved up next to him. There was a tight, almost ugly scowl on Andrew's face. These men were coming toward her and Andrew was doing nothing! Nothing at all. He was just standing there.

Madeline backed to the wall. The two men were closing in and now had seized her by the arms.

"Just come along with us, miss," said one of them. "Don't worry about a thing."

"Andrew!" Madeline called. "Andrew. Stop them!"

The two men holding her had started toward the door, and suddenly had stopped. Both were staring at Sam Delafield and now Sam stepped forward.

Paulson swung to face him, and Andrew Bellamy jerked that way, too. Andrew's hand was in his pocket. He brought it out and in it, Madeline saw her gun. She screamed a warning.

Things happened fast, too fast to fit into any logical sequence. Sam's arm swung out and thrust Dr. Paulson against Andrew Bellamy. The gun Andrew was holding exploded as he staggered sideways. Sam was moving toward him. The two men who had been holding Madeline, forgot about her. They released her. They rushed toward Sam. Andrew, unaccountably, was on the floor. Perhaps Sam had hit him. And Paulson, attempting to scoot through the door had run into other men who were now crowding into the room, other men who were led by a short, stocky man whose scowl Madeline would never forget.

There was a brief struggle at the door. There was hoarse shouting and the flat sound of crushing blows, and the milling picture of battle and above this, the sharp and commanding voice of the scowling man. And abruptly as it started, it was over. One of the orderlies lay flat on his back, unconscious. One had backed away, his hands raised above his head. Dr. Paulson was being held by two strange men. The scowling man stood above Andrew Bellamy and now bent over and snapped handcuffs on Bellamy's wrists, then looked at Sam.

"You all right, Sam?" Madeline heard him ask.

"Of course I am," said Sam Delafield. "But you didn't get here any too soon."

"You were the one who wanted to go

[Turn page]



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on ahead, remember?" said the scowling man. "You insisted that we wait outside."

Sam was grinning.

He stood near the door, above Andrew Bellamy, rubbing one hand over the knuckles of the other.

"What about the girls?" asked the scowling man.

"I'll call an ambulance for Joan," said Sam. "We'll take her to a hospital. Madeline and I will ride in with her. The clean-up, here, is yours. Bellamy is yours, too. And don't forget, there are probably a few people here who need medical attention. You'd better call in the county health officer."

"The local police, too," said the scowling man. "After all, I'm out of my territory."

Madeline sat on the edge of the bed, holding Joan's hands. She couldn't remember sitting down and she doubted very much whether or not she could stand. It was all over, she realized. The danger which had threatened her and which had almost destroyed Joan, was past. It was a danger which had been centered in Andrew Bellamy, on whom she had relied so much, who had seemed so friendly, so close, so completely dependable.

The scowling man now pulled Andrew to his feet and before he was led from the room, Madeline caught a glimpse of his face. It was not the jovial face she knew. The lines seemed deeper and his eyes had a dazed and almost frightened look.

IT WAS an hour before the ambulance came. Much of this time Madeline and Joan were alone. Sam was off, somewhere, with the scowling man and the other officers.

The scowling man was really Detective Chris Tibbe, but it was hard to think of him by that name.

At last, however, the ambulance was ready and she and Sam rode in it with Joan. They stayed at the hospital until Joan was settled for the night and a doctor had assured them that with a little care she would soon be up and around again. After this, Sam took Madeline home, and in her front room, they talked.

"We'll get this over and behind us," said Sam Delafield, or Sam Warren, as Madeline was now trying to think of him. "Some of what I'll mention I know from Chris Tibbe, an old friend and a top-grade detective. Some I know from what Bellamy admitted after his arrest, some from what Dr. Paulson said, and some I have guessed. First, the explosion which killed your father and mine, and which was supposed to kill you, was set off by Andrew Bellamy. He has admitted it."

MADELINE shuddered. She closed her eyes and listened.

"Next," said Sam, "it was Andrew who pushed you into the path of the truck and who telephoned a fake wire to Bill Sands, designed to get you on the ferry boat from which you could be pushed into the bay. Chris, however, was on the job that night and Andrew didn't have the chance he needed. Later, he killed Fred McHugh, who made the mistake of complaining to Dr. Paulson about Joan. Paulson called Andrew Bellamy, and Andrew took care of McHugh."

"But what about Joan?" Madeline asked.

"She never went East," Sam answered. "Andrew doped her. He found a minister up in Marin county who married them, then he took her to the rest home where she was confined, and where she was rapidly being driven crazy. With you and your father dead, Andrew, as her husband, would have controlled the fortune that new quick dye process will bring in. Why go more into detail? It's not a pretty picture."

It wasn't. Madeline opened her eyes and looked across at Sam who was slouched deep down in his chair and who was making himself very much at home.

He grinned at her. It was a lazy, friendly grin.

"Hey, are you any good around the house?" Sam asked abruptly.

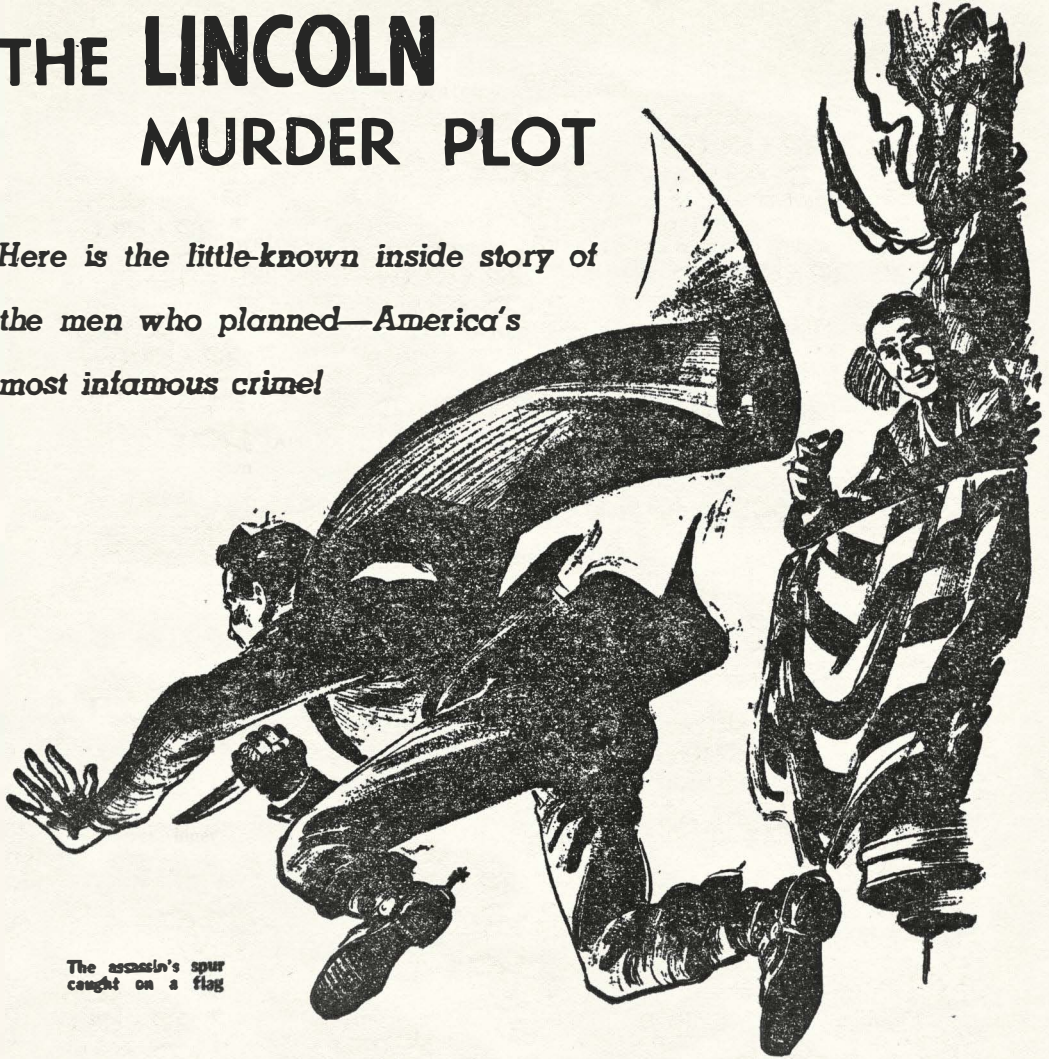
"Of course I am," Madeline answered.

"Then how about some food for a hungry man?"

This was such a wholesome and such a homely demand that Madeline laughed. And it was awfully good to be able to laugh again.

THE LINCOLN MURDER PLOT

*Here is the little-known inside story of
the men who planned—America's
most infamous crime!*



The assassin's spur
caught on a flag

By JACKSON HITE

WHILE every school child knows that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in Ford's Theater in Washington, D. C., by John Wilkes Booth, remarkably few people know the details of what actually was an intricate murder plot, similar in many respects to those dreamed up by fiction writers, but in this case the victim actually was the President of the United States.

The unraveling of the plot and the

capture of those who took part in the conspiracy is a fascinating story, and one that properly belongs in this series of American Crime Classics.

On the night of April 14, 1865, Ford's Theater was sold out. Washington was in a gay mood. The tide of battle in the Civil War had turned in favor of the Federal troops and people were light-heartedly flocking to the theater. The bill for the night as arranged by John T. Ford, proprietor and manager of the

theater, proclaimed, "Benefit and Last Night of Miss Laura Keene, the distinguished manageress, authoress and actress, in the celebrated eccentric comedy, 'Our American Cousin.'" "

The presidential box was decorated with flags and bunting indicating that President Lincoln was to attend the performance, but he had not arrived when the curtain went up. A short time later the play halted and the band played, "Hail To the Chief" as President Lincoln did arrive accompanied by his wife, an aide, Major Rathbone, and the Major's fiancée, Miss Cora Harris. President Lincoln sat in a corner of the box.

The Assassin Enters

At 10:10 P.M., a young man entered the theater and moved up the steps leading to the box. When a servant approached him he presented a card with a flourish and continued up the stairs. After he gained entry into the private box section he removed a board that had been concealed under his cape and placed it so that it barred anybody from the outside from entering.

Harry Hawk, the show comedian, was on the stage alone at this time. All eyes, including those of President Lincoln, were focused on the stage. The intruder quietly opened the private door of the presidential box without being noticed by any of the occupants. He whipped out a small derringer, thrust it against the back of the President's head, and fired. Lincoln slumped forward, mortally wounded.

Startled by the shot, Major Rathbone turned around just in time to see the intruder slash at him with a long knife. The Major put up his arm to protect his head and he received a deep cut.

The assassin then shouted, "Sic semper tyrannis," a Latin phrase meaning, "Ever so to tyrants," and vaulted to the stage below. As he did, one of his spurs caught momentarily on a flag hanging from the box. He plunged awkwardly to the stage, but jumped up, visibly limping, and dashed out to the alley where he leaped upon a waiting horse and fled. Before spurring the steed, he blew on a whistle.

The audience had been too stunned to

move even after Major Rathbone had shouted, "He just shot the President."

President Lincoln was carried to a house directly across the street from the theater where he died early next morning.

Another Murder Attempt

This much of the story is generally known. But few know that practically at the same time that President Lincoln was shot, an intruder, posing as a messenger with medicine, entered the home of William H. Seward, Secretary of State, and attempted to kill him. Seward was ill in bed with a broken jaw and arm injuries suffered in a fall, and the caller said he had some medicine sent by the family physician.

He refused to give it to the servant, claiming he had orders to deliver it personally, and pushed the objecting servant aside.

Frederick Seward, son of the cabinet member, heard the noise and met the stranger on the steps. He told him nobody could see his father. The caller then pulled out a gun and fired directly at Frederick. The bullet was faulty and did not explode. The stranger then battered Frederick on the head with the revolver and ran into the Secretary of State's bedroom.

A male nurse named Robinson, and Seward's daughter, Anna, were also in the room.

Using a knife, he slashed at both Robinson and Miss Seward, who were trying to keep him away from the Secretary of State. His knife once hit Seward in the jaw, but struck a steel brace and did not injure him. Seward managed to roll onto the floor and out of the would-be assassin's way. By this time, Col. Augustus Seward, another son, and a messenger from the Department of State had arrived. The attacker also slashed them and dashed down the steps, making his escape on horseback, leaving five wounded people in the house. Anna Seward was fatally injured.

There was no secret as to the identity of President Lincoln's assassin almost from the moment the shot was fired. Many of those in the theatre recognized

him as John Wilkes Booth, the youngest son of Junius Brutus Booth, and a member of a famous theatrical family.

Trailing the Killer

Immediately upon the death of President Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton took charge of the case and he assigned Col. Lafayette C. Baker, head of the United States Secret Service, to the task of running down Booth and everybody else involved in the murder. The Secret Service at that time did not guard the President but was attached to the Army as spies and counter-spies.

It was obvious to Stanton that the assassination was not a spur-of-the-moment thing but a well-hatched plot, with the attempted murder of Seward being part of the scheme. Evidence later uncovered showed that Stanton himself had been marked for death that night.

Our great modern system of almost instantaneous communications still was in the future at that time, although the telegraph had been invented and was in use. It required hours for the news of the attacks to get about and to have roadblocks established on the highways leading out of Washington.

Baker learned that Booth already had fled the city. He had galloped over the Navy Yard Bridge only a short time after the shooting. The guards knew nothing about the assassination and allowed him to pass. A man named David Herrold also had ridden over the same bridge about a half hour after Booth. Later, when the guards learned of the shooting, they closed the bridge.

The Secret Service head learned that Booth and Herrold were close friends. Herrold was a pharmacist in a drug store near the White House where the President and his family had their prescriptions filled.

Stanton's belief in a plot was strengthened by a strange ad that had appeared December 1, 1864, in an Alabama newspaper, the *Selma Morning Despatch*. A copy of the ad had been forwarded to Washington by a Union spy operating behind Confederate lines. The ad read:

One Million Dollars Wanted to Have Peace by the 1st of March

If the Citizens of the Southern Confederacy will furnish me with the CASH, or good securities for the sum of one million dollars, I will cause the lives of ABRAHAM LINCOLN, WILLIAM H. SEWARD and ANDREW JOHNSON to be taken by the first of March next. This will give us peace, and satisfy the world that CRUEL TYRANTS can not live in a "land of liberty." If this is not accomplished, nothing will be claimed beyond the sum of FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS, IN ADVANCE, which is supposed to be necessary to reach and SLAUGHTER the THREE VILLAINS.

I will give myself, ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS TOWARD THIS PATRIOTIC PURPOSE.

Who Placed the Ad?

The ad then concluded with the words that every one wishing to contribute should address their replies to a post office box "X" in another Alabama town. The Secret Service Agents were not able to learn who had rented box X or who had placed the ad.

Washington police and Secret Service agents went to work quickly after President Lincoln's assassination to piece together Booth's movements during the fateful day. They knew that he was a friend of John H. Surratt who lived with his mother, Mary, at 541 H Street in Washington. Surratt was suspected by Secret Service men of being a Confederate spy. He often had been seen in Booth's company.

Officers raided the house on H street that night, but Surratt was not there. Among those interviewed in the house was a boarder named Lewis Weichmann, who was a minor government employee. He said little that night.

With John Surratt missing, War Secretary Stanton issued a bulletin for the arrest of Booth, Herrold, and Surratt, offering rewards totaling \$30,000. Later this sum was to be raised to \$100,000 for the various suspects.

The suspicions of Stanton suddenly were confirmed by Weichmann, Mrs. Surratt's boarder, who informed police that Booth had been a frequent visitor there and that he heard the occupants scheming as to how they could kill President Lincoln. He confirmed that the

house was headquarters for spies. He said his sympathies had been with the South and he had allowed himself to be sucked into the ring.

A Raid at Midnight

Unknown to the occupants, the house had been under constant surveillance since the President's murder. It was decided, after Weichmann talked, to arrest Mrs. Surratt and others in the house. Officers raided the place at midnight. While they still were there, a young husky giant with a new-grown beard walked up the back staircase carrying a pickax. He claimed he was calling at that hour to receive instructions from Mrs. Surratt about a ditch she wanted dug. The officers noted that if the man had been clean-shaven he would answer the description of the attacker at the Seward home.

Mrs. Surratt was asked if she knew the man. "Before God, I do not know him," she declared. "I have never seen him. I did not hire him to dig any ditch."

The man was identified by the Swards as the attempted assassin of their father. He gave his name as Lewis Payne. Police discovered that he also was known as Lewis Thornton Powell.

Weichmann recognized Payne as a frequent caller with Booth at the house, thereby establishing that Mrs. Surratt had lied when she claimed she never had seen him. It further indicated that Mrs. Surratt knew of the plot, otherwise she would not have feared to admit knowing him.

The probing into Booth's friends brought up the name of George Atzerodt, who also was suspected of being a Confederate spy and a blockade runner on the Potomac. He had been seen in Washington with Booth on the day of the assassination, and also had disappeared. Weichmann revealed that the missing man frequently stayed at the Kirkwood Hotel and Secret Service agents went there and learned that on the night of April 14 he had occupied the room directly above Vice-President Andrew Johnson.

Baker wondered if Atzerodt was supposed to have murdered the vice-president at the same time the attacks were

being made on Lincoln and Seward. Booth had called at Vice-President Johnson's suite on the afternoon of the 14th and left his calling card.

Digging into the background of Atzerodt brought to light information that he had a sweetheart living in Washington. The woman claimed she hadn't seen him in some time and didn't know where he was. Secret Service agents searched her home and in a trunk in the attic found a message from him which showed that he was hiding out in Maryland. Officers went there and arrested the suspect.

Message in a Trunk

Booth's own trunk, which had been in the National Hotel in Washington, contained letters bearing the names of Samuel Arnold and Michael O'Laughlin, two former Confederate soldiers now living in Union territory. These men were traced and arrested.

The main prisoners refused to talk although Mrs. Surratt kept insisting that her son, John, had been on a trip to Canada some days before Lincoln's assassination.

The Federal men discovered that Payne was a simple minded fellow who had been under the complete domination of the elegant and wordly actor whom he revered. For several weeks Payne seldom ate and would not answer any questions, but gradually one of the men won his confidence and got him talking.

Payne said that Booth had been the mastermind behind the murder plot and the funds came from him. Where Booth got the money he did not know. He knew nothing about the million dollar assassination ad.

It was true that Booth had been a very successful actor and commanded large fees.

Payne revealed that there had been at least three different plots hatched to either kidnap or murder President Lincoln before the successful one. The whistle that Booth had blown after emerging from the theatre was a signal to Herrold to notify the others that he had succeeded. The plotters then were to flee the city.

Atzerodt also began to talk. He denied that he was to have killed Vice-President Johnson and said the actual plot was to ruin Johnson's reputation by linking his name with Booth. This was the reason the actor had called at the hotel to see the vice-president the afternoon of the murder. Johnson had been out and Booth left his calling card. The actor wanted to be recognized after the assassination and pictured himself as a great hero to the people of the South.

It was Weichmann, the boarder, who involved Mrs. Surratt most deeply. He said that Booth had been in Washington for some six months prior to the assassination and often was at the Surratt home. At first he had wanted to kidnap President Lincoln and bring him a prisoner to Jefferson Davis. Booth actually arranged where he would spend the nights with the abducted president. Herrold, Atzerodt, O'Laughlin, and Arnold, were to have major roles in the abduction. They plotted to seize the President on a certain day while he was en route to visit wounded soldiers at a hospital. But on that day, President Lincoln was detained by pressure of work in the White House and couldn't make the trip.

The conspirators, afraid that somebody might have got wind of their activities, dispersed for a while. Later O'Laughlin and Arnold were directed to kill Secretary of War Stanton at the same time the other key government officials were to be killed. The latter two said they agreed because they were afraid of Booth, but they fled Washington the night of April 13, the night before the assassination.

With the various statements, War Secretary Stanton now had definite proof of the plot, but Booth, Herrold and John Surratt still were missing. Federal authorities did manage to pick up the trail of Booth as he fled southward through Maryland. They learned that he was walking as if crippled. Finally they located a doctor who said Booth had come to him with a broken leg which he had suffered most likely when his foot caught in the American flag as he plunged to the stage. The physician set the leg and still had the riding boot he had removed from Booth. The doctor was arrested although he insisted he had not known at the time of the murder of President Lincoln. Later he was cleared, after serving time in prison.

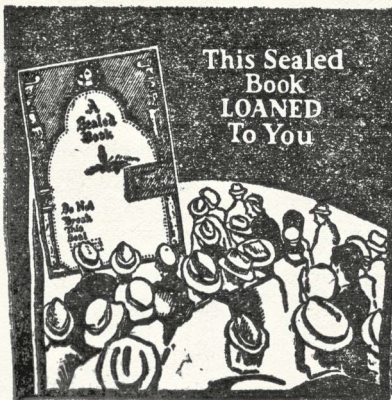
Following a Cold Trail

Still following the cold trail, the tenacious Federal men found where Herrold had joined Booth, who still was on the move despite his broken leg. The trail finally led to a farm near Bowling Green where Booth and Herrold were trapped in a barn.

Herrold surrendered when the Federal officers ordered the men to come out. Shouting that he knew nothing about the other man in the barn and that he had no firearms, Herrold came out with his hands held high. Booth shouted after him, "So you desert me, too, in my hour of great need."

The actor refused to emerge, and the barn was set on fire. A young soldier who saw Booth coming toward the door

[Turn page]



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just as his commanding officer stepped toward it, decided that Booth was out to shoot his commanding officers and he fired, striking the actor in the head. Booth died a short time later.

The actor's body was brought back to Washington and the various prisoners, including Herrold, were placed on trial. Johnson, who had succeeded to the Presidency, ruled that the prisoners would have to stand trial before a military commission rather than a civil trial.

Weichmann was one of the star witnesses for the government. He said that on the day of the assassination he had accompanied Mrs. Surratt to Surrattsville, where her family owned an inn. She left a package there. Booth had made the inn his first stop during his flight and it is believed he picked up the package. Later, while Weichmann and Mrs. Surratt were returning to Washington, she pointed to the city and predicted that the people there soon wouldn't be so happy.

Mrs. Surratt, Payne, Herrold, and Atzerodt, all were convicted of treason and murder, and were sentenced to be hanged. The others received sentences ranging from a few years to life imprisonment.

The four were hanged on July 7, 1865. Up to the moment of her death Mrs. Surratt never confessed guilt, and insisted that her son, John, who was still missing, was innocent.

The hunt for John Surratt continued. Two years later he was found employed in the Papal Zouaves, the bodyguard to the Pope in Rome. He was turned over to American authorities but broke away, slid down a cliff, and boarded a boat bound for Alexandria, Egypt. He was picked up there and brought back to this country. A jury was unable to reach a verdict. While several witnesses testified they had seen him in Washington on April 14, he produced reputable witnesses who swore he was out of town.

The government finally decided to release him, closing the case of the amazing murder plot to wipe out the key figures in our government.

Every once in a while, a story crops up that Booth did not die in Bowling Green. Like most such stories, there is no basis for it. Booth's body was brought to Washington where it was identified by more than twenty persons, including a Dr. May who had operated on the actor's neck. The physician even identified the scar of his operation.

The "Inside" of Detective Work

8. Suicide or Murder?



ONE of the most difficult problems in homicide investigation is determining whether a case is suicide or murder. Here are some points detectives have to consider.

If it's suicide, the gun must have been fired from a distance of no more than twenty inches. Analyses of powder residues and burns will aid in fixing the distance. And if several bullet wounds are found in the dead man, more likely than not it's murder.

In cases of hanging, there must be a chair, ladder, or other object around from which the victim jumped—if his body is hanging free.

It's impossible for a person to choke himself to death with his hands. The hands become powerless as a person becomes unconscious, and at that point he'd still be a long way from dead. The direction of cutting or stabbing wounds in suicide should conform with whether the person was right—or left-handed.

Suicides almost invariably uncover the part of the body where they plan to stab or shoot themselves. If the clothing has been cut through, a murder is usually indicated.

Suicides usually leave notes, have made statements indicating they were planning suicide, or have records of past, unsuccessful suicide attempts.

—Carter Critz

LAST of the LANSINGS

by
WAYLAND RICE



*When he is faced by a desperate killer, Lieutenant Kelly
blasts wide open the mystery of the disappearing family!*

SAMUEL PHILIPS LANSING was about sixty-two and looked perhaps ten years older. Why, nobody knew, for he'd hardly done a lick of work in his life. People who lived in Poplar City and didn't work were considered freaks.

He was short and rather stout and looked something like a small town physician. His manners were the casual, lazy ones of a person born to wealth. He was sitting now in the old fashioned living room in a tapestry chair that had seen

better days.

Samuel Philips Lansing was still wringing his hands. "I can't understand it," he said in his squeaky voice. "It's utterly incredible that Ellen hasn't come home. She never stays out past ten o'clock and it's two in the morning now. That's why I called the police."

Lieutenant Robert Kelly nodded. "I know how you feel, but Mr. Lansing, your sister has been missing only three or four hours. She did leave the high school auditorium at nine-forty. She drove your old family car. We've already found that in your garage so she must have come here."

"Then why isn't she here now?" Lansing asked plaintively. "I can't get along without her. She knows that."

Kelly asked, "Did she ever stay away before? Even for a matter of a few extra hours, like tonight?"

"Never. She knew I wouldn't like it."

"How has she been feeling? Do you think she could have wandered off somewhere?"

"No. You are referring to amnesia. Quite impossible. There has never been anything like that in the family. Something has happened to Ellen. Something—bad."

Kelly was thinking the same thing. He knew that incredible old lady, Ellen Lansing. Knew how she flitted about minding everybody's business. A small but never run down human dynamo. A woman of fixed habits who lived by the clock. Yet he didn't want to alarm this old man. Not quite yet.

Kelly rose. "Suppose I look over the house with you, Mr. Lansing. She might have entered without attracting your attention. She might be ill, or been hurt."

"I've looked. And looked," Lansing exclaimed. "She isn't here. But, if you insist, I'll look again."

They searched the house from cellar to attic. Kelly entered the final room which he knew was just below the glassed-in turret set atop the huge old mansion. He started opening doors. One led into a bathroom, another into a clothes closet and a third into a storage room. The fourth door was securely locked.

"How about this one?" Kelly asked.

"It goes to the turret room," Lansing said. "I keep it locked. We have valuable

things up there. I'll open it for you."

He took out an enormous bunch of keys, carefully selected one made of brass and unlocked the door. A steep, dusty stairway stretched upwards. Climbing it, Kelly knew that Ellen Lansing couldn't have come here. The dust hadn't been upset for months.

IN THE turret room, with four large plate glass windows overlooking the whole town, Kelly made only a perfunctory search. There was nowhere even a small woman like Ellen could be hiding. He stared for a moment out into the moonlit night and saw the quarry pond sparkling brightly. Kelly chewed on his lower lip. The quarry pond had taken more than one life in the last few years. It was a popular place for suicides.

Kelly turned to the old man. "What about your financial status, Mr. Lansing? Forgive me for asking and what you tell me will go no further, but did your sister have money troubles?"

Lansing nodded. "We've been living on the last of our inheritance for the past ten years. Barely ekeing out an existence but comfortable enough for all that. Ellen has been in the habit of attending as many dinner parties and teas as possible and she always sneaked out something to eat for me. Yes, we're certainly not rich any more."

They went downstairs again. Kelly felt that he might as well lay it on the line. "Mr. Lansing, do you think your sister could have killed herself? From the results of worry, I mean."

"No, I don't. We Lansings are a proud family, what there is left of us. Meaning only me if—if Ellen is dead. Some of my ancestors took their own lives but never over money matters."

Kelly picked up his hat. "I'll keep working on it. Personally I believe your sister is suffering from amnesia and has just wandered off somewhere. She'll turn up. I'll send out an alarm for her. Don't lose hope."

"I haven't," Lansing said without raising his head. "I know your first step though. I noticed how intently you looked at the quarry pond. She won't be there, Lieutenant. Not Ellen. She was too fastidious to have drowned herself in that dirty old pond."

Kelly walked to the door, opened it and was out on the porch when Lansing stepped into the doorway. He rubbed his nose and looked thoughtful.

"Just the same," he said, "perhaps you should search the quarry pond. Let me know, one way or another."

Kelly started the ball rolling. The pond was dragged for hours. Certainly Ellen hadn't fallen or jumped into it. There were no results from his teletyped alarms to various states. Nobody at the bus station or the railroad station had seen her. She'd driven her own car back to the house and so eliminated any idea of having gone off by motor.

The Lansings had only one relative, a nephew who lived in Chicago, some nine hundred miles away. Kelly even took a chance and phoned him.

He chuckled at Kelly's question. "I haven't seen Aunt Ellen in thirty-odd years. I wouldn't know her if I bumped into her and I can assure you she didn't contact me."

Ellen Lansing continued to be missing. For seven months Kelly conducted a sporadic search without finding the dimmest trace of the woman. He finally placed her record folder in the unsolved case section of the files. He'd all but forgotten the matter when his telephone awakened him at five one October morning. The desk sergeant at headquarters was on the wire.

"Just got a call from a neighbor of the Lansings, Lieutenant. Seems a cat has been crying inside the house for the last couple of days, and nobody has seen anything of old man Lansing. You worked on the disappearance of the old lady, so I figured maybe you'd like to handle this."

"I'll go over there right away," Kelly said. "Thanks for calling me."

He told his half asleep wife about it, heated up some left over coffee and had a slice of toast while he dressed. He got out his own car and drove the four miles to Lansing's home. In the brightness of dawn, the old place looked more run down than ever. The moment he stepped on the porch, he heard the wailing of the cat.

Kelly rang the hand operated doorbell, pounded on the panels a moment and finally he broke a window. When he raised the sash, a gray and white cat dived out onto the porch and scampered away.

Kelly felt uneasy in the dismal stillness of the big house. He had a feeling that Death had preceded him here.

Knowing the layout of the place, he started his search systematically. In Lansing's bedroom, he found the bed unmade and looking as if it had been that way for days. In the kitchen there was pitifully little food. Some soup had dried up in a pan, the bread was green and moldy, the ice in the ancient ice box had melted long ago. Even the drip pan under the ice box was almost dry.

Kelly spent an hour going through the place before he was convinced beyond any doubt that Samuel Philips Lansing had vanished as completely as his sister. He had the quarry pond dragged again without result. Methodically he sent out another alarm and sat down to await results. Nothing happened. Sam Lansing had been wiped off the earth as completely as his sister had been. . . .

It was a week after this second disappearance when two men walked into his office. They were about the same build and age. One was fair, the other of medium coloring. Both were well dressed, clean cut. The blond man offered his hand.

"Lieutenant Kelly? I'm Owen Lansing, the nephew of Sam and Ellen. The last of the Lansings, I guess you might put it."

"Oh yes." Kelly shook hands. "Sit down, gentlemen. You're the chap I phoned about the disappearance of your aunt and uncle. You live in Chicago, is that right?"

"Correct." Owen Lansing smiled. "I took a leave of absence from the firm where I work. Frankly, Lieutenant, I remember Sam and Ellen so vaguely that I can't get excited over their disappearances. But I am intrigued. How could two retiring, elderly people simply vanish like that?"

"I wish I knew," Kelly sighed. "I only wish I knew."

"Lieutenant, you dragged all lakes and ponds and rivers?" the other man asked. "You checked the morgues and hospital records of all towns for a reasonable distance around?"

"I did—twice. Once for Ellen and again for Sam. Who, by the way, are you?"

O WEN LANSING jumped to his feet. "I'm sorry, Lieutenant. This is Martin

Cullinan. He's a private detective from Chicago. I brought him along to help me find out what has happened."

Kelly extended his hand, palm upwards. "Your license, Mr. Cullinan, if you don't mind."

Cullinan grinned and handed him a leather wallet. It contained a license, his picture and a thumb print. Kelly handed it back.

"Thanks," he said. "Maybe you can help us. Here are the facts, what there are of them. Ellen attended a social at the high school auditorium the night she disappeared. She left early, as she usually did, and drove her old relic of a car home. Put it in the garage and then—vanished. Sam was seen less and less after that. Finally neighbors suspected he might have died. I searched the house. He wasn't there. I haven't a clue, a motive—no a darn thing, in fact."

Cullinan frowned. "It's amazing, Lieutenant. When Owen came to me about this, I got the impression there might have been foul play."

"For what?" Kelly demanded. "The Lansings used to be very wealthy and influential—about fifty or sixty years ago. Lately they've been broke. The only thing left is the house and I doubt if a buyer could be found. I think Sam got rid of some of the furniture to obtain food. The Probate Court couldn't locate an asset beyond the house and its contents. Why kill two inoffensive old people who didn't have a dime?"

Cullinan studied his highly polished nails as he spoke. "Many years ago, Lieutenant, the Lansings got rich by preying on others. Perhaps, out of the past there has arisen an enemy who never forgot. Owen put it to me this way. He was willing to come down here, live in the house and expose himself to any possible killer or kidnaper. If two Lansings were spirited away, perhaps an attempt will be made at the third—and last Lansing."

Kelly shrugged. "Go ahead and try it. I've been at the end of my rope for days and I'm willing to co-operate in any sort of a scheme. My office records aren't too clean with a pair of disappearance cases among the unsolved affairs. It may be a good idea."

"Of course I'll stick close to Owen," Cullinan said. "I'll report to you every

morning just in case. If you don't hear from me, come running."

"It's a deal," Kelly said. "I think it's hopeless, but then, you never can tell. It's true, there are a lot of people in this town who have consistently hated the Lansing family for generations. You might be on the right track."

After the two men left, Kelly put in a call to the Chicago police and talked to a detective inspector he knew. The Inspector said, "Yes, I know Marty Cullinan. He's been running a private eye business here for the last ten years. Never given us any trouble. A good man from what I hear and absolutely trustworthy. A smart one, too. Knows all the angles."

Kelly felt satisfied. That night he dropped around to the Lansing home, found it fully lighted and somewhat neater. Both Owen Lansing and Cullinan had stripped down to their undershirts in their efforts to make order out of the mess.

Cullinan mixed a drink for all three, and they sat down in the Mid-Victorian living room to drink it. The private detective placed an old ledger on Kelly's lap.

"That, believe it or not, is a diary we found. Sam kept it. Not regularly, but when he had something to remember he wrote it down. Do you know a man named Howard Jordan, Lieutenant?"

"I do. They live down the street about half a mile. Nice people."

"It seems Jordan has been trying to buy this house and the property for the past five or six years," Cullinan said. "You'll find, from the diary entries, that Jordan approached Sam a number of times and always got turned down. You'll also find a little notation to the effect that Sam would rather fry than have any Jordan own a foot of Lansing property."

Kelly thumbed through the book and found the entries. He studied them and sat back with a frown as he reached for his highball glass.

"Come to think of it," he told Lansing and Cullinan, "Howard Jordan's family and the Lansings have been bitter enemies for decades. I think two of them even fought a duel once."

"The thing is worth checking," Cullinan said. "I felt certain we'd find a few instances like this. Something to give us a

faint lead."

Kelly put the book under his arm. "I'll study this and see about the Jordans. Maybe I'll drop in on Howard Jordan tonight. Just a friendly call. I know him that well. I could phone first—but no, there isn't a phone here."

Owen Lansing laughed. "We've installed all the latest conveniences, Lieutenant, including a telephone. Cullinan got it by explaining to the phone company that we might be in some danger and really needed a phone. It's upstairs in the bedroom. Handy in case of an emergency. Help yourself."

KELLY got Howard Jordan on the wire and told him he'd drop by. Cullinan and Lansing followed him to the door.

"Well, I know this much," Lansing said. "If the contents of the house were sold, I'd profit about ten dollars. Suppose you sort of feel Jordan out. I want to get rid of this place."

"Wait a minute," Kelly put in sharply. "We've no evidence that you are already an heir. Until your aunt or uncle are found—or their bodies discovered—or until seven years are up—this property is under probate control."

Cullinan grinned and slapped Owen Lansing across the shoulders. "Take it easy, Owen," he said. "You might give the impression you knocked off your aunt and uncle to get your hands on this gorgeous estate."

"I didn't mean to insinuate that," Kelly said sharply. "One thing about this, even if it turns out to be a double murder, the motive can't concern money. This estate isn't worth killing anyone for. I'll drop in again tomorrow. Meantime watch yourselves."

Kelly drove to the Jordan home and by some careful questioning discovered that when Ellen Lansing vanished, Howard Jordan had been in California. When Sam Lansing disappeared, he'd been home but actively engaged in trying to help elect a new mayor. So he had an alibi for both occasions.

Kelly gave up. He wasn't even impressed. Jordan could no more be a murderer or kidnaper than could his quiet and charming wife. All he wanted the Lansing estate for was to build a new house for the sake of the view from the

top of that hill.

Kelly headed back toward his office but went around a block and returned to the Lansing place. He might as well advise Cullinan and Owen Lansing that there was nothing to the Jordan clue. He parked in front of the house and walked toward the porch.

The October air was still, clear and crisp and carried sounds well. Kelly heard the snapping of a dead branch somewhere at the back of the place. He veered to the left and began running. As he rounded the corner of the big place he reached for his gun.

Nothing moved in the back. Not another sound reached him. The yellow light that streamed from the house illuminated the area in front of the stable which was now used as a garage; but the building itself was in darkness. Kelly wove toward it warily.

He circled the building once, telling himself he was an idiot and that some animal could have snapped that branch. He approached the closed door of the stable, pulled it open and listened intently. No matter how much he tried to convince himself this was all foolishness, he couldn't help feeling that a deadly and insidious something menaced him from within the protection of the night shadows.

With his gun slanted down a trifle, Kelly reached for his flashlight. The attack came so swiftly and from such a short distance away that he had no time to twist and meet it, or even to bring up the gun. Something hit him across the top of the head. The blow would have crushed in his head except for the padding afforded by his hat. Kelly dropped to the wooden floor, floundering like a fish just boated.

He rolled over and got the flat of both hands on the floor and struggled to push himself up. That was when he got kicked under the chin. He fell flat again and stayed down.

It must have been nearly half an hour, if his befuddled wits and burning eyes read his watch correctly, before he was able to prop himself into a sitting position against the stable wall. The outlines of the ancient vehicle which Ellen Lansing had driven the night of her disappearance, loomed like some vague and formidable ghost there in the gloom. Owen

Lansing's sleek club coupe was beside it.

The intense ache in his head having subsided, Kelly got to his feet and stumbled a few steps before he got his balance back. Then he made his way to the front of the house and rang the old spring bell. Through the window set in the door he could observe the stairway. After a moment or two he saw Private Detective Cullinan walking casually down. Cullinan opened the door.

"Oh, it's you, Lieutenant," he said. "Come on in. We—holy cow, what happened to you? There's blood on your face. You're all dirty—"

"Where is Owen Lansing?" Kelly demanded. "Quick, where is he?"

"Upstairs in the bedroom. Calling Chicago. His boss wanted to talk to him. But what—"

"Someone has been prowling the place," Kelly said. "I think, whoever it was, meant to take Owen Lansing away just as his aunt and uncle were taken away. We'd better go see if he is okay."

Cullinan whirled around, took the steps three at a time, yelling Owen's name as he neared the top. Kelly followed him at a slower pace. Every step he took made his head hurt again. Cullinan barged out of the bedroom as Kelly reached the second floor.

"He isn't there," Cullinan cried. "But he's got to be inside the house. I sealed the only other door so no one could get through it. Owen was in the bedroom, on the telephone, when you rang. Nobody passed me on the steps. He's got to be in the house."

BUT Owen Lansing didn't have to be, it seemed. They searched to the top floor without finding a trace of him. They tackled the third floor and went through the dusty old rooms. It was no use.

"If I believed in ghosts, I'd say that's what we're up against," Kelly said. "You left Lansing in the bedroom. You had the back door sealed and you really did a job there. Lansing couldn't have passed you because I'd have seen him too. He didn't jump out of any window. None were open and it's impossible for a man to climb through one of these narrow-silled windows, close it behind him and leap. He'd have broken his neck anyway. These windows are plenty high."

"But where did he go then?" Cullinan was sweating profusely. He wiped at the beads of moisture with a hand covered by dust, leaving his face streaked and dirty.

"Try the tower room. That's all there is left," Kelly grunted.

"I forgot about that," Cullinan exclaimed. He went directly to the door, shook the knob and then reached into his pocket for a bunch of keys. "Owen gave me these this afternoon. We'll soon find out about the tower room."

He got the door open. Kelly pushed him to one side and sent the ray of his flash up the stairs. All he saw were his own footprints in the dust. The prints he'd made in searching for Sam Lansing.

"Nobody can be up there," he said. "Oh, we'll go have a look but I made the only prints in the dust."

They climbed the stairs and found a deserted room, cold as an ice box and very drafty. Cullinan sneezed several times. They went downstairs again to the bedroom. Beside the telephone was an ash tray with a cigarette in it which had burned down almost its entire length. Apparently Owen Lansing had been smoking it when that unknown force swept him up and spirited him away.

Kelly reached for the phone. "Lansing was talking over this when I rang the bell. To his boss in Chicago, you said, Cullinan?"

"That's right." Cullinan sat down on the side of the bed. "I know what you're thinking, too. Go on and check. If you don't, I will."

"Thanks," Kelly told him. "I didn't want you to feel offended."

Kelly got the operator and asked if a call had gone through. It had and the time of it corresponded perfectly with Cullinan's statement. When the call was made, Kelly was sleeping off that slug on the head. He had the operator call the same number. A man's voice answered.

"This is a detective lieutenant in Poplar City," Kelly said. "You can help me by answering one question. Did you receive a phone call within the last hour?"

"I did," came the prompt reply. "Owen Lansing phoned me from Poplar City. About certain business. He works for me."

"You're certain it was Owen Lansing?" Kelly asked.

"Am I certain? Of course I am. We discussed in the greatest detail a certain matter he's been working on for me. I know his voice. It was Lansing. What in the world is wrong down there?"

"Lansing has vanished," Kelly said. "When he concluded his conversation with you did he sound strange?"

"He did not. He said goodnight as calmly as you please. You say he's missing? How can you know? Certainly he can't be missing more than half an hour or so."

"That's true, but his aunt and uncle also vanished some weeks ago and now Owen is gone," Kelly explained. "We're trying to find out what happened. Was Owen in debt? Was he conscientious? You see, he never lived in my town. We didn't know him at all. He just came here for visits when he was a kid."

"Owen Lansing was financially secure. At least I paid him a reasonable salary and no one ever garnisheed his wages. As for honesty, I've trusted him with important deals, and he always came through. In fact, I intended to promote him very soon."

"All right," Kelly said. "Thanks very much. I'll let you know if we find him."

He hung up and looked at Cullinan. "Well, it's happened again. Under our noses this time. You're in the clear, of course. Whatever happened here wasn't your fault. What are you going to do now?"

"Do?" Cullinan thundered. "Stay here until I find out what happened to Owen. I got to like that fellow."

"There won't be any fee," Kelly reminded him. "I won't be able to get you one even if you solve the whole thing."

"I'm not interested in a fee any longer, Lieutenant. This is personal. About Owen—his story sounded funny to me when he came to my office so I checked and double checked on him. He was a quiet-living, ambitious man. There isn't one thing in his life that's been out of the way."

"I know." Kelly stroked his chin. "His boss told me the same thing. Besides, what in the world would Owen gain by abducting or murdering his aunt and uncle? Why, he'd have to wait seven years to get the estate, and it isn't worth waiting seven months to get. The old ark is mortgaged and the equity amounts to

beans. But someone walloped me on the head. Someone was around here tonight about the time Owen vanished. That much we know."

"Oh, I've never thought anything but that a crime has been committed here," Cullinan said. "But how was it done? How did this abductor or killer get Owen out of the house? Say—we've overlooked one thing. Old houses like this often had secret panels—"

Kelly whistled and jumped up. "Let's go," he said. "You may have hit on the solution."

IF CULLINAN had, neither of them knew how two hours later. There were no secret passages, nothing. Cullinan was down to drinking rye out of the bottle by then, and Kelly didn't blame him much.

"Well," Cullinan asked, "what do we do now?"

Kelly took the old diary under his arm again. "You'd better get some sleep. I'm going back to my office, send out the usual alarms and try working this by regulation methods. I know there'll be no results but I'm a cop and it's part of my job to start routine procedure. Then I'm going to read this old diary."

Cullinan reached for the bottle again. "I'm going to sit here and think—or maybe get stewed. It's got me, Lieutenant. Owen depended on me. I failed him as miserably as if he'd hired a tenderfoot scout to protect him. I have no excuse but I'm going to stay around until we know the truth."

"I'll give you a ring later," Kelly said. "Try to be around. A fourth disappearance would be just about all I could stand."

Cullinan patted the holster in his hip pocket. "I'm praying they take a crack at me. Brother, that's what I want."

Kelly drove to headquarters, locked himself in his office and sat there for half an hour consuming cigars by chewing them to bits. He opened the ledger which had been used as a diary. It went back forty-odd years. The entries were in a steady hand then and were mostly concerned with paying bills or changes in the dwindling family and the aging house.

There was an item about Owen Lansing. He'd come for a visit with his mother and

father who died a few years later. Owen seemed to have been a normally active twelve year old. Sam and Ellen worried over him because he insisted on diving into the quarry pond from considerable heights.

Sam had written:

. . . Owen would stand there, naked as a new born. He'd raise his hands, walk to the edge of the cliff and then dive off. Ellen always screamed when he did that but Owen's mother and father only laughed. They said he could swim like a fish and I believe it. The boy knew Ellen was easily frightened and took to staying under water as long as he could hold his breath. . . .

Kelly kept thumbing the pages. Sometimes months went by without an entry and then some inconsequential thing was written down. Halfway through the book a page had been torn out. A hasty, careless job too. The opposite page was smeared with ink, as though the book had been closed while the ink on the missing page had still been wet. These were more than mere smudges. Kelly could almost make out a few words.

It took him half an hour to do it but he finally traced, lightly in pencil, some of the words blotted from that missing page. All he could get out of it, with the aid of a hand mirror, were occasional, almost meaningless words.

. . . finally . . . long last . . . Josephine is ours
. . . complete . . . kind in . . . world. . . .

The thing didn't make much sense. Kelly forgot it and kept reading. Toward the end of the book he found entries which showed how financially hard up Ellen and Sam Lansing had been. In 1933 a new mortgage had been taken out. Kelly frowned as he recalled that 1933 had been a bad year. Banks hadn't handed out mortgages, especially to almost destitute people like the Lansings who had only their crumbling hundred year old house as security. Why the place wasn't worth the face value of that second mortgage.

Kelly picked up the phone, called a number and finally calmed down a rather irate and sleepy banker.

"Yes, I do recall that Lansing mortgage," the banker muttered. "We didn't grant it on the value of the property. The house had no value beyond the mortgage already on it, but the Lansings were proud people and I'd known them a long time. The mortgage was made ostensibly on the house but it was really on their collection of miniatures."

"What miniatures?" Kelly asked quickly. "Miniatures of what?"

"Of people, you confounded idiot. The Lansing family had been compiling the only complete collection of Napoleonic miniatures. Hand done paintings on extremely small canvasses. That's what broke the Lansings. They were crazy about finishing the collection. It was an obsession. Nobody knew they had it. They collected only for their own personal enjoyment. Besides, the collection is so valuable that it would have been dangerous to make public the fact that it was in that old house and guarded only by a couple of doddering people."

Kelly didn't even say thanks. He cradled the phone, reached for his hat and then sat down again weakly. Sure, he'd discovered something very important, but what of it? If Owen Lansing was after those miniatures, where was he now? And why didn't he simply wait to get possession of them legally?

GRADUALLY it dawned on Kelly what this was all about. His head was aching worse than it had when he'd been slugged, but he thought he had the answer. He picked up the phone and asked information for the new number of the Lansing home. Cullinan answered instantly.

"Stick around," Kelly said. "I've found out something and maybe our very good friend Owen Lansing isn't dead. Or even missing—not from himself at least. I'll call back very soon."

He didn't give Cullinan time to ask any questions. He dialed again and woke up another man. "So what if it is three in the A.M.?" Kelly demanded. "Police business doesn't wait. Look, Paul, I need some dynamite. Yes, I said dynamite. And a man who knows how to use it. For what? Why I'm going to dynamite the old quarry pond. When I was a kid I used to swim in it and one time I nearly drowned. You know how rocky the bottom is. That pond was blasted out of rock and the rain and a few streams filled it in. I happened to remember nearly drowning there and I got mad again. So I'm going to blow the place up."

He smiled grimly and went out to his car. He met the man who knew how to handle explosives and directed him to the

quarry. Kelly proceeded to strip down to nothing. The water was icy cold but he waded out, lost his footing and fell in with a loud splash.

He swam out, dived and kept on diving for a few times. Then he came ashore, dried himself and got dressed. He and the dynamite expert went to the top of the cliff.

"Make certain our watches agree," Kelly said. "It's now four-ten. At four-thirty, on the dot, set off three or four sticks of dynamite. Not in the water, understand. Just blow some of this rock around a bit. Place the explosions five minutes apart. Okay?"

"Okay, Lieutenant. Hey, do you like apple or peach pie the best?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I was wondering what kind to bring when I visited you at the booby hatch. Brother, you're all gone."

Kelly laughed. He drove to the Jordan house and woke up Mr. Jordan. It seemed half his work was to awaken people. Kelly used the Jordan phone and called Lansing's house. Cullinan answered again, quickly, as though he'd been seated beside the phone.

"I'm at the old quarry," Kelly said. "I'll be up after you in about half an hour. Soon as I finish a job here. Be ready, will you?"

"Of course I will," Cullinan agreed. "But what's up?"

Before Kelly could reply the first of the dynamite blasts went off. Kelly said into the phone, "I'm fishing, Cullinan. With a new kind of tackle. This is going to land us a big one."

He raced out of the house and jumped into his car. He didn't turn on the lights

but sped down the road toward the Lansing place. When he got close enough he pulled over but left the motor running. He drew his service pistol, cocked it and laid it on the seat beside him. The dynamite was going off with clocklike regularity.

Then he saw a car move out of the Lansing driveway. It turned his way. In fact, there was no other way for it to turn, for the house was in a dead end street. When the car reached the proper spot, Kelly wheeled his heavy sedan out to block the road. He jumped from the car as the other coupe came to a screaming stop.

One shot was fired from the other car. Kelly didn't even duck. His own gun was level and he pulled trigger three times in rapid succession. Someone screamed. Kelly took handcuffs from his pocket, approached the car warily and got the door open.

Cullinan was behind the wheel, holding his side and groaning. Kelly closed the cuffs around Cullinan's other wrist and picked up the gun which Cullinan had dropped.

"Okay," Kelly said, "let's go. You need a doctor."

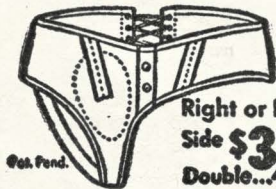
"And you've lost your mind," Cullinan groaned. "Why shoot me up?"

"Cut it out," Kelly said. "I'm placing you under arrest. Not as Marty Cullinan, private eye, but as Owen Lansing, because you really are Lansing."

KELLY explained it to the Chief of Police later on. "Ellen and Sam Lansing took over a very valuable and rare collection of miniatures," he said. "They

[Turn page]

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built it up, and finally completed it, though they went broke buying the last few pieces. It was so valuable that a bank loaned them money merely on the strength of their honesty and the fact that they owned his quarter of a million dollar collection.

"Owen Lansing, in Chicago, found out about the miniatures. He also discovered that upon the deaths of Ellen and Sam, the collection went to a museum as a perpetual monument to the Lansing family. Owen couldn't see that. He flew down here, killed Ellen and concealed her body. He waited until the excitement over that died down, came back and did away with Sam."

The chief nodded his white head. "Okay. We found all three bodies where you said they'd be. Interred in a small cave at the bottom of the quarry pond. How did you know about that cave?"

Kelly grinned. "As a matter-of-fact, I'd forgotten about it until I read a diary Sam kept. It told about Owen Lansing diving into the pond and staying under water a long time. Sure he did. The little caves intrigued him as they intrigued me. Then I realized that a good swimmer could haul a corpse down to one of those caves, stow it inside and push a stone to seal the entrance. Owen did that with the bodies of Ellen, Sam and Cullinan."

"Your prisoner still insists he is Cullinan," the chief remarked. "Of course it's just a bluff, but how did you find out the truth, Kelly?"

"It was simple, once I really got to figuring on it. Owen Lansing hired Cullinan to help find out what happened to his aunt and uncle. He talked Cullinan into taking his identity while he became the private detective. On the theory, I suppose, that any attack on Owen Lansing would center on Cullinan who was trained to react fast to danger. They even carried out the scheme with me.

"It was further emphasized when the supposed Owen Lansing vanished. In reality, Lansing waited until I left the house. Then he killed the private detective and hid his body out back. I almost caught him returning to the house. He let me have it and while I slept off the blow in the stable, he entered the house and phoned his boss in Chicago. He knew I'd check. I did and became convinced that it really had been Owen Lansing who talked to Chicago and ended the conversation just as I rang the bell. That meant Owen Lansing was alive when Cullinan left him. That he vanished in the space of a few seconds."

The chief whistled sharply. "So the man you thought was Cullinan was actually Lansing and so he could pretend to be two people. Lansing's boss would swear it was Lansing who spoke. You'd swear it was Cullinan who let you in, and they were one and the same person."

"I should have tumbled sooner. The man I knew as Cullinan was too familiar with that rambling old house. Though he'd never been to the tower room, he instantly picked the correct door. The collection of miniatures was well hidden but Lansing found them. He was in no hurry. As Cullinan he could leave any time. Then, later on, Cullinan would have vanished, too, and Lansing would have disposed of the miniatures. But when I had a friend of mine start setting off dynamite near the quarry, Lansing realized a blast might move that stone and set the bodies free. So he quickly got set to run for it. I was waiting for him. If Lansing had read all of that diary, he'd never have let me take it, but he was afraid to hold the thing back."

"And a fine rat you juggled for us," the chief said. "Hey, Kelly, wait a second."

"I'll be back," Kelly said. "I want to take the files of Ellen and Sam Lansing out of my office. I don't like unfinished business of that kind hanging around."

●

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*A rubber overshoe
his "sole" clue,
Officer Long
makes an arrest!*



The gun and the newspaper went flying into the air

the Clock that Wasn't There

By WALT BRUCE

IT WAS A cold night on Patrolman Jerry Long's beat. The wind whirled the snow around and made it hard to see for any distance ahead. The flakes stung as they blew against Long's strong young face, and he drew the collar of his uniform overcoat tighter to keep the snow from sliding down his neck.

He tried the doors of the little row of shops to make sure they were all securely locked. In most of them a light had been left burning and the patrolman was able to peer through the glass of the doors and show windows and assure himself everything was all right inside the store.

As Long approached the door of a jeweler's shop at the end of the line a man stepped out of the store, closed the door, then turned to lock it from the outside with a key. He wore a soft hat pulled low and his overcoat collar was turned up, but Long recognized him.

"You're working late tonight, Mr. Bryant," the patrolman said as he came closer, and he was forced to speak loudly because of the wailing of the wind. "Everything all right?"

"Quite all right, officer," Tillman Bryant said, turning and peering at Long through the falling snow. "Had a special watch repair job I promised would be ready the first thing in the morning. Took me longer than I expected. Terrible night, isn't it?"

"Pretty bad," Long said. "If it keeps on snowing things sure will be a mess by morning."

"I don't envy you your job in weather like this," the jeweler said. "Well, I'd better get on home. I catch cold so easily."

He hurried away, heading back along the street in the direction from which Long had come. The patrolman watched him until the tall thin man was out of sight, and then shrugged his shoulders. The conversation they'd just had was the longest talk Long had ever had with Tillman Bryant. Usually the jeweler merely said good evening when he saw the patrolman and let it go at that.

In a city the size of Bankford—population 40,000 the last census—the police got to know a lot of the local citizens, particularly those on their beats. Long considered most of the store keepers in his section good friends of his, but there were a few who apparently couldn't be bothered by policemen. Up to now Tillman Bryant had been one of these.

"That's strange," Long muttered as he gazed at the shop. "He forgot to leave a light burning."

NEVER in the year that Long had been on this beat had Bryant failed to leave a light burning in his shop when he had locked the place up for the night. But this time he had obviously forgotten to do so.

Automatically Long tried the door of the shop. The door swung open as the patrolman turned the knob. He stood there peering into the blackness beyond the door, his gloved right hand still on the knob. He had seen Bryant apparently lock the door from the outside and yet now it was unlocked.

"Guess I'd better take a look around inside," Long decided.

He stepped into the shop, drawing his flashlight, and closing the door. Behind him the sound of the wind was muffled, and it was good to get in where it was warm for a little while.

The beam of the flash circled around, passing over the glass counter, the clocks on the shelf behind it, the little work bench near the front window where the jeweler sat to do his repair work. The light gleamed on the curtains that hung in a doorway leading to the rear part of the shop, then centered on a shoe that was visible on the floor beneath the lower edge of the left curtain.

Jerry Long had a sickening hunch that there was still a human foot in that shoe. He pushed the curtains aside. In the light of the flash the gray-haired man, sprawled there on the floor with a knife in his back, seemed strange and unreal.

Somewhere in the back of the shop a door banged as the wind blew it shut. The sound startled Long and he drew his gun and stood listening tensely. The door creaked as it swung open and then banged shut again. The patrolman found it was getting on his nerves. He knew he should report the discovery of the dead man, but it would do no harm to close and lock that door first.

He made his way back through a little store room, and reached the door and caught it just as it was about to bang shut for the third time. He closed it silently, found there was a bolt on the inside and shoved it home.

As he moved back he stepped on something soft. He flashed the light down and saw it was a man's rubber. It had come off a right foot, and the toe was pointing toward the rear door. Long picked the rubber up and thrust it into a side pocket of his uniform overcoat. He switched off the light as he heard the

murmur of voices coming from the front of the shop.

Slowly and cautiously he made his way back to the curtained doorway, careful not to stumble over the dead man, or to make any noise. The front of the shop was dark, but there were figures moving about stealthily there.

LONG'S first impulse was to confront them with flashlight and ready gun, but he hesitated for a while, listening, as a man spoke.

"Fullerton said we'd find the diamonds in the wooden base of the old gold clock standing on the shelf here," a man said softly. "Bryant doesn't even know anything about them. Fullerton brought the clock in and got Bryant to agree to try and sell it for him."

"I know, you told me all that before," a woman's voice said impatiently. "Get the clock, and let's get out of here. This place gives me the creeps. Hurry up!"

"Aw, don't get so excited," the man said. "I don't dare use a flash for fear it might be spotted outside through the windows. I've got to try and find the clock in the dark. Give me time, will you?"

"Yeah," said the woman. "And while we're fooling around here the cop on the beat might come back and catch us."

"Don't worry about him," said the man. "Didn't I spend three nights checking on Long? He always passes these stores around eleven every night and by this time he is all the way at the north end of his beat." The man cursed. "Where is that blasted clock?"

Long decided he had heard enough. He moved forward, gun ready. Then he stumbled over the dead man's legs and went down with a crash, pulling some wooden boxes down with him.

"Get out of here!" shouted the man in the front of the store. "There's somebody back there."

Long heard the pounding of feet and then the slam of the front door as he got up quickly. He raced to the door and peered out. The snow was coming down harder, and it was impossible for him to see more than twenty feet in any direction. The couple who had been in the jeweler's shop were not visible, though they still might be somewhere close by.

DISGUSTEDLY the patrolman closed the door from the inside. He found the light switch and turned on the electric lights in the shop. Then he used Bryant's phone to call the Bankford police station and report the murder to the sergeant on the desk.

"Stay there, Long," ordered the sergeant. "I'll tell the chief about this and send some men to the address you gave me right away. We'll pick up Bryant and bring him back to the shop, too."

"All right, I'll be here," Long said as he hung up.

He went back and made sure the man with the knife in his back was dead. A quick examination left no doubt of that, though the police would bring the coroner who would make a thorough check and then give his report.

From the letters Long found in the pocket of the corpse the dead man was probably Harlan Fullerton.

"But according to the man I heard talking in the dark," muttered Long. "Fullerton was the man who left the clock containing the diamonds here for Bryant to try and sell for him. Now why was he murdered?"

The patrolman was sure the man and the woman he had heard talking in the dark had been forced to flee from the jeweler's shop without getting the gold clock they had been seeking. Long started looking around for the clock.

There were clocks of all shape and sizes on the shelf behind the counter but there was no old gold clock with a wooden base anywhere to be seen. Ten minutes later Jerry Long was still searching for that clock when Chief Dover and Coroner Walsh arrived with police and detectives.

The coroner began examining the body and the chief drew Long aside. "Now tell me exactly what happened, Long," Dover said.

The patrolman gave his story in detail from the time he had seen Tillman Bryant come out and apparently lock the door of the shop, until the couple had escaped and Long had reported to the desk sergeant.

"Looks like Bryant may be mixed up in this some way," said the chief thoughtfully. "I sent a man to Bryant's house to bring him here. They should

arrive soon."

"Coming in now," said Long as he glanced at the door and saw the jeweler enter accompanied by a detective. "Here they are."

"What's wrong?" Bryant demanded excitedly. "All this detective would tell me is that the police wanted me at my store right away. Have I been robbed? How much did they get?"

"It's more serious than that, Mr. Bryant," said Chief Dover. "We want to question you about the murdered man Officer Long found in your shop just after you left here tonight."

"Murdered man!" exclaimed Bryant dazedly. "Here in my shop? But that's impossible. There was no one here but me when I left earlier tonight." He looked at Long. "You saw me lock up, and we talked about the weather."

"Right." Long nodded. "But after you left I found the lights weren't on."

"I must have forgotten about the lights in my hurry to get home," Bryant interrupted.

"That's possible," Long said, staring at the rubbers the jeweler wore on his rather small feet. "You also might have thought you locked the door as I came up and spoke to you. Do you remember locking the back door before you left the shop, Mr. Bryant?"

Bryant thought a moment and then shook his head. "No, I don't. I always keep it closed and bolted from the inside at night and in the daytime, too. I guess I didn't bother to check on it."

Long drew the rubber out of his pocket. It appeared large enough to fit over a size eleven shoe. The patrolman peered inside the rubber and then glanced at the chief.

"If you'll give me permission I'd like to try and pick up an important witness in this case, Chief," Long said. "Will that be all right?"

"A bit irregular, Long," said Dover. "But go ahead. If you help solve this case I'll see that you are promoted to the rank of detective."

"Thank you, sir!"

LONG hurried out of the shop, thrusting the rubber back into the side pocket of his coat, as he stepped out into the storm.

He hurried to a small frame house out on a street three blocks away and went up the steps and rang the bell. There were lights burning on the first floor and he was sure the occupants of the house were still up and awake.

In a few moments the door opened and a pretty, rather heavy blond woman gazed out at him.

"Mrs. Crowder?" Long asked then as she nodded. "I'm sorry to trouble you so late at night, but I wonder if I might talk to your husband for a few moments. It is important."

"Of course," said Mrs. Crowder, and then loudly, "It's a policeman, Pete. He wants to see you."

"Have him come in here, Martha," called a masculine voice.

Mrs. Crowder led the way into the living room with Long following close behind her. A husky looking young man sat in an easy chair. He was in his shirt sleeves and held an evening paper in his lap. He made no attempt to rise when he saw Long.

"What it is, copper?" he demanded sullenly.

"Afraid I'll have to ask you to come along with me, Crowder," the patrolman said. "You made a bad mistake when you murdered Harlan Fullerton in Bryant's jewelry shop tonight."

MRS. CROWDER gasped and Crowder frowned.

"Murdered Fullerton," snapped Crowder. "What are you talking about, Long?"

Mrs. Crowder frowned at Policeman Long. "That's silly," she said. "Why my husband and Harlan Fullerton are partners in the real estate business, and the best of friends. They completed a big deal only today for which Pete is to receive ten thousand dollars tomorrow from Harlan."

"Thanks, Mrs. Crowder," Long said dryly. "I've been wondering about the motive. I think we'll find that Fullerton had at least twenty thousand dollars in cash on him when he was killed. Of course there weren't any diamonds in the wooden base of the old gold clock. In fact there isn't even any such clock."

"But Pete said—" began Mrs. Crowder.

"Be quiet you fool!" Crowder shouted at her.

He lifted the paper and there was a revolver in his right hand covering the patrolman. There was a wild light in his eyes as he glared at Long.

"You've been too smart, Long," Crowder growled. "But you won't live to tell anyone about it."

"I'd like to tell you before I die," Long said. "I suspect you convinced your partner that Bryant had an old gold clock in his possession with diamonds hidden in the wooden base, though the jeweler didn't even know they were there."

"Both Pete and Harlan have been doing a lot of talking about diamonds lately," said Mrs. Crowder. "And so was that snippy wife of Fullerton. I didn't understand what it was all about."

"I do now," said Long, who had been puzzled. Mrs. Crowder's voice didn't sound at all like that of the woman he had heard talking in the dark. "Apparently your husband and Mrs. Fullerton sold Fullerton the story of the clock. Maybe Fullerton went to Bryant and offered to buy the clock. Since Bryant didn't have any such clock, he refused to sell or show it to Fullerton."

As he talked the patrolman moved casually closer to the chair, his night stick in his right hand.

"Tonight Fullerton must have waited until Bryant left the shop and then sneaked in the back way to steal the clock and the diamonds," Long went on. He stared at Crowder. "Fullerton also happened to be carrying the twenty thousand dollars in cash, so you followed him, killed him and got the money."

Crowder cursed and raised the gun. But before he could shoot, Long hit him on the side of the head with the night stick and knocked him cold. The gun and the newspaper went flying into the air. Mrs. Crowder screamed.

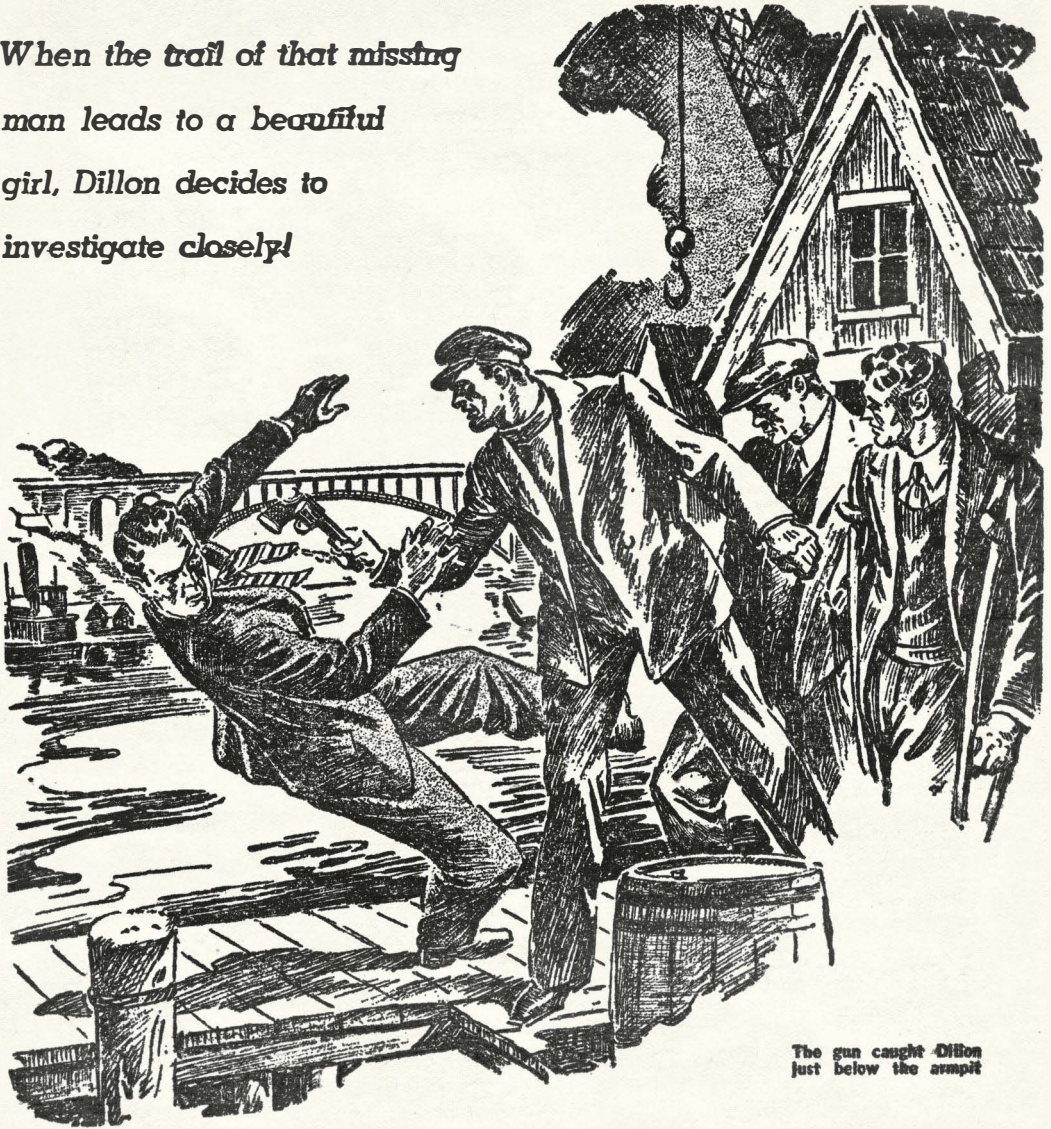
"Sorry, Mrs. Crowder," said Long. "But I had to do it. He might not only have killed me but you, too."

"Why me?" she asked.

"Because I suspect he has been running around with Mrs. Fullerton," said Long. "At least I'm pretty sure she was with him when they came to the jewel-

(Concluded on page 86)

When the trail of that missing man leads to a beautiful girl, Dillon decides to investigate closely!



The gun caught Dillon just below the armpit

Climax, Second Act

By O. B. MYERS

THE blonde behind the PBX canted her delicately penciled eyebrows at the tall young man with the tight-curling sandy hair and murmured, "I'm afraid Mr. Hale is not in."

"I didn't expect he was," was the reply.

"How about that secretary of his—Miss Henshaw?" He chose a card from his pocket—one that said just *Carney Dillon* and nothing else, and laid it down.

She sniffed faintly, as if to indicate that she knew all the time it was Miss Hen-

shaw he wanted to see. Then, after speaking into the mouthpiece that dangled in front of her face, she nodded.

"You'll find her in Mr. Hale's office."

He followed an aisle between desks amid the clatter of typewriters and the busy rustle of papers. No one looked up, but he got the impression of curious glances following the back of his neck. It was a feeling a cop often gets, even when not in uniform. He shrugged it off as the effect of imagination.

The door marked *Walter Hale, Assistant Sales Manager*, opened as he reached for the knob, and Margery Henshaw met him with her crisp, business-like smile. At least she tried to make it crisply impersonal, but without complete success. Nature, to begin with, seemed to have designed her small, warm mouth particularly for smiling, and the deft addition of lipstick didn't cool the effect noticeably. A mass of dark hair framed her ivory complexion in loose, careless waves which were probably not as careless as they appeared, but the net result was not at all difficult to look at.

"Good morning, Mr. Dillon! Have you located Mr. Hale yet?"

He emitted a cautious but good-natured grumble. "It's always the same. People seem to be afraid of the police, as if bringing in the cops would bring in a crime. Nobody ever comes to us in Missing Persons until after they've used up all their own resources, and by that time all the trails are cold. Then they give us about half the facts, and expect miracles."

Her eyes were sympathetic. "Then you haven't found him?"

He looked straight at her and his voice hardened. "No, but I've been up to the '100 Club' in Hartsdale, and I've found out some things I didn't know when I last talked to you. For one thing, that you haven't told me the truth."

PINK spots spread in her cheeks, and pain leaped in her eyes—pain tinged with fear. "What—what do you mean?"

He scowled. "The 100 Club is a roadhouse, with music, on Route 100—that's Central Avenue. Just a week ago—that's Thursday the twelfth—some hoodlums pulled a stick-up about midnight. They got away clean with over a thousand dollars in cash, but in the course of the ex-

citement they shot a waiter. He died the next day. The local police haven't much to go on, but day before yesterday somebody happened to notice a car standing way up in the parking area, near the kennels next door. Nobody knew who it belonged to, or how long it had been there. The keys were in it, and it wasn't damaged. They checked up on the license plates. It's Walter Hale's car. And Thursday the Twelfth is the last day Hale was ever seen, as far as we know."

Her eyes were wide, intent, and frightened.

"I went up there last night," he continued. "The car itself tells nothing. But when I showed Hale's photograph around, the cashier and a couple of the waiters recognized him. Said he had been in there Thursday for dinner, and most of the evening, but had left an hour or so before the hold-up. He had a brumette with him that they described as pretty gorgeous. Now I've seen Mrs. Hale. She's the one put in a complaint about her husband being missing. Outside of being a blonde, only a one-eyed Indian would describe her as gorgeous. Whereas you—"

His voice trailed off. Her cheeks were like chalk now.

"Have you—have you told Mrs. Hale?"

"Not yet. I haven't seen her since I went up to Hartsdale."

"You're not going to tell her, are you? Oh, please—"

She stood close to him, her hand on his arm, her face upturned in appeal. There was frightened tension in her fingertips.

"That depends on how much help you give me."

His tone seemed to reassure her. After peering anxiously for a moment, she stepped back, lowering her eyes.

"All right. I'll tell you all about it. But I don't see how it will help you to find Mr. Hale, now."

"I'll be the judge of that."

"He had his car in New York that day. I live in Yonkers, just off Central Avenue, and he said he'd drive me home. Then, later, he persuaded me to have dinner with him, and dance a little, too."

Dillon's look was faintly amused. "I see. You make a practice of going out with married men?"

She bridled, and the pink spots came back in her cheeks. "No. I never did be-

fore. But he's my boss, and a secretary can't say no to her boss, or she wouldn't be his secretary very long. And Mr. Hale is—he's the kind who expects that sort of thing."

"Oh, he is, eh? Ha! So is every man, if you let him think he can expect it. All right. What happened?"

"We went to the 100 Club. We had cocktails, and ate dinner, and then had a couple more drinks during the evening, between dances. He was—well, a little high, but not drunk. Then a little after ten we started back for Yonkers."

Dillon caught at the last sentence. "Started? What time did you get there?"

She dropped her eyes. "It was just eleven-thirty when he dropped me at my apartment. That's the last I saw—"

"Just a minute. Hartsdale to Yonkers—that's not more than a twenty minute run on Route 100. What happened to the other hour?"

Her eyes stayed on the floor, veiled by long, dark lashes.

"He parked, just off Central Avenue."

"Oh, he did! And did he get the sort of thing he expected?"

Her cheeks were bright pink, but her eyes came up flashing.

"I don't know what he expected, but he ended by getting his face slapped. Then he took me home."

Dillon grunted. "Probably not the first time! But what else? What happened to make him disappear afterwards?"

SHE insisted there had been nothing. Hale had seemed to be in a perfectly normal frame of mind when she said good-by to him on the sidewalk. He had even spoken about repeating the evening's fun some time the following week.

"How did his car get back to the 100 Club?"

She knew nothing about that either, she insisted. "Naturally I didn't say anything about this, the other day. Mrs. Hale would—well, she would probably make trouble. I might lose my job, and I can't afford that. And, besides, I can't see how it has anything to do with his being missing. It was just a—an innocent diversion. You won't have to tell his wife, will you?"

He studied her quietly. "Look, Miss Henshaw. If it was just an innocent junket, you wouldn't object to repeating

it, would you?"

"Repeating it? What do you mean?"

"I've found from experience that people are poor observers, and have very bad memories. They forget things just when they want most to remember them. But, sometimes, if they go through the same motions, those things come back to them. Now something happened that night. Something must have happened. Something that would give us a clue to what Walter Hale did after he left you. I want to know what."

She shook her head blankly. "I can't remember—"

"But if you go through the motions again, perhaps you will remember. You and I are going up to the 100 Club. Tonight, in my car. We'll start at the same time, end at the same time. Drinks, dinner, dances. All the same things you did with Hale. Maybe something will come back to you. What do you say?"

She stared at him, smiling in a peculiar fashion. "Oh! Oh, I see." But then she nodded. "All right. I'll go . . . Mr. Hale and I left here at five-thirty, that night."

"Right. Then I'll pick you up at five-thirty."

Down in the lobby of the office building Dillon, smiling half to himself, headed for a telephone booth. He would be using his own car, and spending his own dollars. His expense account would not stand for that sort of item unless it cracked the case—and maybe not then. But what of it? He hadn't treated himself to a night out at a roadhouse in a long time, and Margery Henshaw was not exactly a repulsive companion. It would be mixing business with pleasure.

But, in the meantime, business came first. He called his office.

"Yeah, we got one call-back on your inquiries," Harry Falk told him. "The Bronx General, on Kingsbridge Road, has got one unidentified accident case. A man about thirty-five, who was admitted early last Friday morning with a serious head injury. He's been in a coma ever since. They don't know who he is. You might take a look at him."

Just because he had one line of inquiry laid out for the evening was no reason to neglect his other lines. He rode up to the Bronx on the subway, hunted up the doctor in charge of the emergency wards,

and explained his errand.

"Why, yes. That patient is in a semi-private, on the third floor. We put him there because he was in bad shape, but we're going to have to move him to the general ward pretty soon unless we get some indication that he'll be able to pay. Those small rooms are rather expensive, you know. Er—just a minute."

The doctor shuffled through some papers on his desk, picked up the one he wanted, and then led the way down the hall. They rode up in an elevator, traversed a long corridor and near its end, entered a door that stood ajar. The room contained two beds, one shielded from immediate view by a screen. The doctor moved one panel of the screen, and stood aside. Dillon peered past his shoulder.

He shook his head at once. The features which were visible through the bandages, the color of the hair—everything was wrong. He did not even have to pull out the photograph to be sure.

"Sorry," he murmured, "that's not the man I'm looking for."

The doctor replaced the screen with a shrug of disappointment. "That's that, then. Do you mind waiting a moment?" Without waiting for a reply, he crossed toward the other bed. "Mr. Fendel? Since I was coming up anyway, I brought your bill. Your week is up in the morning."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll pay. Don't git worried."

DILLON, waiting, glanced with mild curiosity at the occupant of the other bed. He was a man in his mid-twenties, with a deep, powerful chest and long arms that tapered to sinewy hands. One leg, encased in a plaster cast from hip to knee, lay extended on top of the blankets. He had a mop of untidy black hair, heavy, truculent features, and a swarthy complexion.

"Just hand me my pants, there, will you, Doc."

His tone carried an unpleasant sneer, but the doctor complied without comment. Dillon kept looking at the patient.

His clothes were hung in an enameled steel cabinet at the foot of the bed. The doctor lifted a pair of gray herring-bone slacks from a hook and laid them across the bed. They were baggy and soiled, and showed a ragged gash in the fabric above

the right knee, but when the dark-visaged man fumbled in the pocket, his hand emerged holding a fat wad of paper money.

His position, propped on one elbow, was awkward, and his motions impatient. Along with the bills a handful of small change slid out on the bed, and a couple of coins clattered to the floor. The doctor stopped one with his foot, picked it up, and tossed it back on the blanket. The other rolled to Dillon's feet.

"How much does it cost me, Doc?"

The doctor glanced at the bill in his hand. "One hundred and twenty for the week—up to tomorrow morning."

"Well, I'm gettin' out o' here tonight, anyway." He counted out a pile of fives and tens on the bed.

Dillon had picked up what he first thought was a dime. It was oddly heavy in his hand. When he turned it over and looked again, he saw to his surprise that it was two-and-a-half dollar gold piece. These were so rare that he examined it curiously, and noticed that on one side the design was half obliterated by deep scratches. In fact, the scratches looked as if they had been deliberately engraved in the metal, and seemed to form a design. But before he could figure out what the design might be, the doctor was speaking again.

"There's your receipt—and thank you very much, sir." He tore the lower half from the billhead and laid it on the bed. "Of course you can leave if you wish, though we advise against it."

"Don't worry about me, Doc. I can take care o' myself." The patient was stuffing the remainder of the bills back in his pants pocket. There still seemed to be plenty. "When it's time to take the cast off, maybe I'll be seein' yuh."

Dillon stepped over and dropped the gold piece amid the rest of the change. The man on the bed, with a muttered, "Okay, mister," scooped it all up together and shoved it in the pocket.

Dillon kept staring at his face, but the man returned the stare with only a brief glance holding no flicker of recognition. His attitude plainly said that the sooner his callers left, the better he'd like it.

When they were out in the corridor, Dillon asked, "What was that patient's name—the one who just paid his bill?"

The doctor consulted the stub of the billhead in his hand.

"James D. Fendel, Two-six-one-two Webster Avenue," he read. "He was admitted about four in the morning, last Friday, with a broken leg. Struck by a hit-and-run driver on the Grand Concourse, he said. Some other car picked him up and brought him in here. Why, you know him?"

Dillon shook his head slowly. "Fendel—I guess not. I just thought I'd seen his face before."

The feeling of having seen that face before persisted so strongly, however, that after he had returned to his office Dillon went to his index file and hunted for the name Fendel. He found nothing. He even called the criminal division, but with no result. They had nothing on any man named Fendel. He shrugged it off as a trick of the memory.

Margery Henshaw was waiting for him in the lobby of the office building at five-thirty.

"Now we want to do everything just the way you and Hale did it, that night," he reminded her as he led her out to his small coupe. "So you coach me when necessary."

She directed him up Park Avenue, along the Concourse, and then onto Jerome. Past Woodlawn the traffic thinned out somewhat. She didn't have much to say as they tooted up Central Avenue, but stole occasional glances at him out of the corner of her eye. By the time they were seated in the 100 Club and starting on the second Manhattan, she began to relax, and got a little chummier.

THE headwaiter recognized Dillon, who had been there only the night before. Perhaps he recognized her, too. If so, he discreetly kept his speculations to himself, like any good headwaiter.

They had a table back against the wall, under an amber shaded light fixture that drew golden glints from her eyes when she smiled.

"What did you have for dinner, that night?" he asked.

"I ordered roast duck," she recalled. "He ate—let me see—lobster Newburgh, I think."

"Fortunately I like lobster Newburgh." Dillon gave the order, duplicating every-

thing right down to the vegetables.

"Now what did you do during dinner?"

"Why, we—we talked."

"All right, let's talk," he grinned.

Although there were occasional references to the purpose of their tete-a-tete, Dillon saw no reason to labor the point. Pleasure gradually outweighed business, and the conversation grew quite personal. She told him about her early days on a farm in Wisconsin, winning a beauty contest in the local shorthand school, and heading straight for New York on the proceeds. She admitted with a giggle that there had only been a dozen contestants.

"The result would have been the same with ten thousand," he assured her.

She called him Mr. Dillon. After a while he asked, "Did you call your boss Mr. Hale all the time, while you were up here?"

"Not that night, no," she confessed. "He told me to use his first name: Walter."

"Okay, Margery. My first name's Carney."

She got him talking about himself then. About his three years with the Air Force in Europe, his job in the Police Department, and the flat he shared with three other bachelors in the Bronx. When the orchestra arrived and began to give out sweet and slow, they got out on the floor. She danced as smooth as cream.

"You danced like this with Walter Hale, that night?" he asked.

She nodded, then gave him a slanting look out of the corners of her eyes. "He held me closer than this, though."

His only answer to that was a scowl.

They ate the same dishes, drank the same drinks, and danced to the same music. In no time, it seemed, it was ten o'clock, but as for arousing any recollections that might give a clue to Walter Hale, very little progress had been made. He looked at his watch.

"You left about this time, didn't you?"

She colored faintly, but agreed. Dillon called for the check. It came to \$10.40. He put down a ten and two ones and was about to stand up when Margery spoke.

"Wait a minute." Her brow was puckered in concentration. "It seems to me that Walter Hale paid a larger check than that."

"How come? We've had the same things to eat and drink."

"Yes, but his check was nearly twenty dollars. I'm sure he paid it with a twenty, and two ones. Yes, now I remember."

Dillon stared at her, puzzled. "I can't figure that out." He rose. "You go and be getting your coat. I'll speak to the manager."

The manager, seated behind a cash register in the foyer, nodded as soon as Dillon began to explain the circumstances.

"You're the man from Missing Persons, in New York, following up Walter Hale, aren't you? It's odd, I don't know whether it will mean anything to you or not. In order to establish the exact amount of cash taken in the robbery, we've been going over the checks for that night, and we found one that has a mistake in it."

He pulled a guest check from a rear compartment of the cash register and smoothed it on the glass top of the desk.

"This item—the next to the last. 'One Benedictine—one dollar.' You can see that the figures, written hastily, were written a little too far to the left. Consequently it was added in as a ten instead of a one. That made the total \$19.40, instead of \$10.40. Just an error. But some guest paid us nine dollars more than he should have."

DILLON studied the check, which was dated the 12th. 2 Bar—that represented Manhattans. 2 Dinners—bourbon-soda, Benedictine—another bourbon-soda. It duplicated his own check, and when added correctly came to \$10.40, the amount he had just paid. He grinned a little crookedly.

"Your waiters often do that?"

"Not if I catch 'em at it, they don't," retorted the other sharply. "We charge good prices here, for good value, but we don't try to clip our patrons. If I were sure it was Hale, I'd be only too glad to return the overcharge with an apology."

"Perhaps the waiter could verify that for you."

"Unfortunately, the waiter who was shot and killed that night was the one who took care of Mr. Hale and his—er, the young lady."

"Oh, I see. Well, if I locate Hale, I'll tell him where he can get a nine dollar refund by asking for it."

Margery Henshaw emerged from the cloakroom. They went out together and

climbed into the coupe. As he started south on Central Avenue, he explained to her about the discrepancy in the check.

"It suggests a possible reason for his going back to the 100 Club, after leaving you. He may have figured out that he had been gypped, and went back to collect. But it doesn't suggest anything as to what happened beyond that point, does it?"

She shook her head silently, sliding down into the far corner of the seat. For a couple of miles she had nothing to say. Then she straightened up slowly, peering ahead.

"This is where he turned off."

"Oh, I see!" Following her gesture, Dillon swung right on a side road. It curved around the base of a hill, climbed past a few new small homes, and then ran along the crest of the ridge.

"He parked, right along here somewhere."

Dillon pulled off on a grassy shoulder and switched off engine and lights. They could look out over quite a stretch of landscape, twinkling with lights, without being under observation themselves.

"He knew a good spot, all right," muttered Dillon. She made no answer. "Well, what happened here?"

Her face was in shadow; her voice sounded small and unhappy. "He tried to kiss me."

"Tried! Did he have to try so hard?"

She made no reply as he slid his arm around her shoulders. He muttered something about "playing out this little act," and kissed her. Her lips began by being warm and willing, but then drew back.

"What's the matter, don't you like it?" he asked gruffly.

It seemed a long minute before she whispered, "I like it better than—that night."

The next time her lips didn't draw back, but kept on being warm and willing, and got warmer. Her one hand crept up to touch his cheek, and he was feeling no pain whatsoever. But, finally, when her head slipped down on his shoulder and she murmured, "Carney!" very softly, he suddenly got sore.

He gave her a shove that jerked her head on her shoulders. "You crazy little dope!" he growled.

"What—what is it, Carney?"

"You're on the wrong track entirely. You come to the big city, a cute-lookin' doll, and somebody tells you the way to succeed is never to say no. You wanted to make time with Walter Hale, your boss, so you let him neck you to his heart's content. Now you want to make time with me, so I won't blab all I know to his wife, so you use the same bait. I suppose if I kept on long enough—"

"Carney Dillon!" Even in the darkness her eyes flashed. "You mean to say that you think the only reason I'm kissing you is so you won't tell Mrs. Hale about that night?"

"I don't think so. I know so. But—"

Wham! She slapped him so hard that his head twisted on his neck, and tears came to his eyes.

Too startled to speak, he lurched back behind the wheel. While his hand felt of his stinging cheek, his tongue tasted her lipstick on his lips.

Neither spoke.

AFTER some time he heard a queer sound from her side of the car.

"You don't have to laugh at me," he grumbled.

"I'm not laughing at you," she retorted. "I just remembered. I slapped Walter Hale, that night. Right here. And let me tell you, I slapped him a lot sooner than I slapped you, Carney Dillon!"

"Interesting, if true," muttered Dillon.

"I slapped him harder, too. So hard that my ring flew apart. I'd forgotten. He put it in his pocket, said he'd get it fixed."

Dillon exhibited polite interest. "Your ring?"

"It was an old one, used to belong to my grandfather," she explained, as if glad to have a neutral topic to talk about. "I wore it on my pinkie. It was an old coin, in a setting. A two-and-a-half dollar gold piece, with grandfather's monogram engraved on it. It wasn't really very valuable. Just an heirloom—"

Suddenly Dillon whirled and seized both her shoulders. "What did you say—it fell apart?"

"Why, yes." She was startled. "When I slapped him, the coin fell off. We heard it clink on the steering column. He found it on the floor, so I slipped off the band and gave him that, too."

"Describe it," commanded Dillon.

She described it, as well as anyone could describe an ornate, Spencerian monogram in the dark.

"So he put it in his pocket, kept it there?"

"Yes. He said he'd have it fixed for me. Then he took me home."

Dillon snapped on the lights, thumbed the starter, and slammed the gear-shift lever into reverse. He got back on Central Avenue and drove south at break-neck speed.

"Where are we going, Carney?" the girl asked hesitantly as they crossed Yonkers Avenue without slowing.

"To identify that coin," he replied briefly.

As he snaked the coupe under the pillars of the Woodlawn subway, Dillon suddenly beat the steering wheel with his open palm.

"Now I remember that face! Fendel—my eye! That's just a phony name he gave, to keep from answering a lot of questions. That was Tony Fenacci. I've seen him in the line-up a couple of times. No wonder that face looked familiar!"

She didn't know what he was talking about. "The line-up?"

"Sure, we often sit in at the line-up. Sometimes we find missing persons there. But never mind, honey. I'll explain it all to you later. Right now I want a telephone."

He curbed the coupe in front of a cigar store and dashed in to the booth.

"Mr. Fendel was discharged earlier this evening," the clerk at the hospital told him after some delay. "He called a taxi about nine o'clock and left, on crutches. His home address—"

"Never mind the address—thanks," said Dillon, and hung up. The address, like the name, would be phony, of course. He next called the Kingsbridge precinct and told the desk sergeant who he was.

"Tony Fenacci?" came the reply to his question. "Sure, we know Tony Fenacci. We haven't got anything on him right at the moment. I don't think he's been in circulation lately. Maybe he's behaving—"

"Where does he hang out?"

"His brother runs a gin-mill just off Bailey Avenue, near the Harlem River. The Blueboy Bar and Grill, he calls it.

Tony's apt to hang around there. Why, you looking for him?"

"I hope to tell you I'm looking for him!" barked Dillon.

"Now look, mister. Tony's a mean character. If you're going to stick your neck into—hello! . . . Hello!"

But Dillon, with a hastily blurted, "Thanks!" had already hung up.

He climbed into the coupe and coursed down Jerome Avenue, turning right on Kingsbridge Road. At the foot of the hill he turned again on Bailey, and slowed down somewhat. After several blocks the neon sign that said simply *Blueboy* caught his eye just as he passed a corner. He braked, backed up, and swung into the side street that led toward the river. Rolling slowly past the dimly lighted front of the bar, where several other cars stood at the curb, he parked about fifty yards beyond, opposite a vacant lot.

"Just sit tight, Margery. The trail's getting hot!"

"What shall I do?" she asked in a whisper.

"Nothing—yet," he told her, climbing out on his side. "If I need you, I'll come out and get you."

BACK toward Bailey Avenue the bar and grill occupied the ground floor of a two-story brick building. Directly before him was a wide, vacant expanse stretching to the river—or almost to the river. At the lower end of the lot stood a couple of small, wooden buildings. One, with double doors facing the street, was evidently used as a garage. The other might have been a boat club. A plank walk ran to it from the street, circled the shack, and extended out over the water on piles to form a small pier.

As he glanced in that direction, he noticed two or three figures, vague in the gloom, moving slowly along the board walk. They meant nothing to him. He gave them one glance—then suddenly looked again. One of those figures moved slowly because he was moving on crutches—one leg swung, bulky and stiff. The other men kept pace.

Dillon promptly turned right instead of left. They had disappeared behind the boathouse by the time he reached the beginning of the board walk near the garage. The buildings were unlighted. It was

quite dark. He stepped cautiously, less to conceal his presence than to be sure of his footing. His rubber heels made little sound on the weathered planks, but they did make some.

He thought that he heard the murmur of voices ahead of him. After he turned the near corner of the second shack, he heard them no more. He passed a row of grimy windows, hearing the lap of dark water against piles beneath the flooring. As he rounded the far corner onto the open pier, a voice cut him short.

"Well, what is it?"

The three men stood with their backs against the side of the shack facing the river. They were in deep shadow, so that it was hard to see their faces. Dillon's features, in the light of a distant street lamp, were only slightly more distinct.

"Tony Fenacci?" said Dillon inquiringly.

There was no reply. The man on the right shifted one of his crutches a few inches. Dillon peered at his face, not quite certain.

"Who wants to know?" growled the man on the left finally.

Dillon cleared his throat. "I saw him this morning, and I want to find out—"

He heard the breath hiss between Tony's teeth, and stop. Tony leaned forward. "Turn around a little. No, the other way."

Dillon twisted his head in the light. Tony cursed in surprise.

"You was at the hospital!"

"Who is he, Tony?" demanded the man who had spoken first.

"I dunno . . . What yuh lookin' for, here?"

Dillon suddenly realized that he had rushed in where angels fear to tread, and that his position was precarious. The only inhabited place within shouting distance was the *Blueboy Bar and Grill*, which was owned by Tony's brother, and he had already betrayed knowledge that might be dangerous by connecting Tony with the hospital.

He licked his lips, and began, "I lost—that is, a friend of mine lost—a coin, a souvenir. I thought maybe you'd found it."

It sounded stupid, and he knew it, so he stopped. A nervous silence waited for him to continue. Finally, the man in the

middle spoke with a cold, level sneer. He was short, slight in build, and kept both hands in his coat pockets all the time.

"What's he talkin' about, Tony?"

"Search me. Who is he?"

"You're busy now," started Dillon again. "I'll wait for you in—"

"No, you don't!"

The big man on the left was blocking his way before Dillon had completed one full step. The big man's hand held something that glittered dully, with which he prodded Dillon's ribs.

"We want to know why you're here first. Frisk him, Joe."

THE short man's fingers were expert. He felt first for a gun, found none. Dillon's duties, as an inside man in Missing Persons, did not call for him to carry a weapon. If he had had one, it would have been out in his fist long before this. He did carry a shield, however, and the searching fingers shortly pulled it out of his vest pocket.

"A copper, eh! Well, ain't that nice! . . . What else, Joe?"

Dillon was acutely aware of the menace in that voice. From somewhere in the street he heard the hum of a motor, and the glare of headlights swung for a minute over the water, then faded. Someone entering or leaving the Blueboy, perhaps. But the building was in between, and Dillon could neither see nor be seen.

He held his tongue while Joe emptied his pockets one by one. There was nothing he could say now that would not worsen his chances. The big man, getting no replies to his questions, became savage with impatience. He swung with the flat of his gun.

Dillon sidestepped and ducked. The blow whistled over his head, further enraging the man who had launched it. Joe had his rod out now, too. Dillon saw that he was trapped. He could screech at the top of his lungs, like a stuck pig. That might bring help or it might not, but in any event not in time to keep him from being beaten to a bloody pulp. And, anyway, his masculine pride prevented that.

He clenched his teeth and ducked again. But this blow came lower. The weight of the gun caught him in the left side, just below the armpit. A sharp pain flooded his chest, as a rib cracked,

and the muscles of his lungs were momentarily paralyzed, so that he could neither breathe nor move.

At that moment Joe kicked him in the stomach.

As he folded up and toppled forward to his hands and knees, he heard, as if through a fog, a voice. A feminine voice, urgent, compelling.

"Yes, this way!" it said. "He went out here!"

Footsteps pounded on the planking. As he knelt there, dizzy, nauseated and helpless, there was a brief but swift commotion above his head. Joe darted to the corner.

"The bulls!" he hissed.

His gun blasted, once. There came the answering crack of a police positive. Joe gasped, and spun on his heel.

The big man, seized by the guilty instinct for flight, dashed for the opposite corner of the shack. He crashed headlong into Tony Fenacci, who had essayed one step on his crutches. It was like an old comedy act in vaudeville. Tony toppled and fell across Dillon's back. He came down heavily on the stringpiece, balanced for an instant, and then went over. There was a sullen splash, almost unnoticed.

The big man, unheeding, dashed on. But the two cops from the prowler car, despatched by the desk sergeant and guided by Margery, had gone into action before and knew their trade.

One came around one side of the building and one around the other. There were a couple more shots, and a short scuffle. By the time Dillon could stagger to his feet and regain his wind, the big man was being frog-marched back to the pier. He was handcuffed to little Joe's one good wrist. The other had been neatly smashed by a bullet.

"This is Harry!" said the man in uniform. He was panting softly as he slid his gun into its holster. "Tony's brother, who runs the Blueboy. I thought he said it was Tony you were looking for?"

"Tony was here," gasped Dillon. His head was still woolly. He wagged it from side to side to clear it. "He went over the side, into the water, when the big guy—Harry—rammed into him."

The cop moved to the edge and peered downward, starting to unbutton his jacket. But Dillon shook his head.

"No use. He's plenty drowned by now. He must have gone down like a stone, with that cast on his leg. You could never get him up to the surface alone. It'll take a derrick."

WHILE Dillon took Margery to one side and set about convincing her that he was all right, one of the uniformed men went back to the prowl car and used the radio. This brought, in a few minutes, a patrol wagon to cart off the prisoners, and a police launch from the river side. The latter tied up to the dock, turned on a powerful spotlight, and lowered a grapnel into the oily water.

The patrol car also brought a couple of Bronx detectives, who listened carefully to Dillon's reconstruction.

"These three hoodlums had just finished knocking off the 100 Club when Hale came back to claim his overcharge. As they ran out, Hale's car struck Tony, knocking him down and breaking his leg. The other two picked up Tony and tossed him in their car. Realizing that Hale had by now seen all their faces—they had stripped off their masks as they ran out—and would be a deadly witness against them, they took him along too. When they divided up the loot, they divided the cash in Hale's pockets as well—even the small change."

"Those cheap thugs don't overlook a nickel, do they?"

"No—and it happened that in with his small change, Hale had a coin that had come out of a ring. That fell to Tony's portion, and went into his pocket. If he noticed the gold piece at all in the excitement, he never realized of course what it was. After they had disposed of Hale, they took Tony to the hospital, where he

checked in under a phony name and a phony story about a hit-and-run accident. When the gold piece fell on the floor at my feet this morning, I had no idea what it was, either. But when Margery told me, later—"

"But what did they do with Hale?"

Before Dillon could answer, there came a shout from the launch. The grapnel broke surface with a body. But surprisingly, there was no plaster cast on the right leg. Instead it was weighted by an anvil wired about the neck.

A week under water had done the features no good, but they were recognizable, and comparison with the photograph in Dillon's pocket clinched it. It was the body of Walter Hale.

On its very next immersion the grapnel brought up Tony Fenacci, dripping and cold with slime. The two lay side by side on the deck of the launch, where Dillon and the detectives bent over them.

From Tony's pants Dillon brought out the two-and-a-half dollar gold piece with the ornate monogram engraved on it. In Hale's pocket they found a plain gold band with an old-fashioned, five-pronged setting. The coin fitted in the setting perfectly, but loosely. That put the last link in the chain.

Some time later, when he had driven to the door of Margery's home, Dillon asked, "You still frightened, honey?"

She sighed. "Yes. I wish you would put your arm around me. I'll promise not to slap you."

Dillon turned, but then groaned. "I guess that rib *must* be cracked. I'll have to get it taped up, in the morning."

"Then," she declared, "I'll have to put my arms around you."

Which she did.

THE CLOCK THAT WASN'T THERE

(Concluded from page 76)

er's store tonight and he pretended to be looking for a clock that Fullerton had left there. When your husband makes up wild stories, he sure doesn't fool about it. But he is careless."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Crowder.

"When he killed Fullerton he left one of his rubbers at the scene of the crime with his name inside of it, and didn't

even notice it," said the patrolman. "May I use your phone. I want to tell the chief I have the killer."

Mrs. Crowder stared at the unconscious man, her face hard. "Bess Fullerton, eh?" she said. "You go right ahead and phone, officer!"

As he picked up the phone, Patrolman Jerry Long thought he would like being a detective.



Keder's fist rocked
against Osborne's jaw

I Won't Be Home Tonight

By B. J. BENSON

Harry Osborne was dissatisfied with his way of living, until he saw how the other half—died!

IN THE first place, he was sick of the whole business. Sick of his humdrum job and his humdrum wife and his humdrum way of living. In the second place, he had been saving the money secretly for over a year. So now he had one hundred dollars in fives and tens in his wallet and he was in the bus depot in Portland. It was five o'clock in the evening and he wasn't coming home—tonight or any other night.

He had made the decision on the spur of the moment. It had happened just like

that. He had walked out of the office and, before he knew it, his steps had taken him to the bus station. Now he was waiting for the Boston bus to load.

He had been in that knitting mill for seventeen years, and anyone would have been fed up with its musty smell and the endless stack of invoices and shipping tags and old oak desks and dusty windows. He'd started in there as an office boy, fresh out of high school. He was office manager now, but that didn't make any difference. It was still the same.

And there was his wife. The same old Dorothy. She was pretty enough when he married her. But that was ten years ago, and she was beginning to fade. She had the same routine habits, and she cooked the same old things and he was bored with her. He was bored with the Saturday night shopping in Yarmouth, and his used car with the sticky valves, and his easy chair near the radio and the weekly movie. He was thirty-four years old and he was heartily sick of it. He was leaving Portland and he wasn't coming back. For the first time in his life he didn't know what he was going to do next, and the unexpectancy of it sent a delicious shiver up his spine.

So he went over to the counter and bought a ticket to Boston. He idled there a moment, then turned and walked into the waiting room.

That was where he saw her.

SHE was standing near one of the benches, and one of the porters was picking up her expensive matched luggage. Then she sat down and loosened her sheared beaver coat. She was wearing no hat, and her ash blonde hair was tied severely back with a blue velvet ribbon. When he came closer, he saw the long slim legs and the smoothness of her skin.

She was probably in her mid twenties, but she was ageless in sophistication and manner. Her eyes flashed up at him for a split second, then turned away as she opened a magazine and began to read. He felt his pulse quicken and automatically he looked into the mirror of a cigarette vending machine.

He saw himself with his neat brown suit and his neat tweed topcoat and his neat chocolate brown hat. He saw that he was of medium height and slim and not half bad looking, even if he did have a short stubby nose. He was vaguely pleased with what he saw and he adjusted his hat at a more rakish angle.

When he boarded the bus he had a seat halfway back and near the window. Then he caught a whiff of heady perfume. He felt the blood rush to his face as she moved in beside him.

Things were certainly starting off right, he thought. But because he didn't know what to say or do next, he stared stolidly ahead.

The bus had pulled out of the city limits and was humming along Route One when she broke the silence.

"Would you care to look at my magazine?"

He glanced over and saw the cover.

"Thanks," he said. "But I don't read movie magazines."

That was foolish of him, he thought, because her mouth was soft and friendly. He looked out of the window and back at her again. She had a nice profile, and when she turned and looked at him, he saw there was something about her eyes. They were neither blue nor gray, but almost smoky, and he shivered a little inside.

"Let's talk," she said. She was smiling at him, showing small white teeth.

He smiled back. "About bus rides?"

"I don't ride buses very often," she said. "It's rather a lark for me."

"Me too," he said. He noticed the expensively tailored suit she was wearing.

"We can always talk about ourselves," she said. "My name is Adele. Adele Winters."

"Glad to know you," he said. "Mine's Harry. Harry Osborne."

She bobbed her head in salutation, then twisted around and looked to the rear of the bus. Her eyes scanned the passengers anxiously.

"Looking for somebody?" he asked.

"Oh!" she said. She was startled. "Oh, no. I was just looking at the people. People fascinate me."

She lapsed into silence again. The bus rolled along, gathering speed.

"Going to Boston?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes. Business trip."

"Staying over?"

"I don't know yet. Why?"

"You didn't have any luggage?"

"You noticed?"

"I couldn't help it." She smiled again. "You're the type that catches the eye."

"Am I?" That pleased him.

"Yes. Didn't you know?"

"I hadn't given it much thought," he said. He found himself reddening.

"I live in Boston," she said as an afterthought. "I have an apartment there."

"Alone?"

"Yes. I'm originally from the West Coast. I work in a Boston department store. Fashion advertising."

"Sounds interesting. I—I'm in woolens. Manufacturing."

"How nice," she said. "I was up in Bangor visiting friends for the week-end."

"Today's Wednesday."

"Is it?" She laughed. "It was a long week-end. And after all that fun it's going to be lonesome in that apartment."

"It shouldn't be—not for you."

"Oh, but it is. I'm rather choosy about people. I don't make friends very easily."

"You made friends with me."

"That's just what I mean. I think you're nice. I wouldn't mind *you* visiting me—if you had the time."

"I guess I could," he said almost inaudibly. His mouth was dry.

"Would you? Really?"

"I sure would."

"That would be wonderful," she said. She took a tiny gold pencil and a little white card from her purse. She scribbled something.

"Commonwealth Avenue," she said. "In the Back Bay."

"I'll find it," he said as he took the card.

His voice slurred in anticipation.

He looked down and saw her hand resting on his arm.

SWISHING its air brakes, the bus eased into a wayside restaurant near Portsmouth, New Hampshire. They waited until the other passengers had gone out before they left their seats.

"I'm not a bit hungry," she said as he helped her down to the pavement. Her eyes were roving over the cars in the parking area.

"We can at least have some coffee," he said.

They went inside and sat at the counter. She turned sideways, so that she could look at him and also at the window.

The coffee came and she stirred it absent mindedly without putting the sugar in. Then she brought the cup up and started to sip it. Her hand shook violently and the coffee sloshed out and spilled. She put the cup down quickly.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said. "I didn't get a good grip on it. These handles are made for truck drivers. By the way, Harry, do you see that car that just pulled into the parking area?"

He turned around and peered out into the darkness. "Where?"

She pointed. "Over there in the shadows."

"You mean the convertible?"

"Yes. Is that a Buick?"

"Yup. It's a Buick. I wouldn't mind having one."

"Is it maroon?"

He looked again. "It's hard to tell in the dark. It might be. Why?"

"Some friends of mine have a car just like it."

"You mean your Bangor friends?"

"Yes. I could have sworn it's their car."

He moved off the stool. "I can find out for you."

She clutched his arm. "Don't," she said fiercely.

"Why?" he asked surprised. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing. I just reminded myself. It couldn't possibly be them. They're in Bangor." She slid off the stool. "Excuse me a moment," she said. "I want to fix my face."

She hurried off to a door marked *La-dies*.

He drank his coffee and lighted a cigarette. As he glanced down at her untouched cup he saw that she had left her black leather purse on the counter.

Ten minutes later she was still out, and he began to get worried. Then the bus driver called out that they were starting, and the door opened and she came back in. She smiled at him as they left the restaurant and boarded the bus. As she got on, she looked over the parking area again. He did, too.

The Buick convertible was gone.

WHEN they alighted at Park Square in Boston, a porter put her bags into a cab.

"When will I see you, Harry?" she asked. Her eyes darted nervously through the crowd.

"I'm not sure," he said. He looked at his watch. It was 8:05 P.M. "I have a few things to do first."

"Come as soon as you can," she said earnestly. "I don't like being alone."

"I won't be long," he said.

"No matter what time it is, come anyway. Please. If it's late, you'll find the

key under the mat. Promise?"

"I promise."

"Please," she said. "I'll be expecting you."

He helped her into the cab. The cab sped off past the Statler and turned on Arlington Street. He watched it go. Then he took out his handkerchief and wiped his clammy hands.

He went back into the bus depot and over to the lunch bar. He sat down and ordered a sandwich and a cup of coffee. He wasn't hungry, but there was some thinking to do.

He was halfway through the sandwich when a man sat down beside him. The man was big and the camel's hair topcoat he wore made him appear even larger. He had a red meaty face, thick lips, and small close-set eyes. He was about thirty-five years old.

"Nice babe," the man said.

"Who?" he asked.

"You know, the blonde. Saw her on the bus with you."

"Oh. Were you on the bus?"

"No. I was driving my car on Charles Street and I pulled up alongside the bus at the light. Saw the both of you talking. Friend of yours?"

"No. I just met her on the bus."

"The babe has class. You can always spot it. I'd never let go of it if it was me."

"I still have a string on it," he said.

"She gave me her address."

"I wouldn't pass it up," the man said. He put out his hand. "My name's Sam Keeler."

"Harry Osborne." They shook hands.

"Look, Harry. You're not in any great hurry, are you?"

"No. I guess not."

"Good. I have some time to spend and plenty of money to spend it with. How about you being my guest tonight?"

"I don't know about being a guest. I like to pay my own way."

"You hold onto your money tonight. I own some horses I'm running at Suffolk Downs and I collected a good purse today. I feel like celebrating. How about it?"

"Sure."

"Good boy. There's a place called the Beachcomber around the corner. I have my car parked near there."

"I still say I have my own money," he objected.

"Don't be absurd, old boy. This is on me."

THE Beachcomber was warm and murky with smoke. There was a sweetish smell of liquor and perfume and the band made a great deal of noise and Osborne had a headache. Besides, the liquor hadn't agreed with him. The tables were squeezed in so tightly that his elbow was resting on the adjoining table, and he had a hard time breathing. He was beginning to feel giddy.

"I'm from Maine," he said to Keeler. "Best little state in the country."

"Well, what do you know," Keeler said. "We're neighbors. I'm from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, myself."

"Yeah? Fine native son, you are. Whyn't you race your horses at Rockingham?"

"Purses are too small. Have another drink."

"Wait'll I finish this one," he said.

Then he started to giggle, and he had to repress himself. He noticed his speech was thick and furry, and he put his drink down.

"What's so funny?" Keeler asked.

"The floor show. Those girls wear hardly anything."

"Not bad for Boston," Keeler said.

"They wear less clothes than they do in Maine."

"That blonde, the second from the end. She's cute."

"Sure is," he said. His headache was beginning to dissipate. As he picked up the glass again, his arm felt as light as a feather.

"Speaking of blondes," Keeler said. "How about the girl friend?"

"Who?"

"The girl on the bus. What's her name?"

"Oh, Adele?"

"Yeah. Maybe we can get up a little party."

"The three of us?"

"Oh, no. Call her up and tell her to get a friend."

"Would she have one?"

"Sure she would."

"I don't happen to have her telephone number."

"You've got her address. We can call information."

"Say, that's a good idea. Have a swell party. They plug phones in at the tables here, don't they? Like they do in the movies?"

"Maybe. But it's too noisy. Let's go out and get some air. We can call from a drugstore."

"Okay," he said.

He looked at his watch as Keeler called for the check. It was 10:27, and he thought it was a heck of a time to start a party.

* * * * *

Outside, Keeler held him steady by grasping his arm. He was gulping in the cool night air.

"I'm woozy," he said. "How about you?"

"Me?" Keeler laughed. "I've got a hollow leg."

"Well, there's a Liggett's drugstore at the corner."

"Wait a minute," Keeler said. "Let's take a little ride first. It'll clear our heads. She might not like it if you've had too much to drink."

"Good idea," he agreed.

CAREFULLY, they made it around the block to the parking lot. The attendant started to come out of the little shack, but Keeler waved him back.

"I can get the car out myself," Keeler explained. "It's only at the edge of the driveway."

When they came to it, Keeler started to open the door. Osborne stopped short. The car was a maroon Buick convertible.

"Hey," Keeler said suddenly. "You sure you have the address?"

"Right in my pocket."

"You might have lost it."

"No. I have it right here." He fumbled into his pocket and brought out the white pasteboard.

"Let's see it," Keeler said. His voice was flat and metallic.

"There's something wrong." He shook his head, remembering where he had seen a Buick before. "Your car has New York plates. I thought you came from New Hampshire?"

"Let's have the card," Keeler said.

"What's your hurry?" He began to get

[Turn page]

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a squeamish feeling in his stomach.

Keeler left the car and came over to him. He held out his hand.

"Now just a moment," Osborne said. "I don't like this. You couldn't have seen us in the bus. I just remembered that. If you were riding beside the bus in a car you couldn't have seen us."

Keeler reached for the card.

"Wait," Osborne said, edging away. "Those bus seats set up high. You might have seen me at the window, but certainly not her. I know where you saw us. It was in that restaurant outside of Portsmouth. That's where. And I don't—"

Just then Keeler's arm came up and he got a quick flash of something brassy. There was a white explosion in his eyes and he stumbled and went down. He felt a searing pain along the side of his head, and a warm trickle ran down the side of his face. He got to his knees and shook his head, and he felt the blood spattering off him. His hand went up along his ear and over the torn flap of skin at the stubbled hairline.

Suddenly there was a roar in his ears and he rolled out of the way as Keeler gunned the motor of the car. The car slithered off, spewing gravel, and he stared after it as it rounded the corner. He looked at his hands. The card was gone.

Now there was a pounding of running footsteps and he looked over his shoulder and saw the attendant coming up. He lurched to his feet.

"What happened?" the attendant asked. He was small and thin and he wore thick horn-rimmed glasses.

"Nothing," he said, brushing himself off. "I slipped and fell."

"What about the guy you were with? He went off and left you."

"Yeah. I guess he did. He got disgusted with me. I've had a little too much to drink."

"That's a nasty cut you have there, mister."

"It's all right," he said. "Where can I get a cab?"

"There's a stand at the corner."

"Thanks."

He went quickly out of the parking lot. His head was clear now and he was cold sober.

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There was a cab at the corner and he climbed into it and gave the driver the Commonwealth Avenue address.

IT WAS 10:53. He stood in front of the apartment house looking for the Buick. He didn't see it. The building was eight stories high and he craned his neck looking up at the lighted windows. He crossed the pavement and went in. There were two long vertical rows of white buttons and, beside them, small black metal nameplates. He ran his eye up and down until he caught the name A. Winters. He put his hand on the button. Then he thought better of it.

He pushed a button named Clark and waited. The inside door clicked, and he opened it and went in. He walked along the first floor looking at the names on the doors. There was no Winters. He disregarded the elevator and went up the rubber-treaded stairs. On the second floor a door was ajar and a heavy faced man with gray tousled hair stared out at him.

"Yes?" the man asked, looking at his blood streaked face.

"Sorry," he said. "I rang the wrong bell. I'm looking for Winters."

"Never heard of them," the man said, and slammed the door.

He went up to the third floor and then the fourth. On the fourth floor there was a door with a new card on it. It said Miss Adele Winters, and he stopped and took a deep breath.

He knocked at the door. There was no answer. He knocked harder.

The door opened.

"Oh," she said. "Oh, Harry. Come in."

He stood there. She was wearing a flimsy lace negligee, which accentuated more than it concealed. Then he noticed the red welt across the pale skin of her face.

"Please come in," she said.

He went in. He stood in the foyer as she closed the door behind him. There was a dim light cast by a black shaded lamp with a bronze base. He looked into the living room and back at her.

"Look," he said. "There's something funny going on. I met a man and he—"

He stopped. Keeler's big bulk had

[Turn page]

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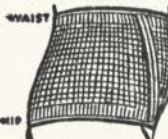
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loomed out of the shadows near the door. "Go ahead," Keeler said. "You were saying something."

He looked at Keeler and then at Adele. Her face was drawn and tight.

"What's the matter?" he asked her. "Is he somebody you know?"

"Tell him, Adele," Keeler said softly.

"Yes, I know him," she said listlessly.

"I guess I had it all wrong," he said slowly. He moved toward the door.

"Don't go, Harry," she said quickly. "Please."

"Take off," Keeler said. "You've had your party."

"She said she wants me to stay," he said. "You shouldn't have hit me, Keeler."

"You've been lucky," Keeler said. "Get out before I really tie into you."

"I don't like to get pushed around," he said stubbornly.

"All right, all right," Keeler said. "This isn't a game of marbles. You've got Adele all wrong. It's no set-up for a guy like you. This girl is tricky. She can wrap you up like nothing."

"I'm staying," he said.

"You're asking for trouble," Keeler said. "She's cute. You're liable to wake up in a few hours with a big headache and your roll gone."

"It looks like she don't want your company, Keeler," he said.

"Sure, she don't. If she wants to get rid of me, ask her why she don't call the cops. Go ahead, ask her."

She spat something in gutter language at him.

"See?" Keeler said. "Her mask is slipping. I slipped, too. I let her get away from me in Bangor."

"She told me she was visiting friends up there."

KEELER laughed shortly. "You know what she was doing in Bangor? She was working a badger game with me. Sure, we pulled a smooth fix on an old geezer who has a string of cabins. The frame was neat, the guy had plenty and he paid. Only she grabbed the dough and beat it. I trailed her as far as Boston when I lost the bus in the traffic."

"I told you, Sam," she said urgently. "I figured it was better to split. Things were too warm. Don't you believe me?"

"No," he said flatly. "You're a liar. You had the whole gimmick planted in advance. You had this apartment rented without telling me. You figured you'd lay low here for a while. Then when you knew I was following you, you needed a sucker to help you make a getaway. That's where the hick came in. Well, you can get away. I don't want any part of you. But first, I'll have the dough. And I'll have all of it."

"I haven't got it," she said. "I banked it in Portland."

"You're a liar," he said. "I'm going to have a look."

"Don't, Sam," she said. "Don't." She threw herself in front of him. He pushed her aside with his arm. She snarled something at him and he slapped her hard across the mouth.

"Hold on," Osborne said.

He went over and grabbed Keeler by the back of the collar. Keeler whirled and swung. His fist rocked against Osborne's jaw and spun him halfway around. He crashed back against the lamp table where he held on groggily. Then he heard Adele scream. He heard her thud into something and then the noise stopped. He shook his head at the brightly colored lights inside his head and opened his eyes.

She was lying on the floor with her head twisted up against the baseboard of the wall. One leg was drawn up under her body. Her negligee was open and there was something unnatural in the position of her head. He looked again because he saw the blood oozing out of her mouth and nose. Then Keeler came in from the living room. He was stuffing a large brown envelope into his breast pocket.

"You killed her," he said to Keeler.

"I hit her," Keeler said. "She tripped and fell." He bent down over her. Then he straightened out. He wet his thick rubbery lips.

"I guess she is dead," he said slowly. "She must have banded herself as she fell. Looks like she broke her neck or something."

"You killed her," Osborne said monotonously.

"It was an accident. I've got a bad temper and sometimes I don't know my own strength."

[Turn page]

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He looked at Osborne reflectively and there was a cunning look in his eyes. He reached into his pocket and brought out some brass knuckles. He fitted them carefully over his fingers.

"It won't do you any good," Osborne said.

"Let's try," Keeler said. "I need a little time. I'll rock you to sleep again and you can do the explaining when you wake up."

"You can't get far."

"Sure," Keeler said easily, coming over. "But you won't be able to talk either. Not with your jaw all wired up. Now hold your chin steady, pal. You won't know what hit you."

He clawed at the table to get away from Keeler. His grasping fingers touched the heavy bronze lamp. He grabbed it desperately. Keeler moved in to measure him, and he swung.

The lamp crashed onto Keeler's shoulder. The shade crumpled and the bulb was pulverized as the lamp went out. Keeler staggered and lunged for him. In the half light from the living room, he swung again. He caught Keeler squarely on the top of the head and Keeler went forward and ground into the rug with his face. One leg twitched spasmodically as his hands groped along the rug. Then he was still.

IT WAS five minutes to eight in the morning when he walked down the wide stairs at the entrance of Police Headquarters. The morning was cold and raw and gray and the plainclothesman with him turned up his topcoat collar.

"It'll be warmer for you in Portland, Osborne," the detective said, grinning. "Your wife said to make sure you get on that train. She sounded a little mad."

"I'll be on it," he said.

They stooped into the police car, headed down Berkeley and turned right on Beacon.

"Do I have to come back?" he asked.

"I don't think so. Keeler wants to cop a manslaughter plea and, according to the

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evidence, I think the D.A. will let him. That means no trial. No trial, no witnesses. What's the matter? Don't you like Boston?"

"Oh, I like Boston all right," he said. "But I like Portland better."

At North Station he bought his ticket while the detective chatted with one of the uniformed patrolmen. He turned away from the ticket window and walked across the marble floor to the gate. When he got there, he waved goodbye, and the detective waved back. He went up the rear platform of the train and sat down in the car. Moving closer to the window he stared out into the smoke-filled railroad yard. He was thinking of the busy beehive at the office and the friendly banter of the Saturday night shopping crowds. Then there was the delicious fragrance of home cooking and the comfort of his easy chair near the radio. His fingers drummed the window sill impatiently.

There was a rustle of clothes beside him, and the scent of perfume. He turned his head. A girl sat down beside him. She had raven black hair and a smooth white skin. She threw back her coat and he saw her trim figure. Then she looked at him and smiled slowly.

"Excuse me, please," he said, as he got up and moved past her.

He went forward into the next car. There he saw a fat gray-haired woman with a ridiculous flowerpot of a hat on her head. The seat beside her was empty.

He sat down and stretched his legs comfortably.

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(Concluded from page 9)

cus-murder stories? I'll appreciate it if you let me know.

I have a complaint. With all the handsome, two-fisted detective heroes in your mag, the latest issue comes up with only a female on the cover. Tsk! Tsk! I don't think dames have any place in detective stories, but when they begin to crowd the men out—#%&*c!—Ronnie Charity, Abilene, Tex.

Sorry, Ronnie. But you'll agree it was a good-looking cover!

In a recent issue, Mr. Walter S. Winfield, Portland, Maine, states in regard to silencers on guns that they were made of bronze and only five or six have been made and did not silence. I owned two a long time ago and had them on .22 and .32 caliber rim-fire rifles, which I used squirrel hunting. I also know of several more owned by my friends and hunting partners. They were made by the Hiram Maxim Silent Firearms Co. I think the address was Hartford, Conn. They made a .22 caliber sound like an air gun. The first one I used on the .32 caliber. It was about six inches long and one and a half inches in diameter. The second—which I acquired seven or eight years later—was about four inches long and one inch in diameter. The gentleman's letter finishes with: "Have you ever seen one?" The answer is—I have owned and used two for twenty or thirty years and seen dozens more. They were prohibited by law about twenty-five years ago.—Frank M. Jamey, Fort Wayne, Ind.

That's an interesting and informative letter, Frank, and I'm sure it clears up many questions readers had in their minds about silencers.

I disagree with the reader who objects to "ghost" stories. I say ghost stories are fine as long as they have a legitimate crime or murder in them and are legitimately explained.—Dolf McKettrick, Sheboygan, Wis.

And for the last letter, I come up with this out of the mail bag:

My favorite authors? Norman A. Daniels, Stewart Sterling, O. B. Myers, and—Joe Archibald.—Tom Dare, Jr., Honolulu, T.H.

Write to me—a postcard will do—telling what you think of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, and let me publish what you have to say in a forthcoming issue. Thanks again, meanwhile, to all who have written. And, remember, all letters are published or personally answered. So please let's hear from you! Address all letters and postcards to The Editor, **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y.

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—THE EDITOR.

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Your Guarantee is good enough for me. Here's my part of the bargain—just the postage to make you prove your part. I am checking below what I want:

- I want to purchase your hosiery. Please have your representative call.
- I am interested in a high-paying future as your representative in my territory.

Name _____
Street _____
City _____ Zone _____ State _____

Give
Sheaffer's
 America's
FIRST Choice

(BY ACTUAL SALES RECORDS)*

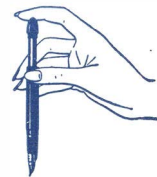
*magnificent
 Christmas gift
 greatly appreciated.
 This Sheaffer is the set
 I have always admired
 and hoped to own.*

*Affectionately
 John*

*Merry Christmas
 to John
 from Kay*

Harry Shigeta, FPSA, M.Phot.

Few gifts can match Sheaffer's for dignity, richness...for the definite impression of unsurpassed quality. And in the limited group of gifts bearing the distinction of being the very finest of their kind, Sheaffer's alone are not costly. Genuine Sheaffer's writing equipment is priced to fit every purse and made to fit every gift purpose. Set Illustrated: Crest De Luxe model, 14K gold filled. Touchdown Pen, \$17.50; Pencil, \$6.00; Strato-writer Ballpoint, \$12.50. Plus fed. tax. W. A. Sheaffer Pen Company, Fort Madison, Iowa, U.S.A. In Canada: Malton, Ont.



NEW TOUCH DOWN

Exclusive pneumatic down-stroke filler. Easiest pen in the world to fill because AIR DOES THE WORK! In all White Dot models.

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*Based on latest annual report