

SOME DIE HARD *By* BRUNO FISCHER

FLYNN'S 10¢ DETECTIVE FICTION



CRY MURDER!

*A NOVEL OF
GRIPPING MYSTERY*
by **NORBERT DAVIS**

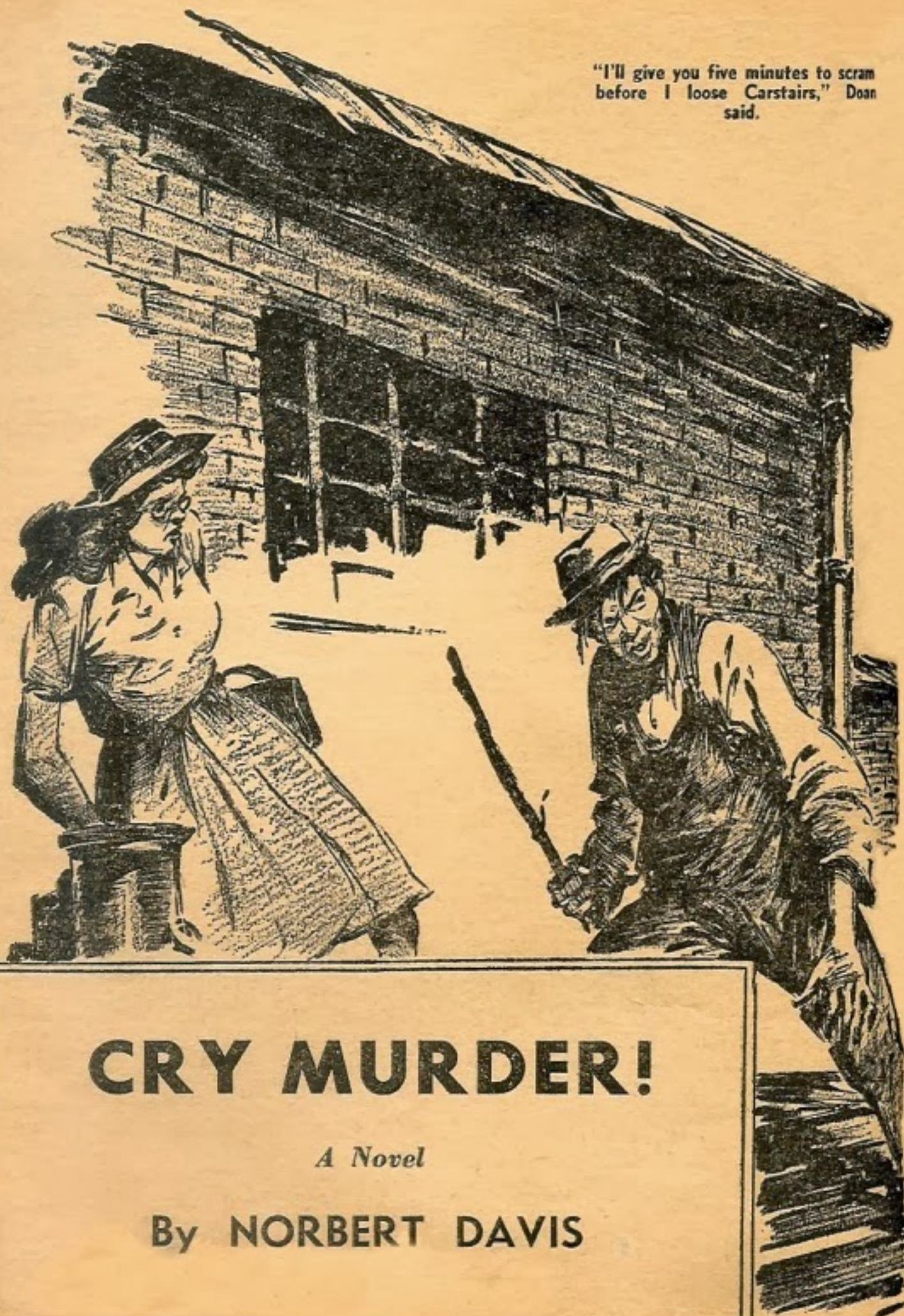
D.L. CHAMPION

DAY KEENE

AND MANY OTHERS



"I'll give you five minutes to scam
before I loose Carstairs," Doan
said.



CRY MURDER!

A Novel

By NORBERT DAVIS

CHAPTER ONE

Canine Copper

THE station wagon trundled around the corner into the narrow, deeply shaded street, idled down the block with scarcely a whisper from its motor, and parked in at the curb. This was no ordinary station wagon by any manner of means. It was a custom job, and in the good old days when you could buy such things it had set its owner back just \$3987.92 F.O.B. Michigan plus tax.

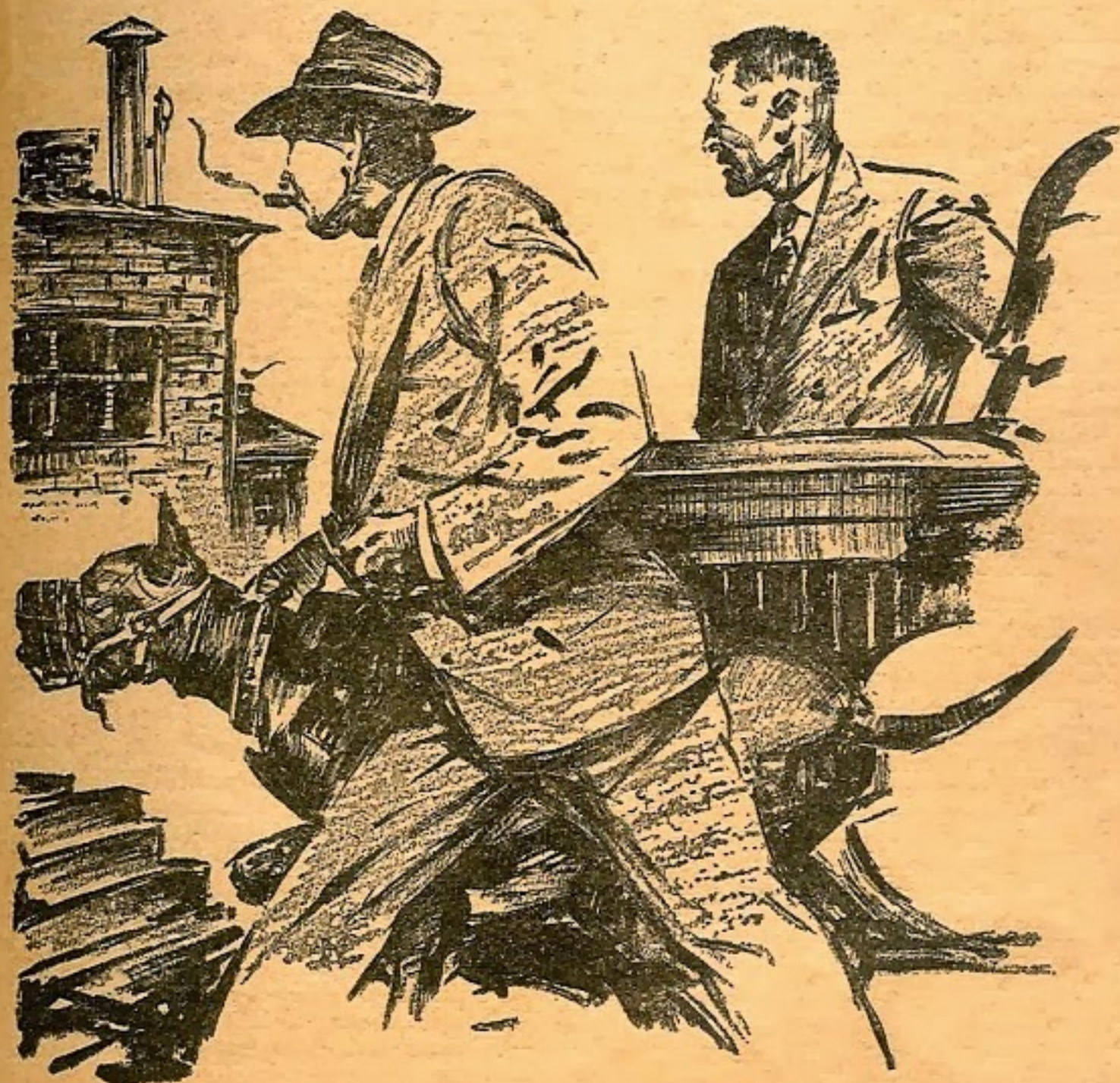
It looked something like a sportily streamlined combination of a limousine and a high-class hearse.

Doan was driving it. He was plump and not very tall, neatly and soberly dressed in a gray business suit, and he had a round, unlined face and a complexion like a baby on a supervised diet. He was a very innocent and nice and harmless appearing person, but that was all strictly camouflage. He was innocent and nice only when it paid him, and he was as harmless as a rattlesnake.

"We're here," he said, looking over his shoulder.

The back seat of the station wagon ran around in a semicircle to fit the rear contour of the body, and it was designed to seat six persons comfortably. Carstairs was filling it all up, now, and dangling over the edges here

Introducing Carstairs, who's almost human . . . Doan, who's almost bloodhound . . . and a road which stretched through the night to —trackless murder!



and there. He was snoring with gentle gusto.

"Hey, stupid," said Doan.

Carstairs opened one eye and watched him.

"Come on," said Doan. "You've slept long enough."

He opened the door beside him and slid out into the street and then opened the rear door. Carstairs mumbled under his breath and began to assemble himself in sections, cracking his joints and grunting with the effort.

Carstairs was a dog, but it would be impossible just to let it go at that. In the first place he was a Great Dane, and in the second place he was enormous. Standing on four feet, after he had untangled himself and climbed out into the street, his back came up even with Doan's solar plexus. Had Carstairs worked up energy enough to stand on his hind legs he could have looked right over Doan's head, hat and all, without the slightest effort.

"You see that wall over there?" Doan asked.

Carstairs examined the wall across the street from them with disapproval. It was really something in the way of a wall. It was two stories high and made of gray granite blocks that looked cold and sullenly unyielding in the morning sunlight.

"There's a prison behind it," Doan said. "A prison is a place where they put criminals—well, not all of them, as you very well know, but the ones they catch. Keep that in mind in the future."

Carstairs grunted and sat down. The sun hadn't risen high enough to shine on the pavement as yet, and it was cold. Carstairs stood up again, muttering disgustedly deep in his throat.

Doan pointed. "That small door there is where they let the criminals out after they're through with them. Keep your eye on it."

CARSTAIRS watched the door without any noticeable signs of interest. The street was very quiet, and the tree shadows made motionless, dappled patterns along the base of the prison wall. Somewhere a clock began to strike the hour with sullen, rumbling booms. It was ten o'clock.

"Just right," said Doan.

There was the cold rattle and snap of bolts, and then the recessed door in the wall opened and a man stepped out through it and stood hesitantly on the sidewalk. The door closed behind him with a sharp clack. The man winced slightly. Then he pulled in a deep breath of free air and started up the street.

"Hey, you," Doan called.

The man stopped short and half turned. A Doan crooked his finger invitingly. "Come here."

The man hesitated again and then walked slowly across the street. He was young, and he was dressed in a brown tweed suit that

had cost quite a lot some time ago. He had black, close-cropped hair and heavy black brows and contemptuous brown eyes with little greenish flecks in them. His lips were thin and hard and twisted down a little at one corner. He stared silently at Doan.

"Are you Bradfield Owens?" Doan asked.

"Yes."

"I'm Doan," said Doan. "This is Carstairs. He's my assistant, or else I'm his. We've never straightened out the relationship."

"Very interesting," Owens said. "So what?"

"Colonel Ephriam Morris got you paroled," Doan told him. "It was quite a job. Parole boards are a little leery of guys who go around sticking knives in people and stuff like that. He wants to see you."

"What if I don't want to see him?"

"Just go right over and rap on that door," Doan answered. "They'll let you back in."

Owens shrugged. "Okay. Where's Morris?"

"Where he always is. On his farm. That's where we're going to take you."

"What am I supposed to do when I get there?"

"Run the damned place," Doan said. "What did you think Colonel Morris got you paroled for—just because he liked your pretty brown eyes?"

"No," Owens said grimly. "I didn't think that. Well, let's go."

IT WAS dusk now, and Doan was still driving. The road looped in long, loose curves through country that was just slightly rolling.

"I've only driven this road once before," Doan said. "We're pretty near there, aren't we?"

Owens nodded. "Yes."

"I don't hear any loud cheers from you."

"No," said Owens glumly.

Carstairs grunted and complained to himself, shifting around in the back seat, and then snuffled meaningfully just behind Doan's right ear.

"Okay," said Doan. "Screw-loose, back there, wants a drink and a walk. Is there any place we can stop near here?"

"Yes. Cleek's Mill is just around that curve ahead. It's abandoned, but there's still a dam and a mill pond."

Carstairs snuffled more urgently.

"All right," said Doan. "I hear you."

"He's a nice dog," Owens remarked.

"Well, no," Doan said. "Not exactly nice. As a matter of fact, he's meaner than hell." "I meant that he was a good specimen. He's one of the finest Great Danes I've ever seen."

"He is the finest you've ever seen. He's

got four hundred and eighty-nine blue ribbons to prove it, but they weren't judging him on his good disposition. He doesn't have one."

"Did he cost a lot?"

"He didn't cost me anything. I won him in a crap game. Of course the up-keep is a little heavy. He eats three times as much as I do. I wouldn't mind that so much if he'd only act a little grateful when I give him my meat coupons."

"Doesn't he?"

"No. He goes around sneering because I'm not allowed more. He acts as if rationing is something I dreamed up just to annoy him."

Carstairs made an ominous, rumbling sound.

"All right!" said Doan.

The road swung around in a sharp curve, and the mill loomed to their right, blending into the thick shadow of the trees close behind it. It was a two-story brick building with a steeply peaked roof, the harshness of its outline blurred and melted by the thick growth of vine that covered it. The windows gaped like dark, empty eyes. The creek that ran along the road had been dammed to make a pool that gleamed deep and smoothly stagnant.

Doan bumped the station wagon along a weed-grown lane that ran up to the wreck of a loading platform, and then he stopped with a sudden jerk. They could see on the far side of the building now, and there were two figures facing each other in the shadow. One was crowded in against the wall, and the other loomed over it in gaunt and gangling menace. They were too interested in each other to have seen or heard the station wagon.

Doan turned off the motor. "What's all this?" he asked.

The figure crowded in against the wall was a woman—short and dumpy in a shiny black silk dress and wearing steel-rimmed glasses set a little askew on her pudgy nose. She was holding a short, crooked stick in her hand.

"Aw!" said the gangling figure, making little tentative grabs at the stick. "You're scared! You don't even dare hit me! Yah!"

This one was what could be roughly called a youth. He had hulking shoulders and a lopsided, out-of-proportion face with loosely blubbery lips. He wore an old pair of overalls and a stained shirt and a dirty slouch hat with the brim ripped off on one side.

He feinted again at the stick in the woman's hand and then suddenly grabbed it and twisted it away from her.

"Now," he said, malignantly gleeful. "Now what you gonna do, huh?"

"THAT'S Joady Turnbull," Owens said. He flipped the catch on the station wagon door and stepped out. "Joady! Quit that! Leave her alone!"

Joady Turnbull swung around with a sort of awkward grace. He stared unbelievably, his lips loose and slack in his smeared caricature of a face.

"Brad Owens," he said. "Brad Owens. They went and let you out of the jail."

"Yes," said Owens.

Joady Turnbull made a thick, choking noise. "And you got the nerve to come back! You think you're gonna get away with that?"

"I think so," said Owens. "And I think that you're going to stop annoying Miss Carson."

"You gonna make me?"

"Yes," said Owens.

"How?" Joady Turnbull jeered. "You think you're gonna stab me, too? In the back?"

"No," said Owens evenly. "I'll just break your neck."

"But not now," said Doan, getting out of the car. "I'll tend to that if it's necessary. Listen, goon, run along and haunt some other neighborhood."

"I know you," Joady Turnbull said. "You're that city detective old Morris brought down. You don't scare me none."

"Then you're even more simple than you act," Doan told him. He opened the rear door of the station wagon, and Carstairs got out.

Joady Turnbull backed away two steps. "I heard about that there damned big dog."

Doan nudged Carstairs with his knee and said, "Woof."

Carstairs bayed suddenly. It was a solid, rocking blast of sound with a deep undertone of savagery in it. Joady Turnbull backed away three more steps, stumbling a little. Carstairs watched him with eyes that gleamed greenish in the dusk.

Doan said, "If you're not out of sight in five seconds, I'll have him give you a little demonstration that his bite is worse than his bark. Get on your horse and gallop."

It took Joady Turnbull the count of two to absorb that. Then he whirled around and fell over a bush and scrambled to his feet and ran. His feet slashed through the drift of fallen leaves, and then he disappeared in the thicket on beyond the mill.

Carstairs grunted contemptuously, shook himself in an irritated way. Then he strolled over to the mill pond and lapped the water, making a noise like rain on a tin roof and sending the ripples scurrying in frightened haste.

"Would he really have attacked Joady?" Owens asked.

"Sure," said Doan. "He likes nothing better than to bite people. He won't hurt you, lady."

The woman was still crowded back against the mill wall. She had been watching Carstairs with a sort of fascinated horror, and

now she looked at Doan with her eyes wide and dilated behind the steel-rimmed spectacles.

"D-dogs frighten me," she said with a little catch in her voice. "I—I thank you for—for interfering. . . ."

"Aren't you going to say hello to me, Norma?" Owens asked.

"Yes! Of course, Brad! I'm so upset—Joady and you and the dog. . . ."

"I'm here, too," Doan reminded her.

"This is Mr. Doan, Norma," Owens said. "Apparently he is my—ah—guardian for the time being. Doan, this is Norma Carson. She teaches the lower grades in the Ramsey village school."

"Pleased," said Doan. "Who was the ghoul we just chased off?"

Norma Carson looked uneasily at Owens and then away again. "That was Joady Turnbull."

"I suspected that," said Doan. "Is this the way he usually goes on, or was he celebrating some special occasion today?"

Norma Carson said, "You see—I refused to have him attend any longer the grades I teach in school. . . ."

"I may be wrong," Doan remarked, "but he looked a little elderly to be attending the lower grades."

"He's a moron," said Norma Carson. "I mean, really he is. He just can't learn anything, and he's so much older and larger than the other children, and he does things in school he shouldn't and—and—"

"And," Doan agreed. "I get the picture. If he bothers you again, tell him Carstairs and I will pay him a social call. We love morons. We feel right at home."

"Are you a parole officer?" Norma Carson asked.

"Right now," Doan said. "It's nice work if you can get it—I hope."

Owens said, "Norma, can we give you a lift into town?"

She shook her head. "No, thank you, Brad. I have my coupé. It's parked up the road. I came to the mill, here, because I'd heard there were some swallows nesting in it. I wanted to show their nests to the children. But Joady came while I was watching for them."

Carstairs came back to the car and sat down with a self-satisfied sigh.

Doan rapped him on top of the head with the knuckle of his forefinger and said, "Get in the car, dumbness."

Carstairs climbed in and dumped himself on the back seat so enthusiastically that the springs groaned in protest.

"Brad," said Norma Carson hesitantly, "are you going back to The Square?"

Owens shrugged. "Apparently I am."

"After all—that has happened?"

"I don't have any choice, Norma."

"Jessica is there."

Owens frowned. "I was hoping she wasn't."

"I hate this town and all the nasty, mean-minded people in it for what they've done to you, Brad!" Norma said. "And that goes for Jessica Morris, too."

"I lived through it," Owens said. "Forget it. We'll have to run along. Good night, Norma."

THEY got back into the car and Doan turned it around and bumped out along the lane again to the main road. Every once in a while Owens silently pointed out the turns to be taken in the roads.

"You might sort of explain this and that to me," Doan requested, "just so I can pretend I know what the score is here."

"You know, of course, that I murdered a man," Owens said.

"That's nothing to brag about," Doan told him. "I've finished off a couple of dozen more or less in my time."

"I stabbed this one in the back."

"I've never used that method," Doan said. "I'll have to give it a ring some time. What was this party's name, as if it mattered?"

"It does matter. His name was Turnbull."

"So?" said Doan. "Any relation to the mental giant we just met?"

"Yes. His father."

Doan nodded. "Well, that might explain the way he acted when he recognized you, although if heredity means anything I'd say you did the boob a favor. Was the old man as stagnant in the head as the kid?"

"Even worse. He was stupid in a sort of mean, vicious way that grated on everyone's nerves."

"What did you kill him for?"

Owens sighed. "We gave him work sometimes as an extra hand when we were short of help. This particular time he was harrowing with a tractor over in the north field. It was a new tractor. I told him several times to watch the oil and water and not let it get too hot. He let the water boil out, and then he was too lazy or too contrary to walk two hundred yards to get some more. He ran the tractor until the engine seized. When I came around to see what he was doing, he was pounding the block with a wrench. The motor was ruined."

"What'd you do?"

"I lost my temper."

"Imagine that now," Doan commented. "Just over a little matter like that. What then?"

"I bawled him out, plenty."

"Did it kill him?"

"Not that, no. He got nasty and threw the wrench at me."

"The Turnbells are certainly an attractive family," Doan said. "Did he hit you?"

"Yes. In the head. I don't remember a thing that happened after that."

Doan glanced at him sideways.

Owens shrugged. "Believe it or not, I honestly don't. When I came to, I was in the hospital under police guard."

Doan said, "I had an idea when this started that we were going to talk about a murder."

"We are. According to the evidence, Turnbull started to run after he threw the wrench at me. I threw my knife at him and hit him in the back when he was about twenty feet away."

"Whose evidence?" Doan inquired.

"There were no witnesses. The field is not close to any houses, and there was no one else near. The evidence was the tracks on the ground, my knife in Turnbull, and the positions we were lying in when we were found."

"Uh," said Doan. "It seems to me that the matter of self-defense might come in there somewhere."

"No," said Owens. "Turnbull was running away when the knife struck him. He wasn't attacking me."

"Uh," Doan repeated. "It seems to me, just offhand, that there's something missing in this little tale."

Owens nodded slowly. "Colonel Morris."

"How does he fit in?"

"He's very unpopular around here. He's accumulated about five thousand acres of the finest farm-land in the state through some pretty sharp deals in mortgage foreclosures. He owns the bank in Ramsey."

"He runs the bank, so they put you in jail," said Doan. "Well, maybe it makes sense."

Owens cleared his throat. "You see, lots of people are anxious to get back at him for one thing and another—and, well, I was supposed to be his prospective son-in-law. It seemed a good chance to hit him through me."

"A little tough on you," Doan observed. "This son-in-law thing. Let's look at that a little more closely."

"I was engaged to his daughter."

"Was?" Doan said.

"Yes."

CHAPTER TWO

Carstairs Accepts a Case

"OPEN up a little," Doan invited. "Are you engaged to Colonel Morris's daughter now?"

"Certainly not," Owens said.

"Did she give you the brush-off when they put you in the pokey?"

Owens stared at him, narrow-eyed. "Is this any of your business?"

"Oh, hell no," said Doan amiably. "I just ask questions because I've got nothing else to do until I get to this farm."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Ask more questions—of other people."

"Ask them of me, instead."

"You're a hard guy to please," Doan observed. "That was just what I was doing. Did this party of the second part give you the brush-off?"

"Her name is Jessica Morris, and she did. Now are you happy?"

"Oh, very," Doan said. "Are you?"

Owens said slowly, "You're going to carry this matter a little too far, friend."

"Probably," Doan admitted. "I've got no sense of discretion. Are you? Happy, I mean?"

"No, you fool! Would you be?"

"All depends," said Doan. "How does this Jessica stack up? Bowlegged? Knock-kneed? Halitosis? Poisonous personality?"

"No!"

"I only asked," Doan said. "I didn't see her when I was down here before. What kind of a brush-off did she hand you?"

Owens breathed deeply. "Very kind. Very polite. Very diplomatic. She believed in me. She trusted me. She blubbered all day long at my trial. She wrote me nice letters when I was in prison—affectionate at first and getting less and less so all the time. Finally I received a clipping from the Ramsey paper. She was engaged to a man named Gretorex."

"Cute," said Doan. "Is she married to him now?"

"I don't know."

"Who is he?"

"He's a gentleman farmer—so he says."

"Oh," said Doan.

"He hunts foxes—on a horse."

"Tally-ho," said Doan. "Does the dame go for that brand of daffiness?"

"I suppose so. She evidently goes for him. And the colonel likes him."

"There's no accounting for tastes," Doan comforted. "This Norma Carson, the school-ma'am, doesn't seem to think so highly of Jessica."

"She's prejudiced. You see, she and I were raised in the same small town. We've known each other all our lives. She thinks the set-up here prejudiced the jury against me and that if it hadn't been for the colonel and Jessica, too, that I would never have been convicted in the circumstances. Jessica didn't seem to care about what happened to me."

"What do you think?" Doan asked.

Owens scowled. "I don't know. The colonel is hated. I don't think he's technically dishonest, but he's very sharp and slippery in a business deal, and he doesn't have any more mercy than a weasel."

"Well," said Doan, "it looks like things are a bit complicated here. It's a good thing the colonel hired me to sort of straighten them out."

Owens snorted. "How do you think you're going to do that?"

"I'm a genius. I don't have to think. I just sit down and wait for an inspiration."

"You'll need one," Owens said sourly.

"Where do we turn?" Doan asked.

"The next block to the right."

"There it is," said Owens after awhile. "The show place of the county. All lit up like a wedding cake, as usual."

The house sprawled across a fold of ground up and back from the road. The architect who had designed it had taken a good long look at Monticello and Mt. Vernon and other colonial show places before he had started working.

Fine gravel rattled under the station wagon's fenders as Doan wheeled up the long, curving drive, and stopped opposite the front door.

"Ah, there!" a voice boomed at them. "Hello!"

The man was at the top of the veranda steps, looming huge and solidly confident, with the light gleaming sleekly on his bald head. He was dressed in tan trousers and a tan tweed jacket and a darker tan shirt. He looked like the country squire in a whiskey advertisement. He beamed and rubbed his hands joyfully and came hurrying down the steps.

"Ah, there, Doan. It's a pleasure to see you again. And you brought him with you? Ah, yes! I knew you would. I had every confidence in you. Brad, my boy! Brad! Welcome home, lad!"

"Hello, Colonel," Owens said, getting out of the car.

Colonel Morris clapped him on the shoulder. "Why, you're looking fit, lad! Yes, you are! And it's good to see you! Indeed, it is! I could hardly curb my impatience. I swear, I've been pacing the floor all day."

"I've done that a few times, too," said Owens.

"Eh? Oh, yes. Of course. But it's past now, my boy! Past and done with and better forgotten. Now just step right in here, lad, and. . . Eh? Oh, yes. Here's Jessica."

She was standing on the veranda, a little out of the pathway of light thrown from the front door. She was wearing a white dress, and her hair gleamed darkly lustrous in the shadow. She made no move to come closer.

"Jessica," said Colonel Morris. "It's Brad Owens come back from. . . well, come back."

"She knows where I've come from," Owens said.

"Hello, Brad," Jessica said evenly.

Owens nodded politely. "Hello."

"Eh!" said Colonel Morris. "Well. . ."

"Ahem," said Doan.

"Oh!" said Colonel Morris. "Yes. Surely. This is Doan, the detective fellow, Jessica. You remember I told you he was fetching Brad from the. . . from the city."

"Hi, Jessica," said Doan.

"What?" said Colonel Morris, startled. "Here! This is my daughter!"

"I wouldn't even count that against her," Doan assured him. "Are you going to leave her all your dough when you croak?"

"Well, of course I— What do you mean, sir?"

"I was only asking," Doan said. "I wouldn't know as much as I do if I didn't ask people things. Are you married, Jessica?"

"No," said Jessica.

"Somebody should do something about that," Doan said. "Aside from the dough you're a pretty neat little number just as you stand. Don't you think so, Owens?"

"That's immaterial," said Owens coldly.

"Not in my book, it isn't," Doan denied. "You don't find girls with figures like Jessica's and dough, too, on every street-corner. I know, because I've looked."

"Here, you!" the colonel bellowed furiously. "Stop your infernal insolence! I'm your employer, sir!"

"You'll find that out when I present my bill," Doan assured him. "Well, let's go inside where it's comfortable and sit down and have a long chat about the political situation. Jessica and Owens probably want to talk, too."

"We have nothing to talk about," Owens said coldly.

"No," said Jessica. "Good night."

SHE walked across the porch and through the front door.

Colonel Morris scowled at Doan. "Sir, I resent your attitude and your words. Hereafter, if you find it necessary to address my daughter at all, do so with more courtesy."

"Okay," said Doan. "But I'll have to charge more for special service like that. Are we going to stand out here and gab all night? I'm tired."

Colonel Morris breathed deeply. "Come in the house, please. I have some matters to take up with you, Doan. Brad, your clothes and personal effects are in your old room in the left wing."

"I'll go there now," Owens said. "This has been rather a long and busy day for me."

"Would you like Cecil to get you something to eat?"

"No, thanks," Owens said. He turned to his left and walked on along the veranda.

Colonel Morris nodded at Doan. "Come with me."

They started toward the front door, and

then Colonel Morris stopped and pointed a stiff, accusing forefinger.

"Do you propose to take *that* into the house?"

"Carstairs?" Doan said. "Yes. He's afraid of the dark, and when he's scared he howls."

"Well, let him howl!" Colonel Morris sputtered.

"Oh, no," said Doan. "You've never heard him. The last time he let loose he broke three plate glass windows and stopped a grandfather clock dead in its tracks."

Carstairs settled the argument by pacing dignifiedly through the front door into the hall. Colonel Morris followed him, muttering to himself. Doan trailed along behind them down the hall and into a room that had been fixed up as a combination study, den, and office by someone who had expensive, if not very original, taste.

There was a fireplace with a high, broad mantel cluttered up with ship models and hunting prints on the wall and an enormous flat executive's desk in one corner and deep leather chairs.

Doan sat down in one of the chairs, sighing. "I could use a drink now," he observed.

"Humph!" said Colonel Morris. He picked up a square, cut-glass decanter from the stand beside the desk and looked at it. It was empty.

"Cecil!" he shouted. "*Ce-cil!*"

The rear door of the study opened, and a man put his head inside. He was bald, and he had a limp, corn-colored mustache and eyes that were just slightly crossed.

"You're gonna bust a gut sometime, yellin' like that," he said. "What you want?"

"There's no whiskey in the decanter!"

"Of course not," said Cecil. "You drank it."

"Bring some more!"

"I was goin' to in a minute. Just keep your pants on, will you?"

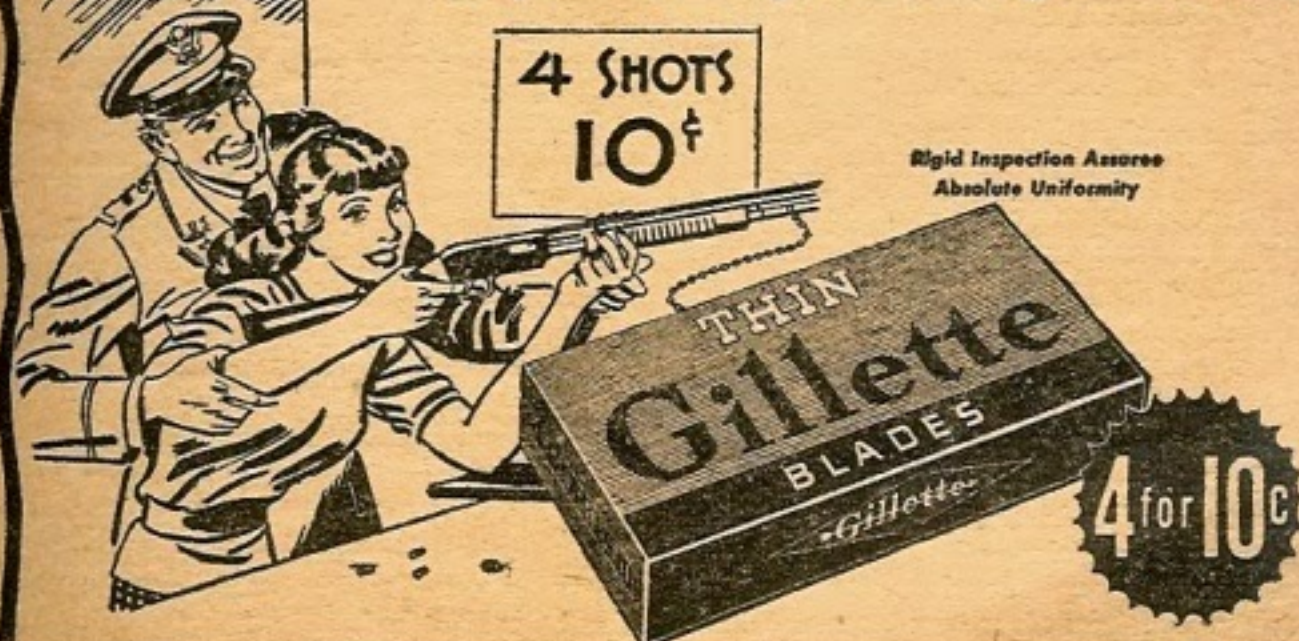
He pulled his head back, and the door swung shut.

Colonel Morris slammed around behind his desk and sat down with a thump. "Insolence!" he seethed, the veins in his cheeks standing out in bright, cherry-red knots. "Nothing but insolence. The world is going to the dogs, sir!"

"If it does," Doan said, indicating Carstairs, "I'll get my share."

Carstairs was sitting in the middle of the floor, examining the room with an air of supercilious disapproval. Cecil opened the door and came back in the room. He was carrying a white crockery jug. He pulled the cork out with his teeth and poured liquor from the jug into the decanter. The liquor was just off the color of water, slightly yellowish, with an oily, smooth thickness.

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When the decanter was full, Cecil upped the jug in the crook of his elbow and took a long pull out of it.

"You the detective?" he asked, glaring at Doan.

"Right," said Doan.

"I don't like detectives," Cecil said flatly.

"Oh, you'll like me, though," Doan said. "I'm something special."

"You'll be something dead if you don't stay out of my kitchen," Cecil assured him. "I'm the cook around this dump, and I don't like snoopers, and what I say goes. The dead-line of my bailiwick is right at that door there. Don't cross it."

"That'll do, Cecil," Colonel Morris said.

"Don't interrupt me," Cecil ordered. "I don't have to work here, you know. I can get a job any time for twice the dough you're paying me and meet a better class of people at that. I suppose I've got to feed that cross between a water buffalo and a giraffe, too."

"Yes," said Doan, "but you'll love him when you get to know him. He has a beautiful character."

"Hah!" said Cecil skeptically. "What does he eat?"

"Steaks," said Doan.

"What kind?"

Doan stared. "You mean you've got a choice?"

"Hell, yes," said Cecil. "I've got a couple of cows hung out in the freezer. I can hack off any kind of a piece you want."

"OH, FOR the life of a farmer," Doan commented. "I think a filet would do nicely for him. About two pounds. Grind it up and just warm it in the oven. Don't cook it. You might dig up one for me, too, when you get through with him."

"Okay," said Cecil. "Come on, clumsy."

"Go with the nice man, Carstairs," Doan ordered. "He's got a steak for you. Steak. Meat." He licked his lips elaborately.

Carstairs stared at him incredulously.

"Fact," Doan assured him. "Real meat."

Carstairs instantly heaved himself to his feet and started for the door, eyes narrowed in anticipation. Cecil held the door open for him and then nodded meaningly at Colonel Morris.

"Don't go and drink yourself dumb, now. You know the doc told you to lay off the stuff."

"Get out of here!" Colonel Morris shouted furiously. "Mind your own damned business!"

"Pooey to you," said Cecil, closing the door emphatically behind him.

"Insolence," Colonel Morris muttered. "Unmitigated, infernal insolence, no matter where I turn!"

"It's enough to drive a man to drink," Doan agreed. "Are you going to?"

"Eh? Oh, yes. Here."

Colonel Morris took two out-sized shot glasses from the rack under the stand, poured liquor into them, and handed one to Doan. Doan drank it.

The liquor felt as smooth and slick as plush in his throat.

"Like it?" Colonel Morris asked.

"Sort of tasteless," Doan said. "Pretty weak stuff, too, isn't it?"

Someone suddenly set off a small charge of blasting powder in Doan's stomach. The room tipped up at one corner, spun around three times, and settled back slowly and gently.

"Weak?" the colonel repeated softly.

"Wow!" said Doan, swallowing hard. "No. I take that back. What is it, anyway?"

"Just corn liquor. Cecil makes it. That's why it's necessary for me to put up with his boorish impertinence. He has a still hidden somewhere here on The Square. He won't give me his recipe or even show me his methods."

"Can't you find the still?"

Colonel Morris chuckled. "No. Cecil is an old-time moonshiner. Sheriff Derwin has caught pneumonia twice sitting out all night on Fagan's Hill watching with night glasses and trying to spot Cecil visiting his hide-out. Derwin would like nothing better than to bring a moonshining charge against Cecil and against me as his employer. Will you have another drink?"

"No, thanks," said Doan. "That stuff goes a little rough on an empty stomach."

"Then to business," said Colonel Morris. "Do you know why I hired you for this particular job?"

"Sure," said Doan. "Because I've got such a world-wide reputation as a brilliant detective."

"No," said Colonel Morris. "Hardly. I made many inquiries from official sources. I was informed that you were shrewd, violent, tricky and completely unscrupulous."

Doan shook his head sadly. "That's nothing but slander. I devote all my time to good works."

"I can imagine," said Colonel Morris dryly. "However, if you can curb your blasted impudence, I think we will get along." He leaned forward and tapped his stubby fingers impressively on the desk top. "I anticipate trouble, Doan. A lot of it."

"Trouble is my business," said Doan.

"I SUPPOSE you've had sufficient initiative to make inquiries of Brad Owens about the death that occurred here?" the colonel asked.

"We talked about it some."

"Good. That was a most vicious miscarriage of justice. If the jury hadn't been com-

posed exclusively of half-wits and enemies of mine, he would never have been convicted in the circumstances. As it was, it took me two years and every bit of influence I have to secure his release even on parole. There is a great deal of bitterness in the neighborhood because I was even able to do that. You are to see that the bitterness doesn't take any—ah—material form."

"I get it," said Doan. "If anybody opens his mouth, I bat him down."

"That is putting the idea crudely but lucidly," Colonel Morris agreed. "I feel that Owens is almost a son to me, and I will not have him persecuted further."

"And besides," Doan added, "you need him to manage your farm."

Colonel Morris's red, overripe face darkened slightly. "That is the kind of remark I would prefer that you keep to yourself. Such cynicism sickens me."

"Me, too," Doan agreed. "All right, I'll sort of walk around behind Owens and interview anybody who sticks out his tongue. How long does this go on?"

"If there is trouble—and I believe there will be, as I said—it will come soon. Resentment of the sort felt against Owens—and me—shows itself immediately."

There was a furious, strangled yell from the rear of the house, and an instant later the door burst open and Cecil raged into the room.

"What kind of an animal is that you own?" he yelled at Doan. "Was he raised in a pigsty?"

"Yes," said Doan, "but a very clean one. What did he do this time?"

"He sneezed in my cake dough! After I fed him! What kind of manners is that? He sneezed right in it on purpose and blew it the hell all over the drain board!"

"What did you do?" Doan asked. "Before he sneezed, I mean?"

"Why, I just took a short snort of corn, is all."

Doan sighed. "That was it. Carstairs disapproves of drinking—violently. The smell of alcohol gives him the pip."

Cecil gasped. "You mean to say he won't even let me drink in peace in my own kitchen?"

"Probably not," Doan admitted.

"The hell with that noise!" Cecil shouted. "Then he ain't gonna eat in my kitchen! You hear me, Colonel? After this, that damned dog eats in the dining room!"

"Here, here!" Colonel Morris echoed, aghast. "That infernal beast in the dining room? Impossible!"

"Impossible or not, that's where he gets served," Cecil snarled. "And he'd damned well better keep his nose out of my cake dough after this. You! Come out of that kitchen!"

Carstairs strolled unconcernedly through the

door into the study. Once inside, he stopped short and turned his head slowly and ominously, glaring at the glass still in Doan's hand. Doan put it down quickly.

"I've only had one," he said.

Carstairs snorted in utter and contemptuous disbelief. He walked over to the corner and lay down with his head in it and his back to the room.

Doan shrugged. "Oh, well. Since he's going to sulk about it, anyway, I might as well have another drink or two or even three. Roll out the barrel."

CHAPTER THREE

Murder in the Night

DOAN was lying flat on his back in bed, gurgling peacefully in his sleep and blowing alcohol fumes at the ceiling, when an object that was cold and gruesomely moist pressed itself against his cheek. Doan woke up, but he wasn't startled at all. This had happened many times before. Carstairs' nose, properly applied, was a very effective alarm clock.

"All right," Doan said. "What's your trouble now?"

It was pitch dark, and he rolled over and fumbled for the reading lamp on the bed-stand and snapped it on. Carstairs was sitting on the floor at the head of the bed, watching him narrowly. Seeing that he had Doan's attention, he paced over to the door of the bedroom and stood looking at it.

"Listen, lame-brain," Doan said, "if you think I'm going to get up in the middle of night and escort you on a tour of the trees outside, you'd better start thinking all over again."

Carstairs looked over his shoulder, his ears flattened tight against his head. He growled very softly.

"So?" said Doan. "Some matter that needs my attention?"

Carstairs turned his head back to stare at the door.

"Coming right up," Doan said.

He got out of bed. He was wearing only the top of a pair of pajamas. He pulled on his trousers, put his suit coat on over his pajama jacket, and slid his bare feet into a pair of old moccasins he used for bedroom slippers. He jerked the bed covers back and unearthed a .38 Colt police positive and dropped it into his coat pocket.

"Let's go," he said.

He opened the bedroom door and bumped Carstairs in the rear with his knee, commandingly. They went out into the hall. It was darker even than the bedroom had been. Doan fumbled along the wall, and then Carstairs

nudged in against him. Doan put his hand on Carstairs' spiked collar, and the dog led him, Seeing-Eye fashion, down the length of the hall toward the front of the house.

At the stairs, Carstairs stopped, and Doan felt out cautiously with one foot until he located the top step. They went on down into the smooth, stagnant blackness of the lower hall. Carstairs headed straight for the front door and stopped in front of it.

Doan snapped the night latch and opened the door. Outside, the moon was fat and red and bulging, low over the rim of hills that enclosed the valley, and in its thin light familiar objects assumed brooding, weirdly twisted shapes. The air was dry and cold and sharp in Doan's throat.

"If this is just a gag to give you a stroll in the moonlight, I'll beat your brains out," he threatened.

Carstairs ignored him. He was testing the faint stir of wind, head held first on one side and then the other. He went down the steps of the veranda and trotted in a circle, muzzle lifted high. He stopped suddenly and looked back at Doan.

"Lead on," said Doan. "I'm with you."

Single file, they went along the front of the house and on past the west wing. Carstairs stopped again, made up his mind, and then angled down the back slope. There were shrubs here, high and shaggy in the moonlight, and they worked their way through them. A row of barns and out-buildings stretched, solid and sturdily white, ahead of them, and Doan could hear faintly the stab of hoofs on board and the rolling wet crunch of corn in animal teeth.

"I'm getting damned good and tired of this," Doan stated angrily. "Just what. . ."

A CREEK meandered across the pasture beyond the barns, and Carstairs was standing near a bend where it looped lazily back on itself in the lee of a dense, close-cropped clump of brush. His ears were pricked forward, and his shadow lay thin and spindly and black on the ground in front of him.

Doan came up to him quietly, alert now, his hand grasping the revolver in his coat pocket.

"What?" he whispered.

Carstairs rumbled deeply and softly in his throat.

Doan saw it, then, too. It was an object pushed in under the brush, lumpy and motionless and limp, with the dim light gleaming a little on the paleness of what could only have been a face.

Doan drew his gun. "I see you, bud," he said. "Just speak up nicely."

There was no answer, and the lumpy bun-

dle did not stir. Doan cocked the revolver and then Carstairs moved in cautiously, his head lowered. He snorted suddenly and loudly.

"The hell," said Doan.

He moved in, too, shoving Carstairs aside with his knee. He leaned down and poked the bundle with the barrel of his revolver. It was a slack and solid weight. Doan poked harder, and the head rolled back so that the moon shone on the pallidness of the face.

"Joady Turnbull," said Doan softly. "Fancy meeting you here."

Joady Turnbull's eyes stared dully and sightlessly up at him. A trickle of blood, glistening black and jagged in the moonlight, spread over his chin. Doan lifted him slightly and saw the knife handle sticking up, grimly solid, from his back just over his heart.

"Very neat," Doan commented.

He took hold of the handle and pulled the knife free with a little grunt of effort. He dropped Joady Turnbull, and the body rolled loosely back under the brush. Doan stood up and examined the knife. It was not graceful or deadly or designed for murder. It was a work-knife with a thick, broad blade that could be used for almost anything from pulling nails to cutting down a tree.

Doan stared at it, whistling noiselessly to himself, and then he stopped that and looked at Carstairs. Carstairs had turned his head and was watching a clump of willows that made a thick, dark clot on the far side of the pasture where the creek ran out into the next field. He began to pace toward it, stiff-legged, and Doan trailed right along behind him, the knife still open in his left hand, the revolver in his right.

They approached the willows slowly, circling a little, and then a voice said wearily:

"I'm right here, if you're looking for me."

"Well, well," said Doan. "Good evening and all that. We're not intruding, I trust."

"You are," said the voice. "But I don't suppose there's anything I can do about it. There's a path just to your left."

Carstairs found it, and Doan followed him along the tunneled blackness with the branches whipping stingingly across his face and the dried leaves whispering slyly together. There was a little opening here with the dappled, dark sheen of the creek moving slowly past. Owens was a bulking shadow seated on a fallen log beside the water.

"I saw you coming across the pasture," he said. "What did you find back there?"

"Three guesses," Doan answered. "On the other hand, let's not play games. I found Joady Turnbull, and he's deader than a salted smelt, and just what the hell do you propose to do about that?"

Owens' body jerked. "Joady. . ."

"Turnbull," Doan finished. "Remember

him? He's the one who was lying out there with a knife in his back."

"Knife," Owens whispered in a shocked, thick voice.

"This one," Doan agreed, holding it out.

Owens moved back. "That—that's mine. That's the one—I—his father. . . ."

Doan stared, trying to see his face in the dimness. "You mean that this is the same number you stuck into his old man?"

"Yes. It—it's called the 'Farmer's Friend.' I always carried. . . ."

"THIS is a pretty dish of goulash," Doan remarked. He knelt down on the creek bank and, holding the knife under the chilling water, scrubbed its blade and hilt with his fingers vigorously. "How did you get hold of it again?"

"Me? Why, I've never had it since the day that Joady's father and I. . . ."

"Huh!" said Doan. He found a handkerchief in his pants' pocket and dried the knife carefully. Then he snapped the blade shut and put the knife in his pocket.

Owens said incredulously, "What are you going to do with that?"

"Never you mind," said Doan. "And as of now, you've never seen it, and neither have I."

"Do you mean you're going to conceal. . . ."

"Look," said Doan. "Remember me? I'm the guy who was hired to keep you out of trouble. If you have to be consistent when you murder people, I wish you'd be a little more careful about it."

"But you can't just. . . ."

"Oh, yes, I can," said Doan. "But after this, if you're going to murder people at night,

I'm going to charge Colonel Morris time-and-a-half for overtime."

Owens came up to his feet suddenly. "Do you think. . . . Are you saying that I killed Joady Turnbull?"

"What am I supposed to think?" Doan asked.

"Why, what reason. . . ."

"You tell me," Doan invited.

Owens leaned forward dangerously. "I had nothing whatever to do with it, you fool! I had no idea he was anywhere near here, alive or dead!"

Doan stared at him speculatively.

"Don't you believe me?" Owens demanded.

Doan sighed. "The hell of it is, I think maybe I do. You don't strike me as being completely nuts. Oh, this is a fine state of affairs. I think I'll resign."

"Resign?" Owens repeated blankly.

"It wouldn't be so bad," Doan explained, "if I only had to keep the police, or whoever, from proving you did the dirty work. But now I'll have to dig around and find out who is really guilty, or else they'll certainly hang you for it."

"Hang. . . ." Owens said dully.

"Somebody wants to see your neck stretched," Doan said absently, "and he strikes me as one of these gents who believe that if at first you don't succeed you should try, try again. It's all very discouraging at this point. If you weren't killing Joady Turnbull, just what *were* you doing out here at this hour of the night?"

"I couldn't sleep," Owens said. "After two years in a cell. . . . I just thought I'd walk down here and sit for awhile. It's quiet,



The lumpy figure lay very still

and we—that is, I—used to come here often. . . .”

“Which way did you come?”

“Through the north gate. It’s on the far side of the pasture from where you came in.”

“Uh,” said Doan. “How do you let the cows and horses and junk out of those barns?”

“Why do you want to do that?” Owens demanded.

“We’ll track up the pasture. We’ll let the animals run back and forth a while and confuse the issue.”

“But—but that would be destroying evidence!”

“Don’t worry,” Doan said gloomily. “I’ve got an idea the guy that thought up this little caper will strew some more around.”

Carstairs growled warningly. Doan turned around quickly, the revolver poised in his hand. Dried leaves rustled somewhere close in the shadow, and then a voice whispered:

“Brad! Are you here?”

Owens stiffened. “It’s Jessica!” he breathed.

“Hail, hail, the gang’s all here,” Doan said sourly. “I hope she brought something to eat. We’ll have a picnic lunch. Come join the band, Jessica.”

SHE still wore her white dress, and she was plainly visible groping her way cautiously closer. “Brad,” she said uncertainly. “I was sitting up, and I saw you come down here, and I thought—thought. . . .”

Owens said to Doan, “As you’ve probably gathered by this time, we used to meet here quite often and sit and look at the moon.”

“A harmless pastime,” Doan said.

“You used to like it,” Jessica said.

Owens nodded curtly. “I used to be stupid, too.”

“What do you mean ‘used to be’?” Doan asked. “You’re giving a pretty good imitation of it now.”

“Mind your own business.”

“Okay, okay,” Doan agreed. “But it wouldn’t hurt you to talk to the girl.”

“I don’t want to talk to her.”

“Why, not, Brad?” Jessica asked.

“I’m not interested in making polite conversation with the future Mrs. Gretorex.”

“I’m not the future Mrs. Gretorex,” Jessica said steadily.

“The paper said you were.”

“The paper was wrong. Gretorex comes here quite often, and some busybody called up the editor and told him that Gretorex and I were going to be married. The editor called Gretorex and asked him if it was true, and Gretorex said that was his intention, so the paper printed the story. I didn’t know anything about it until I saw it. I could have made the editor print a retraction, but what

could that possibly have brought about?”

“I’m,” said Owens doubtfully.

“Brad,” said Jessica. “Don’t you remember asking me to marry you? I said I would. I intend to.”

“What?” said Owens.

“He’s a nice fellow,” Doan said to Jessica, “but he’s a little slow on the up-take.”

Owens said, “Jessica! You don’t know what you’re saying!”

“Oh, yes I do.”

“But you can’t. You couldn’t possibly—”

“Take a deep breath,” Doan advised helpfully.

“Shut up!” Owens snarled at him. Then:

“This is all the most ridiculous nonsense. Why, you don’t even love me, Jessica!”

“I’m the best judge of that,” Jessica informed him calmly. “You offered to marry me, and I intend to hold you to it.”

Owens turned on Doan. “Now see what you’ve done!”

“I told you I was a genius,” Doan said. “Since I’m stage managing this reconciliation, I’d advise you to kiss her about now.”

“Oh, be quiet! Jessica, your letters to me didn’t sound as if you still loved me!”

“It’s a little hard to write love letters to someone who won’t answer you or even let you visit him.”

“I couldn’t. . . . I didn’t want you to think. . . .”

“He’s dumb,” Doan observed, “but he means well.”

“All right,” Owens said. “Since you’re so clever, just explain to her what you found in the pasture.”

“Yes,” Jessica added. “I saw you come across from behind the barns. What did you find?”

“Nothing to get excited about,” Doan told her. “Just a body.”

“Joady Turnbull!” Owens snapped. “And he was stabbed with my knife!”

Jessica stared. “Your. . . . The same knife. . . .”

“Yes! Now I suppose you’ll tell me you don’t believe I did it!”

“I’ll believe what you tell me, Brad.”

“You’re the only one who will!”

“Don’t forget me,” Doan said.

“Oh, you!” Owens said. “You don’t count.”

“I do so,” said Doan. “My opinion on a matter like this is vital.”

“What—what are you going to do?” Jessica asked faintly.

“He thinks he’s going to conceal the evidence that links me with the murder!” Owens blurted. “He’s crazy!”

“Like a fox,” Doan said amiably. “Now look. Let me explain things to you in simple words. You are out on parole. If you are even faintly suspected of being involved in

anything slightly illegal, your parole will be revoked. Aren't you tired of jails?"

"But it's only a matter of time before they suspect me anyway!"

"That's what I want," Doan said. "Time. Now you scam over and let the cows out of the barn. I would myself, only they might moo at Carstairs and scare him. And just keep in mind that you weren't here tonight and you don't know anything about any bodies or pastures or knives or what-the-hell. You were in your room the whole time, and I was with you. So was Carstairs. So was Jessica."

"You can't involve her—"

"She's already involved," said Doan. "Didn't it ever occur to you that she might need an alibi herself?"

Owens breathed in noisily. "Don't you dare insinuate that she—"

"Oh, run along," said Doan.

"Do what he says, Brad," Jessica directed.

"Now there's a woman with brains," Doan observed.

Owens spun around, muttering fiercely in an undertone, and slammed out through the brush.

Jessica came a step closer to Doan. "If he says he didn't—didn't have anything to do with Joady. . . ."

"I don't think he did," Doan said. "I wouldn't be sticking my neck out like this if I thought so. I'm not completely cracked. Someone wants people to think Owens is out to eliminate the Turnbulls."

"Then—then it might be that Joady's father. . . ."

"Say," said Doan admiringly, "you are pretty smart at that."

"If you could prove—if you *could*—I'd give anything. . . ."

"I hate to bring up these commercial matters," said Doan, "but how much would anything be worth in cash? A thousand bucks?"

Jessica swallowed. "I—I haven't that much. My father gives me only an allowance. . . ."

"I'll shake it out of him," Doan said, "with a slight assist from you. Let's get out of here before the cows get in."

CHAPTER FOUR

"You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet"

SUNLIGHT, coming through the open front door, made a bright, slanted outline on the rug in the front hall as Doan came down the stairs with Carstairs shambling along, limp-legged, behind him. Doan started toward the back of the house and then heard angry voices from the porch. He turned around and went outside.

There was a long, swooping low convertible with a right-hand drive and high, slanted fenders standing in the drive. A man stood in front of it, his head held high and arrogantly, his hands pushed deep in the pockets of a tailored suede sport jacket. He wore boots and riding breeches, and he had a voice that sounded as though it came from directly behind his beaked nose.

"This is a situation," he said, as though that settled it, "which is absolutely intolerable."

Jessica was standing on the edge of the porch, and Owens was leaning against a pillar beside her, scowling darkly. Colonel Morris teetered back and forth from heel to toe at the top of the porch steps, looking unhappy about it all.

"Intolerable," the man with the beaked nose repeated. "A man of your sensibilities, Colonel, should have realized that. You should have consulted me."

"We didn't think it was necessary," said Jessica.

The man looked amazed. "Well, naturally it was. A man of my experience is able to give sensible advice on such matters. Who is this person with the—ah—dog?"

"Doan," said Doan. "You could only be Gretorex. This is Carstairs. Don't mistake him for a fox. He probably wouldn't react properly."

"Naturally he's not a fox," said Gretorex. "He's a Great Dane."

"He means you," Doan said.

Carstairs sat down and scratched himself absentmindedly.

"He thanks you kindly," Doan said. "What were you beefing about?"

"Ah?" said Gretorex. "Beefing? Oh. I was objecting to the presence of this person—Owens—in this vicinity at this time. As I said, the situation is intolerable. People simply won't stand for it. There'll be serious trouble. I warn you."

"Consider us warned," said Doan. "Why don't you go chase a fox?"

"What?" said Gretorex. "Well, really, this isn't the season for fox hunting, you know."

"Then chase yourself," Doan advised.

"Here!" Colonel Morris intervened. "Doan! Mr. Gretorex is a respected neighbor of mine, and I put great value on his opinions. I didn't realize the repercussions. . . I rather feel. . . ."

"I'll leave right away," said Owens.

"Wait until I pack my things," Jessica requested.

"Eh?" said Colonel Morris.

"What?" said Gretorex.

"If he leaves, I leave," said Jessica.

"Oh, I say!" Gretorex blurted in horror.

"You really can't do that, you know. I mean to say. . . ."

"Go ahead," said Jessica. "What do you mean to say?"

Gretorex swallowed. "Well. . . . The Owens person is a criminal—a convicted one. You can't just go away with him."

"Try me and see," Jessica invited.

"But, my dear girl, *think!*"

"I'm through thinking. Now I'm going to do something about it."

"Wh-what are you going to do?" Gretorex asked warily.

"Marry Brad."

Gretorex went back a step, shocked to his core. "Oh, but this is unbelievable! Colonel Morris, do you mean to say you will allow this bounder to abduct your daughter into—into a life of crime?"

Colonel Morris sighed. "There's no respect for parenthood any more. She's stubborn and defiant."

"What's more," Doan added, "she's of age."

Colonel Morris nodded gloomily.

"WELL!" said Gretorex. "My dear Jessica, think of the terrible consequences of such a rash act. And you mustn't feel too broken-hearted over the little quarrel we had regarding that item in the paper. You were sarcastic and rude and—quite impossible, but I'll forgive you. I'll marry you myself!"

"Thanks," said Jessica. "Some other time."

There was an echoing yell from behind the house. It vibrated in the still air, and then there was the hurried pound of feet running.

"Here we go again," said Doan.

A man in overalls swung himself frantically around the corner of the house. "Colonel Morris! Down there—in the p-p-pasture—"

"Here, here!" Colonel Morris snapped. "Get a hold on yourself, man! Speak up! What is it?"

"There's a fella," said the man, gulping. "And he's there in the pasture—lyin' there. And he's dead with a stab in the back. And—and he's Joady Turnbull!" The man's eyes, round and avid and horrifiedly fascinated, stared at Owens.

"Mercy me," Doan commented. "A murder. And so early in the morning."

Colonel Morris made a strangled sound. "Murder! Joady Turnbull!"

Gretorex had got back his arrogant confidence. "I don't think, Colonel, we need worry about this bounder and his attentions to Jessica any longer."

Colonel Morris's face was leaden-colored. "Show me!" he shouted incoherently, lunging down the steps. "Show me where you found . . ."

He disappeared around the corner of the house with the farm hand thumping along behind him.

"Maybe we'd better notify what passes in this neck of the woods for the police," Doan suggested.

Gretorex smiled thinly. "I'll attend to that. Personally. And with pleasure." He slid under the wheel of his car and headed it for the highway in a sudden ripping blast of power.

"Bad news sure travels fast," Doan remarked.

Cecil came out on the porch and pointed a finger at Doan. "Listen, you. If you want me to get you your breakfast, you get up when the rest do around here. All my help has run out on me on account they're afraid of gettin' their throat cut, and I'm runnin' the whole damned she-bang, and if you want your bed made, make it yourself."

"Okay," said Doan, following him back into the house. "Did you hear that Joady Turnbull has been found murdered?"

"I can't think of anybody I'll miss less," Cecil informed him. "What does clumsy eat for breakfast?"

"Just gruel. With lots of cream and sugar and no lumps in it. I eat ham and eggs. I'll bet Joady Turnbull and his old man were good hunters, weren't they?"

Cecil stopped short and turned around. "They hunted rabbits and stuff some."

"Did they ever hunt stills?"

Cecil's gaunt shoulders hitched up threateningly. "If they had, they wouldn't have found none, and if they had found one, they wouldn't have been stabbed in the back. They'd have been shot right between the eyes. Just keep that in mind. Now sit down and eat your breakfast and keep your big mouth shut."

DOAN was staring, glassy-eyed, at the ceiling. In front of him, on the dining room table, were the scant and tattered remains of what had been the equivalent of six restaurant orders of ham and eggs. Carstairs was lying under the table, gurgling and grunting in surfeited content.

Colonel Morris came into the room, followed by a second man who walked with a limply disconsolate slouch, long arms dangling loosely. His pants were baggy at the knees, and his coat was rumpled in front, and his whole posture gave the impression that if you patted him on the top of the head he would slump into a small heap.

"This is Sheriff Derwin, Doan," Colonel Morris said in a worried tone.

Doan burped. "Excuse me," he said. "How are you, Sheriff?"

Derwin leaned down and looked him right

in the eye. "I know you, all right. I heard plenty about you. Don't try to put none of your slick tricks over on me."

"Not right after breakfast," Doan said. "Not, anyway, this breakfast. Cecil is certainly a whiz-bang."

Color surged up into Colonel Morris's face. "Doan! There's been a murder, do you understand that?"

"Sure," said Doan, sighing contentedly.

"Well, don't sit there like a stuffed toad! This is serious! *Do something!*"

"He ain't gonna do nothin'," said Derwin. "Not if he wants to keep walking around outside my jail, he ain't. I got this case sewed up, and I don't stand for no monkey-work from the likes of him."

Colonel Morris's face was turning purple. "Doan! This—this imbecile claims that Owens murdered Joady Turnbull! He proposes to arrest Owens!"

"Let him," Doan advised lazily. "Owens has been arrested before. One more time won't hurt him. We'll get him right out again."

"Oh, you will, will you?" Derwin inquired. "And just how do you think you're gonna do that?"

"You haven't the slightest shred of evidence connecting him with the crime," Doan said. "We'll be on your trail with a habeas corpus for him in a half hour."

"Humpf!" said Derwin. "If he didn't do it, then who did do it?"

"That's your question. You answer it. What time was this murder put together?"

"Doc Evans says Joady's been dead about ten hours."

Doan nodded. "Some time around midnight. Owens has an iron-clad alibi."

"What?" Derwin demanded.

"Not what. Who. Me. I was with him all the time. We were talking things over in his room."

"Hah!" Derwin jeered. "You think anybody'd believe that? You'd say it, anyway."

"Jessica was there, too," Doan said.

Colonel Morris made a gurgling sound. "Jessica! Was she in—in—"

"Don't get excited," Doan advised. "I told you I was there with them."

"When?" Derwin asked skeptically.

"From ten o'clock last night until four o'clock this morning, more or less, as the case may be."

"Jessica!" Colonel Morris bellowed furiously.

Jessica came in the dining room. "Yes?"

Colonel Morris gestured wildly. "Doan has the infernal insolence to say you were with Owens last night!"

"I was," said Jessica.

"It was all very proper," said Doan. "We

were playing cards. Five card stud. A fascinating game. By the way, I won a thousand bucks from Jessica. She said you'd pay."

"A thousand. . . ." Colonel Morris repeated numbly.

"One thousand and three dollars and ninety-one cents, to be exact," Doan said. "But I'll skip the small change."

"Shut up, all of you," Derwin ordered. He looked at Jessica. "Was you with Owens like he says?"

"Yes."

"All right," said Derwin grimly. "All right, for now. But I got my ideas. That stab in Joady looked mighty like the one his pa got, but this time I ain't found the knife—not yet. And somebody let the cows out so they'd trample up the ground. And I bet I know who."

"I never bet," said Doan. And then he added hastily, "Except in poker games."

"Your time's comin'," Derwin promised. "You think you're pretty smart, but you ain't seen nothin' yet. Colonel, you're responsible for Owens. I'm leavin' him here now, but I'll be back, and I wanta find him here." He pointed his finger at Doan. "And you, too."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Party of the First Part

TWILIGHT made shadows that were thick and gloomy in the study where Doan was napping when someone twisted his foot and woke him up.

"Umm?" he said, rolling over on the couch and blinking sleepily.

"The master-mind at work," Cecil sneered. "Listen, dopey, here's someone who wants to talk to you, and you'd better pry open your ears and listen."

Norma Carson's steel-rimmed spectacles made shiny circles in the dusk. Her face was pallidly drawn, and her hair straggled loosely down over her forehead.

"Oh, Mr. Doan!" she said. "You've got to do something! They're coming here! They *are*! And it's partly my fault!"

Doan sat up. "Who's coming, and what's your fault?"

"Those—those loafers and bums from town! It was that beast of a Gretorex. He talked to them and worked them up and gave them drinks, and then when Sheriff Derwin didn't arrest Brad Owens for Joady's murder, he said that they should take the law into their own hands!"

"Think of that, now," said Doan.

"They'll come here!" Norma gasped. "They—they'll *lynch* Brad!"

"How would that be your fault?" Doan asked.

"Joady told all over town that Brad had you send your dog after Joady. There at the mill. He said the dog attacked him, and he barely got away with his life. They're talking about tarring and feathering you!"

"Don't worry about it," Doan soothed her. "I'll handle things. You run on back to town now. It wouldn't be so good if the school board found out about this Paul Revere act of yours. Cecil, here, won't say anything, though."

Norma left reluctantly. Cecil went through the door, and slapped it shut emphatically behind him. Carstairs was lying on the floor with his head in the corner. He had slept through all the disturbance.

Doan got up and kicked him in the rear. "Up on your feet, brainless."

Carstairs sat up and yawned and then stared at Doan with an air of cynical expectancy.

With Carstairs padding silently behind him Doan went through the hall and out on the front porch in time to see Norma Carson's dingy coupé turn out into the highway and head back toward town. Doan sat down on the front steps. He took the police positive out of his pocket, flicked the cylinder open to make sure it was loaded, and then slid the gun into the waist-band of his pants under his coat.

He sat there, looking dreamily thoughtful, while the shadows thickened and deepened and crawled softly across the sweep of the lawn. A few early stars made bright pin-pricks in the darkening purple haze of the sky, and then there were other bright pin-pricks, lower down, that moved and jittered jerkily in pairs and that were not stars.

Doan nudged Carstairs in the ribs with his thumb and pointed. "Company coming," he said.

Carstairs grunted, and his claws scraped a little on the porch flooring. Doan sat unmoving while the pin-prick headlights of the cars crawled closer on the town road.

Suddenly the front door banged deafeningly behind him, and Colonel Morris raged out on the porch. "Scum!" he bellowed. "Infernal, impudent swine! Do you see them?"

"Yup," said Doan.

The colonel stamped down the steps past Doan and stood at the top of the drive.

Doan jerked his head at Carstairs and then got up and sauntered quietly around the side of the house and down the back slope through the thick hedge. Light showed mellowly through the windows of the barns, and there was the high, thin whine of a cream separator. Following the sound, Doan went around to the front of one of the buildings and in through the wide doors.

Jessica was tending the separator, and she snapped the switch and stared at Doan.

"We're having some visitors," Doan told her. "The unwelcome variety."

Owens came in from the back carrying two shiny tin pails. He set them down, and milk spilled a little, frothily thick, on the cement floor.

"Don't tell me you've finally decided to lend us a hand?" he said to Doan.

"In a manner of speaking," Doan said. "There are some rough and ready parties on the horizon who have the idea of hanging you on a tree like a Christmast stocking. You and I and Carstairs are going for a hike in the woods and study bird life and all that."

"Run away?" Owens asked incredulously.

Doan nodded. "Just that."

"And you," he told Jessica, "are to run back and put on a little diversion for the boys. You weep and wail and wring your hands and tell them that Owens has left you flat."

Jessica stared at Owens for a moment, biting her lower lip, and then she turned wordlessly and ran out of the building and up the slope toward the big house.

"They might trail us," Owens said. "If they should have dogs. . . ."

Doan smiled and indicated Carstairs. "He likes nothing better than a light snack of well-buttered bloodhound. Let's be on our way."

THIS was thick timber, on the north side of the valley, and it was darker than the inside of a cat. Doan bounced his chin off a low-hanging branch, stumbled backwards, and nearly stepped on Carstairs. Carstairs growled warningly.

"The thing I don't like about woods at night," Doan said, rubbing his chin, "is that they're dark. Do you know where we are?"

"Certainly," said Owens. "Keep close behind me, and, that way, you won't have much trouble."

"Okay," said Doan. "Is there any place near here where we can park and watch our back-trail?"

"Yes. Fagan's Hill is on ahead a ways."

"You can see the farm from there?"

"Yes. You can see the whole valley."

"Is there any place else like that?"

"No. All the other hills are timbered thickly. Fagan's Hill was once, but some early party dug a big quarry out of the side of it. It's not in use now, but the cut and the erosion made a sort of a cliff out of it. It drops off steeply, and there are no trees to cut off the view."

Doan said, "You told me that you don't remember stabbing Joady Turnbull's father."

"I don't."

"I know," said Doan. "Would you remember doing it if you had?"

Brush crackled against Owens' legs, and he

was much closer suddenly. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, I think the reason you don't remember stabbing him is because you didn't do it. Someone else handled that end of it for you."

Owens' breath made a harsh noise in his throat. "What are you—"

"Easy," Doan said. "Take it easy. I've got a gun, and Carstairs is right behind you, and we're nervous people."

Owens said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"It's simple," said Doan. "You didn't kill Joady Turnbull or his old man, either. I want to know if you know who did."

"If I knew, do you think I'd have gone to jail for it?"

"Maybe," said Doan. "Just maybe."

"You fool! Why?"

"To protect the person who did do it."

Owens' shadow contracted a little. "You—"

"Don't try to jump me," Doan warned.

"That won't work. Answer my question. Do you know who did the dirty deeds?"

"No!"

"I do," said Doan. "And I don't think you're going to like my answer."

Owens was breathing heavily. "What kind of a trick are you trying to pull off now?"

"I'm trying to earn a bonus," Doan told him. "A little matter of one thousand bucks, and I see it fluttering prettily right in front of my snoot. Turn around and lead us to Fagan's Hill."

"Why?"

"Because I'm telling you to," said Doan, "and, brother, I'm not fooling. Lead on, or

I'll dump you here and find the place myself."

Owens stood there for leaden seconds, leaning forward, trying to see Doan's face, and then he turned without any more words and headed through the tangled darkness. They went on steadily in silence, climbing slightly. Doan had his left arm in front of his face to protect it from invisible slashing branches. He was holding the revolver in his right hand.

At last Owens' face made a pallid blob as he paused and looked over his shoulder. "It's about a hundred and fifty yards ahead," he murmured.

Doan reached back and got hold of Carstairs' spiked collar and hauled him ahead. "Go ahead. Go on. Watch."

Carstairs slid on ahead of them, his head swinging alertly from side to side.

"Follow him," Doan ordered. "Don't make any more noise than you have to."

O WENS walked on slowly, picking his path, and Doan kept in step right behind him. Owens stopped again. Doan looked around him. Carstairs was standing still, his head tilted, testing the night air with noisy little snuffles. He growled in a low rumble.

Doan sighed. "I'm on the beam tonight." He stepped past Owens and nudged Carstairs with the revolver barrel. "Go on. Get him. And take it easy. Hold. Hold, you hear?"

Carstairs mumbled sullenly and then seemed to fade away silently into the shadows. There was no further sound, and Owens and Doan waited, listening to their own breathing. Then a man yelled frantically.

Instantly Doan cupped his hands around his

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mouth and shouted, "Don't run! Don't try to get your gun! Don't move, and he won't touch you!"

He threshed his way ahead up the slope with Owens pounding along behind him. The timber thinned into stunted brush, and they broke through it into a small clearing. There was a man sitting on the ground, both his hands raised protectively.

Carstairs was crouched squarely in front of him, his head thrust forward until his muzzle was no more than a foot from the man's face. His fangs glistened, white and shiny, in the dimness, and he was growling in a continuous, ugly mutter.

"Okay," said Doan. "Relax, stupid."

Carstairs quit growling and yawned in a bored way. He backed off and sat down.

"Gaah!" said the man in a choked voice. "He come without no warning and—and jumped at me. . . ."

"Hi, Sheriff," Doan said.

Derwin caught his breath.

"I sent him on ahead," Doan said, "because I thought you might hear us coming and sort of shoot before you looked."

"Huh?" said Derwin. "Why?"

"I thought your conscience might be bothering you."

"Huh?" Derwin repeated. "Conscience?"

Doan pointed. "On account of that."

The valley stretched out in a long, smoothly graduated scoop ahead of them, rolling up on its sides into the timbered shadows of the hills. The Square was immediately ahead and below, far down, as small and miniaturely perfect as an expensive doll house with lights bright and tiny in its windows. Other lights, mere pin-pricks, moved and churned around it—in front and on the sides and in back among the smaller, lower outbuildings.

"Friends of yours?" Doan asked.

"What do you mean?" Derwin demanded.

"Look," said Doan. "We're grown up. We know the facts of life. No one could gather up a mob that size in a little joint like Ramsey village without the sheriff knowing all about it. *You* knew all about it. You just didn't want to stop them, so you kept out of their way."

"Humpf," Derwin said sullenly. "Well, damn it, I—I figured. . . ."

"You figured maybe the mob would scare Owens so that he might confess to something."

"So maybe I did," said Derwin. "And he's guilty!"

"And you're so dumb it's pathetic," said Doan.

Carstairs suddenly stood up and growled. Doan swore in a bitter whisper. "No, I'm wrong. I'm the dumb one."

"What is it?" Owens demanded.

"I figured Derwin would come up here to

see what was going on. I never thought that the murderer might, too."

"What?" said Derwin. "Hey!"

"Shut up," said Doan, watching Carstairs. Carstairs lowered his head, staring into the darkness at the back of the clearing. A stick snapped loudly there. Carstairs started forward.

Doan kicked him in the ribs. "No!"

"Why not?" Owens whispered.

"This is different," said Doan. "This party sees us. I don't want Carstairs full of buckshot. You out there! Come on in! I know who you are!"

Doan shoved Owens. "You and Derwin go to the left. Run for it! Circle around and drive back in toward the cliff here!"

Then he nudged Carstairs with his knee. "Come on!" He ran across the clearing and crashed into the brush on the right side of the clearing.

THE darkness closed in tightly. Doan felt for Carstairs, grabbed the spiked collar. Carstairs lunged ahead, and Doan smashed and clattered along behind him, swearing in a bitter monotone.

"Make some noise," he ordered. "Woof!"

Carstairs bayed savagely, and the sound rolled and echoed ahead of them. Doan fell into a gulley, and Carstairs dragged him, willy-nilly, up the other side, going ahead in great, heaving jumps. He bayed again and then stopped short. Doan fell over the top of him and scrambled to his feet. He stood tensely, listening.

"I know you're close to me," he said. "You're not going any further in this direction."

There was the whistling sound of an in-drawn breath. Carstairs leaped in that direction, and Doan got him by the tail and hauled back, digging in his heels.

"No! Take it easy, lame-brain! I like you without holes in your hide better!"

He got a new grip on the collar, and they went ahead in a weirdly tandem fashion with Doan caroming off trees and wading sightlessly through brush that crackled angrily.

"Derwin!" Doan yelled. "Owens!"

"Here!"

"Here!"

"Circle back this way!"

Carstairs stopped uncertainly, started in one direction, turned and went in another.

"Make up your mind," Doan panted.

Carstairs slowed up, and Doan hauled on the collar, gasping for breath, and then the darkness seemed to thin a little, and the undergrowth fell away ahead of them.

"Ah," said Doan. "This is it." He slapped Carstairs on the muzzle. "Back! Keep back."

Carstairs grumbled and grunted indignantly,

but he edged in back of Doan's legs. Doan went ahead slowly, the police positive poised.

The ground sloped steeply down, and then they were abruptly in the clear, looking out over the empty black space of the valley. There was a figure right on the edge of the drop ahead—dark and wavering there, unsteady.

Doan said, "There's the party of the first part."

"Who?" Derwin said. "Who. . . ."

A small, soft breeze from the valley ruffled the brush-tips and touched the figure on the cliff-edge, and her skirt ruffled and moved a little.

"Why," Owens said in a numb, incredulous voice, "why, it's Norma Carson!"

Her spectacles glinted a little, turning toward them, and then she turned and gathered herself.

"Hey!" Doan yelled.

There was nothing on the cliff-edge, and then like an echo to his yell there was a thin, chilling shriek that tapered off into the rolling, rumbling smash of rocks rolling.

"She jumped!" Derwin shouted.

He ran toward the cliff and threw himself down on hands and knees and crawled forward.

"Oh," he said in a sickened voice. "Oh. . . . Clear down on those sharp rocks, and she's all twisted and smashed. . . ."

He got to his feet and ran back across the clearing, heading for the smoother slope farther along the hillside.

"Norma. . . ." Owens said. "I don't—I don't understand. . . ."

"She killed old man Turnbull and Joady."

"Killed?" Owens repeated, still numb. "I can't believe she would. . . ."

"It took me quite awhile to get the idea, too," Doan admitted.

"But why?"

"Well, did you ever notice the way she looked at you or the way she looked when she talked about you?"

"What?" said Owens.

"She loved you, you dope. You thought no one saw old man Turnbull smack you with that wrench. But Norma did. She thought you were killed, and she gave herself away completely. Probably got hysterical and took on at a great rate. Old Man Turnbull got the idea. He was scared because he had socked you, and he put the pressure on her. She was supposed to say you hit him first or something. He threatened her.

"That was about the end of him. Your knife had probably fallen out of your pocket, or else she found it while she was trying to find out how dead you were. She gave it to Turnbull—in the back. Then, when she found you were only knocked cold, she scuffed out her footprints and scrambled."

O WENS swallowed. "But then, when I was arrested. . . ."

"I'm afraid you won't like Norma so well after this," Doan said. "I'm afraid she figured that if you were in jail, she wouldn't have you, but neither would Jessica."

"Oh," said Owens slowly.

"Norma probably figured on gathering you in when you got loose," Doan went on. "She never dreamed that Jessica would stick to you—especially after she maneuvered that little phoney rumor of her engagement to Gretorex and sent you the paper so you'd know."

Sheriff Derwin's voice came to them faintly from below. "Doan! Owens! She—she's dead. Oh, lordy! What—what will I do now, huh?"

"Go get a doctor or an ambulance or a hearse or something," Doan ordered.

"But about Joady. . . ." Owens said.

"Joady was mean," Doan said. "Joady was dumb like his old man. He was so mean and dumb he died. He was mad because Norma wouldn't let him go to school. Probably people needled him about it. He took to following her around and pestering her—like at the mill. He followed her once too often. She had to come, you see, and find out if you and Jessica were going to get together again. She had to know that. She was sneaking around the joint last night, and Joady followed her, and she caught him at it. He would have told on her. She couldn't have you—and everyone—know she was sort of a Peeping Tom."

"The knife. . . ." said Owens.

"After it was used at the trial, it would just be filed away in some drawer in the courthouse as an exhibit. No one would suspect a schoolteacher of anything if she was around the courthouse, and certainly no one would ever dream she would pinch a knife."

Doan took the knife from his pocket, opened it and wiped the blade and hilt on his coat front. He flipped it over the cliff edge, and a thin metallic rattle echoed back.

Owens drew a deep breath. "You—you know, it's a little hard for me to grasp all this. . . ." He hesitated uncertainly. "You—you are a pretty clever detective after all!"

"I'm the best there is," said Doan. "I told you that in the first place. You better run on back to Jessica. The mob has beat it by this time."

"Well. . . ." said Owens. "Thanks."

He turned and started back.

"Have Cecil put on a couple of steaks for us!" Doan called. "And, hey! Don't forget that thousand dollars!"

Owens ran on, unheeding.

"Love," said Doan, nodding to Carstairs.

Carstairs slowly and thoughtfully licked his chops.

Doan nodded. "Yup. Steaks are good, too."