

5 DETECTIVE **Novels** Magazine

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SUMMER



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By **RICHARD DEMING**

AND HERE COMES MURDER

By **G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS**

HOMICIDE SANITARIUM

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SUMMER, 1951

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THE EDITOR LOOKS AT CRIME



FINGERPRINTS? Old stuff! Rogues' Gallery profiles? Ancient history! You know what? They're taking moving pictures of our favorite criminals these days. And in technicolor too.

The idea is, you don't really get to know a man without seeing him in action—how he walks how he lights a cigarette, mops his brow, or—who knows—maybe even smiles.

It's not a universal practise—this moving picture gimmick, but the idea is spreading. We thought we'd better warn you. Then there's television.

It will be a long time before a certain Boston citizen appears on a T.V. program again—even one with such a good-natured and cheerful sounding name as *Draw Me a Laugh*. It was after appearing on this program that he was carted off to the bastille.

He was recognized as an individual the police had been after for fourteen years!

Yes, it's getting more and more rugged for the tough crumbs to keep their poison-alities a secret. Science is closing in on them. Did someone mention plastic surgery? Well, Dillinger tried it, and if our mind serves us correctly, he didn't have much luck with it. After all, who can permanently change his walk, or his talk, or the way he blows his nose, or the jokes he tells—and it's things like these that tell the real story.

Still, let's be fair to plastic surgery. It is of some help in some cases. If a wanted gent is known to have some definite characteristic—such as a broken nose, drooping eye-lid, or loving-cup ears—to which attention is immediately attracted, elimination of this "red flag" is of some temporary benefit.

But how long can anyone keep undercover when police eyes are prying?

"I'll bury myself after this big job,"

Joe Crook says. "Nobody'll ever know me. No cops will ever find me."

It listens good. If you grab some loot deep in the heart of Dallas, how is any cop ever going to find you after you've taken a new name and begun a new life as an "honest" and "upright" citizen in Podunk, New Jersey?

Harry Lane, out in Las Vegas, figured he could do something like that. Harry was on the hook for \$5,000 to some tough gamblers, and they were breathing down his neck. Harry wanted nothing more than to drop out of sight.

Then he accidentally killed Cedric Elsfield, and he had his chance for anonymity. Elsfield, a Canadian, was the heel who had landed Harry in the jam in the first place.

Harry switched clothes and identification with Elsfield, and became Elsfield instead of Harry Lane.

The new Elsfield moved far and fast, and with him went a sexy little lady who was as smooth an operator as Harry was sharp. They took up residence in L.A. Everything was swell.

Then, one night, Harry accidentally sideswiped a car—a police car, no less. But it was only a slightly dented fender, and after the girlfriend threw a couple luscious curves at the officers, they melted. But they did take his name.

The next day, Harry was picked up—charged with murder. Not the one he really had committed, of course.

It was one this jerk Elsfield had committed years before in Canada!

And then the fun began. . . .

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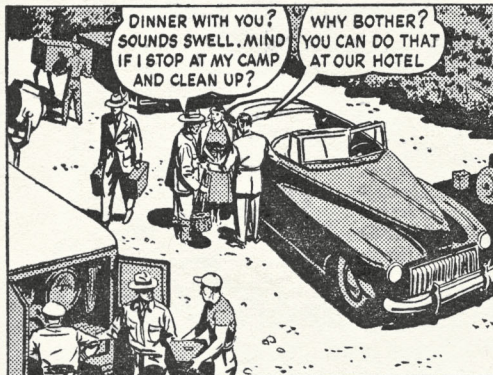
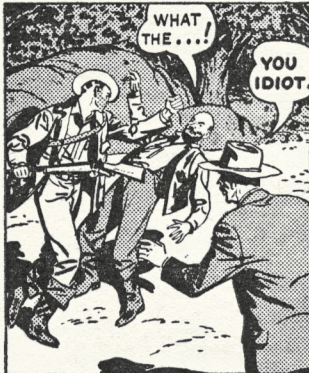
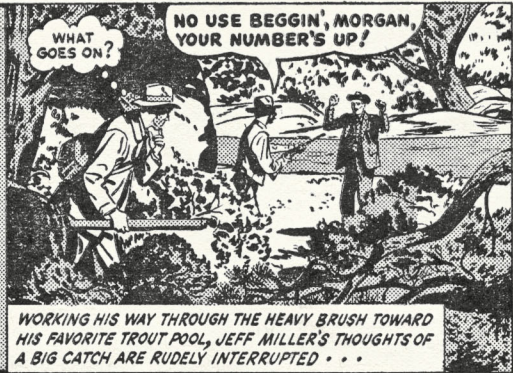
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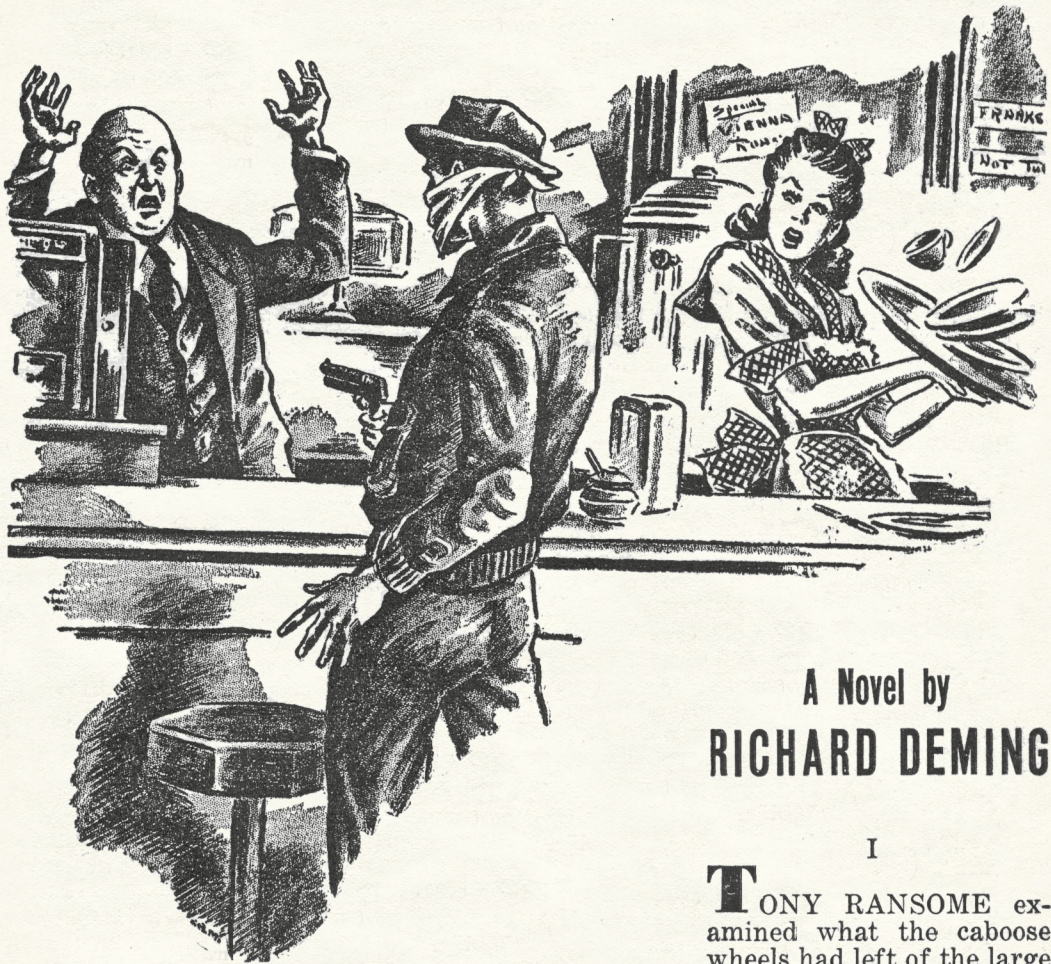
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The KILLER from BUFFALO



A Novel by
RICHARD DEMING

I
TONY RANSOME ex-
amined what the caboose
wheels had left of the large
young body on the embalm-

The slaying the pretty waitress witnessed was only part

of a shocking story, but to learn all of it—was to die!

Was the Victim Killed by the Wheels of a

ing table without any expression at all on his face, but deep within him was a churning bitterness.

"Sam Stone all right," he said in a colorless voice. Then, as though conscious something aside from dazed apathy was expected of him, he added with forced briskness, "Funny, the way it missed his head completely."

"We figure he fell square across one track with his head clear of the rails," Chief Ward Murphy said. "The wheels caught him at belt level."

Tony lifted achromatic eyes to the face of the fat chief. "Then how you account for his arms? A guy falling would push his arms in front of him; not hold them flat to his sides."

"We figure he fell clear from the top of the car," the police chief said. "Probably he rolled before the wheels hit him."

Ransome's lips tightened. "Or maybe he was dead before he fell."

Abruptly he turned and stalked toward the exit from the funeral parlor's basement, a thin, wiry little man in his early thirties who moved with a belligerent strut, as though daring anyone to block his one-hundred forty pounds. Outside he waited for the slower moving fat man to catch up.

"How could he be dead before he fell?" Chief Murphy asked querulously. "He just had an unlucky accident. Three witnesses saw him hold up the restaurant, clean out the cash drawer and shoot Larson, the proprietor. Then he hopped a freight to get out of town. There can't be any mistake about him being the robber, because we found the money and the murder gun on his body."

"Why'd he wait five hours to hop a freight?"

The chief shook his head resignedly. "What's eating you, Ransome? So the guy was a respected citizen in Buffalo, but down here turns out to be a killer. That any skin off your nose? You act like the guy was your brother."

YOU fat slob! Tony thought. But what he said was milder than his thoughts. "My chief in Buffalo told me to stick

around long as I thought necessary. Mind?"

"Don't trust small-town police work, huh?" Murphy asked resentfully. "You think maybe because our five cops ain't split up into fancy-named teams like 'vice squad' and 'homicide department,' we never catch the right guy, is that it?"

The little man's patient expression hid growing irritation. "I don't think anything. Got any objection to my sticking around?"

"Can't very well run you out of town. But just remember Buffalo detective sergeants got no jurisdiction in Missouri. What's the name of that fancy department you work for up there?"

"Homicide and arson."

"Yeah. Imagine that! A whole department to chase murderers and firebugs."

"Possibly we have more murders and fires than St. Michael," Tony said shortly. "Do I get police backing if I poke around?"

"What's there to poke for?"

"Kind of like to know why a straight character like Sam suddenly went nuts. Occur to you maybe this was a frame?"

The fat man said, "Who'd bother to frame a hobo?"

"Somebody mad at the guy he was supposed to have killed. Who held a grudge against Jonathan Larson?"

The chief opened his mouth, closed it again and let the fat around his eyes squeeze them half shut. "That kind of question could get you in trouble if you asked it too public. There ain't no doubt about Stone being the killer, and very little doubt about robbery being the sole motive. But in a town this size gossip builds mountains out of mole hills. You ask that question to a few people and it plants suspicion. They kick it around without a shade of evidence to go on, and first thing you know everybody's asking, 'Think so-and-so hired Jonathan killed, and the robbery was just a cover-up motive?' Couldn't really blame so-and-so for getting mad, could you?"

Train—or Was He Dead Before He Fell?

Tony stared at the fat man in amazement. Was this a warning, or an oblique suggestion as to how to start things moving? The former implied the chief's complicity in some sort of underworld arrangement, and the latter that he was as suspicious as Tony, but for some



This is TONY RANSOME—who found it unhealthy to be a stranger asking questions

reason fearful of continuing the investigation himself.

Either interpretation required Tony to adjust his opinion of the man's intelligence, but before he could decide which way to take the chief's remarkable statement, a tall man in a light gabardine suit stopped and said, "Good afternoon, Chief."

The man was meagerly built, with a thin, alert face and a jutting jawline. His complexion was a smooth tan, but his iron-gray hair indicated he was past fifty.

Chief Murphy said, "Afternoon, your Honor. Meet Sergeant Ransome of the Buffalo police." To Tony he said, "His Honor, Mayor Ainslie. Aside from being mayor, Mr. Ainslie also owns the *Bijou*, only legitimate theater in the county."

As they shook hands, the mayor's alert eyes examined Tony attentively. "Long way from home, aren't you, Sergeant?"

"About nine-hundred miles."

"The sergeant isn't satisfied with our solution of the Larson case," the chief said. "Wants to stay around and ask questions."

The mayor shot a quick glance at the fat man. "Does our force require outside help?"

Chief Murphy shrugged. "I've closed the case as solved, and got no intention of reopening it. Don't see how I can prevent Ransome from asking questions though, long as he behaves himself."

Tony sensed a baffling undercurrent in this exchange without being able to analyze it. Was the chief subtly telling the mayor to mind his own business, or carefully explaining his position so that he could not be held responsible for whatever Tony dug up? The double-meaning innuendoes began to irritate the little man.

"What questions you intend to ask?" the mayor said to him.

"Things like who had enough grudge against Jonathan Larson to hire him killed?"

AN OPAQUE film seemed to settle over Mayor Ainslie's eyes. "I was under the impression the killing was the bandit's own idea."

Tony shrugged. "Maybe it was. But from the way Chief Murphy describes the robbery, the bandit could have gotten away without hurting anyone, but deliberately went to the unnecessary trouble of killing Larson. Sounds to me as though his purpose was murder as much as robbery."

"I see," the mayor said thoughtfully. After a short pause he added in a de-

liberate tone, "You'll probably discover he was trying to have me impeached. But being mayor of St. Michael is an hour-a-day job with five-hundred dollars a year salary, in case you wonder if desire to hang on to the job is sufficient motive to hire a man killed. You may unearth some other people with better motives, but I wouldn't advise stirring up gossip unless you first uncover evidence that the killer actually was a hired assassin."

Another warning? As he walked back to the hotel Tony wondered if anyone in St. Michael spoke straight out what he meant, or if he could expect to encounter from everyone the same double-talk which suggested menace and friendly advice at the same time. In the hotel bar he brooded over a Bourbon and soda while contemplating what little evidence he had.

Information of Sam's death had come to the Buffalo police in the form of a telegram from Chief Murphy reporting the death of a bandit named Sam Stone, whose papers showed he was a resident of Buffalo, and asking if he were wanted for anything there.

Since "Sam Stone" was a pseudonym under which the dead man had both written and traveled, and while he was hardly a nationally famous writer, he was well known and well thought of in Buffalo, the Buffalo police were amazed to discover he was a bandit. Tony was not amazed; he simply did not believe it. And since he had a personal interest in the matter, he immediately obtained leave of absence and hopped a plane for St. Michael. On arrival he learned Sam was accused of robbery and murder, and with Sam's death the police had marked the case closed.

In the face of the evidence Tony could hardly blame them, except for the chief's refusal to even consider the lack of motive. Aside from the fact that big, grinning Sam would have been incapable of shooting a man in cold blood, there simply had been no reason for him to commit armed robbery.

"Stone wasn't a real hobo," he had tried to explain to Chief Murphy. "He was a professional writer bumming around for magazine article material. He wasn't rich, but he could write a

check up to two-thousand dollars. Why would he knock over a restaurant for two-hundred?"

But against the testimony of three witnesses, the chief had no intention of reopening the case on the say-so of an out-of-state cop. Until the fat man's odd dissertation on the evils of gossip, Tony had grown increasingly to regard him as a pig-headed fool, but gradually he was beginning to realize the man's placid exterior concealed a tortuous subtlety. Whether this would prove helpful or dangerous to the little detective sergeant was still an open question.

II

WHEN he finished his drink, Tony left the hotel again and walked two blocks to the town square. From the Western Union office he sent a wire to Buffalo stating arrangements had been made to ship the body home the next day.

Then he crossed the square to the restaurant Sam was supposed to have robbed.

In streamlining, the *Missouri Cafe* was years ahead of the rest of the town. From its glass brick front to its chrome and bakelite tables, it was strictly modernistic. Apparently its owner's murder had not driven away business, for even though the hour was 3:30 P.M., a half-dozen patrons were seated at tables.

Tony perched on one of the red leather stools at the glistening black counter and ordered a cup of coffee. He was served by a bright-eyed brunette of about twenty, who seemed to be responsible only for counter trade and the cash register, for in spite of Tony being the only counter customer, she paid no attention to the loud throat-clearing of a table patron wanting service. After placing Tony's coffee in front of him, she stood watching him idly, and eventually another girl came from the kitchen to investigate the "hurrumphs".

"You on the night shift?" Tony asked abruptly.

"Three to eleven," she said, and a wariness jumped into her eyes—the wariness of a girl whom experience has taught to expect, "What are you doing

after work?" immediately following questions about her hours.

"What's your name?"

"Janet," she said without enthusiasm.

"Work night before last, Janet?"

"The night of the stickup?" The wariness was replaced by interest. "I'll say I did! I was as close to the bandit as I am to you."

"You were one of the witnesses, eh?"

"Sure. Me and Gert—she's the girl just went back in the kitchen—and Henry, the cook, all had to go over to Werlinger's Funeral Home to identify the bandit's body. They use Werlinger's for a morgue, you know, on account of we got no regular morgue."

Tony asked, "Just the three of you and Mr. Larson were here when it happened?"

"Yeah," she said eagerly, gratified by his attentiveness. "It was just before closing and there hadn't been a customer for fifteen minutes, when in walked this fellow with a handkerchief over his face—"

"Handkerchief!" Tony snapped. "Chief Murphy didn't say anything about a handkerchief."

Some of her previous wariness returned. "Say, are you a reporter or something?"

"Cop," said Tony. "Detective Sergeant Ransome."

She eyed him suspiciously. "Then you must be new. I know all the cops."

"I'm from Buffalo." He slipped a badge from his vest pocket and held it before her face a moment before returning it. "Down to take back the body. I have no official connection with the case. Just interested."

"Oh," she said, obviously impressed by meeting a big-city detective from so far away.

"About the handkerchief," Tony prodded. "How'd you identify the bandit if his face was covered?"

"Why, he might as well left it off," she scoffed. "He'd been in here for supper, you see, and I recognized him right away in spite of the mask. He had this white scar through one eyebrow, and his nose had a bump on it, where it had been broken sometime, I guess. The handkerchief didn't hide that. Then too, I could tell the clothes. He had on a green

corduroy jacket with leather elbow guards and leather patch pockets, blue denim pants and a pork-pie hat with a little hole worn where it pinched together in front. I noticed his clothes at supper because they was old and kind of worn like a hobo's but clean as a pin and even pressed."

A SLOW sickness built within the little man. This was no primed witness. She was telling the truth spontaneously, and her testimony left no doubt that the killer had been Sam.

"How'd the shooting happen?" he asked dully.

"That was the terriblest thing of all. No call for it whatever. With his gun the bandit motioned me and Gert and Mr. Larson behide the counter, then pushed open the kitchen door, still keeping his gun on us, and made Henry come out too. We all crowded over there near the coffee urn while he cleaned out the register. Then he backed to the door, and we all thought he was just going to leave. Nobody made a move or said a thing, but all of a sudden he aimed the gun at Mr. Larson and fired. The boss fell dead just like that." She snapped her fingers. "Then the robber ran out the door."

As one of the table customers approached the counter with his check, Janet moved over to the register. Moodily the little man watched the waitress, Gert, bring a tray of food from the kitchen and return again with a load of dirty dishes. He drained his coffee cup and pushed it away.

The bandit seemed to have been Sam all right, he decided, but he could not have been in his right mind. The wild possibility that Sam had been hypnotized by some master criminal jumped into his mind, to be irritably kicked out as plausible only in comic books. Could Sam somehow have been roped into what he thought was a practical joke? The idea seemed as far-fetched as the first, except the only possible circumstance under which Tony could visualize the good-natured Sam firing a gun at another human, was if he believed it loaded with blanks.

He turned his mind back to Chief



Ward Murphy's remarks about starting gossip, wondering again if it had been meant as a warning or a suggestion. It seemed a sound plan to stir things up a little in either event, since he had no idea where else to start.

When the waitress returned to him, he said, "You know, Janet, it sounds to me as though the bandit's real purpose was to kill your boss, and robbery was just a cover-up."

"How you mean?"

Tony examined his fingernails. "Suppose some local Joe wanted Larson out of the way, but was afraid if anything happened to him, everyone in town would know right where to look for the

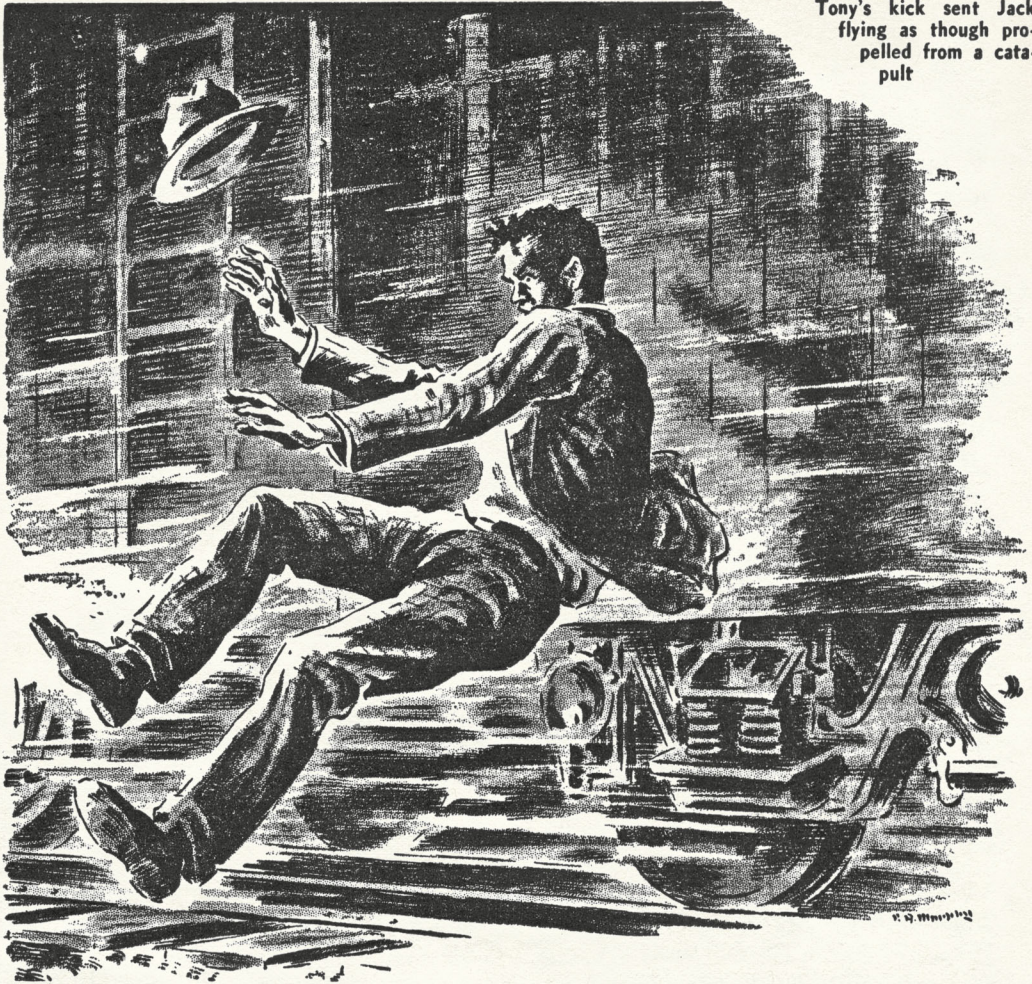
murderer. So he hires an out-of-town hobo to stick up the restaurant and knock off your boss. Everybody takes it for granted it's a simple case of murder during robbery, so no one even thinks about this local Joe's grudge."

He glanced up to see the girl staring at him with widespread eyes, her lips formed into a round "O."

"Jeepers!" she breathed. "Art Jason or Harry Short!"

"Who?"

"Art Jason, who runs the *Blue Goose* across the square, or Harry Short, who has the bingo hall and a bookshop. The boss headed the Citizens' Committee, which was trying to get the mayor im-



Tony's kick sent Jack flying as though propelled from a catapult

peached so they could run gambling out of town. You see, Mayor Ainslie won't let the police touch Jason's or Short's gambling places, and if the Citizens' Committee got the mayor kicked out, they'd get the council to appoint an interim mayor who would clamp down on both of them."

"Why won't Ainslie let the police touch Jason or Short?"

"He thinks gambling draws in tourists or something," Janet said. "Or so he says. Personally I think he figures the stage shows he books for his theatre aren't good enough to draw people in from very far, but with gambling pulling folks from all over the county, a lot

go to the *Bijou*, beings they're already in town."

Tony let his lips curl in a cynical smile. "I could think of a more probable reason."

She eyed him, puzzled.

"What's the usual reason local governments give protection to guys running illegal businesses?" he asked.

HER face remained blank, then slowly the dawn of understanding lighted her eyes. "Protection money! I'll bet Art Jason and Harry Short are paying him off!" She frowned thoughtfully. "That would give Mayor Ainslie just as much motive as either of them though.

For that matter George Erickson's got as much motive as all three of them."

"Who's George Erickson?"

"Druggist on the corner. Mr. Larson was divorcing his wife and naming George correspondent. Like to have ruined George's business in a small town like this."

Tony said, "Kind of gives Mrs. Larson a motive too then, doesn't it? Wouldn't she inherit the restaurant?"

The girl's mouth widened into a delighted grin. "Yeah," she said. "It's kind of convenient for the old gal, isn't it?"

Tony rose, paid seven cents for his coffee and slipped a quarter tip under the saucer. "Better not mention our conversation to anyone, unless you're sure it's someone who won't repeat it. Wouldn't do for the guilty person to have warning before Chief Murphy has time to act."

"Oh, sure," Janet breathed.

Tony watched the other waitress enter the kitchen with a tray.

"I'd like to talk to Gert and the cook now," he said. "All right to go back in the kitchen?"

"Sure. Go right ahead."

He learned nothing from Gert or the cook, Henry, except they were equally positive in their identification of the body lying at the funeral parlor as that of the bandit. When he came out of the kitchen again, Janet was ringing the register for a woman who was paying her bill.

"—and wouldn't it be awful if the robbery was just a cover-up," he heard her say in a low voice. "But don't repeat it to a soul."

As he left the restaurant, the little man's grin was self-satisfied.

III

OBVIOUSLY the *Blue Goose* was straight out of the pre-prohibition era, complete to sawdust, brass rail and cuspidors. Through double curtains across an archway at the rear came the whir of slot machines and the brittle click of dice. Aside from two men leaning against the bar, most of the place's custom seemed to be the other side of the curtains.

"Looking for Art Jason," Tony told the bartender.

"Usual table," the man said, jerking his head toward the archway.

The little man parted the curtains and stepped into a wide, barn-like room containing a roulette wheel, three dice tables, two poker tables and about twenty slot machines. Five men sat around one of the poker tables, a half-dozen more ringed one of the dice boards and three women played slot machines. No one was playing roulette.

Behind a square table centered nearly against the rear wall sat a large-boned man of middle age wearing a close-cut mustache and goatee. Laid out in front of him on the table were stacked coins ranging from nickels to silver dollars, the last denomination taking up half the table space in stacks of ten each.

Tony approached the man and said, "Looking for Art Jason."

Sharp eyes surveyed Tony before the man spoke, and his gaze was such a solid ray of power, it exerted nearly physical force. The little man got a fleeting impression of ruthlessness, and experienced mild surprise to encounter it in a small-town gambler. A dangerous opponent, was his first appraisal, but he immediately revised it downward when he detected evidence that the man's forcefulness was largely theatrical effect. His whole personality was an obvious pose, from the small beard which only partially concealed a weak chin, to the thick gold ring with its glittering yellow diamond, which he wore on his right forefinger.

"You've found him," the man said.

"My name is Tony Ransome. Buffalo Homicide and Arson. Got permission from Chief Murphy to ask questions."

"About what?"

"Killing night before last. Kind of like to know what made an honest Buffalonian turn killer."

The sharp eyes lanced at Tony again, but when they clashed with the smaller man's steady gaze, immediately dropped. "What makes you think I'd know?"

"Didn't say you did," Tony said. "Thought I'd try tracing back the kid's movements after he hit town. Got to start somewhere."

"Better start somewhere else." He became absorbed in the refracted light from the stone on his index finger. "Never heard of the guy until he was dead."

Jason turned his attention to a portly, bald-headed man who wanted to trade a twenty-dollar bill for silver dollars.

"Aren't many places in town a fellow could go," Tony said mildly. "Thought maybe he dropped in here. Big fellow about your build, wearing a green corduroy jacket with leather pockets and elbow patches, denim pants and a flat fedora."

The portly man glanced at Tony. "You talking about that tramp who murdered Jonathan Larson?"

Tony eyed the man deliberately. "The kid accused of it, yes."

"He was around here a couple of days. Getting the lay of the land, I guess. Tuesday night he made thirty bucks riding me on a hot roll, then backed out of the game. The next afternoon I saw him drop five and quit. You'd think a guy that cagey with money wouldn't need to stick anyone up, but that same night he robbed the *Missouri Cafe*." He shifted his attention to the bearded man. "You remember the guy he is talking of, Art. You gave him a letter to mail for you."

Jason's face assumed an expression of sudden enlightenment. "Yeah, I remember the guy now. Big fellow in his late twenties with a bent nose and a scar through one eyebrow. Looked like a hobo. Didn't realize he was the one killed Larson."

"You gave him a letter to mail?" Tony asked.

THE GAMBLER nodded and flicked a thumb in the direction of one of the tables.

"Yeah. Wanted it to make the five o'clock mail train. He was standing there doing nothing, so I gave him a buck to run it over to the post office."

"Was he alone or with somebody?"

"Alone, I think," Jason said. "Didn't really notice."

Tony turned to the bald-headed man. "You notice?"

"I think he was by himself. . . No, wait a minute. By himself Tuesday,

and I think he came in alone Wednesday afternoon, but I saw him leave with George Erickson."

"The druggist, eh?" Tony said softly. "Thanks, mister."

Nodding curtly to the bearded man, he left the *Blue Goose* and crossed the square again to a store with a sign on the window reading: *Erickson's Drugs and Sundries*.

The man who came from the prescription room to wait on Tony was as tall and heavy set as Art Jason. But there the resemblance ended. He had a soft, round face and large dark eyes like a woman's, but a blunt jaw and square, hard mouth saved him from effeminacy. Instead of asking what Tony wanted, he questioned him silently with a direct, impersonal gaze.

"You George Erickson?" the little man asked.

"Yes."

"My name is Tony Ransome. With the Buffalo police. Got Chief Murphy's okay to ask questions about the killing Wednesday night."

"Yes?"

"Understand you knew the guy who stuck up the *Missouri Cafe*."

The dark eyes stared straight into Tony's face. "Afraid you've been misinformed."

Tony shook his head. "You left the *Blue Goose* with him a few hours before the robbery."

Erickson's expression did not change. "Oh, that. We did leave at the same time, but we weren't together."

"Witnesses say you were." Tony estimated the man, then hazarded, "For quite a while."

"That's not true," Erickson said calmly. "We talked not more than a minute in front of the *Blue Goose*. Then I came back to the store and he went on to the bookshop."

"What you talk about?"

"Nothing, really. I'd just met the man five minutes before. He asked where Short's bookshop was and I told him."

"Ask where the post office was too?"

The druggist shook his head.

"Have a letter in his hand?" Tony asked.

"A letter? Don't remember any. . .

Yes, now that you mention it, I believe he did."

"But he didn't go to the post office when he left you?"

Erickson's voice developed an edge of impatience. "He may have. I didn't watch where he went. He asked about the bookshop, so I assumed he intended to go there."

"Where is this bookshop?"

"Over the bingo hall next to the fire station. Block and a half east."

"Where's the post office?"

"One block west."

"Thanks," Tony said, and left the store.

Outside two women standing by the show window furtively glanced at him, then peered through the window into the store.

"That must be the Buffalo detective," one said to the other in a whisper she mistakenly believed would not carry. "Do you think Mr. Erickson—?"

The little man was gratified to learn how quickly his seed was taking root.

AT THE post office he found a plump, gray haired woman sorting mail behind the counter.

"You the postmistress?" he asked.

"That's me," she admitted.

"Were you here Wednesday afternoon?"

"All day Wednesday."

Tony said, "Notice a man come in to mail a letter who wore a green corduroy jacket trimmed with leather, denim pants and a pork-pie hat with a hole in it?"

"Why?" she asked.

"I'm from the Buffalo police." He produced his badge. "I have the local chief's permission to ask questions."

She examined him interestedly. "Chasing a crook?"

"Sort of," Tony said non-committally. "Remember the man I described?"

She shook her head. "Nope. What'd he look like?"

"He was about twenty-eight years old, had a nose with a crooked bump on it and a scar through one eyebrow. Kind of good-natured, but beat up face."

She shook her head again. "Sorry. Don't think he was in. Think I'd remember it too, because I really wasn't

very busy at all on Wednesday."

"Were you here alone?"

"Yep. My mail clerk's been sick for a week."

"Any place in town aside from here a guy could mail a letter?" Tony asked.

"Just the mailbox in front of the place. Most people come on in when the post office is open."

"Thanks," the little man said.

IV

GREEN paint blanked out all of the wide show window next to the fire hall, except for an oblong section through which a poster proclaimed: MONDAY, THURSDAY, SATURDAY—30 REGULAR, 10 SPECIAL GAMES—5 TO 100 DOLLAR PRIZES.

Over a doorway beside the bingo hall hung a sign reading: SMOKE SHOP UPSTAIRS. But at the top of the stairs there was no evidence of any tobacco business. Instead of the usual token front room engaged in selling cigarettes and cigars, the stair head led directly into the bookshop.

A race was in progress as Tony entered, for a man wearing a phone headset stood in front of a large blackboard droning the positions of the horses at each quarter. Seated on a dozen of the approximately fifty chairs facing the blackboard, a mixed audience of men and women listened to the results.

Ringling the walls were a series of long, narrow tables littered with racing forms and turf news, and several men sat at these, concentrating on dope sheets and paying no attention to the race currently being run. Behind a cashier's cage to the right of the blackboard sat a young red-headed man wearing horn-rimmed glasses.

Approaching the cashier, Tony said. "I'm with the Buffalo police. Got Chief Murphy's okay to look into the Larson killing. Trying to check back on the bandit's movements the day of the robbery, and understand he was in here."

The customer-greeting smile on the red-head's pale face faded to blankness. Behind their glasses his colorless eyes examined Tony deliberately.

"He wasn't here," he said in a flat voice.

"You Harry Short?" the little man asked mildly.

"No."

"Like to talk to Mr. Short."

The redhead said in a toneless voice.

"Sorry. He's busy."

Casually Tony put one hand on the swinging gate next to the cashier's cage. "That his office over there?" he asked.

In one quick movement the cashier swept off his glasses, laid them in front of him and stepped in front of the gate. From an advantage of three inches he stared down at the little man with his jaw outthrust.

Tony's eyes brightened with an interested, almost eager look, and gently he massaged his left fist with his right palm. Then he dropped the fist to his side and slowly began to push open the gate.

The cashier drew in his chin. "Wait here," he said, turned abruptly and ducked into the office door Tony had indicated.

Almost immediately he was back, followed by a thick-set, heavy-shouldered man with a long, jaundiced face and a crew haircut. The redhead slid back on his stool and replaced his glasses, and the yellow-faced man pushed open the swinging gate to come out into the main room. At that moment the race ended, there was a sudden burst of conversation from the audience and people began to crowd up to the cashier's cage, either to collect their winnings or lay bets on the next race. The yellow-faced man stood quietly examining Tony until the hubbub subsided sufficiently for his voice to be heard.

"What's on your mind?" he asked.

Tony said, "You Harry Short?"

The man nodded.

"You run this place?"

Short nodded again.

Tony repeated what he had told the cashier.

"You got a bum steer," Short said.

"He wasn't in here."

"Witnesses say he was."

"The witnesses are wrong."

"Fellow wore a green corduroy jacket with leather trimming," Tony said mildly. "Denim pants and pork-pie hat."

"He wasn't here."

"Maybe you just didn't see him."

Tony turned to the cashier. "Recognize that description?"

THE CASHIER stared at Tony stonily and Harry Short said, "Jack didn't see him either. Take a walk, Shorty."

Tony's eyes flicked over the other's chin at "Shorty," but his tone remained amiable. "Remember the guy?" he asked Jack.

The yellow of the big man's complexion deepened to orange, and he reached spread fingers for Tony's shirt front. But before they could bunch the material together into a ball, the little man's left whipped around like a swinging bat, and the crack of a line drive sounded and the big man sat on the floor. When his eyes uncrossed, he focused them blearily on the little detective.

"Remember the guy now?" Tony quietly asked the cashier.

The man moved his pale face back and forth sidewise. "No sir. He wasn't here."

[Turn page]

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Harry Short's dazed expression turned to malevolence, but he made no attempt to regain his feet. Amid the silent scrutiny of the horse-players, Tony stalked to the stair head and went on down the steps.

Five minutes later when he entered the hotel lobby and passed the desk, he was stopped by the day clerk.

"Mr. Ransome," the clerk said. "Is it true the police think the *Missouri Cafe* robbery was a put up job by some local person?"

"I wouldn't know," Tony said. "You'd have to ask Chief Murphy."

After dinner the little man sat in his room and waited for the moving tide of gossip to flow over the town. He had no idea what effect his plan would have, merely having proceeded on the principle that stirring a muddy pond could not make it muddier, and might bring something to the surface. At eight o'clock the first tangible effects appeared in the persons of the mayor and the chief of police.

Politely offering His Honor the lone easy chair, and the fat chief the only other chair, an uncomfortable straight-back, Tony seated himself on the bed.

"You been misrepresenting the truth, Ransome," Chief Murphy said reproachfully. "You been creating the impression you got my backing in your poking around."

Tony raised innocent eyebrows. "I merely said I had your permission to ask questions."

"But people got the idea I put you up to it. Thought I made it clear you was on your own."

"That's unimportant now," Ainslie broke in. "Sergeant Ransome, your rather loose talk around town has started a lot of gossip I resent exceedingly."

Tony turned his head to survey the mayor and was surprised to note the man's thin face was pale and pinched, not with anger, but with fright. "What kind of gossip?" he asked.

"You know very well what kind of gossip, since you started it," Ainslie said irritably. "The whole town is suddenly convinced that man Stone was hired to kill Larson by someone local. Opinion on who did the hiring seems divided between the team of Erickson

and Mrs. Larson and the team of Art Jason, Harry Short and myself."

"Tough," Tony said unfeelingly. "Wouldn't be surprised if one of those views is correct."

The mayor raised a hand that shook slightly. "I wouldn't so much resent speculation that I hired the killer myself, since it's public knowledge Larson wanted me impeached. But linking me with Jason and Short is hitting below the belt. People are saying they pay me protection money to let them operate unmolested, the implication being we constitute some kind of criminal organization. But I assure you my five-hundred a year salary is every cent I receive from the mayor's office, directly or indirectly."

Tony said, "That story must have been kicking around before Larson was killed, else why the petition to impeach you?"

The mayor said indignantly, "There was no question of dishonesty behind that. Even the Citizens' Committee never accused me of anything but dereliction of duty. The whole argument on gambling is simply a difference of opinion about what is best for the town. My own opinion is that it stimulates trade and benefits the merchants. The gambling enterprises draw people from all over the county, and aside from my theatre, there certainly is nothing else in St. Michael to attract visitors. Many business men agree with me, and the Citizens' Committee simply represents the blue-nosed faction which doesn't."

ALL THIS Tony absorbed in silence. Finally he said, "If I understand you straight, you don't mind being accused of hiring a guy murdered, but you resent being accused of accepting bribes."

"You're twisting my meaning," Ainslie objected. "I meant I could understand why people think I had a motive to kill Larson, mistaken as their opinion is, but linking me with Jason and Short is the most vicious kind of speculation without the slightest foundation."

Tony said, "This is all very interesting, but just what do you expect me to do about it?"

Mayor Ainslie cleared his throat and

glanced over at his fat companion, who pointedly missed the invitation to take the floor by blowing his nose.

"The chief and I think you should drop this investigation and return to Buffalo," the mayor said finally.

Tony glanced at Chief Ward Murphy. "What do you think, Chief?"

"I'm here at Mayor Ainslie's request," the fat man said carefully. "I've explained to him my official interest in the case is closed, and I was willing to repeat to you that your investigation doesn't have my sanction."

"Suppose I continue anyway?"

The chief shrugged. "No law I know of to prevent a man asking questions."

"You're virtually telling him he can stay in town!" the mayor said sharply.

Chief Murphy regarded the mayor from half-closed eyes. "You sign a charge of some kind, Sir, and I'll put him on the next train."

Ainslie's pale face reddened and abruptly he got to his feet. "I seem to have wasted my time talking to either of you," he said, and stalked from the room.

The fat chief's left eyelid drooped in what might have been a wink, then he surged to his feet with a grunt and started to follow the mayor.

"Just a minute, Chief," Tony called.

In the doorway the fat man turned to look back.

"About this Art Jason and this Harry Short. How they get along?"

"So so, I guess. Just how you mean?"

"Occurred to me this is a kind of small town to support two gamblers. They got a partnership or something?"

The fat man grinned a peculiar grin. "You're wasting your time looking for an underworld setup of some kind in this town. You been in a city too long. Jason and Short are just business men. Friendly competitors, like two grocery stores would be. Far as I know they're not in partnership, but they ain't gunning for each other either."

"Thanks for dropping in," Tony said.

The chief lingered for a minute. "You shouldn't have swung on Harry, Ransome. He's not a mug who has to take pushing around from cops. Around here he's considered a prominent citizen. Member of the town council, in fact."

One of Tony's eyebrows raised. "That so? How about Art Jason?"

"Member of the council too." The peculiar grin formed again. "So's George Erickson. Three of your suspects are part of the local governing body. Ain't that interesting? Almost a majority, because there's only seven of the council."

When the chief left the little man mulled over the visit without getting anywhere. About Mayor Ainslie he was even more puzzled than before, but at least Chief Ward Murphy's position seemed a little clearer. Apparently the fat man wanted Tony to continue his investigation, but wanted no personal connection with it. That could mean either that he was afraid of someone, or was merely taking the politic attitude that a small-town police chief could not afford to step on the toes of influential local citizens unless he had more than suspicion to go on. In either event, if the chief was not exactly on Tony's side, apparently he was not against him.

V

NEARLY an hour passed before Tony's next visitor arrived. At an imperious rap he opened the door to a striking brunette about his own age. She was taller than Tony, with ebon hair and luminous eyes in a square-jawed, olive face. Her nose curved slightly over a sulky mouth which gave her an appearance of restlessness.

"I'm Mrs. Larson," she announced.

"Come in," Tony said, stepping back and waving her toward the easy chair.

She entered, closed the door and stood with her back to it, ignoring the proffered chair.

"If you're not out of town by morning," she said, "I'm going to sue you for slander."

"All right," Tony said agreeably.

The anger in her eyes was partially displaced by surprise. "You mean you'll leave?"

"I mean go ahead and sue."

Color rushed to her face and her eyes blazed. But before she could speak again, another knock sounded. Immediately she stepped away from the door and examined it fearfully, as though

trying to guess who stood on the other side.

"Come in," invited Tony.

The door pushed open to disclose George Erickson. He started to open his mouth, saw Mrs. Larson, shut it again and closed the door.

"What are you doing here, Grace?" he asked.

"Probably the same thing you are," she snapped.

Erickson swung his eyes back to Tony. "Perhaps it's just as well we're here together. Ransome, unless you make immediate public apology for the rumors you've started, I intend to sue you for defamation of character."

"What rumors?"

"You know very well what! The dirty story you've spread that Grace—Mrs. Larson and I hired her husband murdered."

"Never even suggested such a thing," Tony said. "Simply suggested *somebody* might have."

"But that coupled with Larson's idiotic divorce action—"

"Listen, bub," Tony interrupted. "What Larson did to you is none of my concern, nor what you did to him to make him do it. That restaurant robbery was as phony as a telephone booth, and that I'll quote for the papers. If people are embroidering that with dirt, I'm sorry, but you can expect dirt in a murder investigation. Somebody had Larson killed, and when we catch the guilty guy, people will stop talking about you—unless you're the guy that did it. But if you think I'm going to stop a murder investigation because your feelings are hurt, think again."

"You—" Grace Larson started to say, but stopped when the phone rang.

Tony lifted the receiver and said, "Yeah?"

"This is Mayor Ainslie," a tense voice said in his ear. "I've been trying to reach the chief, but can't. I've discovered something in the men's dressing room at the *Bijou*."

"What?"

"Something missing. We haven't had a show this week, or I'd have discovered it sooner. Can you come over here?"

"Listen, Mr. Mayor," Tony said irritably, "all I'm in town for is the Larson

killing. Call on the local police to solve your robbery."

"But this may tie in with the Larson case. If it means what I think it does, it puts an entirely different complexion on the whole matter. I just discovered—"

"Hold it!" Tony interrupted. He glanced at the attentive faces of Erickson and Mrs. Larson. "Where is the *Bijou*?"

"First block beyond the square on Main Street. The front door is open, so just come on backstage."

"Be right there," Tony said, and hung up.

Grace Larson said, "That sounded like Mayor Ainslie's voice. Did I understand him to say something about my husband?"

"You got good ears, lady," Tony said. "Sorry to rush you people off, but I got an appointment."

HE SHOODED them from the room amid assurances from Erickson that he had not heard the last of this. From his window he could see by the dim light of a street lamp that they got in the same car and drove off toward the square.

It took Tony only ten minutes to walk to the *Bijou*. As Ainslie had indicated, he found the front door unlocked and walked in. A single small light burned in the lobby, and in the main auditorium only the footlights were on. Tony made his way down a dark aisle to the stage, mounted steps at one side and walked backstage.

He found himself in a lighted hallway, passed two doors marked with stars, another labeled LADIES' DRESSING ROOM, and eventually came to one marked MEN'S DRESSING ROOM. The door was slightly ajar and light shown from within.

Tony pushed the door the rest of the way open, stepped through and then stopped still. Mayor Ainslie lay face up on the floor in the center of a pool of blood. Simultaneously with his realization that the man was dead, Tony sensed another presence in the room and attempted to spin around in order to slam the door back against whatever was behind it.

The spin was but half completed when

a star shell went off in his brain, the momentary flash being followed by pitch blackness. . . .

The first thing of which Tony's dim consciousness grew aware was a large shoe. He closed his eyes until the noise in his head subsided to boiler factory intensity, then opened them and let his gaze travel from the shoe up a wrinkled pant leg, across a bulging stomach to the face of Chief Murphy. The chief stood some four feet away idly swinging a large revolver.

Tony sat up and rubbed the back of his head. Finally he stood up, swaying slightly, and looked around the room. Except for the body of Ainslie, he and the chief were alone. On the floor next to where Tony had been a moment before lay an automatic, and lying next to the dead man was a heavy cane. Neither had been present when Tony first entered the room.

"You clip me?" Tony asked dully.

The chief shook his head. "Just got here. Mayor Ainslie left word at the jail for me to drop around."

"He phoned me he had a lead on the murder," Tony said dispiritedly. "Said something had been stolen from this room. When I walked in, he was lying like that and his murderer clunked me from behind. I didn't see who it was."

"Sure," the fat chief said tolerantly. "You was framed."

Tony peered at the fat man through aching eyes. "Think I shot him and then knocked myself out?"

Murphy gestured with his gun toward the cane. "Looks like you shot him, then he biffed you with the cane before he died."

"Come awake," Tony said sourly. "Do I look stupid enough to let a guy with a cane bean me if I had a gun in my hand?"

"No stupider than getting clipped from behind."

"All right," Tony said. "Either way I'm stupid. But you'll probably find that cane came from the stock room and hasn't got Ainslie's fingerprints on it. And if that's supposed to be the murder gun, it's not mine. I haven't been carrying one because I got no permit for Missouri, but you'll find it in my suitcase at the hotel. You can check

which one is mine with Buffalo."

"Guys have been known to own two guns. Let's go."

There was nothing Tony could do about it, so he went. The jail was in the basement of the city hall, which sat in the center of the town square. It consisted of three cells, all empty at the moment. Tony was given the middle one.

"Listen," he said to Chief Murphy through the bars. "If you're going to be a boob about this, at least you can check my story. George Erickson and Mrs. Larson were in my room when the mayor phoned, and could hear what he said because his voice carried. You might also try to find out what was missing from the dressing room. There must be a cleaning woman or something familiar with the place."

"Sure," the fat man said. "We'll put our homicide and arson squad on it."

Tony said a four-letter word.

FOLLOWING a night of fitful tossing on the hard, drop-down bunk, he was awake by seven when Chief Murphy appeared accompanied by a uniformed policeman carrying Tony's suitcase. When the policeman had set the suitcase inside the cell and relocked the door, the chief sent him off to get some breakfast for the prisoner.

The fat man examined Tony's reddened eyes through the bars. "No sleep, huh?" he asked.

"No," Tony said shortly.

"Took the liberty of removing your gun from the bag," the chief said. "Also checked with Buffalo by phone. It's yours all right, and they got no record of you owning another. But your prints are on the murder gun and Ainslie's on the cane."

The little man began removing shaving equipment from the suitcase. "They could have been put there after Ainslie was dead and I was unconscious."

"Maybe," the chief said non-committally. "Also checked your story with Erickson and Mrs. Larson. They both say far as they're concerned, you can rot in jail."

Tony looked up quickly. "You mean they refused to verify my phone call from Ainslie?"

"Not refused, exactly. Said they

didn't know. Both remembered you got a phone call, but all they heard was your side of the conversation and you didn't call the other party by name."

"That's kind of interesting," the little man said slowly. "Ainslie's voice carried, because Mrs. Larson remarked it sounded like him. And if she could recognize the voice, maybe she could hear everything he said. Apparently the mayor was alone when he phoned, so Mrs. Larson and Erickson were the only ones aside from me knew he'd discovered something about the murder. They got in a car together, and could have made it to the theatre ten minutes before I got there."

Tony turned the hot water spigot on the bowl in one corner of the cell, found it did not work and filled the bowl with cold water.

"Also talked to Maggie, the cleaning woman at the *Bijou*," the chief said. "Had her check over everything in the dressing room. She knows the place by heart, and there ain't a thing missing."

Tony stopped lathering his face and turned slowly. "Then what the devil was Ainslie talking about?"

"Thought maybe you might know," Murphy said. "You're a big city cop."

Tony said, "What was in the dressing room when you checked it with Maggie?"

"Not much. That's why she's so sure nothing is missing. It ain't exactly furnished in luxury." The chief brought a scrap of paper from his pocket. "Three dressing tables with mirrors and three chairs. One small stand with a phone and phone book on it. Washstand in one corner. Dozen clothes hooks around the walls. On each dressing table is a box of face tissue, a makeup kit, jar of cold cream and a water tumbler. Think of anything else that ought to be in a dressing room?"

"Not offhand," Tony said. "You don't really think I killed Ainslie, do you?"

"Don't know. But you're staying locked up till I find out."

Tony finished his shave and was repacking his suitcase when breakfast arrived. It was restaurant fare, brought in from outside, and it was good, consisting of eggs, bacon, toast and coffee.

"At least you feed well," he said to

Murphy, who still stood outside the cell.

"We can afford to. Don't have many prisoners. That's from the *Missouri Cafe*."

As he ate, Tony kept turning over in his mind the list of items the chief had read off as being in the dressing room, and suddenly the item Mayor Ainslie might have meant occurred to him.

Carefully he set down his coffee cup, looked up at the fat chief and said, "You know, I just figured this whole thing out."

VI

CHIEF MURPHY regarded his prisoner placidly and waited for him to go on.

"I got it figured out," Tony repeated, "provided I can find out one thing." He frowned thoughtfully at his empty coffee cup, then glanced up at the chief. "Stone's body is due on a train at noon. Think you could get an autopsy done right quick?"

"Might. Why?"

"We don't need a complete autopsy. Just want to know whether or not he'd been doped. Tell the doc to look for knockout drops first. Chloral hydrate. If he can't find that, tell him to test for the other hypnotics. Sodium amytal, for instance."

"Sodium what?"

"Amytal. A-m-y-t-a-l."

"Better write it down," the chief said.

For the next three hours Tony lay on his bunk staring at the ceiling. At eleven o'clock, when Chief Murphy returned, he had just fallen asleep. He was awakened by the chief tossing spit balls through the bars at his head. Tony stretched and sat up.

"The doc found the stuff," Murphy announced. "Chloral hydrate. Now tell me how you knew."

"Genius," the little man said modestly. "Do I get out of here now?"

The chief shook his head. "Finding Stone full of knockout drops proves nothing about Ainslie's killing. You're still the only suspect I got, and I'm hanging onto you till I get a better one." He contemplated the prisoner and added

consolingly. "I'm a pretty cooperative guy though. You keep calling the bets and I'll fade them."

"Listen," Tony said. "Let me out of here and I'll crack both cases. How you expect me to do anything from jail?"

"Is a tough problem," Chief Murphy admitted. "Good thing you're a genius so you can figure it out."

The little man stared at his gaoler coldly. "All right," he said finally. "Break them yourself." He lay back on his bunk again and deliberately rolled his face to the wall.

"Want to talk to you, Ransome," said the chief. "Turn over."

Tony continued to ignore him.

"Don't you think it's time we stopped calling this dead kid 'Stone' and started calling him Sam Ransome?"

Slowly Tony rolled over and sat on the edge of the bunk. "You're not as sleepy as you look," he said.

The chief put his hands behind him and teetered back and forth. "Thought it kind of funny Buffalo would send a cop nine-hundred miles to check up on a

dead guy. So when I phoned last night, I asked them. Found out you weren't sent here at all. You're on leave of absence."

"The kid was my brother," Tony said. "Now you know why I was so sure he was framed. Listen, why don't you let me out of here? If I can't crack this case in twenty-four hours, I'll come back voluntarily."

The fat chief shook his head. "Not a chance. If I turned you loose when the whole town thinks you shot the mayor, I might as well resign. The gossip you spread backfired a little. Talk is Ainslie hired Larson killed, you found it out and killed Ainslie instead of just arresting him, as you ought." For a moment he examined the little man expressionlessly. "Matter of fact, not only ain't I going to turn you loose, I'm aiming to stay up all night on guard, case you make a break. This jail ain't as strong as it might be."

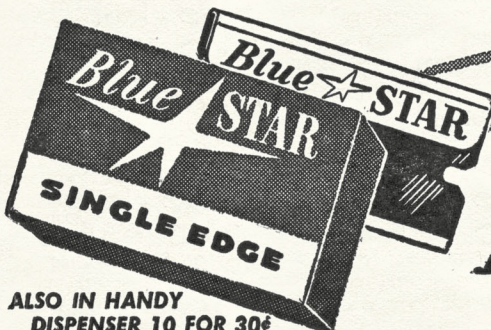
"I won't make a break," Tony said irritably.

[Turn page]

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"Good. Be embarrassing to the town council if you broke out. I been asking for repair money two years now. Keep telling them the jail's falling apart."

Tony gazed at the fat man in astonishment. Was the chief subtly suggesting he would not be opposed if he broke jail, but could not be officially released? The thought was fantastic, but what other interpretation could be put on the man's remarkable comment that the jail was falling apart? Again Tony got the impression that Chief Murphy was on his side, but for some reason must keep up a public front of unrelenting opposition.

HE WAITED until the middle of the afternoon to test the chief's description of the jail. Then he rose from his bunk and wandered to the single window, which contained three verticle bars set in mortar. Since the jail was in the basement, the window was scarcely a foot above ground level.

None of the loiterers on the town square seemed to be looking his way. Tentatively Tony reached out and grasped the center bar. He shook it slightly and a minute shower of crumbling mortar fell from the upper hole in which the bar was imbedded.

Satisfied, he returned to his bunk and took a nap until suppertime. After supper he sat doing nothing until the chief came back at nine, announced, "Lights out," and threw a switch in the hall.

Tony waited fifteen minutes, then went to work on the bar. The only tool he had was his straight razor, which against every principle of penal custody the chief had left in his possession. He ruined the razor, but the mortar holding the bar in place was so dried out and crumbly, it took him only ten minutes to gouge out enough to remove the bar.

Noiselessly setting it on the floor, he grasped the other two bars in either hand, braced his feet against the wall and literally walked up it. He squeezed between the two outer bars feet first, going through easily up to his chest, then turning sidewise to get his shoulders through.

There was no moon, and the old-fashioned shaded street lamps at each corner of the square cast a bright circle of

light directly beneath themselves, but left the rest of the square in pitch darkness. The *Missouri Cafe*, directly across from Tony's cell was the only business establishment still open, apparently, and the diffused light from its show window made for bare visibility on the city hall lawn.

Just as Tony rose to his feet, he made out a portly shadow at one corner of the building. The shadow moved, and a highlight glinted on metal.

"Who's there?" Chief Murphy's voice demanded.

Tony froze against the side of the building. For a long period neither moved, though momentarily Tony expected the chief either to speak again or walk toward him. He was puzzled rather than chagrined by the chief's challenge, for he could not reconcile it with the fat man's seeming suggestion to break jail. And being puzzled, Tony decided to wait to see what would happen.

What did happen outraged him. Metal again glinted in the chief's hand, then his heavy revolver roared. Dirt rained into Tony's face as the bullet slammed the ground almost between his feet.

For an incredulous instant Tony remained frozen, then rage at his own gullibility flowed over him as the thought flashed into his mind that Chief Murphy had deliberately talked him into breaking jail for the purpose of killing him while attempting escape.

Spinning, he headed for the opposite corner of the city hall at a dead run. Another shot crashed, the bullet almost nicking one heel, then he was around the corner and scooting diagonally across the wide lawn. Apparently the chief reached the corner of the building just as Tony reached the other side of the street, for a third bullet whanged into the curbstone and careened upward with a dull whine. Then Tony was plunging between two shops into pitch darkness.

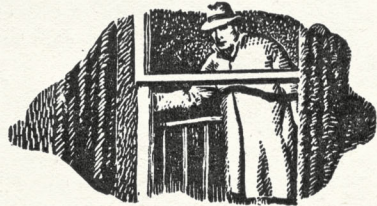
From the roof of the city hall a siren began to scream. For two blocks Tony ran down an alley, then entered a back yard and cut back a half block by climbing fences. This brought him into the parking area behind the building housing the bingo hall and bookshop run by Harry Short.

Tony stopped between two cars parked in the lot to organize his plan of action. He was still both angry and amazed by Chief Murphy's performance, for he believed the man had deliberately maneuvered him into position so that he could be killed safely and legally, which caused Tony to reconsider the entire situation. The most logical assumption to follow was that Chief Murphy wanted him dead because Tony was too close to the real answer to the three killings. And the most logical assumption to follow the original assumption

the hood and finally to the car's turret top. From it he was able to reach the first landing of the fire-escape without pulling down the iron ladder and risking its creak. Swinging himself up, he noiselessly climbed to the second floor.

The window giving out on the fire-escape let into Harry Short's office, and it was locked. Tony wrapped his handkerchief tightly around his fist, struck the upper pane sharply just above the catch and was rewarded by a mild crash of splintered glass. Without pausing to determine if the noise had been heard

CROOKS WILL BE *Crooks*



Generally Hooversville, Pennsylvania, is a peaceful little town where nothing exciting ever happens. But a few years ago a crime wave hit Hooversville which is still talked about in police circles. First a man broke into a house. He was caught and imprisoned in the local jail awaiting sentence. Then someone broke into the jail and robbed the prisoner of \$14.75.

This second thief was likewise caught, but when brought before the judge he couldn't find either his own money or the loot.

Someone had picked his pocket!

was either that Chief Murphy was the killer, or a part of the underworld organization he claimed did not exist in St. Michael.

GLARING headlights flashed at the entrance of the alley, and Tony dropped between the two cars. A patrol car—probably the town's sole one—went by slowly, playing a spotlight over the yards on the other side of the alley, against the rear of the fire hall on this side and into the parking lot. Momentarily it hovered on a fire-escape at the rear of the bingo building.

As soon as the squad car passed, Tony rose and moved to a car parked directly under the fire-escape. Through the rear of the frame building he could hear the drone of a bingo caller's voice announcing numbers.

Stepping on the car's bumper, Tony climbed to the left front fender, then to

below, he reached through to release the catch, raised the lower pane and crawled through.

Quickly he drew the shade behind him, and in pitch blackness felt along the wall for the light switch. He found it near the door.

The room contained very little furniture. Centered against one wall was a scarred desk upon which sat a telephone. The only other furnishings were a filing cabinet, a safe and two straight-backed chairs.

Tony tackled the three drawers of the filing cabinet first.

The top drawer contained file folders which in turn seemed to contain general correspondence. The second held a large ledger which a cursory examination disclosed to be a record of business disbursements. Apparently the record of profits, if any, was kept in the safe.

Quickly Tony thumbed through it,

noting there were four separate categories of disbursements listed, the four being given no designations other than A, B, C and D. A random check of some of the expenses listed showed under A such items as "folding chairs," "ten-thousand markers," "five hundred number cards" and "piano repair," under B such things as "turf news" and "telephone service," under C almost entirely purchases of liquors and beer and under D "three-dozen decks cards," "five-dozen dice" and "five-hundred chips." All four categories contained a number of disbursements to persons listed by name, most of them appearing at regular intervals for the same amount each time. These Tony guessed to be salaries.

Rapidly he glanced over the names listed, hoping to find that of Mayor Ainslie or Chief Ward Murphy, but none were names he had ever seen before. He closed the ledger and went on to the bottom drawer.

The lower drawer disclosed a half-carton of cigarettes, two bottles of Bourbon and a small wooden rack with several round slots in its which held three shot cups and three hi-ball glasses. Tony uncorked and sniffed at each bottle of whisky. Then he poured a drop from each into his palm and tasted it. He frowned, replaced both bottles, lifted out the glass rack and peered into each glass. All seemed to be clean.

Abandoning the filing cabinet, he went to work on the desk. He found what he was looking for at the rear of the second drawer he examined. The small box bore no label, but it contained five papers of crystalline powder.

Shoving the box into his pocket, Tony crossed the room and was just reaching for the light switch when the door suddenly opened.

"I thought I heard breaking glass up here," Harry Short said in a conversational tone over the .45 automatic in his hand.

"I'll have to learn to be more quiet," Tony said politely.

VII

HARRY SHORT moved into the room and circled toward the desk with-

out allowing his gun muzzle to waver from its bead on Tony's nose. Jack, the red-haired cashier, followed the yellow-faced man through the door.

"Have a chair," invited Short, indicating one of the straight-backs with his gun.

Obediently the little man seated himself.

His eyes still on Tony, Short reached down with his left hand and drew all the way open the drawer in which Tony had found the box of powders. Momentarily he dropped his eyes to it, immediately raised them again and pushed the drawer shut. He smiled slightly.

"Heard they had an autopsy on that bandit," he said.

Tony said, "You must have an in with the police."

The bookmaker raised one eyebrow. "A councilman can find out most everything, if he goes to the bother." His pleasant expression faded and his voice became ominous. "Hand it over."

"What?" Tony asked, then decided pretended ignorance would only delay the inevitable, and started to reach for his pocket.

"The box, Shorty," Harry said.

The little man's movement toward his pocket stopped and his face flushed at the nickname. "Come and get it, you yellow-faced ape."

The red-headed Jack casually stepped behind Tony's chair. The little man's head turned to follow him warily, then snapped back toward Short when the bookmaker rasped, "Eyes front, or I'll blow your head off."

At the same moment a gun barrel crashed down on Tony's head. . . .

A surging, then diminishing roar, such as the breaking of surf against a cliff, awakened Tony. For nearly a minute he lay in throbbing pain, dully trying to figure out how the ocean could have moved itself to southern Missouri. Then he realized the noise was all within his head. He waited with closed eyes until the pain subsided to a persistent ache, then opened them to equal darkness.

He lay on the rear floor of a speeding sedan, he discovered, and his hands were bound behind him so tightly they were numb to the shoulders. His legs were

tied together both at the ankles and knees, but not so tightly that circulation was stopped. His forehead pressed against someone's foot, and the person's other foot casually rested on his shoulder.

"This is about far enough," said the owner of the feet. Tony recognized the voice as that of the yellow-faced book-maker.

Obediently the car came to a halt. The front door on the driver's side opened, then slammed shut again. At the same time Harry Short pushed open the rear door on the other side. For a moment his full weight rested on Tony's shoulder as he stepped from the car, and the little man had to clench his teeth to prevent a groan of pain.

A moment later he was unceremoniously dragged from the car and dumped on the ground. Giving no indication of consciousness, Tony allowed his eyes barely to slit open. A half moon had now risen, and by its subdued light the bound man made out that they were parked on a graveled road running parallel to a railroad track. In the distance he heard the slow whistle of a freight.

Between the tracks and the road was a shallow ditch choked with weeds and small bushes, some of the bushes being nearly shoulder high.

"All right, snap it up," Harry Short ordered his companion roughly.

He stooped to grasp Tony's shoulders as the driver caught him beneath the knees. Like a sack of grain the two carried the little man into the ditch, dropping him between two bushes.

The freight's whistle sounded again, clearer this time, but still a mile or two away. Harry Short knelt over the bound man, unexpectedly flashing a light into his eyes.

Instead of snapping shut his barely opened lids, Tony rolled his eyeballs upward so that only the whites showed. A palm slapped him solidly across the mouth. He let his head roll loosely with the slap, which faced it away from the light and allowed him unnoticeably to close his eyes.

FINGERS groped for his throat, pinched together a bit of the tender

[Turn page]

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flesh beneath his chin and squeezed until tears of pain gathered beneath the little man's closed lids. But he managed to keep his face vacant of expression and his body limp.

"Still out like a swatted fly," Harry Short decided, rising to his feet. "Get to work on his legs and I'll take his hands."

"Wouldn't it be safer to leave him tied?" the dubious voice of cashier Jack inquired.

"How the devil would you explain it as an accident with ropes around him?" Short asked. "Snap it up. If we miss this freight, we got a two-hour wait till the next."

Tony felt hands fumbling at his bonds, and a minute later he was free. But he might as well have remained bound insofar as use of his arms was concerned, for the tight cords had stopped circulation and both arms were asleep. Attempting to flex his muscles, the little man discovered neither arm would respond to his will.

Although his legs tingled, Tony learned both were in working order by wriggling his toes within his shoes.

The train whistle blew a third time, seeming only hundreds of yards away, and now the roar of wheels and the rumbling rattle of freight cars could be heard. Then the track in front of them was suddenly bathed with light.

Above the growing noise Harry Short shouted to his companion, "Keep down till the engine is past, so they don't see us in the headlight!"

With a hiss of escaping steam the locomotive swished past, dragging behind it a long row of box cars which seemed as though it would never end.

"Now!" the bookmaker yelled, slipping his hands under Tony's shoulders and pulling him half erect.

Tony felt his arms flop limply, tried to propel some power into them by force of will, then gave up the struggle as hopeless. His feet were grasped by the red-headed Jack and he was lifted bodily.

"Let him fly on three!" Short yelled above the train roar. "And time it right, so he goes clear under."

Together they swung his limp body forward slightly. "One!" Short counted.

They swung Tony back, and as he reached the peak of the back swing, the bookmaker said, "Two!"

At the same instant Tony jerked both knees to his chest, pulling the red-head off balance, snapped his legs straight again and felt Jack release them as though propelled from a catapult.

There was one wild scream which cut off suddenly at a sickening crunch.

Beside thrusting Jack beneath the train, Tony's kick expended part of its force in the opposite direction, causing Harry Short to stagger back and sit down with a crash. Immediately he sprang to his feet again and threw himself at Tony.

With his arms flopping uselessly at his sides, Tony rolled to his back, again brought both feet to his chest and kicked the larger man solidly in the stomach.

Short staggered backward, teetered on one foot inches from the speeding box cars, and for a horrified moment gyroscoped his arms in an attempt to keep from falling beneath the wheels. He fell to one elbow, at the last instant twisting from beneath the wheels, and started to scramble to safety on hands and knees.

But his moment of terrified balancing had allowed Tony to leap to his feet. Aiming deliberately, the little man swung his right leg back and kicked the scrambling bookmaker solidly on the jaw.

It took Tony ten minutes to restore circulation to his dead arms, and another ten to tie his unconscious opponent and drag him to the car. The box of pills he found in Short's coat pocket, and the automatic in a holster under his arm. He relieved the man of both. Half lifting and half heaving, he managed to get the big man on the car's rear floor. Then he turned the car and drove back to town, the bookmaker tied and unconscious in the back seat.

They had been nearly ten miles out, Tony discovered, and the city hall clock struck midnight as he parked on the town square. The only lights in the city hall were in the basement, on the side containing the jail and police headquarters. Over the basement entrance to police headquarters a small green light was burning.

QUIETLY Tony moved to a lighted window and peered into the main office. A single uniformed policeman slept in a chair with his feet elevated to a desk. Beyond him, down a hall, the little man could see the open door of the chief's office, and a light burned within it.

Without sound the little man tiptoed under the green light, past the sleeping policeman and down the hall. Next to the open door of the chief's office he paused, drew the automatic he had taken from Harry Short and ruefully felt the twin bumps on his head. Then he took a deep breath and entered the office.

Chief Ward Murphy looked up calmly from the fiction magazine he had been reading.

"Howdy," he said. "Been waiting up for you."

The little man circled to a chair against one wall, seated himself, thrust the automatic in his coat pocket, but kept it aimed at the chief through the cloth.

"As I remember," he said tightly, "you told me your town council consisted of seven members."

The chief nodded, his face expressionless.

"One of them—Harry Short—is tied up in the back seat of a car outside. Get on the phone and call a special meeting of the rest of them for right now. We'll hold it here."

"Why?" the fat man asked.

"Two reasons," Tony told him. "The first is that I don't trust the police chief and want to break this case to the council. The second is that if you don't start calling, I'll blow you apart."

The fat chief allowed his eyebrows to raise. Then he shrugged, picked up the phone and after a moment said, "Hello, operator. Which one is this?"

After a pause he said, "Oh . . . Jane. Listen Jane, you know who the council members are, don't you? I want a special meeting of them in my office right now . . . Yeah, fast as they can get here . . . Never mind Harry Short. He's already here."

He cradled the phone, looked up at Tony and asked, "Satisfied?"

"Not quite," the little man said. "Now get hold of the three witnesses to the *Missouri Cafe* robbery and get them over here."

The chief looked at him in surprise. "The *Missouri's* been closed over an hour," he objected, "and I don't think either waitress or Henry, the cook, have phones."

"Send the cop sleeping in the front office," Tony said. Then added in a warning tone, "One attempt to signal him you're covered, and you'll get a bullet in the stomach. That's a target I could hardly miss."

Without taking his eyes from Tony, the chief raised his voice and bellowed, "Johnson!"

There was the sound of feet hitting the floor with a bang, and a moment later the uniformed cop came running into the room. He halted when he saw Tony, and his eyes widened. But he could not see the gun which was hidden from him.

"Sergeant Ransome came back of his own free will," the chief explained mildly. "Everything's under control. Run over to Sadie's Rooming House and bring back Janet and Gert, the two waitresses from the *Missouri Cafe*. Don't know their last names. Then pick up Henry, the cook. He sleeps back of the restaurant, I think."

Johnson repeated the instructions, nodded his head twice and left the room. For nearly a minute after his departure, Tony and Chief Murphy silently examined each other.

Finally the chief spoke. "Mind explaining the reason for the gun while we wait?"

"Not at all. I don't know how you fit in this, but you fit somewhere, or you wouldn't have needled me into a jail break so you could kill me and still be able to explain it."

The fat man nodded his head slowly. "Thought that might be what was eating you. Thought I tried to kill you, huh?"

"What's your story?" the little man asked coldly.

Leaning back in his swivel chair, the chief clasped hands across his stomach. "Got tired of waiting for you to move. Decided to light a fire under you." He

paused, then added, "Also wanted to show the general public their chief of police was on the ball, even though the town council is too stingy to give us a decent jail."

"Be a nice story if you hadn't missed so close," Tony said, his tone still cold.

The chief's voice took on a faintly injured tone, "I guess you didn't know," he said, "that I'm the state champ pistol shot."

VIII

FOR nearly another minute the little man did not say anything. Eventually he said, "That makes the story a little better. I might even believe it if you can explain why you've been sitting on the fence in this investigation and letting me do all the work."

"Figured you were a smart feller and could work it out alone." The chief's eyes half closed, and he asked, "You ever live in a small town?"

"No," Tony admitted.

"If you had, you'd realize a chief of police can't push prominent citizens around on mere suspicion. Look at the suspects you picked." One-by-one he ticked them off on his fingers. "The mayor, three members of the town council and the widow of the late chairman of the Citizens' Committee. Even if one was guilty, the other four would hate my guts before I got through. I knew something was phony about that stick-up, but what could I do?"

The little man frowned at him. "Suppose I hadn't dropped around? Were you just going to let somebody get away with murder?"

"But you dropped around," the chief said, undisturbed. . . .

It was a large gathering to be crowded into the small room Chief Murphy called his office. On folding chairs facing the chief's desk in a semi-circle sat George Erickson, Art Jason and the four other councilmen. Harry Short, handcuffed and with his jaw twice its normal size, sat in one corner under the watchful eye of the policeman Johnson. The two waitresses, Janet and Gert, and the cook, Henry, sat along the opposite wall. Behind the desk the chief comfortably hunched, while Tony sat to the

right of the desk, facing the audience.

Chief Murphy said to the councilmen, "Sorry to call you out so late, but Sergeant Ransome here claims he's got the *Missouri Cafe* robbery and the mayor's murder all solved. He don't quite trust the police department, so wants to present his evidence to the council." He turned to Tony. "You're running the performance, Ransome. I'll cut in if I have anything to say."

The little man ran his eyes about the circle, but aside from the open-mouthed awe of Janet and Gert, he detected no emotion stronger than rapt attention.

"To start off I better explain that the hobo you knew as Sam Stone was actually a professional magazine article writer named Sam Ransome. He was my kid brother."

He paused long enough to stare broodingly around the circle again. "Larson's murderer had a nice plan to knock Larson off and put the blame on a hobo nobody would bother to check up on. Probably would have worked if he'd picked a real hobo, but he had the bad luck to pick a hobo in disguise who had a cop brother."

Reaching in his pocket, Tony drew out the box of powders. "This I found in Harry Short's desk drawer. This morning an autopsy was performed on my brother and he was found full of chloral hydrate . . . In commoner language, he'd been slipped a Mickey Finn. I think an analysis of the contents of this box will show it matches the dope in my brother's stomach." He tossed the box to the chief. "Better mark it as evidence."

"The next bit of evidence is not so definite," Tony went on. "It's more a matter of reasoning. Just before he was killed, Mayor Ainslie phoned me that he had discovered something missing from the men's dressing room at the *Bijou*, and the missing item put an entirely different construction on the Larson killing. A check of the room by a cleaning woman who knew every item in it, disclosed that absolutely nothing was gone. Our first assumption was that the cleaning woman had forgotten some item, but a better explanation was that when she checked, the item had been returned. As a matter of fact, the murderer was

in the act of returning it when he overheard Mayor Ainslie's phone conversation, realized he had figured out how Larson's murder was accomplished, and killed the mayor to shut him up.

"There were so few items in the dressing room, by checking the list of contents you can almost immediately guess which item had been stolen and later returned." From memory Tony announced the items the Chief had read from his list. "Obviously what Ainslie found missing was one of the makeup kits," he concluded.

"What happened was this: The murderer kidnaped Sam—I'll explain how in a minute—put on Sam's clothes, used the makeup kit he swiped from the theatre to give himself a putty broken nose and a scar through one eyebrow, covered the lower part of his face with a handkerchief and stuck up the restaurant. After killing Larson, he put the clothes back on Sam's unconscious body, stuck the gun and money in his pocket, took him a mile out of town and threw him feet first under a freight train."

RANSOME paused for a moment before continuing his explanation.

"Everything went as the murderer planned until two things happened," he said. "First the rumor got around that some local person had hired the hobo to kill Larson, and then the mayor discovered the makeup kit missing and did a bit of brilliant deduction. Unfortunately for Mayor Ainslie he did his deducting while the murderer was listening, and got himself killed for his trouble. Just to round things out neatly, the

person who killed Ainslie decided to frame me for it, thereby knocking off two birds with one stone.

"If you've all followed me so far, you'll realize the murderer has to be someone about Sam's build." Briefly Tony's eyes flicked over George Erickson, Art Jacobs and Harry Short. "Of the four main suspects, that lets out only Mrs. Larson as the murderer, and is the reason she wasn't required to be here tonight."

No one said anything, and Tony went on softly. "Some of you people got pretty mad when I started gossip circulating all over town, and that's what gave me my first real lead. Five people were being publicly slandered, but only three called to see me. An innocent person's reaction when accused of a crime is to yell his head off, which is exactly what Mayor Ainslie, Mrs. Larson and Erickson did. The only two who failed to show up were Harry Short—and Art Jason!"

Harry Short licked his lips and remained silent.

"If that's an accusation," Jason broke in, "you better be able to prove it."

"Intend to," Tony informed him agreeably. "I've already tied Harry Short into this, because he tried to kill me tonight. You worked it in conjunction with Harry, but you did the actual killing of Ransome, and probably of Ainslie. Short's job was to dispose of the hobo-bandit.

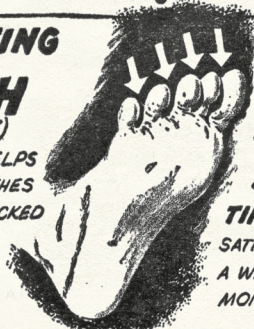
"I looked over a disbursement ledger in Short's office earlier tonight and found something interesting. Four cate-

[Turn page]

AMAZING THING! *By Cooper*

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gories of business disbursements are included in the same book. None are designated, but a study of the expenditures indicates the four businesses involved are a bingo game, a bookshop, a tavern and a casino. They wouldn't all be in the same account book unless they were all under the same control. You and Harry Short are secretly partners."

Under his clipped mustache, the bearded man's lips curled ironically. "Is partnership a crime?"

"Partnership in murder," Tony assured him. "You're finished, Jason. I even know how you managed to kidnap Sam in broad daylight."

The little man's eyes were cold as he went on. "Probably you'd had details of the plan worked out for some time and were just waiting for a hobo or tramp of the right size to come along. Nearly every visitor to town gets to the *Blue Goose* eventually, so you didn't even have to go looking. And the plan was beautifully simple. You merely gave the guy you thought was a hobo a dollar to deliver a note for you to Harry Short at the bookshop. The note was Harry's signal to offer the hobo a drink in the privacy of his office, and the drink was full of knockout drops."

"It's not true!" the yellow-faced bookmaker in the corner said desperately. "Don't be dragging me into this!"

"Shut up!" Art Jason snapped at him. His face was pale, but his smile remained ironic. "You're a wonderful story teller, Ransome, but so far you haven't mentioned a shred of evidence aside from that box, whose contents haven't even been analyzed yet."

"I will," Tony reassured him. "That's why the robbery witnesses are here."

He turned toward the cook and two waitresses. "I want you three to think back to the robbery. Did all of you notice the gun closely?"

Janet said, "Notice it! I hardly took my eyes off it."

"Yeah," Gert put in. "It was a black automatic. A great big—"

"Now I want you to concentrate," Tony interrupted. "If your attention was fixed on the gun, you must have noticed the hand holding it too. Remember anything peculiar about that hand?"

ALL three looked blank. Then Henry the cook's eyes strayed toward Art Jason's right hand. Understanding blossomed on his face, and he said quickly, "If you mean Mr. Jason's diamond ring, the bandit wasn't wearing it."

For an instant Tony felt his whole case crumbling about him, but then Janet spoke.

"He wasn't wearing a ring," she said slowly. "But I remember now there was a white circle on his trigger finger."

"Why sure," Gert chimed in immediately. "I remember that too."

Henry snapped his fingers. "Of course. Gee, I'm dumb. I can even remember wondering what caused it, in spite of being so scared. It was the mark where a ring had been worn."

"There you are gentlemen," Tony said. "All tied—"

Then he grabbed at the automatic in his side pocket and drew himself sideways as the glittering stone on the bearded man's forefinger formed a gleaming arc toward his armpit. Tony's gun became entangled in the cloth, and as he hit the floor and enormous explosion mushroomed in the small room. The little man's body involuntarily flinched, but he rolled free.

On hands and knees he looked up to see Art Jason slowly lean backward, an automatic dangling limply from one hand, then topple to the floor like a falling timber. Tony thrust his gaze upward toward the chief in time to see a final whisp of smoke curl from his big revolver. The handcuffed Harry Short crouched half out of his chair, as though wondering which way to run.

"You," Chief Murphy said to him affably, "had better sit down and relax."

—A GREAT MYSTERY NOVEL—

THE WHITE PRIORY MURDERS

By CARTER DICKSON

in the July

POPULAR DETECTIVE

Now on Sale—25c at All Stands!

Slightly **ILLEGAL**

by Harold Helfer

IF YOU GET SENTENCED to jail in Sydney, Nova Scotia, you'll have to wait to be admitted. The jail accommodates only 85 and there are 65 on the waiting list.

AFTER A GIRL called Painesville, O., police headquarters and tearfully complained that her father was beating her up, an officer filed this report: "Daughter, 15 years old, stayed out until 3 A. M. Got paddled. Needed it."

PATROLMAN HAROLD MUIR turned his car around as fast as he could near Casper, Wyo., when he saw a woman hitch-hiker begin to do a strip tease. But before he could return to the engrossing scene, a motorist had picked the lady up, no clothes and all.

OFFICER PHILIP KOLHOFF'S face was a bit on the pink side when he reported to his superiors in Detroit that a pickpocket had stolen his gun.

IN SOUTH BEND, IND., policemen had to give chase for several blocks before they finally caught an attractive, 25-year-old, fast-stepping woman charged with shoplifting. Her loot—a jar of pickled pigs' feet.

IN SHANGHAI, police discovered that the gun of the notorious holdup man they arrested was made out of rice.

IN CALIFORNIA, the inmate of a woman's prison expressed delight that her son had drawn ten years in the federal pen for robbing a bank. "Thank goodness," she sighed, "now he can't get into any more trouble before I get out. You know how we mothers worry."

SOME THIEVES steal everything but the kitchen sink, but a thief who broke into the home of Mrs. J. H. Amos in Richmond, Va., turned out to be different. The only thing he took was the kitchen sink.



AFTER THIEVES had broken into his Los Angeles filling station twice within the same week, Sam Schulman had this sign on his window: "Come on in. Help yourself." And a spotlight played on his new safe, cemented into the floor.

SOMETHING BESIDES SOULS was lifted when Billy Graham, noted evangelist, held his revival meetings at Portsmouth, N. H. Pickpockets netted nearly \$175.

AWAITING TRIAL as a burglar in Mt. Holly, N. J., a prisoner broke jail. He fled to the home of his estranged wife, who met him at the door and told him coldly, "Get lost, you." He sought shelter in a trailer, but a woman started screaming. He went to the home of a former employer and was refused food. Disgusted with the free life, he finally trooped himself back to jail.

IN CLEVELAND, 100 prisoners staged a sit-down strike because officials took the radios out of their cells.

A VERY INOPPORTUNE MOMENT caused the undoing of a St. Louis barber, who took a \$2 horse race bet. The tonsorialist was also giving a man a haircut at the time and, after he had finished trimming this patron's hair, the patron dusted himself off—then carted the barber off to headquarters with him. The man in the barber's chair was Ernest Jablon, a detective.

A DETROIT PLUMBER who stole a bathtub from a condemned house might have got away with it except for one thing—he got a little absent-minded. He forgot to turn off the water. Consequently, while he was engaged in dragging it out, water from the pipes seeped through the floor and onto some people living in the room below, who didn't like it one bit. Police nabbed the plumber and the bathtub at the front porch.

RECIPE FOR HOMICIDE:

Take one lovely model with

few clothes, one pot of money, one man—

AND



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HERE COMES *Murder*

The young lady's lack of attire has no relation to the chills in this novel
by G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

ROCK ENDERS went into a two-by-four basement cafe known as the Alps, for reasons of his own. The place had mountain murals, a St. Bernard dog complete with flask, and a music box that was more juke than Swiss. The bar special was something called "Suicide Cocktail," and the morning after you knew why.

Rock Enders sat down opposite a man named Jantzen, a lawyer by profession, a shyster by inclination, and Alpinist by choice. Jantzen was tall and stooped. He had pale hair like baby fuzz, hazy blue eyes, and a nose that gave him trouble all through his soup. He had a slight impediment in his speech which

made "ch" sounds out of sounds that were normally "sh." Thus, when Rock asked Jantzen if he had sprung any axe murderers lately, Jantzen returned with this:

"Have you caught any, gumchew?"

Gumchew for gumshoe—that irritated Rock no end, that and the fact that he was still on a wild goose chase that had already wrecked his arches and his morale.

The juke box was grinding out *Blues in the Night*. It had been doing just that for thirty-odd minutes.

"It's killing me," Rock moaned. "Not so much the music as the monotony. You think there's something wrong with



the works of that blasted juke?"

Jantzen, chewing open-mouthed, shook his head. "It's the little chrimp back of you."

"Chrimp?" Rock Ender's broad brow pleaded. Then he twisted his head around and understood that Jantzen meant shrimp.

THE little man sat in the shadow of a painted alp, and he was in mourning. Or maybe the shiny black suit was the only one he had. Anyway, his pale yellow mustache drooped as sadly as crepe from a door. On the table in front of him were eight empty glasses.

"Is it Suicide cocktails or an ingrown romance?"

"Maybe from both," the shyster said. "He's an artist. Name of Ferd Crewer. After a while, you get the impression he likes that music. As soon as the record is played off, he feeds the box another nickel. You watch, Rock. He'll beat everybody to the box as soon as the record is finished."

"Not this time," Rock said grimly.

Jantzen's eyes blinked at his table companion's face. "What's the matter with you, gumchew?"

"It's my feet," Rock Enders said. "Some guy came here from the Coast and hired me to look for a brunette. It's about as definite as that. No picture of her, no description. The gal just had dark-complexioned parents. And she's worth three-quarters of a million on the hoof."

"Name of?" Jantzen asked.

"Olive Selina English," Rock said.

Jantzen shook his head.

Blues in the Night came to an end. Rock Enders slammed knife and fork down onto his plate with a terrific clatter, sprang out of his chair, twisted, dived for the juke.

"No you don't!"

He caught Mr. Ferd Crewer just as the little artist was about to slot another nickel. Mr. Ferd Crewer looked up at him with yellowish eyes.

"But I like that piece," he said deliberately, as though the Suicide cocktails were beginning to fuzz his tongue.

"So did I until you started to wear grooves in my ear drums with it," Rock said.

Crewer tried to sneak in his nickel surreptitiously. The result was a brief scuffle in which the nickel hit the floor and rolled. Then Crewer hit Rock in the middle with everything he had, which included about a hundred and eight pounds plus the weight of the Suicide cocktails. The cocktails must have represented the difference between a love-tap and a painful poke, because Rock had never been hurt by anything human and that small.

He got hold of Crewer under the armpits, lifted him to tiptoe, and shook him. Then he set him down flatfooted.

"Now!" he said.

Crewer was a little dazed. He looked at Rock Enders and then at the waiters and patrons who had gathered around.

"All right," he said meekly, and headed back to his table. His head hung forward on his chest. Jantzen, with a napkin tucked under his chin, put a hand on Rock's big shoulder.

"He could sue you if he wanted to, Rock."

"You don't need to put the idea into his head," Rock said. Then he went over to the little artist's table and sat down opposite him. He looked at the ring of empty glasses and the one that was only part empty.

"You'll have a head as big as a balloon tomorrow," he warned gravely. "You may even dunk it in cold water and forget to take it out."

"That would be wonderful," Ferd Crewer said sadly. "Because did you know a woman is two faced? A worrisome thing—"

"I know," Rock said hastily. "'My mammy done tol' me.' So it's a woman, is it? She leave you flat?"

"She did," the artist said. "But don't get me wrong, Mister. I wasn't in love with her. She was my model. A business proposition, see."

ROCK was interested. This brunette he was looking for—this Olive Selina English—had invaded the big town from the sticks. Pretty girls who did usually either wanted to get on the stage or be models.

"I'm looking for a girl myself. A brunette—"

"They're the ones," Crewer said. "For

a lifetime, I've had to paint blondes, why? Because so many magazines have dark covers, and blondes look better on dark covers. And along comes an assignment on a new mag with a yellow cover. You got any faint idea, Mr.—er—

"Just call me Rock."

"You got any idea, Rock, what a yellow cover does to a blonde? It swallows her. So now I can paint brunettes. I get one cover done and am ready to start on the next, and what happens?"

"The girl quits."

"She does. Olive leaves me flat."

Rock opened his mouth and took the air, such as it was. His vague tip was working out.

"Olive who?" he asked hopefully.

Mr. Crewer batted his yellowish eyes. "Just Olive. But you wouldn't have to learn to like her. Hair black as night—straight—no bloody permanent. Maybe soft wave. Nature's own gift, an inspiration. She was magnificent. Without her, I shall take to sign lettering."

Rock sighed. "Her name wasn't Olive Selina English, was it?"

Crewer shrugged. "What's in a name?"

"Three-quarters of a million bucks in this case," Rock said. He picked up Crewer's check, took hold of the little artist's arm. "Let's go. I want to see that picture of your Olive."

"But," Crewer protested faintly, "I pledged myself to go stinko."

"Those Suicide cocktails will sneak up behind you in an hour or so, and you'll be stinko all right," Rock promised. "I said let's go."

He hauled Crewer to his own table to get his check. Jantzen looked at him over a coffee mug.

"Churely you're going to finish your food, with prices like they are," the lawyer said.

Rock shook his head. He picked up his check and headed for the cashier's cage with Crewer in tow.

The little artist's studio flat was on the top floor of a building not far away. It was a six-flight climb, and Rock Enders' feet reminded him that he had probably climbed eight hundred and sixty-nine thousand steps today, visiting small time theatrical booking agents

in his vain attempt to get some sort of a line on this Olive English. It would be ironical if this final vague agency clue were to work out not four blocks from his own office.

In a small untidy room beneath a skylight, Ferd Crewer turned on a light.

"For years," he was saying, "I have been painting blondes for covers. Blondes with beautiful legs and curly hair. Blondes getting choked to death. Blondes with guns in their lovely hands. Blondes screaming. Blondes about to be dipped in boiling oil. Comes now a chance to paint a brunette on a yellow cover, and what happens?"

"Where is she?" Rock asked. "I mean, where's the picture that you painted?"

Crewer crossed the room, picked up a canvas on a frame stretcher, its front toward the wall. He averted his gaze as he turned it around.

"Even with my eyes closed, I can see her." He turned the picture toward Rock.

"I'm hanged if I can! Where's her face?"

CREWER looked upon his masterpiece—what was left of it—and was shocked beyond words. The picture was that of a beautiful proportioned female figure only partially concealed by a grape-leaf bra and G-string. She held a blood-dripping knife in one hand. But somebody had cut a rough circle out of the canvas about six inches in diameter right where the lady's head should have been.

"The—the vandal!" Ferd Crewer gasped. "The ruthless, rapacious vandal! Who would want to mutilate a thing of beauty like that?"

Rock Enders thought that somebody who wouldn't want the girl's picture distributed nationally would do a thing just like that—somebody who didn't want Olive or any trace of Olive found. The longer he looked at the hole in the canvas the more he realized he must be on the right track. He could think of more than a few reasons why some people might want an unsuspecting Cinderella out of the way.

He took hold of the distracted artist and shook the little man again. "Look here, haven't you got a preliminary

sketch or something lying around anywhere?"

The little man scowled and worried his mustache. "I may have," he said. "It's just possible that I have something in the next room."

Crewer crossed to a door, opened it. "Here," he said, "is where I keep my—my—"

The artist staggered a little, and for a moment Rock Enders thought the Suicide cocktails had sapped him. He stepped forward to catch the little man in case he decided to pass out, and so was able to see into the next room.

There was a man lying on the floor, his legs spread wide. He was a chunky person with black hair going gray. He wore a light tan suit, but the front of the coat was stained dark brown in spots—in the very worst spots.

Crewer, his yellowish eyes goggling, pointed a quivering forefinger.

"Who is it, Rock? How'd he get in here?"

Rock didn't answer. He pulled Crewer to one side, went into the room on tiptoe. Not that the man on the floor was apt to complain about noise. Somebody had stuck an ordinary kitchen knife into his chest. The state of the bedroom, with its rumpled rugs and overturned table and chair, indicated that this had not been accomplished without a struggle.

As soon as he set eyes on the man, Rock thought the chunky figure familiar. Standing in front of the body, he looked at the blunt-featured face, pale and gray in death. The man was Wallace Rainer, a crack private detective with a reputation for thorough and methodical investigating.

Rock knelt carefully, avoiding blood that had spilled to the floor. He touched one of Rainer's hands and found it cool. Then he reached inside the man's unbuttoned suit coat, explored the inner pocket and the gun sling. The holster was empty. In the pocket was a wallet.

"Just to think," Crewer moaned, "that yesterday everything seemed so wonderful. The sun so bright—"

"Shut up!" Rock said tensely. His private opinion of Crewer was that the little artist was half baked. Probably all artists were screwy and apt to blow

their tops under conditions like this.

"But everything was all right," Crewer sobbed. "I cinched my new assignment. They liked my painting of Olive. And then, here comes—"

"And here comes murder," Rock concluded, "sort of spoiling your evening."

"Murder?" the artist gasped. "You are sure of that?"

"Well," Rock said dryly, "that piece of metal sticking out of his chest sure isn't the iron in his blood. Of course he was murdered. It's too bad for you and me because we both had plans which will be upset by this. But think of the poor guy on the floor. Maybe he had plans too. I know damned well he had a nice wife and two kids."

II

ROCK ENDERS looked at the dead man's wallet. He discovered something which had evidently escaped the murderer. Protected by a flap of leather, was a small memorandum pad. On this, Wallace Rainer had taken detailed notes, recording times and places and the names of people—information which he would have used for a report to a client.

The following from Rainer's notes seemed important to Rock:

Eleven A.M. Learned O. E. employed as model by Ferd Crewer.

Eleven-thirty. Found Crewer's studio. F.C. not in.

Six P.M. Still watching F.C.'s place.

Six-twelve. Vivian turns up. Why???

This was the last entry and probably the most important. Rock looked up from the pad.

"Who's Vivian?" he asked. "Know anyone by that name, Crewer?"

"No. And I think you ought to call the police. And maybe I'd better have a lawyer. That's it. I'd better call Jantzen."

"What time did you go to the Alps tonight?"

"I was there from half-past five on. I haven't been here all day, but try and tell the cops that."

"You don't have to. You got an alibi a foot long. This guy was alive and kicking, at least until twelve minutes

past six. You're out of the picture. Where would I find a telephone?"

Before Crewer could answer, somebody knocked at the front door of the flat. The little artist's eyes shuttled toward the door and then back toward the body of Rainer as though he were trying to choose between disagreeable alternatives.

Rock didn't wait for him to make up his mind. He went into the studio living room and opened the door. Outside was a good-looking young man with an aggressive chin and blowtorch flame in his blue eyes. He took one look at Rock Enders, took a single pace forward and swung a big right fist in a haymaker that would have been deadly except for the fact that Rock could see it coming a mile away.

Rock Enders back-stepped to ride the punch, tripped over a stool that was part of the floor litter, and sat down hard. The young man in the door stood with legs wide and fists clenched. He was one of those hit-first-ask-afterwards guys.

"What've you done with her, blast you?" he asked. "Where are you keeping her?"

Rock Enders got to his feet. His short left jab was unannounced. It hammered into the young man's chest and gave him a ride out into the hall.

"Two can play that game, Mister, but it's pretty silly. Who is it I'm supposed to be keeping somewhere?"

The young man leaned against the wall of the hall for a moment, getting his wind. "You know who I'm talking about—Olive English. She's disappeared. She and her roommate have both disappeared. You know something about this, Crewer. I know artists."

Rock Enders grinned widely. "You just think you do, buddy. Because I'm no artist, and I'm not Crewer. "You found out Olive English was working as Crewer's model, and you came up here seeing red and not much else. The only thing I ever painted would be a black eye on some punk like you. I'm just as anxious to find Olive English as you are, but I don't think I'll find her by going around punching people."

The young man flushed. "I guess I was hasty."

"You were. What's your name, and what's Olive English to you?"

"I'm Jack McGruder," the young man said, "and I had hopes that Olive would marry me before I go into the army."

"Maybe she will yet," Rock said. "Maybe she will. You know anybody by the name of Vivian who might in any way be connected with Olive English?"

Jack McGruder shook his handsome head. "But I've only known Miss English a couple of weeks. She came here from some small town in the West. She might have a dozen friends named Vivian, and I wouldn't know about it."

THERE wasn't anything Rock could do except bring Jack McGruder in and introduce him to Ferd Crewer.

"But keep those mitts of yours in your pockets, McGruder," he warned, "because Ferd Crewer doesn't know where Olive is either."

After that, it was the police. The medical examiner and the boys from Homicide took everything in their stride. Rock Enders showed them the memorandum pad he had taken from the body of Wallace Rainer, took his chiding like a man. Rock, Crewer and McGruder all came in for their turn on the grill, and as far as Rock could see practically nothing was accomplished except that the medical examiner named six-thirty as the approximate time of death.

Everybody agreed that it looked pretty bad for Vivian, the unknown quantity who, according to Rainer's notes, had entered the Crewer studio at twelve minutes after six.

Rock, McGruder and Crewer were warned not to leave town, but the police failed to turn up anything definite against them. About an hour later, the Homicide detail tramped out as noisily as it had arrived.

Rock sat down in a chair in the studio and puffed thoughtfully at a cigar. His hard, coarse-featured face was a map of the state of perplexity.

"Seems to me," he said to McGruder and Crewer at some length, "the smart thing for you guys to do would be to change your addresses for the time be-

ing. It's like this—whoever came here this evening cut Olive's face out of that picture Ferd Crewer painted. Which means that people who can identify Olive aren't popular with the killer. That would include you fellahs."

"You think," McGruder asked, "that this Wallace Rainer could have identified Olive?"

"He could if he saw my painting before that vandal mutilated it," Crewer said. "It was a splendid likeness."

"That's what I was thinking," Rock said. "Wallace Rainer found the killer about to mutilate the picture. He paid for that with his life. So I think you two guys better hole up until this blows over."

Crewer shuddered. "I wish the police had arrested me. I'd rather be in jail than murdered."

"I'm not holing up," McGruder said. "I want to find Olive."

Rock promised that he would see Crewer safely to a nearby hotel where he could hide until the affair blew over, and the three men left Crewer's studio to walk around to Rock's office, where the private dick had left his car.

The office was on a side street in the low-rental district. The street was narrow, nearly deserted and not too well lighted. As Rock was unlocking the door of his own sedan, he heard the grind of a car started down the street half a block away. A black coupe rocketed away from the curb in second gear, swung over the left of the middle of the street. Light from a distant street lamp caught the glint of gun steel as a man stepped out of the coupe.

Rock started to tell Crewer and McGruder to drop, but the gun from the man by the coupe talked before he did. Rock's left fist smashed Ferd Crewer behind the ear. The artist went flat on his face against the concrete. Rock's own automatic cleared his shoulder holster.

His big body went into a squat on the sidewalk. Lead from the killer buzzed past him, smashed into the building at Rock's back. Rock retaliated with a couple of shots at the waiting coupe. And then the man got back into the car and drove around the corner on two wheels, and Rock stood up.

Jack McGruder was standing bolt upright on the sidewalk, hands at his sides. "Never touched me," he said scornfully.

"No fault of yours, you big sap," Rock said.

Then he went over to see how Ferd Crewer had made out. The little artist was clinging to the edge of the curb as though the sidewalk were a blanket and he was trying to pull it up over his head.

"You all in one piece, Crewer?" Rock asked, a gentle quality creeping into his usually gruff voice.

"I—think so," the artist stammered. "Yes, I think I'm all right."

Rock picked the little man up. "You guys are bullet bait," he growled. "This Olive English is one girl I'd just as soon not know!"

AFTER he and McGruder had driven the trembling Crewer to a nearby hotel, Rock returned to his office. He wanted to report to his client.

"I don't quite get the set-up," Jack McGruder said as they climbed the flight of steps to the private dick's office.

"It's like this," Rock explained. "This Olive English's dad was in partnership with a man named Richard Kroger. The two of them made a lot of money. Olive's dad died some years ago. He wasn't a family man and didn't get along with either his wife or daughter, I guess. As a matter of fact, he separated from his wife when Olive was just a child and went out to California, where he met this fellow Kroger.

"When English died, the Kroger-English partnership dissolved automatically. It seems there is three-quarters of a million dollars, which was English's share of the partnership spoils, and which Kroger will hand over to Olive English when and if he finds her and she can identify herself. Kroger's a pretty decent sort of an egg, but he's got a nephew who would probably be just as well pleased if Olive never turned up."

Jack McGruder's handsome face was lost in thought. "That makes it different, Rock," he said. "I didn't know Olive was an heiress. I can't very well ask her to marry me now. It would look like I was

after her money."

Rock grunted. "It looks like a lot of other people are, too, so why should you be an exception?"

He pulled his phone to him and dialed the number of the Willis Hotel, asked for Richard Kroger's suite. When Kroger answered, Rock indentified himself.

"Good!" Kroger exploded. "I'm mighty glad you called, Enders. You've got the girl, of course?"

"I haven't got the girl," Rock said. "I'm just an ordinary gumshoe. I'm no magician. But I've got a line on her. What I want to know it, did you by any chace hire a private detective by the name of Wallace Rainer to take this same job you gave me?"

Mr. Richard Kroger chuckled. "Oh, so you found that out, did you? Yes, I hired Rainer. I figured two heads were better than one, and yours did seem a trifle thick."

"I'm just two jumps behind Wallace Rainer right now," Rock told his client. "And do you know where Rainer is?"

"I wouldn't have the slightest idea," Kroger said.

"Well, pal, he's in the morgue!"

Kroger was momentarily stunned. Then he wanted to know all the details. Rock told him that he'd call on Kroger later and talk then.

"That is, if I'm still alive," he added.

"Wait a minute, Enders," Kroger yelled into the phone. "Don't hang up yet. If this thing is working up to murder, I think I'd better have a lawyer. I'd better make out my will. And I don't know a lawyer in this whole town."

"I'll send you one," Rock said and hung up. Then he called the office of Attorney Jantzen.

"Listen, my friend," he said. "Do you think you can draw a will up for a client of mine?"

"Chure," Jantzen said. "I can draw up a will for anybody."

"Then get over to the Willis Hotel sometime tonight and ask for Mr. Richard Kroger. And listen, Jantzen, you know Wallace Rainer, don't you?"

"Chure. Does a lot of leg work for me. A better gumchew than you'll ever be."

"I guess maybe he was too good a gumchew," Rock said. "The poor guy's

dead. I thought maybe you'd better try and break it gently to his wife."

III

THE old red brick house on East 59th Street had a hand-lettered sign on the door that said:

Rooms For Ladies

"This is the place," Jack McGruder said. "Here's where Olive lived. Olive and a girl named Mae Easton had a room together. The landlady never got which one was which straight in her mind. I'd ask if Olive was there, and she'd say, 'Is that the one with the straight hair or the curly hair?'"

Rock grunted. He and McGruder got out of the car, climbed eight steps that rose directly from the sidewalk and knocked at the door. A lean sharp-eyed woman with curlers in her dark hair opened the door. She looked at Jack McGruder.

"How many times do I have to tell you that your girl friend don't live here any more, young man."

"I know," McGruder said meekly, "But I've brought a friend along who wants to ask you some questions and see the room. He's a detective."

The landlady looked at Rock Enders and found him her own age. She smiled and preened herself.

"That being the case, you can just step right in."

McGruder and Rock followed the woman into what was undoubtedly her parlor. She made them as comfortable as the Victorian furniture would permit and asked Rock what he wanted to know.

"When did Miss English leave here?" he asked.

"It was three night ago," the landlady said. "And I was plenty put out about it, believe you me! They just up and left without giving me any notice. Don't the law require that they should give notice?"

"They?" Rock said. "Oh, both girls left the same night."

The landlady nodded. "The one with the curly hair, she came down to me and said, 'We're leaving, Mrs. Rud-

dle.' I says, 'Next week?' and she says, 'Right tonight,' And off she stalked, and I was plenty put out, believe me."

Rock said he could understand that.

"One of them—I never could get the two straight on account of they was both sort of dark complexioned—but one of them had a hope chest."

"A what?" Rock asked.

"A cedar chest," McGruder put in. "I got it for Olive not more than a week ago."

"I don't know who had the chest or nothing," the landlady said, "but anyway they sure banged up my banister moving that chest out."

"The girls carry the chest out by themselves?" Rock asked.

"No. The one with the curly hair and a man carried the chest."

"A man, huh?" McGruder said.

"What'd he look like?" Rock asked.

"Oh, he was small. A shifty little man, I'd say."

"Did he have a mustache?" McGruder asked.

Rock knew McGruder was thinking about Crewer.

"Yes, now that you mention it," the woman said. "Yes, he had a mustache."

ROCK said he'd take a look at the room the girls had rented, if it were convenient. The angular landlady took them up a flight of steps, along a hall to a room at the east end of the house.

"I haven't been in here to give it a real good cleaning yet," the landlady said. "One thing I will say for them girls. They kept their room pretty tidy. You can see that for yourself."

Rock could see that the room had been well taken care of. Nothing seemed out of place except the bottle on the east window sill. It was a small square bottle of brown glass, and it contained a few white tablets. The label on the bottle said "Calomel" and there was no cork on it.

"This yours?" Rock asked the landlady.

She shook her head. "Must be something one of the girls left. If it's medicine, it's probably something that belonged to the one with the straight hair. She worked too much and too hard. She was always taking something when she

should really have got some rest."

"I'll take this bottle to her," Rock said, "when I find her, that is." He corked it with a piece of paper, and put the bottle in his pocket.

He made a thorough search of the rooms and the clothes closet. It was on the floor of the closet that he found a small white business card on which was printed:

The Bon-Bon Beauty Shop

Beneath this was the address and telephone number.

"Do you have any colored people living here now?" Rock asked.

She shook her head, craned her neck to see the card he was holding in his hand.

"Well, for mercy sakes!" she said. "That is a Harlem address, isn't it? What *do* you suppose!"

Rock and McGruder were about to leave when a shrill voice sounded out in the hall.

"Mrs. Ruddle! Oh, Mrs. Ruddle! The mystery's solved!"

A woman with bleached blond hair burst into the room, waving a newspaper. Seeing the two men, she broke off suddenly.

"What is it, Bessy?" Mrs. Ruddle asked. Then to Rock and McGruder she said, "Gentlemen, this is Miss Ingles, one of my oldest roomers."

Miss Ingles giggled. "I am not old, Mrs. Ruddle. I'm not a day over thirty."

"Now, dearie, I didn't mean it like that," Mrs. Ruddle said. "You know I didn't. What was it in the paper you wanted to show me?"

"Oh, it isn't nothing in particular," Miss Ingles said. She gave Rock and McGruder a shy smile. "I always did think Mrs. Ruddle should rent some of her rooms to men—"

"Miss Ingles!" Mrs. Ruddle said. "I'm not doing no such thing. These gentlemen were simply inquiring about the two girls that had this room."

Miss Ingles waved her paper. "Then maybe they'd like to know that it says right here in the marriage licenses applied for section that Miss Olive Selina English is going to marry Mr. Theodore Sharkey!"

JACK McGRUDER'S face drained of color. He looked as though somebody had quietly shifted the world out from under his feet. Rock Enders could hear the grind of his teeth.

"Now hang on to yourself, Jack," Rock said anxiously. He had once seen a man who looked as Mr. McGruder did now, and that man had thrown himself in front of a subway train.

"Let me get out of here," McGruder said. "Get out of the way, Rock. I'm getting out of here."

McGruder stopped tugging to get out of Rock's grasp. "No," he admitted. "I never heard of the guy before. But if he's getting married, that's a help. He could be at the City Hall. Or—or some minister's place."

"Sure. You got something there," Rock said sarcastically. "Have you got a faint notion how many ministers there are in this burg?"

"How many?" McGruder asked.

"A hell of a lot. And while you're wandering all over town suffering from

THE JAIL THAT Goes Places



J. EDGAR SLAVIN of Woodbridge, Connecticut, after a term as sheriff, decided that the way to stop crime was to keep potential law-breakers from committing their first offense.

With that in mind, he set up a "jail on wheels" which was really just a large bus outfitted with such crime items as a prison cell, electric chair, tear-gas bombs, drunk-o-meter and other crime-fighting equipment used by the police.

In more than 250 cities throughout the country, a million persons have visited the rolling exhibit and been given a first hand impression of what they would be up against if they ever decided to give in to crime's easy—but deadly—lure!

Rock grasped McGruder's arm. "You're getting out, and so am I. Where the devil do you think you're going?"

"I'm going after that Theodore Sharkey," McGruder said. "He can't do that to me and get away without so much as a punch in the nose."

McGruder started down the hall. Rock was after him. McGruder went down the steps three at a time, and Rock, who was heavier and not nearly so agile, nearly went over on his nose trying to catch up with him. McGruder went out the front door and Rock just caught him by the coattails.

"Let go of me," McGruder said.

Some of the color had come back into his face, and for a moment it looked as though he might vent his rage on Rock Enders.

"You want to punch this Ted Sharkey's nose, don't you?" Rock said.

"You're darned well right!"

"Well, hop to it," Rock said. "I suppose you know right where to find him?"

flat feet, looking for this one minister who is going to tie the knot, you'll probably get all the insides shot out of you. You don't seem to get it. This Olive Selina English may be a swell girl. But anybody who can recognize her seems to have a slab reserved in the morgue."

McGruder was silent a moment, his youthful face worried. "I can't think Olive would do this to me. I can't believe she would. And I'd still like to punch Theodore Sharkey in the nose."

"That's fine," Rock said. "But don't go off chasing wild geese. I'm going over to see Sharkey right now, and if you string along with me, maybe you can get in a sock at him."

McGruder brightened. "You know him?"

"I know him, and I don't know any good of him. He's got a jail record as long as my arm. And I got a hunch nothing he's mixed up in is strictly on the level."

They got into Rock Enders' car, and

while Rock drove he talked quietly to Jack McGruder.

"Funny how things will add up. All day I've been hunting for this Olive of yours. I go into the Alps to eat to see if an artist who I understand might know her is there, and because I don't like to hear the same record played over and over on a juke box I ran into this little Ferd Crewer. He's my artist, and I'm interested in artists because a lot of girls who land in this town have ambitions to be models. I'm on a wild goose chase and just punching around in the dark.

"Ferd Crewer's missing model is a girl named Olive. I think there's a chance she might be the girl I'm looking for. I go to Crewer's place to see the picture of her he has painted, and somebody's cut the girl's face out of the canvas.

"That's something—the missing face in the picture. It means somebody doesn't want Olive English's face to get well known. Then we find Rainer murdered.

"Then another thing, McGruder. We go to Olive's room and discover she has been staying there with a roommate—Mae Easton. The landlady is a bit confused as to which is Olive and which is Mae."

"They didn't look anything alike," McGruder said. "They both had dark hair, sure, and dark eyes. But beyond that, they weren't anything alike. One had straight hair—Olive. Mae's was curly. Mae was heavier than Olive, and she didn't have a very nice complexion."

"Sure, sure," Rock said gently. "Mae had curly hair. Olive had straight hair. Another thing, in the girls' closet we find a business card from a beauty parlor in Harlem. Harlem beauty parlors take in a lot of money making curly hair straight.

"Another thing we find in the girls' room is a brown bottle of calomel tablets. The bottle is sitting right where it would get the sun, and it seems as though somebody has lost the cork. You know what happens to calomel when exposed to air and sunlight? It breaks down into mercuric chloride."

ROCK ENDERS looked at Jack McGruder to see how he was taking this. He wondered if the lad knew what he was driving at. He decided to push the subject a little further.

"It adds up, Jack," he said. "People who would recognize Olive English get killed. Her face is cut out of a picture. There's an ad for a no-kink beauty parlor dropped in the girls' closet at Mrs. Ruddle's. There's a bottle of calomel which maybe has turned into something else, standing on the window sill. When the girls—Olive and Mae—clear out of Mrs. Ruddle's, it's Mae who tells Mrs. Ruddle they're leaving. And it's Mae and a man with a mustache who carry out Olive's hope chest."

"Good lord!" McGruder breathed. "You don't think they—they killed Olive? You don't think that they murdered her and are going to substitute Mae for Olive in order to collect that money? Is that where the beauty parlor card fits in? You think Mae was going to have her hair straightened?"

"I think that's almost it," Rock said. "You see, my client, the old man who wants to hand this money over to Olive, knew Olive's parents. He knew they both had black straight hair and dark eyes. He'd figure their daughter ought to have that kind of hair and eyes too.

"The murderer would want to fix up Mae's hair so it would be straight, too, in order not to arouse any suspicions. He'd also want to get rid of you and Crewer, so there wouldn't be any chance of your spoiling the scheme until he got the money.

"But then I don't think Olive's been murdered."

"You don't? You really don't?"

"You mustn't build up any false hopes, son," Rock said. "Because if Olive took a dose of calomel from this bottle, she'd have died of self-administered poison. Suppose Mae and our crook discovered Olive dead from accidental poisoning. The big idea in the crooks' mind would then be to keep Olive's death a secret, move the body—"

"God!" McGruder said hoarsely. "In the cedar chest!"

Rock didn't say anything. He'd tried to break it easy to Jack McGruder, and probably he had done a pretty poor job

of it. But that couldn't be helped now. And Rock didn't think there was much chance that they would find Olive English alive.

IV

I NEED a drink," McGruder said. "I feel as if the world had been shot to pieces. I need something to put it back together."

Enders stopped his car just ahead of the no-parking zone in front of the Palms Hotel.

"All right, son. If a drink will help you, I guess you can get something in here."

Rock hung on to McGruder's arm as they went into the small and dingy lobby with its leather and red mahogany furniture and its potted palms. He pointed out the barroom to his younger companion.

"And have one for me," he said. "I got some things to do. I'll be back shortly."

He watched McGruder walk toward the bar like an unseeing robot. Then he went to the clerk's desk and pounded on the bell. A lean, dark man with a cigarette dangling from his lips came at Rock's call.

"Hi, Rock. What's cookin'?"

"I'm looking for Theodore Sharkey," Rock said.

"In 512," the clerk said. "He been passing bogus checks again, Rock?"

"I'm darned if I know what he's been doing, but it's probably not legal. I'll go up and have a talk with him."

"He came in here a while ago with a new suit on," the man said. "But from credit. Anyway, I couldn't get any rent out of him."

Rock took the elevator to the fifth floor, found room 512 without trouble, knocked at the door. When he didn't get any answer, he tried the knob. It turned easily, and he opened the door a little way. Inside was darkness.

Rock pulled his gun from his under-arm sling before he went into the room. He didn't like the dark. Especially, he didn't like the dark if it was in any way associated with Theodore Sharkey. He closed the door behind him, stood there a moment, scarcely breathing.

Then his hand went to the wall, and his big rough fingers made a whispering sound on the paper. He didn't find the switch. Some dope of an electrician must have wired it on the other side of the door. He turned soundlessly, and exposed his back to danger.

The danger struck at his head, was short of the mark, actually got him at the back of the neck, which was probably worse. He turned on legs that seemed jointed in at least a dozen places, hacked out with his gun at the assailant he couldn't see and came down on his knees on the floor.

Somebody kicked him hard in the face. There was plenty of light now, but not the illuminating kind. The light came from bursting balls of fire in Rock's brain. He grasped blindly, and his fingers slid across leather as smooth as an eel. He collected another kick—this one is in the right shoulder—and lost his gun. He felt naked without it and sick. The blow to the back of his neck had done that. The blood in his mouth from the kick to his face made him feel sicker.

He lay flat on the carpet, just hanging onto consciousness. Among the sounds that were inside his head was a noise that could not help but be real. It was the sound of a window opening.

Rock rolled over, sat up. Briefly, he saw the silhouette of a man against the dim glow from the window. If he only had his gun! On his knees again, his fingers slapped the carpet, trying to find it. The silhouette vanished. He could hear the clank of hard shoes on the fire-escape steps. Hard shoes? You bet they were hard shoes. Rock's jaw felt as though it had been shattered by that kick.

He got to his feet, his big body swaying, staggered over toward the window, stumbled into a chair, clutched the back of it for support. He shoved the chair ahead of him, leaned on it. In the alley below, the hard heels clicked against the brick pavement. Rock felt helpless and a bit old.

He let go of the chair, moved back across the room to the door, found the light switch, clicked it on. The light showed him the dinky little room with its scarred furniture. It showed him his

gun lying on the floor. It showed him the desk, and on its glass top was a folded document—a marriage license if he had ever seen one. The document had been issued to Olive Selina English and Theodore Sharkey.

Rock put the marriage license into his pocket and looked dazedly around the empty room. Beneath the bed was a pair of shoes. They were old shoes and brightly polished. Rock frowned. Ted Sharkey wasn't apt to have more than one pair of shoes.

ROCK turned around slowly, spotted the door of the bathroom. He went over to it, pushed it open. Light from the bedroom was all he needed. Theodore Sharkey lay on the cracked tile floor and much of Sharkey's blood lay there, too.

Sharkey had on a suit that must have just come from the store. Probably it had been bought on credit, and the clothier would cry in vain for the balance now. Sharkey's mustache was waxed and pin-pointed to perfection, but nobody would have called him nice looking now—too much blood.

Rock turned away, still feeling sick. He went back to the desk and searched its drawers. There were no letters, nothing that belonged to Theodore Sharkey. Then he went to the dresser, looked in the drawers there. They contained a pitifully small supply of shirts, underwear and socks. Down in the corner of one drawer, he found a small slip of paper. Somebody had printed on the paper in pencil:

Have a good job for you. Phone me tonight.

There was no signature, nothing characteristic about the printed letters, no watermark on the paper. Somebody who didn't care to be traced had written it, so it was probably *that* kind of a job.

Rock left the slip of paper where he found it, went out of the room. Down in the lobby, he leaned over the desk, crooked his finger at the clerk.

"Rock!" the clerk gasped. "What's that on your face? Blood?"

"I been eating watermelon," Rock said. "Listen a minute. About Sharkey.

Has he had any visitors you remember recently?"

The clerk shook his head.

"Not in the past week. He's been out once or twice every day, but nobody's come here."

"No phone calls?"

"No phone calls. But wait a minute, Rock. A bootblack came in here. I think it was three days ago. He had a message for Sharkey. It was in an envelope, and the kid insisted on delivering it in person."

"Could you identify the kid, you think?"

"Maybe. Only maybe, though. I didn't pay much attention to this one. A bootblack is something you see too many of."

JACK McGRUDER came out of the bar. His handsome face was somber, his lips a tight straight line. He looked at Rock's face, asked what the matter was.

"I guess I'm just a has-been, son," Rock said. "How you feeling now?"

"I want to go and knock the stuffing out of Theodore Sharkey."

Rock shook his head. "The stuffing's been knocked out of him already. It's all over the floor up there in the bathroom."

He called the police.

He and McGruder left the hotel as soon as it was possible.

"Always keep one jump ahead of the law," he said, "and you'll get your face kicked in like mine."

Jack McGruder didn't say anything. He didn't want to talk at all. He had only known Olive English a couple of weeks, but he was hard hit nevertheless.

Rock Enders drove uptown to the Willis Hotel where his client, Richard Kroger, was stopping, turned to Jack McGruder.

"I don't think there's any more need for you to go tagging around after me like this. I'm about at the end of my rope anyway, and by tomorrow it'll probably be pretty safe for you to walk the streets again."

Jack McGruder looked at Rock a moment. He smiled faintly.

"I'd kind of like to be in on the kill, Rock. Maybe, as you say, Olive wasn't

murdered. Maybe it was an accidental poisoning. But I'd still like to knock the stuffing out of somebody."

Rock shook his head. "You stay out of this, son. This is strictly a job for me."

McGruder shrugged. "Well, if that's how it is, okay."

He got out of the car, and Rock watched him walking up the street with his hands in his pockets, his head hanging low. Then Rock went into the Willis Hotel and up to the suite occupied by Mr. Richard Kroger of California. He found Attorney Jantzen in Kroger's living room. Apparently he had just concluded drawing up Kroger's will.

Kroger was a bluff, stout old man with side whiskers like those on pictures of generals in history books.

"Well, Mr. Enders," he said. "I supposed you have achieved some results at long last?"

"I've been pushed around a lot, if that's what you mean," Rock said. "As for Olive English, I think we'll know about her by dawn."

Jantzen rubbed his hands. "Miss English will churely be a surprised and happy girl when chee finally hears the news. I hope I am on hand to congratulate her. And now, I believe we have concluded our business."

Jantzen reached for hat and briefcase. He shook Mr. Kroger's hand, turned to Rock Enders.

"If ever a detective had to look for a needle in a haystack, you're it, Rock. I wish you you all the luck in the world to bring the matter to a speedy and satisfactory conclusion."

"I'm heading your way now, Jantzen, if you'd care for a lift."

"Delighted!" Jantzen said.

Rock looked over at Mr. Kroger. "I'll see you shortly, Mr. Kroger, and have something definite by then."

He left with Jantzen, went down in the elevator, across the Hotel Willis lobby and out into the street. He looked both ways.

"Pardon my caution," he said to Jantzen, "but people have been shooting in my direction recently."

He walked around his car and got in under the wheel. Jantzen crawled in from the other side.

"Yours is a very dangerous profechun," Jantzen said. "I don't see how you stand up under the strain. You menchuned over the phone that Wallace Rainer had been killed. It goes to chow you what can happen to gumchews."

"It's a short life and a merry one," Rock said.

V

MIGHTY white of you to bring me clear over here to Rockville Centre," Jantzen said.

"I think it's nice of me, too," Rock said.

The beam of his headlights fell upon the brick gateposts that marked the end of Jantzen's drive. There was a neat bronze plate on one post with V. A. Jantzen on it. Rock turned off his ignition and the night was suddenly very still. He pointed at the gate post.

"I always figured that first initial stood for 'Victor.' How'd you happen to get mixed up in this Olive English busi-

[Turn page]



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ness in the first place, Jantzen?"

"You told me, remember? You called me and told me old man Kroger needed an attorney—"

"I mean before that," Rock cut in. "Hell, Jantzen, you don't think I brought you clear out here on Long Island because I like your perfume, do you? I doped it all out. You and Theodore Sharkey were going to substitute Mae Easton for the real Olive English, get Mae's hair straightened and old Kroger would never have been suspicious. Any identification papers necessary you could have stolen from Olive."

"And when you contacted Sharkey at the Palm Hotel, you didn't want your message to him traced. You couldn't just telephone him, because that meant you would have had to ask the switchboard operator for Sharkey. You would have called him 'Charkey,' which would have been a clue."

"And the very fact that you were so careful not to leave a clue that you were in cahoots with Sharkey gave it away. Nobody with sense enough to dial a telephone would have sent Sharkey a message via a bootblack unless there was something fishy somewhere. The fishy thing was you."

"And then Sharkey thought he'd give you the doublecross by running off with Mae Easton, alias Olive English, and getting married to her. Sharkey thought he could carry off the fraud alone and cut you out of the deal entirely. So you had somebody bump Sharkey."

ABRUPTLY, Jantzen made a move toward his hip pocket, but Rock unlimbered his big automatic and turned it on the lawyer.

"Don't try to get violent, Jantzen. No man named Vivian could do much to me without getting pretty badly mangled himself. I wondered where the Vivian angle came in. You know, when you killed Wallace Rainer, he had you down in his little memorandum book which is now in the hands of the police."

"Rainer was watching Ferd Crewer's place, saw you go there, wrote that down in the book and also the time you went in. It was his last entry. He followed you into the studio and caught you there cutting Olive English's face

out of Crewer's canvas. Rainer had to die. But you left Rainer's notes and they'll put you in the chair."

"That's pretty good, gumchew," Jantzen said. "You're smart."

"I still don't see how you got in on this. How'd you know Olive English had three-quarters of a million bucks coming to her?"

"The nephew. Kroger's nephew came to me some time ago and wanted to know if there was any legal way he could prevent his uncle from handing that money over to his dead partner's daughter."

"And you told him there wasn't," Rock said. "Because as soon as you had his story, you were figuring a way to get that money yourself. And you started to try and find Olive yourself."

"When you did find her, she was dead, which made it even better. You'd have a pretty tough time getting the dough from Olive—money that was rightfully hers. But you could substitute this Mae Easton, pay her off with a few thousand and keep the rest for yourself."

"You're chure smart," Jantzen said. "Especially about it being tough for me to get my hooks on the money if Olive had been alive. Only you got the time of her death wrong."

Jantzen coolly looked at his watch. There was a faint smile on his lips. He nodded.

"I guess chee could be dead by now. Chee will be if you sit out here telling me how smart you are all night."

A cold tide flooded over Rock Enders. He seized the lawyer by the throat and shook him.

"Where is she? Where've you got her?"

Jantzen indicated the house with his eyes. "Chee's probably dead—"

Enders cut him short with a jab of his gun. He shoved the lawyer ahead of him, out of the car toward the house. The door was standing open, which should have been a warning to Rock, but he was too furious with himself to suspect the trap that awaited him.

As he went through it, a man on the right side lunged out of the semi-gloom, seized his gun arm, forced it down so that his gun couldn't have hurt anything but the floor of the vestibule.

Jantzen whipped around, his own gun in his fist.

"Drop it, Enders! Drop it!"

Rock dropped it. The guy that had hold of his gun arm was as big as Rock, younger. He wore the pegtop pants and leather puttees of a chauffeur, and Rock knew they had met before. They had met back there in Sharkey's room, and Jantzen's chauffeur had kicked Rock in the face.

The chauffeur let go of Rock's arm, picked up his gun. Rock looked around the reception hall to see how things stood. There were two women in the room. Both of them had straight black hair and brown eyes. There the resemblance ended.

The one who was chubby and whose face was covered with acne couldn't have been anybody but Mae Easton. She couldn't be Olive English, because the other girl—the pretty one—was bound and gagged and tied in a chair.

"You see?" Jantzen said. "It's going through, Rock, in spite of you. I turn up tomorrow with Miss Easton at Kroger's suite. Who's there to say she isn't Olive English?"

"You mean, you're going to kill Olive—"

Jantzen looked at his chauffeur. "Did you dig the grave deep, Anderson? Deep enough for this gumchew?"

"This isn't going to work, Jantzen," Rock warned. "The cops will get wise as to the identity of the Vivian mentioned in Wallace Rainer's note."

"It'll work," Jantzen said. "Who's going to stop it from working?"

"Me."

It came from the other end of the big reception hall. The voice was that of Jack McGruder, and just where he had come from was a mystery which Rock didn't go into at the moment. McGruder was standing there, tall, straight, empty-handed.

But his sudden appearance gave Rock his chance.

JANTZEN turned around, startled. Even the chauffeur's eyes were momentarily off Rock. Rock got behind Jantzen, got control of the shyster's gun arm. He twisted the attorney around, facing the chauffeur and pumped on the

trigger of Jantzen's gun. He jerked the trigger three times to make sure, and as the chauffeur's knees buckled beneath him, Rock got reinforcement in his struggle with Jantzen.

McGruder came across the room and gave Jantzen a couple of very nice socks on the head. And then Rock decided he would let McGruder play hero while he, Rock, went for Mae Easton.

Mae had decided that if this was the pay-off, she'd rather be miles away. Rock got her with a flying tackle, just as she was going through the door at the rear of the hall.

There wasn't any more. McGruder knocked Jantzen as limp as a rag. Mae Easton was ready to squeal her head off to the first cop who would listen to her.

Jack McGruder came over to where Rock was standing after the police had everything under control.

"I should mop up the floor with you, Rock," he said, "for telling me Olive was dead."

Olive, hanging onto McGruder's arm, didn't look dead, but she was plenty tired. She had been through a lot, including being kidnaped from the room she had shared with Mae while locked up inside her own hope chest.

"All right," Rock said. "If you think it'll make you feel any better, go ahead and mop. But I never was so glad to see anybody as you when you showed up tonight."

Jack McGruder smiled. "You didn't think you could shake me off at the finish, did you? As soon as you went into the Willis Hotel back there in town, I got into your baggage compartment."

Rock looked at Olive English. "I'm sorry I thought you were dead, lady, but that calomel bottle up there in your room—don't you know you shouldn't keep calomel around that's been exposed to sun and air?"

Olive English had the sweetest smile. "I know," she said. "It turns into mercuric chloride. I wouldn't have taken any of it on a bet, but I guess I did forget to throw it away."

"I guess," Rock said, shaking his head sadly, "I'm just a has been."

"You're one swell gumchew," McGruder said.

Rock Enders gagged.

THE NEXT TO DIE



A Novel by **GERALD VERNER**

I

HEAVY clouds filled the sky, engulfing the countryside in darkness that lingered over the little village of Stoneville like an abysmal smog. The rain poured down steadily in a monotonous, unceasing patter. The wind wailed as it whistled through the branches of trees that were weird, distorted shapes in the dismal early spring night.

Elmer Bensen's rugged face was wet and grim as he plodded across the meadows toward the glen. His eyes constantly probed the shadows, searching, for Bensen felt the fear of sudden death hanging over him. It was an intangible feeling, yet real and unshakable.

The man who had written him the letter suggesting that they meet at the old Cedar Inn tonight to discuss a business proposition was a total stranger. Yet about that letter there had been an underlying current of menace.

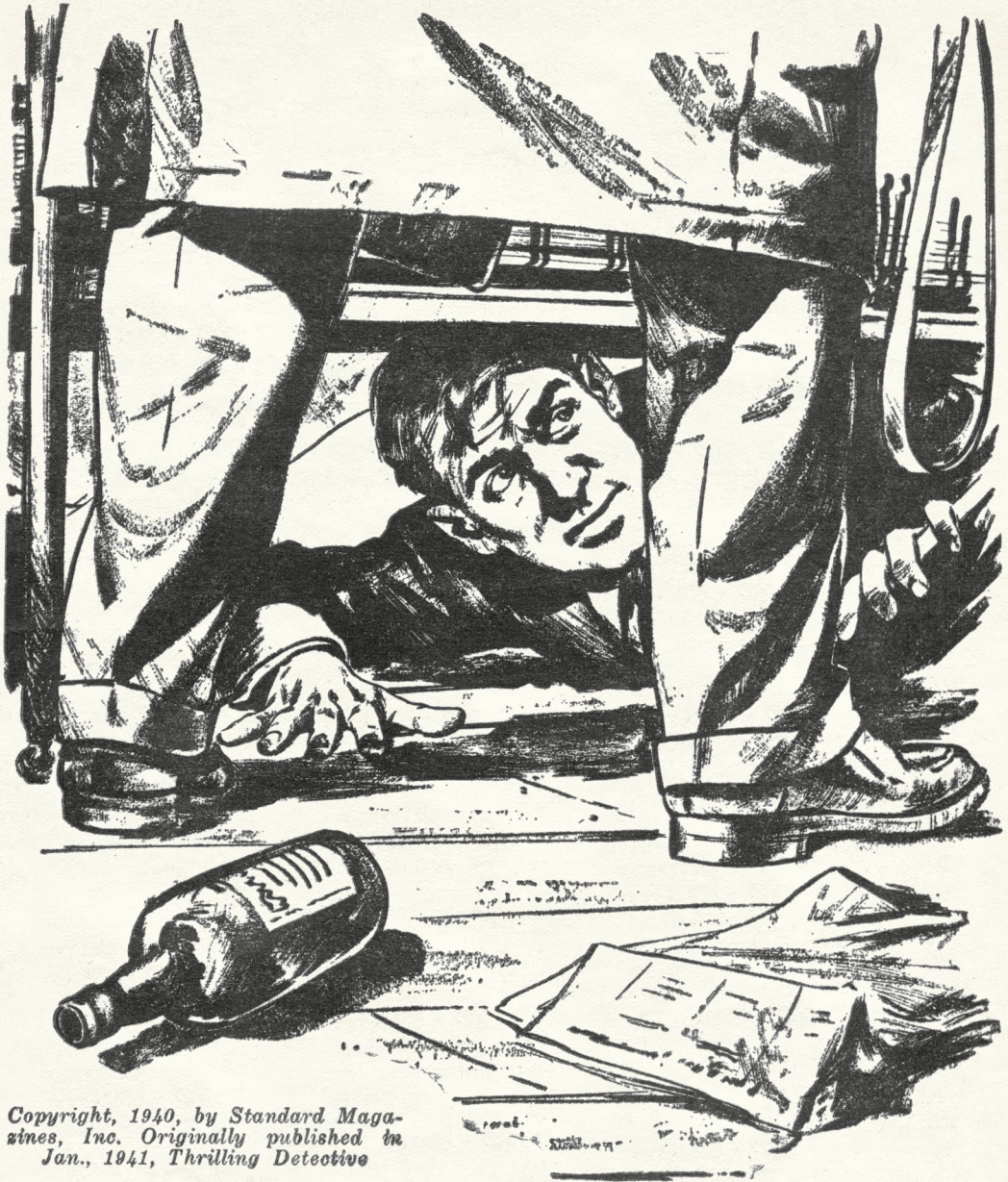
"I'm a fool to meet him at the roadhouse," Bensen said aloud to himself. "And yet it might mean a chance to get rid of them at last."

The sound of his own voice seemed strange to his ears, and he lapsed into brooding silence as he walked on. The wind tugged at his heavy overcoat as if striving to pull it from his big frame. The rain beat against his face, cold and chilling.

He left the last stretch of the meadowland now and entered the small tract of woods that formed the glen. Moist leaves and brush made soft swishing sounds beneath his feet. The trees stood close together here and occasionally a low-hanging branch swept against his hat.

"There's the inn," he muttered gratefully. "About time I was getting there."

Bensen uttered a sigh of relief as he saw the low, ram-shackle building looming dimly in a clearing ahead. It was a blurred, boxlike shape only half visible through the driving rain, a faint light indicating its half-open door. A weather-beaten sign creaked noisily as it swung in the wind. Even though it was impossible in the darkness to read the words



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The girl lay helpless on the bed, and Lowe saw only the

legs of the man he knew as a killer—several times over!

painted on it, Elmer Bensen knew the faded letters read "Cedar Inn."

Bensen strode across the clearing, reaching the road that ran along the front of the place. He realized that he might have traveled on this road, but the distance was longer than the short cut he had taken across the meadows.

ABRUPTLY, his attitude changed as he approached the half-open door. Why should he be afraid? He had always been hard and ruthless, a man his enemies had found dangerous. It was just the weather, the bleak chill, the constant patter of the rain and the wailing of the wind.

He pushed the door open wide and stepped into the small hall between the entrance and the barroom of the old inn. The light from an oil lantern resting on a rickety table cast his shadow as he stepped forward. His own tall figure became a huge black form hovering on the grimy wall.

Behind him, the door swung silently closed.

"You're next!"

The words lingered in the quiet that had gripped the old inn with the closing of the door. At first, Bensen was relieved by the apparent casualness of the greeting, even though he could not see the man who had spoken. Then it suddenly dawned on him that there was something cold and horrible in those words.

Again the strange feeling of impending tragedy swept over him, stronger now than it had been before.

"Who's there?" he called loudly.

He stood listening. Dimly, he could hear the rain beating on the roof. In the flickering light of the lantern he saw the hall grimy with dust. From the bar beyond he smelled the sourness of stale beer.

"You're next!"

The voice coming from the bar sounded like the echo of the one that had spoken before. Bensen advanced toward the bar without looking back. That was why he failed to see the short, stocky man who had been hidden behind the open door, and who was now behind him.

"I've been waiting for you, Bensen,"

said the man in the bar.

A handkerchief masked the lower part of his face, and his soft gray hat was pulled down so that only his eyes were visible. His right hand, stuffed in the side pocket of his overcoat, appeared to be clutching a gun.

"Thomas Manshaw," said Bensen tensely. "You don't need to disguise your face. I-I recognize your voice."

"Good!" The masked man's tone was cold, almost lifeless. "Then you know what I mean when I said that you are next, Bensen."

"But I *don't* know," protested Elmer Bensen. "Just what do you mean, Manshaw?"

"That you are the next to die!" Manshaw's voice was grim. "Sure, I've killed others—but this is something I've dreamed about for a long time—something I've looked forward to."

Deliberately, the masked man moved closer to Bensen. Slowly, Bensen began to retreat toward the door.

"This is the finish for you, Bensen," said Manshaw.

Bensen turned to run, but he was too late. Hands clutched savagely at his throat, strong fingers gouging into the flesh. He fought, writhing and twisting, trying to squirm out of the grip of those hands. He clawed wildly at the fingers, his face red, his eyes glassy.

"I've waited for this!" Manshaw sobbed, as his hands tightened their death grip.

The fingers pressed tighter and tighter, digging into the flesh. Bensen's face turned purple, his eyes starting. Finally he shuddered convulsively and then went limp.

Even then, the viselike fingers did not release their grip as they slowly let the heavy body sag to the floor.

FINALLY, the killer unclasped his hands from Bensen's throat and stood erect. He gazed down at the limp form. Then he leaned over and hastily went through Bensen's pockets, returning each item after he had examined it. He swore when he had completed his search. He had failed to find what he was seeking.

"But I told him in my note to bring them," he muttered to himself. "It was

to be a business deal." He glared at the corpse. "You've tricked me again, damn you!"

Manshaw swung around as he heard the door of the inn open and then close. Footsteps came across the creaking boards. The killer waited tensely, his hand clutching the gun in his overcoat pocket.

A short, thickset man entered, his mouth flying open in a gasp of horror as he saw the body sprawled upon the floor.

"You—you've killed him!" stammered the smaller man.

"Yes." Thomas Manshaw nodded. "I did just what I intended to do." He glared at the other man. "Where have you been, Jim?"

"I was hiding behind the door, like you said to do. When he come in, I let the door swing closed. He didn't see me. Then when he went in here, I stepped outside." The short, stocky man shuddered. "I knew there was gonna be trouble. But I—I didn't know it would be murder."

"Now that you do know, you'll never tell anyone who killed him, will you, Jim?" said Manshaw pointedly.

"No, but the police—they'll find him here."

"That's where you're wrong. They won't find him here." The masked man looked at his companion. "You've never seen my face at all, have you, Jim?"

"You've always been masked when you was with me, Mr. Manshaw," said Jim.

"Good. It wouldn't be nice if you were to recognize me and tell the police anything," said Manshaw. "If I even suspected that you would, you'd die, Jim."

"I ain't sayin' a thing, Mr. Manshaw."

"I'm glad of that," said the masked man. "You see, except for you, no one around here knows me by the name of Manshaw." He stepped toward the corpse. "Come on. Help me carry him."

"Carry him where?" asked the thickset man.

"Never mind where." Manshaw reached down casually and lifted the body by the head and shoulders. "Just take his feet."

Reluctantly, Jim took the legs of the

corpse. With the body between them, they went outside.

"Put him down," Manshaw said shortly. "Now go back and put out the lights and lock the door."

The thickset man hurried to carry out the order. The lights inside the inn went out, and then the door closed as Jim stepped outside again into the pouring rain.

Once more, the two men picked up the body. In a few moments they were gone from sight.

II

HENRY ROOPER, chief of police of Stoneville, yawned and leaned back lazily in his chair. The bright sunlight was a relief after three days of rain. Suddenly he reached up with one hand and flicked a fly off his bald head. Then he glanced at the husky, dark-haired young man who sat opposite his desk.

"How do you like Stoneville, now that you've been here a couple of days?" he asked. "Guess you find it pretty quiet for a big-town detective, don't you, Lowe?"

"It's quiet, all right." Trevor Lowe smiled as he looked out the window. "But, as I told you, I'm on a vacation. I wanted to get away from the noise and excitement of New York."

The telephone on the chief's desk jangled. Rooper picked up the receiver.

"Hello?" he snapped. . . . "Who? Elmer Bensen? . . . What happened? . . . I see. All right, get out there as fast as you can and wait until I come. Did you phone Macauley? . . . Good! Get going, Martin!"

The chief slammed the receiver back on the hook, then leaped to his feet and grabbed his uniform cap. Rooper was a small man who always moved briskly when he went into action. Trevor Lowe looked at him questioningly.

"Elmer Bensen was in an accident out near the glen," explained Rooper. "Don't know just what happened, but I've got to go out there. Bensen's one of the richest men around here." The chief looked curiously at the husky, dark-haired detective from New York. "Want to come along?"

"Sure." Lowe got swiftly to his feet,

picked up his hat and coat. "Thanks for inviting me, Chief. Vacation or not, I'm getting a little tired of doing nothing but just loaf around."

They hurried downstairs and climbed into the chief's sedan which was parked at the curb. A few moments later they left the village behind and were speeding out into the country. Finally they reached a spot where a bank rose steeply, almost like a cliff, and ran parallel with the right side of the road for some considerable distance. A hundred yards ahead there appeared signs of building operations in progress on top of the clifflike bank.

As Rooper stopped the car several heaps of bricks became visible to Lowe, and mountainous piles of slate and the half completed skeleton of a low, one-story building.

"That will be Andy Wilson's new gas station when it's finished," said the chief, nodding toward the building operations.

"Good location." Lowe's gray eyes were fixed on a group of men gathered about something lying on the ground near a pile of yellow sand.

There was a motorcycle patrolman in the crowd.

"What happened, Martin?" demanded Rooper, as he and Lowe got out of the car and joined the group.

"Accident, Chief," answered the motorcycle policeman. "Mr. Bensen was smothered to death under a pile of sand." Martin waved his hand toward the top of the bank where a small dumpcart loaded with sand was standing. "There were two carts up there yesterday. The storm must have blown one of them over last night at the very moment Bensen was passing underneath."

"Who found him?" asked Trevor Lowe.

"The workmen discovered the body a little while ago when they started to reload the cart that had dumped over," said Martin. "Bensen was completely buried at the bottom of the sand pile. One of the men on the job drove back to the crossroads just as I came along. When he told me what happened, I phoned you, Chief, and then came here at once."

LOWE walked over and bent down beside the still form. The body had been moved to a spot a little distance from the sand pile. The dead man was big. His strong face was deeply scored with lines, and his dark hair was plentifully streaked with gray. Lowe put Elmer Bensen's age at about forty-five.

"Died from suffocation, all right," said Rooper, as he joined Lowe and stood looking down at the corpse. "He just couldn't push his way out from under that pile of wet sand."

"Yes, it would be a tough trick for a dead man. Look at his throat. There are still signs of his having been strangled. Those black-and-blue marks could only have been made by someone choking him to death."

Rooper studied the corpse intently. It was quite obvious now that Elmer Bensen had died of suffocation. His face was bluish, his tongue swollen, his eyes distended and suffused with blood.

"You're right," Rooper said. "Yes, you are. Those marks on his throat tell the story. It's murder."

"Wonder what he was doing out here last night?" said Lowe. "It seems certain that this happened last night, though your coroner can tell us exactly the time."

"We haven't a coroner here," Rooper said. "There's only one doctor in Stoneville, so we send for him when anything like this happens." He glanced at the motorcycle patrolman. "Did you call Dr. Macaulay, Martin?"

"Yes, sir," said Martin. "The doctor was out on a call, but I left word for him to come out here as soon as he returned. And I didn't notify the Bensen family. I thought you and the doctor would want to take care of that, Chief."

"Yes, I'll break the news just as soon as I get the doctor's report," Rooper said. He glanced at Lowe as the patrolman walked away. "Macaulay is a good man. Been here about six months. He bought old Dr. Walker's practice not long before Walker died."

"I still would like to know what Bensen was doing out here in the first place," Lowe said thoughtfully. "He was rich. And he owned that estate called Ridgeway Manor, didn't he?"

"Yes. It used to belong to the Dray-

ton family, but Bensen bought the place about two years ago." The chief bit off the end of a cigar and lighted it. "What are you driving at, Lowe?"

"Bensen must own at least one car. Then why did he walk last night when he could have ridden? There's only one answer. He was going some place or meeting someone—and didn't want to be recognized."

"Then he walked along this road, was murdered, and then somebody buried him beneath the sand," Rooper said.

"No," Lowe corrected. "Bensen was carried here. Look at the soles of his shoes. They're caked with dirt and ashes. He was killed in some dry place, for the rain would have washed that dirt off his shoes as he walked. He's big and heavy, so whoever brought him here couldn't have carried him very far. Are there any houses around here, Chief?"

"None until you get to Blaketon five miles from here. There isn't a building between Stoneville and Blaketon except that old roadhouse, the Cedar Inn."

"What about it?" asked Lowe with interest.

"No one would want to go there," Rooper said. "It's old and rundown, and only the owner is there most of the time. Bensen wouldn't have gone to a place like that."

TREVOR LOWE decided that Bensen looked like a man who would go any place he felt like going, including an old rundown roadhouse, but he saw no point in arguing with the local lawman about it. There were angles to this case that interested him greatly, and he was suddenly anxious to go along with Rooper until they reached the final solution.

A mud-spattered roadster drove up then and stopped behind Rooper's car. A tall, thin man, with a reddish mustache, got out of the car. He was carrying a small black bag.

"That's Dr. Macauley," Rooper explained.

"As soon as we talk to the doctor, I think we should interview Bensen's household, don't you, Chief?" said Lowe. "That is, I'd like to see how you handle this sort of thing. I'll probably learn

something from your way of handling things."

Chief Rooper knew what Trevor Lowe said was sheer flattery, but he liked it. He grinned at the big town detective.

"Glad to have you work with me, Lowe," he said. Then, as the doctor came up to them: "This is Trevor Lowe, Dr. Macauley."

Macauley nodded and knelt beside the corpse. Finally he stood up.

"Death by suffocation," he announced. "Doubtless from being buried under the sand."

"I'm afraid you're wrong, Doctor," said Lowe. "Bensen died of strangulation, not suffocation. If you'll look carefully at his throat, you'll see."

Macauley uttered a startled exclamation and then examined the body again.

"You're right, Mr. Lowe," he said, his expression serious. "This is murder! My first examination was purely superficial. I didn't intend it as a final verdict."

"How long would you say he has been dead, Doctor?" asked Rooper.

"About six hours," Macauley said promptly.

"Then he must have been killed at approximately two-thirty this morning," said Lowe, glancing at his wrist-watch. "It's eight-thirty now."

"That's right," said Macauley. He turned to Rooper. "Will that be all, Chief?"

Rooper nodded. Then he glanced at the motorcycle policemen and motioned Martin to come closer.

"Put the body in my car, Martin. I'll take it back to the village."

Martin and two of the workmen lifted the corpse. As they did, something dropped to the ground. Bending quickly, Lowe picked it up. Both Rooper and Macauley looked at the object that Lowe held in his palm. It was a gray-green stone about the size of a small walnut.

"What is it?" asked Rooper, as he frowned at the round object.

"The most interesting thing we've found yet," said Lowe, holding it between his forefinger and thumb for all to see. "It's an uncut diamond—and its value, I'd say at a rough guess, is at least five thousand dollars!"

III

EVEN in the bright sunlight of early morning, the huge old stone house on the estate called Ridgeway Manor was a bleak, drab-looking place that appeared to sag beneath the weight of its many years. The six acres of grounds that surrounded the house were dotted with big trees, their branches showing the first hint of green leaves.

"So this is where Elmer Bensen lived," said Trevor Lowe, as Rooper drove his sedan along the winding drive that led to the old house. "Not a friendly-looking place, but then I don't believe the late Mr. Bensen was friendly."

"He wasn't," said Rooper. "In fact, I know of at least three men right in this neighborhood who had every reason to hate him."

"Three men," said Lowe thoughtfully. "That's very interesting. Tell me more about them when we have time."

Rooper braked the car to a halt in front of the large porch, and he and Lowe got out. The butler who opened the massive oak door of the house at their ring seemed surprised at seeing a uniformed police official.

"Is Miss Bensen at home, Chayne?" asked the chief.

Lowe studied the butler with interest. Chayne looked exceedingly husky, and there was something about his battered face that hinted he had spent considerable time in the prize ring.

"Yes, Chief Rooper," said Chayne, "Miss Bensen is home. Is it about her father?"

"It is," stated Rooper grimly. "He's been murdered."

"Murdered!" Chayne's face went gray and his hands clenched and unclenched. "I beg pardon, sir. The shock—" He turned. "If—if you'll come into the living room, I'll call Miss Dorothy."

He ushered them into a large room off the hall and hurried away. Trevor Lowe frowned. Despite the attractive furnishings and the warming sunlight pouring in through the wide windows, there was a strange, depressing atmosphere about this house. It seemed to him that it was a place that had been dominated by hate ever since its existence.

Evidently Chief Rooper had the same sensation in a lesser degree, for both men remained silent, waiting in almost stolid stillness. Through the half-open windows they could hear birds twittering in a bird bath, but within the house it remained bleak and dismal.

With a sense of relief, Lowe heard quick footsteps approaching along the wall. Both men rose, but it was a man who entered the room and not the girl they had expected. He was young and blond, with thick, wavy hair. To Lowe he seemed too much like a juvenile actor making a carefully staged entrance. His deepset eyes darted from the face of one man to the other as he closed the door behind him.

"What did you tell Chayne, Chief?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

"Mr. Bensen was murdered some time during the night, Mr. Drayton," answered Rooper. "His body was found early this morning."

Trevor Lowe had been a detective long enough to be a bit hardboiled and cynical at times. He watched the blond man, thinking: "That's your cue, my boy. Go to it. Turn on the histrionics!"

JOHAN DRAYTON did not fail him. "Good God!" he exclaimed dramatically. "Murdered! So that's what happened to him!"

"Were you expecting something to happen to him?" asked Lowe.

His words seemed to startle Drayton. He looked flustered, young and frightened for a moment. Then he recovered himself.

"I beg your pardon," he said coldly, "but I don't believe we've met."

It was all Lowe could do to keep from laughing in his face. The sudden rush of dignity was so obviously to cover up the slip he had just made.

"Sorry, Mr. Drayton," said Chief Rooper dryly. "You didn't give me a chance to introduce you. Trevor Lowe—John Drayton, Mr. Bensen's secretary."

Drayton bowed stiffly. Lowe merely smiled. He remembered Rooper had said Ridgeway Manor had once belonged to the Drayton family, and that was an angle to be considered. Bensen's secretary might have had good reason

to hate his boss if this had been young Drayton's former home.

"What made you feel something had happened to Mr. Bensen?" asked the chief suddenly.

"It was only natural under the circumstances," said Drayton. "As a matter of fact, I've just been trying to phone the police station, but the storm must have damaged the telephone wires. About half an hour ago I took some letters up to Mr. Bensen's room for him to sign. He usually stays in bed until noon. But I found his bed hadn't been slept in. When there was no sign of him around the place, naturally we grew anxious."

"Did you know that he went out somewhere during the storm last night?" Lowe asked.

"Mr. Lowe is a detective from New York who is helping me on this case," Rooper explained as Drayton hesitated.

"Oh, I see." Drayton looked intently at the husky, dark-haired man, then nodded. "About what you just asked, Mr. Lowe, the answer is that I did not know Mr. Bensen was away from the house last night. Would you mind telling me just what happened to him?"

The chief briefly related the circumstances surrounding the finding of the body.

"So somebody finally killed him," said Drayton. "I'm not surprised at all. Bensen was cruel and ruthless. He loved to dominate those around him." The blond man smiled ironically. "That's why he gave me a job as his secretary after he had ruined my father financially and snatched this property away from us."

"And your father?" asked Lowe.

"He killed himself," Drayton said stolidly. "So you see, gentlemen, I had plenty of reason to hate Elmer Bensen—to hate him enough to want to kill him. But I didn't. I wish I had though."

"Why did you remain here as Bensen's secretary if you hated him so much?" Lowe asked. "After all, you didn't have to work for him."

"It was because—"

really was. Her soft, dark hair gleamed blue-black in the sunlight pouring through the windows. An attractive girl, Irish type, Trevor Lowe thought; pretty but not beautiful. The nose was slightly too small, the blue eyes a trifle too far apart, the red mouth a bit too large for real beauty. But she had undeniable charm.

"Miss Dorothy Bensen," Rooper said. "This is Mr. Lowe, who is working with me. I'm afraid we've brought you sad news."

"I know. Chayne just told me." Her voice was low and husky. But there was no sign of grief on her face, only a look of anxiety in her eyes as she glanced at Drayton, as though seeking some message from him.

There was apparently something comforting in his glance, for her attitude was composed as she motioned the three men to be seated and she took a chair.

"You wish us to give you the details, of course," said Rooper.

"Naturally," she said.

Her face remained perfectly expressionless as she listened to Rooper's story.

"What we are looking for is some kind of motive," Lowe explained, when the chief had finished. "This was apparently a crime that was not committed on the spur of the moment. Something brought Elmer Bensen out into the storm last night—"

"The letter!" said Drayton. "I just remembered it."

"What letter?" asked Lowe.

"It arrived special delivery yesterday afternoon," said the secretary. He looked at the girl. "Don't you remember, Dorothy?"

"Yes, John, of course," she said. "Father read it through twice, and then threw it into the fire."

"Did you see the postmark?" Lowe asked Drayton.

"No, I didn't." Drayton rose. "But Chayne must have signed for it. I'll get him. Perhaps he can tell us something."

He stepped out into the hall, closing the door behind him. Lowe again turned to the girl.

"Perhaps you may know something regarding your father's life that will

DRAYTON broke off as the door opened and a girl came into the room. She was slim, and because of her slimness she looked taller than she

be a help, Miss Bensen," he said. "Did he ever mention any enemies?"

"I know very little about his life," Dorothy said softly. "He never made a confidant of anyone, least of all me. It may seem strange to you, but I hardly knew him. All of my girlhood was spent in a convent in France. During that time my father spent the years in big cities, like New York and Chicago. He was always generous toward me with money, but it was not until four years ago that he brought me to America. I was seventeen then."

"Your mother died when you were very young?" asked Lowe.

"Yes, when I was seven. That was when Father placed me in the convent in France. Later we lived in a large house on the outskirts of Newark, and then we came here." For the first time she looked distressed. "I've always hated this place because of the way Father got the property from the Draytons."

"How was that?"

"Father talked Mr. Drayton into investing heavily in a mining company, that failed. I don't know the details, but Mr. Drayton lost all of his money and his home. The shock was too much for him and he killed himself."

"Have you ever seen anything like this in your father's possession?" Lowe drew the small gray-green stone from his pocket and held it out to her.

"Never," Dorothy said. "What is it?"

"An uncut diamond," answered Lowe. "We found it on the ground near your father's body."

From outside there came a sudden wild shout. Both Lowe and Rooper jumped to their feet. The girl rose hastily.

"Sounded as if it came from the hall," said Lowe, hurrying to the door and throwing it open. "This way, Chief!"

LOWE stepped out into the hall, with Rooper close behind him. Up the hall, Lowe paused before a half-open door. "Let's take a look in here." He opened the door wider, revealing a big dining room beyond. "Drayton—what the devil?"

The blond young man was bending

over the motionless figure of the butler sprawled on the rug.

"Something's happened to Chayne." Drayton's tone was tense as he stood erect. "I heard him shout and ran in here—and found him lying on the floor like this."

Lowe stepped forward, Rooper kneeling beside the butler. There were red marks on the man's throat.

"Who did this, Drayton?" Lowe demanded. "Somebody tried to strangle Chayne. Did you see anyone?"

"Yes," said Drayton. "I did. As I came in, I saw a tall man with a black cloth hiding the lower part of his face run out through that casement window there."

Chief Rooper went to the casement window. The two glass panels were closed. The chief tried the handle and then swung around.

"This window is locked," he said "and the key is missing. No man could have gone through this window."

"But he did," Drayton insisted. "He did, I tell you!"

Lowe started to speak, but at that moment Chayne moaned and then began to mumble.

"Don't—don't, Spike," muttered the butler. "I didn't know about the big guy—"

Chayne opened his eyes and stared blankly up at the faces surrounding him. Then he sat up weakly, and Lowe and Rooper helped him to his feet.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I must have fallen and struck my head."

The chief frowned and looked as if he intended to say something, but Lowe caught Rooper's eye and shook his head.

"You'll be all right now, Chayne," said Lowe, as they placed the butler in a chair. "Just stay quiet for awhile." He turned to Drayton. "I wonder if we might look through Mr. Bensen's private papers. Perhaps we'll find some help there."

"Of course," said the secretary. "He kept them all in a cabinet in his study."

Drayton led them along the hall to Bensen's study. At Lowe's suggestion, the chief left them to interview the four other servants—cook, maid, laundress and chauffeur.

An inspection of the papers in the

dead man's study proved futile. There were no private papers of any kind.

"What did you find?" asked Rooper when he finally returned from questioning the servants. And then, when Lowe told him: "I didn't get much information. None of the servants have been with Bensen longer than a year, and they know nothing about him. His only regular visitor was a man named Sedgewick, who lives in a cottage not far from here."

"Sedgewick?" exclaimed Drayton as he heard the name. "That's it. Why didn't I think of him before!"

"I don't know," said Lowe quickly. "But you do have a way of thinking of people and special delivery letters very conveniently. Go on, Drayton. What about Sedgewick?"

"He's a writer—apparently an old friend of Bensen's. He used to come here quite often in the evenings. But they must have quarreled about something. Anyway, I heard Sedgewick shout: 'I'll kill you for this!' Then he rushed out of the house and hasn't been back since."

"Are you accusing Bill Sedgewick of murdering Father?" Dorothy Bensen stood in the doorway of the study, staring at the blond man. "Oh, John, I didn't think you'd let your jealousy get the best of you to this extent. Bill Sedgewick just couldn't be guilty."

"Suppose we visit Sedgewick," Lowe suggested.

IV

TREVOR LOWE filled and lighted a pipe as he and Rooper drove away in the chief's sedan.

"What do you think of this case now?" asked Rooper. "Too bad Chayne didn't notice the postmark on that special delivery letter."

"He did seem evasive about it when we finally got around to questioning him," said Lowe. "Interesting household that: A butler who is obviously an ex-prize fighter and who speaks with a phony British accent until he is half-conscious after someone tries to strangle him. And then he talks like a mobster and mentions 'Spike' and the 'big guy.'"

"That's right." The chief nodded. "And a secretary who hated the man he worked for so bitterly that he wished he had killed him." Rooper frowned. "Drayton could have done it, at that. Why did he stay there if he hated Bensen?"

"Because of the girl." Lowe paused, thinking things over. Then he nodded and went on: "John Drayton could have tried to strangle Chayne. There was plenty of time for him to do it. We must have talked to Dorothy for fifteen or twenty minutes after he left us to go and find Chayne."

"His story about hearing Chayne shout and then rushing to the butler's aid sounded fishy to me," Rooper agreed. "Why didn't he go find Chayne at once?"

"Because Drayton was busy in the study destroying all of Bensen's personal papers," Lowe said. "I'm sure of that." He puffed thoughtfully on his pipe. "And you were wrong when you said a man could not have left the dining room by that casement window."

"But the window was locked," Rooper protested.

"Certainly, but you mentioned the fact that the key was missing. The window could have been locked from the outside as well as the inside."

They were rolling along a stretch of country road now. Ahead was a small cottage set back among a group of trees. Rooper brought the car to a stop in front of the place. Trevor Lowe looked at the drawn blinds as he and Rooper got out and walked to the front door.

Bill Sedgewick's cottage appeared to be deserted. There was no response from within the cottage as Rooper used the brass knocker.

"He seems to be out," said Rooper, turning away.

Lowe was about to follow when something on the edge of the door sill caught his eye.

"Wait, Chief!" he said.

He stooped and placed his finger on a small dark stain close up against the bottom of the door.

"What's the matter?" asked Rooper.

"There's something wrong here. That's blood."

Before Rooper could speak, Trevor

Lowe flung himself bodily at the front door. The flimsy lock parted finally under his smashing weight and the door crashed open. A man's body lay sprawled in the small hall. A little dark pool had collected around it, and the ugly hilt of a knife protruded from his chest, just above the heart.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Rooper. "It's Sedgewick!"

LOWE knelt beside the body. Sedgewick had been a man in his early thirties, with a strong, hard face and thick black hair. He was dressed in shirt and trousers and there were bedroom slippers on his feet. Lowe found that there was no pulse and the heart had stopped beating.

"He's still warm and just stopped bleeding," said Lowe, getting to his feet. "He hasn't been dead very long, perhaps not more than a few minutes." He looked grimly at the chief. "The murderer may still be around somewhere."

"Right!" Rooper drew his gun from its holster. "Come on, Lowe. We'll take a look around."

There were only five rooms in the cottage. They found no sign of anyone as they searched the place.

"At least there's one thing we know," said Rooper. "Neither Drayton nor Chayne could have killed Sedgewick. They didn't have time to be in two places at once."

"Just for the sake of argument suppose I say you're wrong," said Lowe. "It took us about ten minutes to drive here from Bensen's. Remember, you were driving fairly slowly while we discussed the case. We'll take it for granted that Drayton and Chayne both can drive and could easily get hold of a car. We don't know where the butler went after he admitted us and told Drayton and the Bensen girl we were there."

"Chayne didn't commit this murder," protested the chief of police.

"I didn't say he did. I merely said he *could* have done it. Suppose he drove here, killed Sedgewick with a knife and then hastily drove back to Ridgeway Manor. He wants to attract our attention so he shouts, then presses his own

fingers into his throat so it will look as if somebody tried to strangle him, and then fakes being unconscious. A perfect alibi."

"What about the man with the black cloth around the lower part of his face that Drayton saw when he rushed into the dining room?"

"Are we sure that Drayton really saw any such man?" Lowe smiled. "After all, our blond young friend loves to dramatize things. It would make it so much better if he dashed in to Chayne's rescue just in the nick of time."

An insistent rapping sounded on the back door of the cottage. Lowe went to the door and drew it open. A short, stocky man stood there, a look of fear on his ugly, grimy face.

"Thought I recognized your car, Chief," he said. "I seen it from the distance as I was running across the field. He's after me, and I want you to lock me up so as he can't get me. He's gonna kill me."

"Who is going to kill you, Buckley?" demanded Rooper. "What are you talking about?"

"Thomas Manshaw," said Buckley, trembling as he looked about him. "He's the one who murdered Mr. Bensen and now he's after me."

"Who is this man, Chief?" Lowe asked.

"Jim Buckley," answered Rooper. "He owns that old roadhouse, the Cedar Inn."

"And Bensen's body was found not far from there," said Lowe, turning to face Buckley. "Who is Thomas Manshaw? Tell us what he looks like, Buckley."

"I—I don't know," Buckley said. "I've never seen his face."

ROOPER glared at him. "You expect us to believe that?"

"You got to believe it," Buckley pleaded. "It's the truth. As you know, the roadhouse ain't been open to the public for a couple of years. I tried runnin' the place, but it just didn't pay. So I just been livin' at the inn by myself. Two or three nights ago, a guy comes there and asks me do I want to make a little dough. So I says I might be interested if it wasn't crooked."

And just as interested if it did happen to be something outside the law, Lowe decided as he sized up the stocky owner of the old Cedar Inn. Buckley looked as if he would be willing to enter into any sort of a crooked deal that did not require too much courage.

"This man who offered you money was Thomas Manshaw?" asked Lowe, as Buckley paused.

"No, it wasn't. It was the guy who lived in this cottage—William Sedgewick."

"Sedgewick?" exclaimed Lowe in surprise. "Go on, Buckley."

"Well, this Sedgewick tells me that he has a couple of friends that are lookin' for a place to hold a private business talk. They asked Sedgewick to find a place for them, so he thinks of the inn and comes to see me about it. We made a deal. A guy named Manshaw is to come to my place and meet another feller. They're gonna talk over this big business deal or something."

"When was this supposed to take place?" asked Lowe, as Buckley again stopped talking and looked around nervously.

"It was last night," said Buckley. "This Thomas Manshaw shows up, and he's got a black handkerchief hiding the lower part of his face. And his hat is pulled down so that you can't see nothing but his eyes. Hard-looking guy, he was, and when he told me to stick around and do as he says, I didn't argue with him none."

"Was he tall or short?" asked Lowe.

"A tall guy. Close to six feet, I guess—" Buckley broke off and stood gazing at the doorway leading from the kitchen into the hall of the cottage. His mouth was wide open.

Both Lowe and Rooper swung around. Chayne, the Bensen butler, stood there, a tall figure in the doorway, a somber expression on his battered face as he gazed at Buckley.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," Chayne said. "I heard voices, and so I came back here hoping to find you."

"What are you doing here, Chayne?" asked Lowe.

"I came here to find you and Chief Rooper, sir," said the butler, still watching Buckley, who was gazing at him

with the fascination of a bird captured by a snake. "There was something said about your going to Mr. Sedgewick's residence after you left Ridgeway Manor, so I took the liberty of borrowing one of the family's cars and driving here at once."

"Why?" Lowe snapped. "Is there something wrong?"

"I'm not certain, sir," said Chayne. "But Miss Dorothy appears to be missing."

"She's probably just gone out for a while," Rooper said. "I don't think we need worry about her in broad daylight, Chayne. Where is Drayton? Maybe he knows where she is."

"But I don't," the blond young man said excitedly, as he stepped in through the back door of the cottage. "I've been looking for her myself."

"So you thought she might be calling on Sedgewick, and came to the cottage by the back way so that you might be able to look in without being seen," said Lowe. "Is that it, Drayton?"

THE BLOND man flushed, but did not answer.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Sedgewick has been murdered and Miss Bensen is not here," Lowe told the secretary.

"Sedgewick murdered!" exclaimed Drayton. "Great—"

"Forget the dramatics, Drayton," Lowe said. "We're not in the mood."

"I'm getting out of here," said Buckley nervously. "I didn't know that Sedgewick guy had been killed."

"You didn't?" Lowe looked at the short, stocky man questioningly. "Then, when you first mentioned Sedgewick a few minutes ago, why did you say: 'It was the guy who lived in this cottage.' You spoke of him in the past tense, Buckley, as people usually do of the dead."

"Rooper! Lowe! Where the devil are you?" a deep voice called from the front of the cottage. "It's Macauley."

"Back here, Doc," shouted the chief. "In the kitchen."

"If there is nothing further I can do, I'll be getting back to the estate," Chayne said. "Perhaps there might be some word from Miss Dorothy by now."

"All right, Chayne," said Rooper sus-

piciously, "go ahead. Phone me at police headquarters if you don't find her by afternoon."

"Very good, sir." Chayne stepped out through the back door just as Dr. Macauley entered the kitchen.

"I saw your car outside, Chief," the doctor said, stroking his red mustache as he looked at the other men in the kitchen. "Thought I'd stop and see if you had learned any more about Benson's murder." He scowled. "But I didn't expect to find another corpse here."

"Neither did we," said Trevor Lowe dryly.

"He'll get me!" shouted Jim Buckley suddenly. "I recognized his voice. I know he'll get me!"

The short, stocky man gave Drayton a shove, and leaped for the back door of the cottage.

"Stop him!" Lowe shouted, darting outside after Buckley, with the others close behind him. "He's the most important witness we have so far!"

From the front of the cottage came the sudden roar of a motor and then the meshing of gears as a car started. Lowe rounded the corner just in time to see Buckley driving away in a low, speedy-looking sport coupe.

"Hey!" shouted Drayton. "He's stealing my car!"

"Go after him, Chief," Lowe said to Rooper. "I'll stay here with the body. Take Drayton with you."

Rooper nodded and climbed into his car, with Drayton right after him. They sped away with the siren on the chief's car wailing.

Lowe and Macauley watched until the car disappeared from sight. Finally the detective drew out his tobacco pouch and filled and lighted his pipe.

"Complicated business, murder," he said. "Don't you think so, Doctor?"

"Yes." Macauley nodded. "Shall I give you a report on Sedgewick's body?"

V

AS THE doctor examined the corpse sprawled out on the floor, Lowe leaned against the wall, watching. A patch of bright sunlight crept in through the door and seemed to halt in fright at the

feet of the dead man.

"I wouldn't touch it," Lowe said, as Macauley reached out a hand to withdraw the black-handled knife from Sedgewick's heart. "Fingerprints, you know, though the murderer was doubtlessly too smart for that. He probably wore gloves."

"Probably." The doctor got to his feet with a sigh. "As near as I can tell, he's been dead about an hour."

"I don't think it's that long. He had just stopped bleeding when we found him," Lowe pointed out—"not more than five or ten minutes before we arrived here."

"Have it your way, if you wish." Dr. Macauley shrugged his shoulders. "Your guess as to when he died is as good as mine. There's nothing more I can do here now." They stepped through the front door and out into the bright sunlight. "Do you think this horrible crime has anything to do with the murder of Elmer Bensen?"

"Of course." Lowe had removed his hat and he ran his fingers through his thick black hair. "Murder breeds murder, Doctor. At least I've often found it to be the case."

"And the motive?"

Lowe looked hard at Macauley. "Did you like Bensen, Doctor?"

"I despised him," said Macauley.

"That makes it practically unanimous," said Lowe. "But the man who hated him the most was named Manshaw."

"Never heard of him." The doctor looked puzzled. "Doesn't live around these parts, does he?"

"I'm not sure he exists at all," said Lowe. "It may be just a name the murderer is using to cover his real identity."

"I marvel at the modern type of criminal investigator," remarked the doctor. "You have to be experts in so many things, like ballistics, fingerprinting. Take that murder case in New York a year or so ago, where a piece of cord was traced to the killer. I—"

Without warning, Lowe flung himself at the doctor in a flying tackle that brought Macauley crashing to the ground. A bullet thudded into the side of the house. From the woods at the side of the cottage came what sounded like

the crack of a .22-caliber rifle.

Lowe rolled quickly aside and whipped an automatic out of his shoulder holster. He fired at a figure running far back among the trees.

"What's the idea, Lowe?" snarled Macauley, getting to his feet.

"Somebody doesn't like you, Doctor." Lowe dropped the automatic back into the shoulder holster. "He tried to kill you with a rifle." The husky dark-haired detective picked up the hat he had dropped when he had leaped toward the doctor.

"But who would want to kill me, and why?" Macauley exclaimed.

"I don't know." Lowe frowned. "But this complicates things greatly."

"Why?" Macauley looked puzzled.

"Because up to now you've been one of my best possible suspects, Doctor." Lowe grinned. "Your carelessness in reporting the time that Bensen and Sedgewick died seemed like an alibi to me."

"Rot!" snorted the doctor. "You're crazy, Lowe!" He moved toward his car. "But I'm glad you got that idea off your mind. You'll find me at my office if you need me."

CALMLY smoking his pipe as Macauley drove away in his mud-spattered roadster, Lowe searched the woods beyond the cottage. It was possible the man with the rifle might sneak back through the trees, and Lowe was not at all sure the shot he had fired had even winged the killer.

"Guess I really am foolish to stay out in the open like this," he said to himself. "I must make a nice target."

He stepped in through the front door of the cottage, pausing in the hall to look down at the corpse. The casual murder-investigation routine of the Stoneville police department worried him. He missed the checking by the fingerprint experts, the work of the police photographers, and even having a guard at the spot where the body had been found.

Compared to the usual thorough examination and report given by a city police medical examiner, the way Dr. Macauley had handled things regarding the two dead men was a joke. Probably,

as Chief Rooper had said, the doctor was a good man as a general practitioner, but in Lowe's estimate Macauley wasn't worth a damn as a coroner.

There were a lot of angles to this case running through Lowe's head. He tried to arrange the facts as he knew them in some logical order. First, Sedgewick had come to the old roadhouse and made arrangements with Buckley for the Cedar Inn to be used as a meeting place between Bensen and the mysterious Thomas Manshaw. In Lowe's estimation, there was a false note right there.

"Why should two men go to all that trouble to arrange a meeting place?" he said, thinking aloud. "And why was it necessary for Sedgewick, a third party, to make the arrangements?"

He could think of only one reason and that was that Manshaw had planned to murder Bensen from the beginning. In that case, had Sedgewick known of the killer's intention and been working with him? Was that why Sedgewick had been murdered—because he knew too much? The whole thing was screwy.

The little cottage was hushed and still now. The door of the living room that opened out into the hall was closed. Silently, Lowe opened it. He stood there with his hand on the knob, his eyes fixed on the broad back of the man who was crouched beside a little wall safe.

"Find anything interesting there, Chayne?" Lowe said as his right hand slid to the automatic in his shoulder holster.

Bensen's butler swung around with a snarl. He leaped toward Lowe even as the detective drew his gun. Before Lowe could aim the gun, Chayne smashed a hard fist against his chin.

The blow sent Lowe reeling back against the wall of the living room with such impact that he jarred the whole cottage. A blinding flash of pain swept over him as his elbow struck the wall, numbing his arm so that the automatic dropped from his fingers.

"You ain't gonna get me." All trace of Chayne's soft English accent was gone now.

Lowe did not waste any breath on words. The pain in his left arm passed as quickly as it had come. He advanced toward Chayne, throwing aside a small

table that stood in the center of the room.

Chayne's eyes gleamed as he saw Lowe hastily throw off his coat and assume the professional stance of a trained boxer. This looked as if it would be right up the ex-prizefighter's alley.

"One of them college-boy champs, eh?" said Chayne sarcastically. "Well, I can take care of you."

He whipped out a left, and Lowe rode with the blow. Another left, and Lowe swayed to the right. Then Lowe came charging in fast, rocking Chayne with four quick lefts to the chin.

The butler was tough, and it was evident that he didn't have a glass jaw. Those four wallops of Lowe's had plenty of power behind them, but Chayne shrugged them off and came back swinging.

Then Lowe swung a right that connected with Chayne's chin and the butler went down.

LOWE was too experienced a fighter to stand there admiring his handiwork. He snatched up his automatic from where it had fallen. Chayne moaned and sat up, looking miserable when he saw Lowe had him covered with the gun.

"Now you be a good boy while I see what you were after," said Lowe.

He backed to the open door of the wall safe and, without taking his eyes off Chayne, drew out a flat case.

"A jewel box," he said. He stepped to a table in one corner of the room and opened the case with one hand. "So this is why you murdered Bensen and Sedgewick."

"I didn't kill them," Chayne protested, struggling to his feet. "Why should I murder the boss? He was a good guy, and smart too. I'll bet there never was a better international crook than Elmer Bensen—"

"International crook? Is that true, Chayne?"

"Sure it's true. But Bensen gave it up about ten years ago. That was when he brought his daughter home from that convent in France. Since then we've been going straight." Chayne frowned. "But when I think of the way the boss used to get away with smuggling stuff

into this country, and the big deals he put across, it makes me sad."

"So you decided to try your hand at a little crooked work yourself?" Still covering Chayne with his gun, Lowe glanced at the contents of the jewel box. Arranged in neat rows were—a glittering and oddly cut diamond, a ruby, a star sapphire, two or three smaller stones, and a single uncut diamond. "Nice little haul, this. Too bad you didn't get away with it, Chayne."

"It is," Chayne said. He had regained control of himself, and once more his voice was suave and accented and he was careful of his English. "Unfortunately Mr. Bensen's death was so unexpected that he made no provision for me. I knew that Mr. Sedgewick had a small collection of rather valuable jewels, so I thought I had better try and feather my nest."

"So you murdered Sedgewick," Lowe said. "But we got here too quickly for you to have a chance to steal the gems."

"No," Chayne said, "I didn't kill Sedgewick. He was dead when I first came here looking for you and the chief a little while ago."

"All right, we'll let it go that way for the time being," said Lowe. "But what about the big deals that Bensen used to put over? Was Sedgewick connected with any of them?"

"I believe he was mixed up in Mr. Bensen's last bit of smuggling," said Chayne thoughtfully. "There were quite a lot of rich people implicated in that, as I recall. A New York bank president—Hillcrest, I believe his name was—and Sedgewick and some other men."

"Martin Hillcrest, president of the Financial Trust Company?"

"Yes, that's the man."

"Good! I know Hillcrest very well. He may be able to tell me something about that smuggling deal you mention." Lowe dropped his automatic back into his pocket. "I'm going to surprise you, Chayne."

"How so, sir?" Chayne was once more the placid butler.

"I'm going to let you go. Of course, I could turn you over to Chief Rooper and have him jail you for attempted theft."

"But that would be merely your word against mine, sir," said Chayne. "After

all, I have not touched that jewel case. Only your fingerprints are on it, along with those of Mr. Sedgewick."

Lowe grinned. Chayne was right. It was his word against Lowe's, and probably his fingerprints were actually not on the jewel case, as he said. Then a sudden thought occurred to him.

"You didn't have time to go back to the Bensen estate," Lowe said. "Where did you go after you drove away from here?"

coat. Then he banged the wall safe shut. "You just came here to see if I had learned anything further about Miss Bensen." His tone was suddenly hard. "But I wouldn't try to leave this part of the country, if I were you."

"Very good, sir," Chayne picked up Lowe's overcoat and held it out for him. "Your coat, Mr. Lowe."

For an instant, Lowe hesitated. Once he thrust his arms into the sleeves of that coat it would give Chayne a perfect



THE PERFECT CRIME —ALMOST!

THE BANDITS were cold-blooded killers. Armed with machine guns and pistols they held up, robbed and murdered a mail messenger at Guthrie, Kentucky, and made off with \$25,000.

It started the postal inspectors on one of the toughest manhunts in history. It seemed to be a perfect crime. The killers had made no mistakes. The money was in old bills of small denomination and there was no record of the serial numbers. The armed killers seemed as untraceable as the money.

But there was one clue—slight, seemingly meaningless, but which, finally, proved to be the one thing needed to bring about the killers' downfall.

It was known that the killers were brothers.

The inspectors did not know the brothers' names—but they did know that they were experts with the machine gun. An expert with the .45 Thompson is rare; a pair of brothers who can handle them is rarer still.

Referring to crime files, the inspectors found a pair of brothers—Floyd and Ray Bruce of Columbus, Georgia—listed as fools with the machine gun.

The inspectors soon proved them fools *period*. They were the killers who never made a mistake—except the one of robbing the U. S. Mail!

"I drove around the bend to the south, parked the car and came back through the woods on foot," said Chayne. "I came in the back door, of course. I heard you shooting, and then everything was quiet. I was sure you were chasing someone when I heard a car drive away." The butler rubbed the chin that Lowe had pounded heavily. "I made a mistake."

"Then you don't know if Miss Bensen is still missing?" Lowe asked.

"No, sir, I don't." Chayne looked at the detective then, as they heard a car stop out in the road. "There's somebody coming. What shall I do?"

"Nothing." Lowe closed the jewel case and dropped it into a side pocket of his

opportunity to capture him. He glanced at the ex-prizefighter. Then he smiled and let Chayne help him on with the garment.

"Thank you, Chayne," he said as he walked away.

The butler bowed and followed the detective out into the hall, picking up the hat Lowe had dropped and handing it to him.

Chief Rooper came barging in through the front door. There were three policemen with him. Lowe saw that John Drayton was no longer with the chief.

"Buckley got away," said Rooper excitedly. "We chased him about a quarter of a mile along the road, then he turned

into a drive leading to an old farm. He left Drayton's car there and struck out through the woods. He had too much of a head-start for us to chase after him on foot, so I went back to the village to get some of my men. I'll have them search this area for Buckley. He's around here somewhere."

"Glad you got back, Chief," Lowe said, yawning. "It's been pretty dull around here just guarding the corpse." He glanced at the butler. "Hasn't it, Chayne?"

"Quite so, sir," said Chayne without the slightest change of expression. "Dull is the word."

VI

MOONLIGHT cast a silver sheen on the stately trees of Ridgeway Manor, and yet there were many places where the light did not penetrate. From beneath the weeping willow tree back near the garage, a tall man loomed into view. A soft hat was pulled low on his forehead so that only the glittering eyes above the black cloth hiding the lower part of his face were visible. His overcoat collar was turned up, though the night was not cold.

A corpse lay at his feet.

"I warned him not to talk," he muttered. "Babbling all he knew to the chief and that detective!"

The man called Thomas Manshaw went to a tall flagpole that was set on the lawn. He unfastened one end of the halyard and carried the rope back with him to the weeping willow. Quickly fashioning a noose, he dropped it around the neck of the corpse. Jim Buckley would never speak out of turn again.

The murderer worked fast, and when he had finished a dead man was hanging from the flagpole on the estate that had belonged to Elmer Bensen.

"That will puzzle them," Manshaw said as he moved quickly away into the enveloping darkness.

The masked man did not see the plain handkerchief that dropped out of the side pocket of his coat.

It was still there, a tiny patch of white in the moonlight long after he had disappeared. . . .

THE CAR'S headlights were like round white eyes as the automobile rolled along the winding drive that led to the front of the mansion. For an instant, the hanging corpse was clearly visible in the bright glare of the headlights. The car halted abruptly.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Rooper. "Look there, Lowe. A man hanging from that flagpole."

"I see him." Lowe opened the door and stepped out, Rooper sliding from under the wheel. "Looks like Buckley from here."

The chief of police fumbled in the pocket of the car and produced a long-barreled flashlight. He switched the light on as they approached the pole.

The white beam revealed the contorted face of the owner of the old Cedar Inn.

"It's Jim Buckley, all right," said Rooper.

Defly, Trevor Lowe unfastened the ropes and lowered the body to the ground. There were times when he hated his job—the close contact with death that murder cases frequently made necessary. He had to be callous, but in spite of everything, Bensen, Sedgewick and Buckley had been human beings. Probably they had loved life as much as any man.

Suddenly something white fluttered in the breeze, catching his eye. Lowe went over and picked it up. It was a man's white linen handkerchief. And he noticed that it had a faintly sulphurous, chemical odor.

"Find something?" Rooper asked, moving closer and peering at the object in the detective's hand.

"Just a man's handkerchief. No initials on it." Lowe thrust the square of white linen into his pocket. "Might be some latent prints on it, though."

"Too bad that my men didn't find Buckley," Rooper said. "He would have been safer in jail, poor devil."

"At least we know where he is now." Lowe's tone was bitter. "But why did Manshaw have to be so spectacular about this? Hanging Buckley on the flagpole is such a childish trick. The sort of prank a college student might play with a stuffed dummy of the dean—" He uttered a startled exclama-

tion as he realized what he had said. "That's it, Chief! I was right!"

"Right about what?" Rooper demanded. "We better hurry up. Remember, the reason we came here is because Drayton phoned and told us Dorothy Bensen is still missing." His voice was tense as a thought struck him. "Do you suppose she might have been murdered?"

"I doubt it," Lowe said. "But when I said I was right a moment ago, I thought I had a line on the murderer. Now I'm not so sure of it. This afternoon you said you knew of three men who had reason to hate Elmer Bensen. Who were they?"

"Just local tradesmen. A butcher, a grocer and a man who runs a hardware store in the village. They all had arguments with Bensen at one time or another. He had a nasty disposition." The chief sighed. "But they had no real motive for killing him."

"The murderer did, I'm sure of that."

"Stay here," Rooper said suddenly. "I'm going into the house and phone for some of my men. I guess I'd better have Doc Macauley give us a report on the body."

"That will be nice," Lowe called out as the chief hurried toward the house. "He'll probably tell us Buckley died from natural causes two days ago."

Rooper laughed, then faded into the shadows as he passed beneath the overhanging branches of some trees. Lowe stood beside the corpse, looking at the big house looming dimly in the night. There were lights shining through the windows on the lower floor, bright squares set in the gray stone.

Lowe agreed with the chief. The three local men who hated Bensen because of his disagreeable disposition were not even worthy of consideration as suspects in this case. There were others far more important.

John Drayton had far more reason for killing the man who had ruined his father financially and caused the elder Drayton to kill himself. Chayne might also be the murderer, for Lowe had not accepted the butler's story without some reservations.

"What the hell!" Lowe muttered as the lights in the house went out, leaving

the windows black blotches in the gloom. "That's strange. Maybe I better go see what's wrong."

HE RAN across the lawn, drawing his automatic as he reached the steps of a small porch leading to the kitchen. The kitchen door was standing open, but the room beyond it was in total darkness.

Trevor Lowe stopped when he saw that the cover of a small, square box built on the wall of the house was open. He produced a pocket flashlight. Just as he had thought—it was the fuse box that controlled the house's electricity. The main switch had been pulled open, cutting off all the lights.

"So that was it!" Lowe reached up and pushed the switch back into place.

The instant he did so a bright light gleamed through the open kitchen door. He stepped into the house. There was no one in the kitchen.

Lowe went through the butler's pantry and on into the dining room beyond. Electric lights were now burning all over the lower floor, but even in the bright glow the dismal atmosphere of the place remained.

"Wonder what happened to Chief Rooper?" Lowe muttered, as he searched the rooms and found them empty.

The phone caught his eye when he stepped into what had been Elmer Bensen's den. The instrument was lying on the desk, as though whoever had been using it had dropped it suddenly. Lowe picked it up. As he did, a weird wailing, like a loudspeaker gone crazy, burst from his phone.

Lowe grinned and placed the phone back on the cradle. He knew that the operator had turned on the "howler" when she had found that the line was open and received no answer. The howler was often used when some one accidentally left their receiver off the hook.

"Hello. Stoneville operator?" Lowe asked after he had picked up the phone and heard the operator speak. "Did you just have a call over this wire?"

"Were you calling Stoneville nine-seven-six?" the operator asked. "That's the police department."

"That's right." Seeing Rooper's blue

uniform cap lying on the floor beside the desk, Lowe scowled. "Let me have them again, please."

As soon as he got the police on the wire Lowe said that he was calling for Chief Rooper, who wanted some men sent out to Ridgeway Manor right away and to come ready for trouble. There had been another murder.

There was no longer any doubt in his mind that something had happened to Rooper while he had been phoning the police station. But what? The only sign of a struggle was the cap lying on the floor, and the fact that the phone had evidently been put down suddenly.

He walked toward the door with the intention of exploring the rest of the house. As he reached the door, the phone rang. He turned back to answer it. But at that moment someone leaped at him from the hall and a hard object crashed down on his head.

Lowe tried to fight back, but he felt himself slipping fast into unconsciousness. . . .

VII

SLOWLY Lowe blinked and opened his eyes. He wondered vaguely why he was numb with cold and had such a racking pain in his head. He stretched out his hand into the velvety darkness that surrounded him and shivered as his groping fingers encountered cold, slimy earth.

"I phoned the police," he muttered. "Phone rang and somebody must have hit me over the head and knocked me out when I turned to answer it."

He struggled to a sitting position. The pain in his head made him wince, but presently the ache subsided somewhat. Who had struck him, and where had he been taken? He was sure he was no longer near Ridgeway Manor. He felt in his pockets, but the flashlight and his automatic were not there.

"If it was the murderer, why didn't he kill me instead of knocking me out and bringing me here?" Lowe asked himself, and then lapsed into silence as he found his own voice eerie, coming out of the black darkness.

He felt in his vest pocket for the small cigarette lighter he usually carried,

flicked it on as he got to his feet. In the dull glimmer of flame he peered about him.

"Repulsive-looking place," he murmured.

He was in a small, low-roofed cellar, apparently hollowed out of the earth itself, for the walls were slimy with the percolated moisture of years. His shoes splashed in an inch of foul water, and the air was so close and fetid that the flame of the lighter burned but dimly.

Lowe shivered. The only way to escape the water underfoot was a flight of wooden steps leading up to a pair of cellar doors, and even these steps were soggy and rotting like seaweed. He looked down at himself. His hat and overcoat were covered with green, slimy mud.

The pain in his head was making him feel sick, and he sat for a moment or two on the steps. He discovered that he still had his pipe and tobacco pouch, so he filled and lighted the briar and smoked steadily in the black silence.

"I guess the next thing is to try and get out of here."

He rose to his feet, snapped on the lighter again and examined the cellar doors, which apparently formed the entrance and exit to this mud box into which he had been thrown. The doors fitted into a six-inch frame of cement which in its turn was embedded in solid earth. A test of the heavy door proved they were immovable.

"Not a chance of getting out that way," he decided. "And the roof of the cellar here at the door must be eighteen inches thick. What I need is a steam shovel."

On further investigation he found what seemed to be a weak patch in the roof near the hinged side of one of the doors. Some of the earth forming the roof had crumpled away at this point.

Lowe searched through the pockets, found a clasp knife and drew it out. He wondered why whoever had knocked him out had taken the gun and the flashlight and not the knife, and then decided they had probably reasoned it would not be used as a weapon.

Opening the blade of the knife, he mounted the steps and began digging away at the loose earth. He had to work

in the dark, but every now and then he snapped on the lighter and inspected his progress.

"I'll probably be at this as long as the Abbe Faria in the *Count of Monte Cristo* was in digging that tunnel," Lowe muttered. "But it's better than sitting around in the dark doing nothing."

DESPITE his self-jesting, Lowe knew the need for haste was urgent. Both Chief Rooper and Dorothy Bensen had disappeared. Even now they might be in the hands of the ruthless killer who called himself Thomas Manshaw.

"What the hell!" Lowe exclaimed, as a strange sound came to his ears. "Water coming in here from somewhere."

He went down the steps and stepped into water that was now up above his ankles. It had risen four inches higher over the cellar floor while he had been digging the hole near the door. With the aid of the pocket lighter he found the place where the water poured into his prison.

It was a drain pipe set in the cellar wall, but now, instead of letting the water out, it was bringing more and more in.

"So this is why he knocked me out and left me down here. When the water rises high enough, I drown. And it might be a long, long time before my body will be found."

The water was coming in with too much force for any attempt to stop it by stuffing something in the drain, for the pipe was already half under water. There was only one thing to do, and that was to try and dig his way out as quickly as possible.

He plowed back through the water and climbed the steps. He raised the lighter and the flame grew dim and then died away altogether.

"Damn it!" he swore. "Fuel's gone."

He took off his overcoat and hat so he would be able to work faster, and began digging feverishly above his head with the knife. The water rushing into the cellar was a steady, sinister sound.

Soon the job became no more than the continuous circling of the knife in the hole that he had already made. Slowly it was becoming larger. He was

standing on one of the lower steps, for it was not much of a reach from there for a tall man. He felt the water creeping up until it was on a level with the tread of the step, then above it, so that it washed around the soles of his shoes.

"Coming in faster," Lowe said. "He must have turned a hose into that drain pipe."

He continued his work and suddenly came upon a stumbling-block. The roof evidently formed the floor of some room above, for he found that the earth had been reinforced with lines of wooden rafters. He was digging a hole about eighteen inches in diameter and he scraped away until he had laid the rafters bare.

The water was up to his thighs now, even though he had climbed as far up the steps as it was possible and still be able to work with any degree of comfort. Then he began the slow and painful task of hacking through the timber. The wood that had been buried in the damp earth for years was not the tough, resilient stuff it had been when the builders had first sunk it there. Age had sapped its fibers, dampness had decayed it, but it was still far from being completely rotted.

Lowe's wrist ached thoroughly. His fingers had gone dead from gripping the slim knife handle, and his arms throbbed with the effort of holding them continuously above his head, but he stuck to his task.

At the end of an hour the water was up to his waist, but one section of the timber had fallen and another was half hacked through. But there were still two more to be dislodged.

"Wonder whether it's night or day," he muttered, as he paused briefly to rest.

He found that he was forced to work in spells, digging for a few minutes and then again resting his arms. He knew that no matter how tired he might be, he had to get the hole dug through before the water rose much higher. If not, he would be unable to continue, for once it rose as high as the roof he would drown.

THEN suddenly Lowe broke through. He could feel air rushing through the place where the knife had dug open a

little, but reassuring hole.

"Thank God!" he breathed, working frantically to make the hole larger.

He tugged at the two remaining rafters and finally they fell, leaving an opening wide enough for him to crawl through.

"Well, here goes."

A dim light gleamed through the opening. Lowe was about to reach up and pull himself through the hole when he heard footsteps above. He stood there in the darkness, the chill water up to his neck, listening tensely. After all the work he had done were his efforts going to be in vain? Would the murderer find him before he was able to get free?

The footsteps above came closer. Whoever was walking up there was close to the edge of the hole and must certainly see it. To Lowe's surprise, the footsteps stopped and there followed a creaking sound and then a long sigh.

"That's better, now that I have removed the gag," said a gruff, apparently disguised masculine voice.

"What am I doing here?" came the husky whisper of Dorothy Bensen. "I — Oh—" The broken sentence ended in a little scream.

"You have nothing to fear," said the voice of the murderer. "If you'll give me the information I want, no one will harm you."

"Information?" Dorothy Bensen's voice was stronger and steadier. "What can I tell you? Who are you, anyway? Why are you hiding your face with that black handkerchief?"

"Never mind who I am. What I want to know is what your father did with the diamonds?"

The water was getting higher and higher. It was almost up to Lowe's neck, yet if he tried to climb out through the hole the killer would discover him at once. In that case, he'd die before he even had a chance to aid the girl.

"Where are the diamonds?" Manshaw repeated. "Tell me!"

"Diamonds?" Dorothy sounded puzzled. "What diamonds?"

"Quit stalling. Your father had three hundred uncut diamonds that he managed to smuggle into this country."

"Smuggle?" Dorothy said. "You mean that my father—"

"Was a famous international crook," Manshaw finished for her. "Do you expect me to believe that you didn't know?"

"Of course I didn't," the girl protested. "So that was why he never told me anything about his life during those years I spent at the convent. I understand why now." Her tone was bitter. "My father a smuggler!"

"I didn't come here to listen to you moan about your father's past," Manshaw said. "Where did he keep the diamonds? I killed three men because I wanted those stones, and put three more where they can't do any harm tonight." His voice had grown sinister. "I might make you the fourth victim if you don't tell me. Where are those diamonds?"

"I don't know." Dorothy's tone had changed. She was frightened now. Trevor Lowe could sense the hysteria in her voice. "Father never told me about the diamonds. He never told me anything. You *must* believe that!"

LOWE had heard enough. He reached up and dragged himself up through the opening he had dug between the ceiling of the cellar and the floor of the room above. In doing so his head came into violent contact with an unseen object above. It was such a heavy blow that it nearly knocked him back through the hole into the water below.

It took him a few seconds to recover, and then he realized he had struck his head on some metal springs two feet above his head. He had excavated the hole by sheer chance right under a bed, a bed on which he was sure Dorothy Bensen was now bound.

"What was that?" Manshaw said suddenly. "I heard a noise. Sounded as if it came from below." He chuckled. "Lowe is down there. He can't get out, and water is pouring in around him higher and higher."

"You fiend!" Dorothy cried. "You murdering beast!"

"Careful, my dear," Manshaw said. "Perhaps you may remember this from your school days: *A verbis ad verbera.*"

"It sounds like Latin."

"It is," said Manshaw, "and it means 'from words to blows.' You really shouldn't call me names, my dear. I'll

be back in a little while, and then I expect you to tell me where your father hid the diamonds."

Lowe had been silently waiting beneath the bed, most of the water seeping out of his clothes. The room was dimly lighted and he could see very little from where he was sprawled close to a side wall. He caught a glimpse of a pair of feet moving away and a length of leather strap as Manshaw walked toward the door. Manshaw was carrying that strap, apparently as a threat to the girl. Then he was gone, closing the door behind him.

For a few moments Lowe waited, then crawled out from under the bed and looked about him. He was in a low, dirty cellar, the corners of which were stacked with barrels and empty bottles. It was evidently the storage cellar of the Cedar Inn. The walls were of rough brickwork and the low ceiling was formed by the rafters of the floor above.

An oil lamp stood on an old, cracked-mirror bureau that stood in one corner. Lowe turned to the bed, which was covered by a filthy blanket that trailed on the floor on both sides of the old iron bedstead. And on this lay Dorothy Benson, her wrists and ankles bound to the head and bottom rails of the bed by long strips of adhesive tape.

Her face was deathly white, and across her forehead was a long gash from which blood had oozed and dried on her cheek. Her eyes were wide as she gazed at the water-soaked figure that had just crawled out from beneath the bed.

"Don't scream," Lowe said sharply. "I'm a friend. You know me, Miss Benson."

"Trevor Lowe," she said. "Oh, thank heaven, you got here! He's coming back to kill me if I don't tell him where to find the diamonds. And I don't know, I tell you! I don't know!"

VIII

REALIZING that Manshaw might return at any moment, Lowe motioned the girl to be quiet and went to the door. He found it locked from the outside. It was built of stout oak, and he realized that even if he did succeed in battering

it down, the noise would attract Thomas Manshaw.

"What's the matter?" Dorothy's voice was low as she regained control of herself.

"He locked the door," Lowe answered, swiftly searching the cellar for some other means of escape. "We can't get out of here."

In one corner were the subcellar doors, secured by a heavy oak bar, leading into the mud-hole from which he had escaped. He wondered how soon the mud-hole would be filled with water and the flood start rising into this cellar.

"What are we going to do?" Dorothy asked, as Lowe went to the bed and cut through the adhesive tape that bound her.

She sat up, the dim light gleaming on her hair.

"There's only one thing to do," Lowe said. "He doesn't know I've escaped from down below. I'll hide under the bed again, and next time he comes in here, I'll be ready for him."

Lowe slid beneath the bed, hidden by the edge of the blanket that was draped over the side. At his order the girl told him her story in a voice so low it was little more than a whisper.

That morning, after Lowe and Chief Rooper had told her of her father's murder, she had taken her roadster and driven into the village. She had remained a little while at the undertaker's establishment where the police had taken the body of her father. Then she had decided to drive out to the spot where the body had been found.

"I felt I simply couldn't go back to that gloomy old house yet," she went on. "John would be there—Mr. Drayton, I mean—and so would Chayne and the other servants. I didn't want their sympathy. I couldn't bear it. You see, Mr. Lowe, I had found that my father's death left me without the slightest sensation of the real grief I should have felt."

"That was natural," Lowe said. "After all, your father was practically a stranger. But never mind that. Tell me what happened."

"I reached the spot where the workmen were building the gasoline station," she said. "Then I changed my mind

about stopping there. So I drove on. Finally I found myself in front of the old Cedar Inn. I wanted to find some place where I could be alone, to think things through."

"You went into the inn?"

"Yes. And the moment I stepped inside, someone grabbed me. Strong, horrible fingers caught me by the throat. Then something struck me on the head and I partially lost consciousness. I dimly realized someone was carrying me down into this dark, musty old cellar. Then some bitter-tasting stuff was forced down my throat. It made me feel ill, and then everything went black."

"And when you opened your eyes, the masked man was standing beside you, and you were tied to the bed?" Lowe asked. "Is that it?"

"Yes," said Dorothy. "He was—"

"Quiet!" Lowe interrupted. "I hear footsteps. He's coming back."

THE SOUND of footsteps could be heard plainly as someone stopped outside the door. A clanking noise followed as a bolt was drawn back and the heavy door opened. Manshaw entered the cellar room. He wore his soft hat drawn low over his eyes and as usual the bottom half of his face was concealed beneath a piece of black material.

"Good thing I turned off the water," he said, glancing at the floor. "The room's filled down there, and the whole inn would have been flooded if I'd let that hose on any longer."

He approached the bed. With his overcoat collar turned up, he was a tall, sinister figure in the dim light of the oil lamp. He stood there glaring at the girl, who was lying on the bed as though she were still helplessly tied.

"Well, have you changed your mind?" he asked. "Are you going to tell me where the diamonds are hidden?"

"How can I tell you?" Dorothy said. "I don't know anything about them."

"This is your last chance. Tell me!"

"I don't know! I never heard—"

She broke off with a little cry as the masked man leaned forward, his fingers reached for her throat.

"You'll speak if I have to choke it out of you!"

Beneath the bed, Lowe slightly raised

the edge of the grimy blanket. He found that Manshaw's feet were within a foot of him. Suddenly he grabbed the ankles and gave a quick jerk.

The masked man shouted as he was pulled off balance. He fell, striking the dirt floor with a thud that jarred the breath out of him.

Lowe crawled swiftly from under the bed. He was on his feet when Manshaw sprang up and hurled himself savagely at him. They went down together, rolling over and over, each clawing at the other.

Dorothy sat up on the bed, no longer pretending she was bound.

A fist slammed against Lowe's chin, jerking his head back. He caught Manshaw's arm and then rolled over, smashing against the old bureau and knocking the lamp over. The chimney glass broke, but the wick continued to burn.

"Look out!" Dorothy screamed. "He's got an ax!"

Lowe made it to his feet, ducked as Manshaw swung at him with a long-handled ax he had picked up from among the boxes and barrels. Lowe caught the ax handle as Manshaw drew it back for another swing.

"Drop it!" he shouted, tugging on the ax handle and smashing a fist into Manshaw's face at the same time.

The blow knocked Manshaw back. He lost his grip on the ax so suddenly that it also flew out of Lowe's hand and smashed into a cask of whisky, tearing a hole in it. The liquor poured out and a bright flash of flame followed as the burning wick of the oil lamp ignited the whisky.

"Fire!" Dorothy screamed. "The whole place will burn!"

Manshaw lashed out with a right and a left that sent Lowe crashing down. Before he could regain his feet the masked man had leaped to the door, slammed it shut from the outside, and shot the bolt into place.

GETTING to his feet, Lowe commanded, "Over by the door. The fire hasn't spread in that direction yet."

He grabbed up an empty box and rushed to the double doors of the subcellar. He drew back the bolts that held them closed and flung the doors open.

Just as he had hoped, the water had risen high enough for him to reach down and scoop up some of it in the box. He dashed the water on the fire, and part of the flames hissed and went out.

"I'll help," said Dorothy, picking up a tin basin from the floor.

She scooped up water as Lowe filled the soap box a second time. They worked fast, flinging water on the fire until it was completely extinguished. Then they found themselves in complete darkness.

"We're still prisoners," Dorothy said. "He bolted the door."

"There may be a way of getting out." Lowe was fumbling around in the dark. "Here, I've found the ax. The handle is scorched but still usable."

He swung the ax against the door, smashing the keen blade through the panel so that he was able to reach through the hole he made and pull back the bolt.

Carrying the ax, he stepped out of the cellar room. Dorothy Bensen followed him. The old inn was quiet and appeared deserted now. They found a flight of stairs leading to the first floor of the place and climbed them, groping their way through the darkness.

The cold night air felt good on their faces when, finally, they stepped outside. They walked along the road.

"Lovely place, the Cedar Inn," Lowe said, glancing back at the squat building behind them.

Dorothy laughed softly.

"My car is gone, of course," she said. "I left it parked in front of the inn. But the killer wouldn't have left it there after he had taken me prisoner."

Lowe liked her. She was able to think for herself. "But where would Manshaw take your car? You said it was a convertible, didn't you?"

"Yes. Chartreuse with a black top."

"Which would make it as inconspicuous as a neon sign around here," Lowe said. "If you were the murderer and wanted to keep that car from arousing any suspicion around Stoneville, what would you do with it?"

"Put it back where it belonged, in the garage at Ridgeway Manor. That is, if I could do it without being seen."

"You're wonderful!" Lowe said. "That is what Manshaw must have done."

HEADLIGHTS gleamed far down the road ahead of them. The lights grew larger and brighter. They waited, standing in the shadows at the side of the road.

"It could be *him*, coming back," Dorothy said.

"Yes, I know."

From the approaching car there came the high wail of a police siren. They recognized the sedan. It was Chief Rooper's car.

Lowe stepped out into the white glare of the headlights, waving his arms. The sedan came to a halt with a grinding of brakes. Rooper and John Drayton stepped out.

"Dorothy, darling!" Drayton exclaimed as he rushed to the girl. "Are you all right? These past few hours have been utter agony!"

Trevor Lowe stood there, still feeling the chill of the water in the subcellar, his arms aching from the work he had done.

"Step over here, Chief," he said, taking Rooper and leading him away from Drayton and the girl. "What happened to you?"

"I left you to phone my men," Rooper said. "Just as I picked up the phone, the lights in the house went out. Someone knocked me out in the dark. When I came out of it I found that I had been locked in a clothes closet. I pounded on the door and my men heard me. They had arrived by then, so they let me out."

"Where were Drayton and Chayne?"

"They had been out looking for Miss Bensen and just returned after the police got there," Rooper said. "But what happened to you, Lowe?"

"That's a long story." Lowe turned toward the car. "Suppose I tell it to you on the way back to the village, Chief." He glanced at Dorothy and Drayton. "After we have taken those two home. By the way, it might be a good idea to station some of your men at Ridgeway Manor. Miss Bensen's a swell girl. I'd hate to have anything happen to her while I'm in New York tonight."

"New York!" exclaimed Rooper. "Why are you going there?"

"To see a man about a murderer," Lowe answered. He frowned and glanced

at Drayton and the girl. "And don't ask me any more about it now."

IX

IT WAS a decidedly different-looking Trevor Lowe from the water-soaked mud-stained figure of the night before who entered the private office of Martin Hillcrest, president of the Financial Trust Company in New York. Lowe had bathed and shaved, and was wearing a new topcoat and hat to replace those he had lost in the sub cellar of the old roadhouse.

"Good morning, Martin," he said, as the banker rose and shook hands with him warmly. "I realize your time is valuable, so I'll get right to the point."

"Wait a minute, Trevor." Hillcrest was a stout, bald man. He handed Lowe a cigar. "What's on your mind?"

"Did you ever hear of an international criminal named Elmer Bensen?"

"No, of course not," Hillcrest said hastily.

"Careful, Martin." Lowe's tone was serious. "I've checked up on the police records and the newspapers of ten years ago. That was around Nineteen-forty. You and four other men were foolish enough to think that you could have Bensen smuggle some jewels in from Europe for you so you'd get out of paying duty on them."

"That's right." Martin Hillcrest nodded shamefacedly. "It was just sort of an adventure, proving that we were smarter than the government men. But we were caught. I paid the duty on the stuff that Bensen brought in for me. It cost me forty thousand dollars, and I just managed to keep from receiving a jail sentence. As you say, there were four others mixed up in it."

"Do you remember the names of those four men?" Lowe smiled. "This is strictly off the record, of course."

"Why, yes. One was William Sedgewick. Another was Thornton Drayton—"

"Thornton Drayton?" interrupted Lowe. "Go on, please."

"Then there was Harvey Vicker, the ophthalmologist. He was in deeper than any of us and went to prison for

ten or fifteen years." Hillcrest frowned. "As I recall it, Bensen arranged everything, but it was Vicker who tried to bring the jewels through the customs."

"Yes, I know," said Lowe. "Vicker claimed that Bensen framed him, but there wasn't enough evidence against Bensen to convict him, and there was against Harvey Vicker. The fourth man was Bill Thomas—a Wall Street broker, wasn't he?"

Hillcrest nodded. "Thomas, Sedgewick, Drayton and I all paid a stiff fine and the duty on the jewels. But Vicker and Thomas went to jail just the same."

"Thanks, Martin." Lowe rose. "That was all I wanted to know." He smiled sympathetically at the worried expression on Hillcrest's face. "Don't worry. You won't receive any unfavorable publicity from this. I just wanted to be sure to get the facts straight."

Two hours later Trevor Lowe was back in Stoneville, talking to Chief of Police Rooper in his office.

"Learn anything from your trip to New York?" asked the chief.

"Just about what I expected," said Lowe, dropping into a chair and filling his pipe. "Anything happen at Bensen's place while I was gone?"

"Nothing." The little chief looked at Lowe like a dog begging for a bone. "What's the idea of holding out, Lowe? You know something that you aren't telling."

"I'll tell you as soon as I'm sure of it," said Lowe. "I think we had better pay a visit to Ridgeway Manor today. There are three hundred uncut diamonds hidden around there somewhere, and we'd better find them before the murderer kills someone else in trying to learn where they are."

"Let's drive out there now," said the chief, getting to his feet and putting on his cap and uniform overcoat. "I'm tired of waiting around for something to happen."

THEY went out and got into Rooper's car. It was just past noon and still chilly for early spring. Soon they had left the village behind and were swinging into the winding driveway of Ridgeway Manor. Lowe decided he wouldn't

live in the dismal place if somebody gave it to him.

"Two of my men are still on guard here," Rooper said as the car stopped in front of the house and a uniformed patrolman saluted him . . . "Everything all right here, Kelly?"

"Yes, sir," said the patrolman. "Been quiet around here all morning."

Lowe glanced at a mud-spattered roadster parked farther along the drive. It was Dr. Macauley's car and the medico was evidently in the house. Lowe and Rooper climbed the porch steps and rang the doorbell. It was a maid who admitted them.

"Where's Chayne?" Lowe asked.

"He took the doctor up to see Miss Bensen," the girl answered. "She wasn't feeling well. She must have caught a cold last night."

"How long ago did they go up?"

"It must have been about ten or fifteen minutes ago, sir."

"And Chayne hasn't come down yet?" Lowe asked.

"No, sir."

"Come on, Chief!" said Lowe, running toward the stairs. "Hurry, or we may be too late!"

He raced up to the second floor of the old house, Rooper following. Just as they reached the upper hall a scream came from one of the rooms along the corridor. Chayne stepped out through an open doorway. The ex-prize fighter swore profanely as he saw the two men, then turned and ran in the opposite direction along the hall.

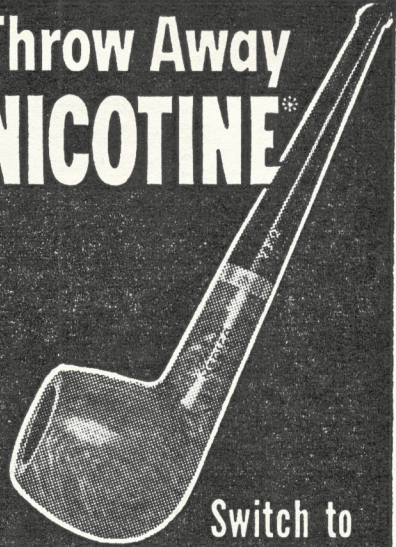
"After him!" shouted the chief. "He's the murderer!"

Rooper ran down the hall after the butler. Lowe did not follow. He stepped into the room from which Chayne had appeared. Dr. Macauley was seated in a chair beside the bed on which Dorothy Bensen lay. The doctor's fingers were on the girl's pulse.

"What's wrong with her, Doctor?" Lowe asked quietly. "Why did she scream?"

"She's all right now," Macauley said. "Her pulse is still a little rapid, but I gave her a sedative. It was Chayne. He threatened to kill both of us if we didn't tell him where the diamonds were hidden. Miss Bensen screamed, and

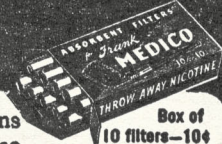
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then Chayne ran when he realized there was someone in the hall."

Lowe took out his handkerchief and held it to his left eye. "The chief will get Chayne. There's not much chance of him being able to escape." He rubbed at his eye.

"What's the matter, get something in it?" asked Dr. Macauley, moving over to the tall, dark-haired man. "Better let me take a look at that eye, Lowe."

"Wish you would. Feels like ophthalmia to me."

"Nonsense!" Dr. Macauley turned Lowe's face to the window. "There is not enough inflammation for ophthalmia. Your eye looks all right to me."

"You are so careless, Doctor." Macauley suddenly found himself covered by an automatic that Lowe had produced from the side pocket of his coat. "Or should I say Dr. Harvey Vicker?"

"Dr. Harvey Vicker?" Macauley gasped. "You're crazy!"

LOWE glanced at the door as the chief and his men appeared, marching Chayne in front of them and with John Drayton following.

"Nice work, Chayne. You probably saved your life by running away a few minutes ago, and giving Macauley a chance to insist you were the murderer."

"Isn't he?" demanded the chief in surprise.

"No," said Lowe. Dr. Harvey Vicker, alias Dr. Macauley and Thomas Manshaw is the murderer."

"Macauley!" There was a dazed expression on Rooper's face. "But how did you know, Lowe?"

"First, because Macauley was so careless in giving the time that Bensen and Sedgewick died," Lowe said, as the chief snapped handcuffs on the doctor. "He evidently did so through his ignorance of the real duties of a coroner. After all, he is—or was—a specialist in ophthalmology. I knew he had been out somewhere the night before last because of his mud-spattered car."

"But he might have been out visiting his patients."

"True, I was willing to grant that." Lowe glanced at the girl lying motionless on the bed. "You weren't foolish enough to let him give you that bitter-tasting medicine a second time, were you, Dorothy?"

"No, of course not." Dorothy sat up. "I pretended to swallow it, but I didn't. I realized the taste was the same as the stuff that the masked man forced me to swallow at the inn, so I spat it out into my handkerchief when Macauley wasn't looking."

"Smart girl," said Lowe. He shook his head sadly as he looked at the doctor. "As I said before, you have been

careless, Doctor. Tying her to the bed with white adhesive tape, such as a doctor uses, dropping your handkerchief with the sulphurous, chemical odor of iodoform on it, and talking Latin. And then when I suggested that I might have ophthalmia, you could tell just by looking at the eye whether I did or not. That required an eye specialist's knowledge. Then I was sure you were Harvey Vicker."

"But who is this Dr. Vicker?" demanded Rooper.

"He was the one man who hated Elmer Bensen enough actually to kill him," Lowe said. "Bensen got Vicker into a smuggling deal that sent the doctor to jail for ten years and ruined his life. When he got out he made up his mind to get Bensen. Vicker came here about the same time Bensen did. He had changed so much during his time in prison that Bensen did not recognize him. Perhaps Vicker is disguised now, to a certain extent. The red mustache, and in other little ways."

"I recognized the doctor yesterday when he was in the house here looking for the diamonds," Chayne said. "I wasn't going to say anything, though. He tried to choke me then, and I knew he might do it again if he got the chance. Later I saw Buckley try to kill Macauley with the rifle at Sedgewick's cottage. It was then that I knew the doctor must be Manshaw."

"Why were you sure of that?" Lowe asked.

"Because Buckley ran away from the cottage badly frightened the moment that Dr. Macauley came into the kitchen," said the butler. "I saw that as I was leaving."

"That's right," Lowe said, nodding. "And Buckley shouted that he had recognized the voice. He meant that Macauley and Manshaw's voices were the same."

"Of course," said Chayne.

"Why didn't you tell me that when I caught you at the cottage later?" Lowe looked at the butler.

"I thought I'd better keep quiet. After all, it would be just my word against that of the doctor. I didn't have any proof, and besides, he had tried to

strangle me at the house. I knew he was dangerous and I didn't want to be his next victim."

"But why did he kill Sedgewick?" Rooper wanted to know.

"Since Mr. Lowe appears to know everything else, let him explain that," Macauley snarled.

THE DETECTIVE grinned. "All right, I will," he said, looking at the killer. "The morning after you murdered Bensen you went to Sedgewick's cottage. He knew you as Macauley, of course, and also knew that you were really Vicker. Doubtlessly you and Sedgewick planned to get the diamonds from Bensen, planned it together. Manshaw was to be an illicit jewel dealer who would take the diamonds off Bensen's hands. He had smuggled them into the country. They weren't registered, and he was anxious to get rid of them."

"Then that was what the special delivery letter must have been about," exclaimed Drayton. "Now I understand."

"Good! It was nice of you, Drayton, to try to protect Dorothy from knowing her father was a crook by destroying Bensen's papers." Lowe smiled at the secretary. "So Sedgewick arranged the meeting between Bensen and Manshaw at the old inn. Bensen was no fool. He left the diamonds at home when he went to meet the man he was to deal with. Manshaw killed him and then was disappointed not to find the stones on the body."

"He tricked us, damn him!" Vicker shouted hoarsely. "All right, Lowe, you win, but you haven't a bit of real evidence on me."

"Haven't we?" Lowe looked at Rooper. "That's where he's wrong, isn't he, Chief?"

"Well, yes," said Rooper. "We've got a nice collection of fingerprints. One or more of them on a handkerchief, two on the knife that killed Sedgewick and a lot of them on that adhesive tape

that was used in order to tie up Miss Bensen. And those fingerprints are all the same. They'll check with 'Macauley's' prints."

"But why did he kill Sedgewick?" Drayton asked.

"Because Sedgewick was willing to rob Bensen of the diamond," said Lowe. "But when Sedgewick found out that Vicker had murdered Bensen, then he must have protested and was killed by the doctor before he could talk. Buckley may have seen this murder, since he knew Sedgewick was dead when I questioned him."

"But where are the diamonds?" asked Chayne. "I've searched this house for them and couldn't find anything. Mr. Bensen had all sorts of strange things around the house stuck in corners. Even had one closet filled with old inner tubes. Patched tubes they are, too."

"Bring those tubes here, Chayne," ordered Lowe.

In a few moments the butler returned with an armful of old inner tubes. Lowe took one of them and cut a hole in the rubber near the place where it had been patched.

He thrust his hand inside and drew out a little package.

"Here are some of the diamonds," he said, as he opened the package and revealed a few of the gray-green stones. "You'll probably find all of them in the rest of these inner tubes. I felt that Bensen would have to hide them in some place that was almost too silly and obvious for anyone to look into. If he had hidden them in a secret safe, Chayne or Manshaw would have found them long before this."

"What an idiot I've been," muttered Chayne. "Right before my eyes for months and I never got wise!"

"Careless of you, Chayne," said Lowe. "Almost as careless as the doctor in thinking that the Stoneville police department didn't even check up on fingerprints." He smiled ironically at the murderer. "A little mental myopia, Doctor?"

There is one day on the calendar that is—

NO DAY for MURDER

By ROGER DEE

IT WAS a penny postcard that put the thought of murder into Ollie Myers' head.

Old man Burns stumped into the Daleyville grocery and post office early on the morning of July 17, rapping his hickory cane and looking like a short-tempered scarecrow in his rusty, ancient suit. He bought a can of pipe tobacco, grouching like the miser he was about the price, and gave Ollie the postcard.

"Get that into Jim Wire's mail in time for today's delivery, young man," he ordered, and hobbled his arthritic way back to his ramshackle house at the edge of town.

Ollie put down the newspaper he was reading and took the card to the stamp wicket in the corner. Ordinarily he would not have read the card because his boss, Selton Clark, had surprisingly rigid ideas concerning the sanctity of the mails—but this morning it happened that old Clark was getting his monthly haircut across the street and was not around to see.

So Ollie read the card, and thought of murder.

He had the long-handled canceling hammer in his hand to postmark the card when the possibilities of the thing struck him. He shoved his mouse-colored hair out of his eyes and fingered a pimple on his neck absently, considering the chances.

He saw a vision of himself with four thousand dollars in his pocket, a vision with side-shots that pictured Ollie Myers, insignificant and underrated clerk at Clark's grocery, taking his rightful place in the world of moneyed men.

The card was addressed in old man Burns' crabbed hand to Carey Wendt, who had a farm for sale out Cherry Creek way, and the message read:

Am ready to meet yr. price. Bring yr. deeds to my house today. Will have yr. money ready.



OLLIE MYERS

No such deal is a secret in a village the size of Daleyville, and Ollie knew that Carey Wendt was asking four thousand dollars. And if old man Burns was ready to meet that price, he would have the money in his house.

Four thousand dollars—Ollie's for the taking.

ILD man Burns lived alone, too stingy to hire a housekeeper or to feed a watchdog. The only catch was that Ollie

would have to kill the old skinflint to shut his mouth, and murder needs an airtight alibi.

Neither point bothered Ollie for long. Old man Burns had lived long enough already, and the postcard would provide the alibi.

It was made to order because the next day was Thursday, when Ollie drove the grocery pickup truck to Shale City for the weekend order, and he would be safely out of Daleyville while old man Burns was, to public satisfaction, still alive. The murder would be blamed on a passing tramp, and the four thousand dollars would keep nicely until Ollie was ready to put it to work.

Ollie craned his neck to look across the street, and came back to the business at hand with a jolt when he saw his boss climbing out of his chair in the barber shop. Ollie worked fast, making the most of his time.

He unscrewed the printing face of the canceling hammer, which was set to read 8:00 A.M., July 17, and punched out the 17-die. He replaced it with an 18-slug from the wooden die-case, thumped the hammer on the ink-pad and postmarked the card. He slipped the card into his shirt, switched the dies again and got out of the post office corner fast.

When his boss came in, Ollie was whistling softly and weighing up beans, hugging to himself the bright dreams that blossomed inside him.

It worked out even easier than Ollie had expected.

He left his room at Mrs. Banks' boarding house at nine o'clock that night, cutting across back lots to miss old man Burns on his way home from the nightly checker tournament at the fire station. He opened the back door with a ten-cent-store key that would fit any lock in Daleyville except the jail's, and went straight to the frowsy living room, blinking his flashlight occasionally for location.

He was waiting behind the door with a heavy poker from the cold fireplace when old man Burns hobbled in. The miser snapped on the light and stared at Ollie,

his bald skull glistening under the naked overhead bulb, his bony face a startled shadow-mask.

"What do you want here, Ollie Myers?" he demanded.

He was not particularly frightened even by the poker, and the knowledge fanned a bitter flame of anger to life in Ollie. The old man's thought was plain—why should he be afraid? It was only Ollie, the village misfit, whom no one ever took seriously anyway....

"I want the four thousand dollars you offered Carey Wendt for his farm," Ollie said.

Locating the money was as simple as that. Old man Burns clapped a hand to his hip, and Ollie knew that the miser, distrusting banks, had the money in his pocket.

Ollie stepped in and swung the poker with both hands. Old man Burns crumpled across his bed, his skull crushed. Ollie wiped the poker carefully on a dirty blanket, remembering fingerprint scenes from the movies, and took the fat, worn wallet out of the dead man's pocket.

Ten minutes later he was back in his room at Mrs. Banks' boarding house, tapping the four thousand dollars, wallet and all, to the bottom of his bureau.

NEXT morning Ollie was at work on time, but not early enough to attract unwelcome attention from his boss. Once inside he found it easy, while old Clark was opening his safe, to slip his all-important postcard into the mail already stacked on the desk of Jim Wire, the rural carrier.

"Take this list," said Selton Clark to Ollie, as he had said every Thursday morning for two years, "and fill it at Holand's wholesale house in Shale City. Don't kill any time, and if you come back with beer on your breath, you're fired."

So Ollie drove out of Daleyville in the pickup truck, grinning to himself. Old man Burns' body would be found some time during the day, most likely when Carey Wendt showed up for his money. Carey would have the postcard with him,

and the card would furnish Ollie's alibi because it proved that old man Burns was still alive when Ollie left for Shale City.

Its postmark would read 8:00 A.M., July 18—and even a fat fool like Constable Will Pearce would know that if old

and pretty women swam in a rosy haze before his eyes.

"Turn on the neons, hotshots," he said, and laughed out loud. "Here comes Ollie!"

He drove back to Daleyville at two o'clock that afternoon, prepared to work the rest of the day as usual and ask as many fool questions about the murder as the next man. Actually he did neither, because circumstances prevented.

Circumstances in the fat form of Constable Will Pearce, who collared Ollie and snapped handcuffs on him before he was well out of the grocery truck.

"That screwy postmark stunt put me onto you right off," the constable said when he took the handcuffs off and shoved Ollie into a cell. "If it hadn't been for that, I'd never have suspected you and found old man Burns' wallet taped under the bureau in your room."

Ollie gripped the bars and sweated. It was all over if the money had been found, but even in his funk of terror he had to know what had gone wrong.

"The postcard," he whispered. "Didn't Carey Wendt get the card?"

"He brought it along with his farm deeds when he showed up today and found old man Burns dead," Will Pearce said. "Jim Wire had already noticed that crazy postmark on it, and swore it was the only one he delivered today that *was* wrong."

"That meant that the date-stamp had been changed just for that card, and nobody but you or Selton Clark could have done it. Your boss had a good alibi—and *you* wouldn't have tried to fake today's date on old man Burns' postcard unless you were trying to cover up the fact that you killed him and needed the card to alibi yourself."

Ollie stared at him blankly.

"When you slipped that 18-die into the canceling hammer," Will Pearce said, "you were in a hurry, and you made a bad mistake. You put the die in upside down and never noticed it. The postmark reads July 81—which is no day for murder!"

Coming—



MY CORPSE HAS TWO FACES

The story of a not-too-gentle gentleman in Las Vegas who gambled for his life—and won somebody else's. What he did with the spare life is masterfully told by

HOWARD J. GREEN
and **PAUL FRANK**

*It's only one of the five novels
in the next*

5 DETECTIVE NOVELS

man Burns had mailed it early it would bear a July 17 date. . . .

"Sharp," said Ollie, thinking of the four thousand dollars taped under his bureau.

He would stay on for a couple of months at the grocery and let the talk die, then he would pull out for good. To Florida, maybe, for the vacation he'd never had. Night clubs and cocktails and dog races



the CRYPTOGRAM CORNER

by Simon Cipher

NO sooner did man learn to write than he began making attempts to keep unwanted eyes from reading his messages.

For instance, an Athenian—wanting to tip off his boss politico who was in exile that all was in readiness for his return and seizure of power—used this means of secret communication. He shaved the head of a trusted slave and tattooed the message on the bare scalp with indelible ink. He waited until the slave's hair grew back, concealing the message, then sent him to the exiled boss with these oral instructions: "Shave my head and look thereon."

The use of codes is often just as ingenious. They are right up the alley of detective story fans, for they are solved in much the same manner as a murder mystery—by tracking

down clues, playing hunches, and using ordinary common sense.

Codes or cryptograms can be solved by simple trial and error substitution. More scientifically, they are solved by observing the frequency with which the code letters occur.

The letter E is by far the most frequently occurring letter in the alphabet. So, for example, if the letter X has been substituted for E in the code, you'll probably find it occurring more than any other letter. Also frequent are the letters T, A, O, N, I, S, H, R, in that order.

Count the number of times each code letter occurs. The most frequent letter will probably be E, the next T, etc. Watch for words that might be THE, or IN, AT, ON, OF. Play your hunches and use your ingenuity.

A Limerick for Beginners

P QRSTUV VSWXY ZPX AX QU RABTTB
CPE P QDBBUCBPTU PXE SGU DBXU US QABTTB
QCB DPQ YFPEVQ HV XPZB
PXE SXB UAZB DCBX CB IPZB
CBT ZSUCBT QPAE: "YFPEVQ QU CABTTB."

Clues:

1. The one-letter word.
2. The four-letter word in the last line followed by a statement in quote. What can it be? Think it over.
3. Find E through frequency.

A Gangland Message

NVVG NV RM UILMG LU GSV TZIZTV LM GSV XLIMVI LU VOVEVMGS
HGIVVG DRGS NZXSRMV TFMH ZMW NZHPH ZG NRW MRTSG

On page 129 are the answers, and an explanation of how they were derived.

"Human ingenuity cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve."

—Edgar Allan Poe.

HOMICIDE SANITARIUM

A Novel by

FREDRIC BROWN





Who was crazier:

The private eye who took a job

in a nut house

on his honeymoon, or the inmates

?????

The answer isn't what you think!

I

I PUT down the newspaper finally. "It's about time," Kit said.

I stood up. "Right, honey. It is."

Her big brown eyes got bigger and browner. "What do you mean, Eddie? I just meant you've been reading that blasted newspaper for hours and hours."

I glanced at the clock. "For eleven minutes."

I sat down again and motioned, and she came over and sat down on my lap.

I almost weakened then and there.

"It's been a nice honeymoon," I said.

"But I *am* a working man. I thought you knew."

"You mean you're taking on another case?"

"Nope," I told her. "One of the same ones. Paul Verne."

"Who's Paul Verne?"

"The gentleman I came to Springfield to find."

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She looked really shocked. "You came here to—Why, Eddie, we came here for our honeymoon! You don't mean you had an ulterior motive in choosing Springfield?"

"Now, now," I now-nowed.

"But Eddie—"

"Shhh," I shhhed.

She cuddled down in my arms. "All right, Eddie. But tell me what you're going to do. Is it dangerous?"

"Get 'em young," I said, "treat 'em rough, tell 'em nothing."

"Eddie, is it dangerous?"

"The world," I told her, "is a dangerous place. One's lucky to get out of it alive."

"Oh darn it, I suppose you *are* going to do something dangerous. I won't let you!"

I stood up, and she had to get off my lap or fall on the floor. I walked over to the bureau and picked a necktie off the mirror.

"What *are* you going to do, Eddie?"

"Answer an ad I just read in the paper."

"You mean an ad to go to work?"

I nodded, and started to put on the necktie. In the mirror, I could see Kit studying me.

"The idea of a pint-size like you being a detective," she said.

"Napoleon wasn't so big," I said over my shoulder.

"Napoleon wasn't a detective."

"Well how about Peter Lorre? He's no bigger than I am."

"Peter Lorre was shot in the last two pictures I saw him in," Kit said.

SHE PICKED up the newspaper I'd put down and started scanning the want ads while I was putting on my coat.

"Is this the ad?" she said. "Wanted: Man with some knowledge of psychiatry, for confidential work?"

"What makes you think that's it?" I countered.

"I know that's it, Eddie. All the other ads are routine sensible ones for salesmen or dishwashers or something. But why get dressed up to answer it? It just gives a phone number, and there's a phone right on the table there."

"That reminds me," I said. "Use that

phone to call Information, will you, and get the listing on that phone number? You'll find it's the Stanley Sanitarium, I think. But I might as well make sure."

She made the call.

"You're right, Eddie. Stanley Sanitarium." She looked at me with respect. "How did you know?"

"Hunch. There's an article on Page Three telling about a new sanitarium for mental cases being started here. A doc by the name of Philemon Stanley runs it."

"But why can't you phone from here about the job?"

"From a hotel? Nix. I've got to give myself a local background and a local address. I go rent myself a room and then use the landlady's phone. That way, if he's going to phone me back or write me a letter, I can give him an address that won't sound phony."

"What's phony about the New World Hotel?"

I grinned at her. "Ten bucks a day is what's phony. People who stay at a hotel like this don't apply for jobs that probably pay less than their hotel bills would be."

I kissed her, thoroughly, for it just might be the last time for a while if I had to follow up on the job right away—and left.

Half an hour later, from a rooming house, I called the number given in the want ad.

"Ever had any experience working in an institution for the mentally ill?" was the question.

"Yes, sir," I said. "Two years at Wales Sanitarium in Chicago. They didn't handle really bad cases, you know, just mild psychoses, phobias, chronic alcoholics, that sort of thing."

"Yes," said Dr. Stanley, "I'm familiar with the work at Wales Sanitarium. What were your duties there?"

"Attendant, male ward."

"I believe you would fit in very nicely. Not—uh—as an attendant, however. I have something in mind of a different and—uh—more confidential nature."

"So I figured from the ad, Doctor," I said. "But whatever it is, I'll be glad to try it."

"Fine, Mr. Anderson. I'd like to talk to you personally, of course, but if our

interview is satisfactory to both of us, you can start right away. Would you rather have the interview this evening or tomorrow morning? Either will be quite satisfactory."

I thought it over, and weakened. After all, I had been married only two weeks and I would undoubtedly have to live at the sanitarium while I was on the job. I told him tomorrow morning.

I went back to the hotel and Kit and I went down for dinner to the New World dining room. Over a couple of cocktails, I told her about the phone call.

"But suppose he should phone the Wales Sanitarium to check up on you?"

"They never do."

"What kind of confidential work would there be around a booby hatch, Eddie?"

"I don't know," I told her. "But as long as it puts me in contact with the patients, I don't care. Anyway, it isn't a booby hatch, honey. It's a sanitarium for the idle rich. People who go slightly screwy wondering how to spend their money. That's why I used Wales as a reference. It's the same type of joint."

"It didn't say that in the article in the paper."

"Sure it did. Between the lines."

"But Eddie, aren't you going to tell me *why* you're doing this?"

I thought out how I'd best tell it without worrying Kit too much. She'd have to get used to things like that, but not all at once. Not right from our honeymoon, to know I was looking for a homicidal maniac who had killed over a dozen people. Maybe more.

"I'm looking for a man named Paul Verne," I said. "He's crazy, but he's crazy like a fox. He escaped three years ago from an institution in California. It's been in the papers, but you may not have noticed it, because his family had enough money and influence to keep it from being played up too much."

KIT'S EYES widened. "You mean they don't want him caught?"

"They very much want him caught. They offered a reward of twenty-five thousand bucks to have him caught and returned to the institution from which he escaped."

"But wouldn't publicity help?"

"It would, and there has been some publicity. If the name doesn't click with you, you just haven't read the right papers at the right time. But they held that down, and they've spent thousands circularizing police offices and detective agencies to be on the lookout for him. That's more effective, and reflects less on the family name. Every copper in the country knows who Paul Verne is, and is trying for that twenty-five grand. And every private detective, too."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars! Why Eddie, think what we could do with that!"

"Yeah," I said, "we could use it. But don't get your hopes up, because I'm just playing a long shot. A tip and a hunch."

Our dinner came and I made her wait until we'd eaten before I told her any more. When I eat, I like to eat.

"The tip," I told her, after we had finished dessert, "was Springfield. Never mind exactly how, because it's complicated, but I got a tip Paul Verne was in Springfield. That's why I suggested we come here for our honeymoon."

"Well," she said, "I suppose we had to go somewhere, and after all—"

"Twenty-five grand isn't hay," I finished for her. "As for the hunch—it's a poor thing, but my own. Where's the last place you'd look for an escaped loony?"

"I don't—You mean in a loony-bin?"

"Brilliant! What could possibly be a better hide-out? A private sanitarium, of course, where everything is the best and a patient can enter voluntarily and leave when he likes. I've made a study of Paul Verne and I think it's just the kind of idea that would appeal to him."

"Would he have money? Could he afford a hide-out like that?"

"Money is no object. He's got scads."

"But why this particular sanitarium?"

I shrugged. "Just a better chance than most. First, I think he's in Springfield, and he isn't at any of the others."

"How do you know that?"

"There are only two others here. One is for the criminally insane. He certainly wouldn't commit himself there voluntarily—too hard to get out again."

and too much investigation involved. The other's for women only. But Stanley's place is ideal. Brand new, takes wealthy patients with minor warps, comfortable—everything."

Kit sighed. "Well, I don't suppose it'll take you more than a day to look over the patients and find out."

"Longer than that," I said. "I haven't too much idea what he looks like."

She stared at me. "You mean you're working on this and haven't even gone to the trouble to get a photograph?"

"There aren't any. Paul Verne did a real job of escaping from the sanitarium out West. He robbed the office of all the papers in his own case—fingerprints, photographs, everything. Took along all their money, too."

I thought it best not to mention to Kit that he'd burned the place down as well.

"Then he went to his parents' home. They were away on vacation or something, and he destroyed all the photographs of himself, even those of himself as a kid. He also took along all the money and jewelry that was loose, enough to last him ten years."

"But you have a description, haven't you?"

"I have a description as he was three years ago," I said. "A guy can change quite a bit in three years, and if you haven't got a photograph you're not in much luck. But I know he's got brown hair, unless he dyed or bleached it. I know he weighed a hundred sixty then. Of course he might have taken on a paunch since then, or got thin from worry. I know he's got brown eyes, unless he went to the trouble of getting tinted contact lenses to change their apparent color."

I grinned at her. "But I do know he's within a couple of inches of five feet nine. He might make himself seem a couple inches under by acquiring a stoop, or a couple inches over by wearing these special shoes with built-up inner heels."

Kit grimaced. "So you'll know that any man you see between five feet seven and five eleven might be him. That's a big help. How *will* you know?"

I told her I didn't know.

"If it were just a matter of spotting him from a photograph or a good des-

cription," I said, "he'd have been picked up long ago. I can probably eliminate some of the patients right away. The others I'll have to study and use my brains on. It might take longer than a few days."

"Well, then I'm glad you didn't go out this evening."

"This evening," I told her, "I'm going to study. There's a bookstore on Grand Avenue that's open evenings. I've got to pick up a few books on psychology and psychiatry and bone up a bit to make good my story to Dr. Stanley that I know something about it. I don't want to get bounced the first day because I don't know pyromania from pyorrhea."

We got the books, and Kit helped me study them. Fortunately or otherwise, there was a Kraft-Ebbing in the lot and we spent most of the time reading that. But I did manage to read a little in some of the others, enough to pick up a bit of the patter.

II

THE STANLEY SANITARIUM was out at the edge of town, as all respectable sanitariums should be. There was a high brick wall around it and barbed wire on top of the wall.

That rather surprised me. So did the size and impregnability of the ironwork gate in the wall. I couldn't get in it and had to ring a bell in one of the gate posts.

A surly-looking guy with thick black eyebrows and rumpled hair came to answer it. He glared at me as though I had leprosy.

"Eddie Anderson," I said. "I got an appointment with Dr. Stanley."

"Just a minute." He called the sanitarium on a telephone that was in a sentry box by the gate, and then said, "Okay," and unlocked the gate.

He walked with me up to the house, slightly more friendly.

"I reckon you're the new patient," he said. "My name's Garvey. The other patients'll tell you you can trust me, Mr. Anderson. So if there's any little errands you want done or anything you want brought in, why just see me, that's all."

"That's fine," I said. "And if I ever

go crazy, I'll remember it."

"Huh?" he said. "You mean you ain't crazy?"

"If I am," I said, "I haven't found it out yet. But don't worry. That doesn't prove anything."

I left him looking doubtful and wondering whether he'd talked too much.

Dr. Philemon Stanley had a white walrus mustache and the kind of glasses that dangle at the end of a black silk ribbon. He twirled them in a tight little circle while he talked. I had to look away from that shiny circle to keep from getting dizzy. I wondered vaguely if he used them on patients for hypnotic effect.

"Uh—Mr. Anderson," he said, "have you had any experience at all in—uh—confidential investigations? That is, in making confidential reports?"

"Can't say I have," I told him. Not quite truthfully, of course. I couldn't say that was my real occupation. "But I'd be glad to try my hand at it."

"Fine, Mr. Anderson. I intend to try out a new theory of mine in the study of mental aberration. A method not of treatment, but of more accurate diagnosis and study of the patient. It is my belief that a person suffering from a mental ailment is never completely frank or completely at ease in the presence of a doctor, or even of an attendant. There is a tendency, almost invariably, either to exaggerate symptoms or to minimize and conceal them."

"Sounds quite logical," I admitted.

"Whereas," said Dr. Stanley, twirling his glasses a bit harder in mild excitement, "they undoubtedly act entirely natural before the other patients. You see what I'm driving at?"

"Not exactly."

"I would like an attendant—someone experienced, as you are, with pathological cases—to pose as a patient, to mix among the other patients, become friendly with them, play cards with them, win their confidence as a fellow-sufferer, and to report confidentially on their progress. The job, I fear, would be a bit confining."

He broke off, watching for my reaction.

It wasn't good, at first. Then I began to see the advantages of it. Certainly I'd

be in a better position to find out what I wanted to know as a fellow-patient.

But it wouldn't do to appear eager. I asked about salary and when he named a figure higher than an attendant's wages would be, I let it convince me.

"My clothes," I said. "Will it appear suspicious to anyone who saw me come here if I leave, and then return with them?"

"Not at all. You are, as far as anyone knows, committing yourself here voluntarily. All my patients, incidentally, are here of their own free will, although they are under restraint to stay within the grounds for the period of their cure. There will be nothing unusual about your having had a preliminary interview."

"Fine," I said. "I'll get my stuff and be back. Right after lunch, say. Oh, by the way, just how insane am I to act, and in what direction?"

"I would suggest a mild psychosis. Something you're more than usually familiar with. Nothing that would force me to keep you under restraint or limit freedom in circulating about with the other patients. Alcoholism. . . . No, you look too healthy for that."

"How about kleptomania?" I suggested. "I'd have to swipe a few things from time to time, but I'll put them under my bed and if your fountain pen disappears, you'll know where to look for it."

"Excellent! Any time this afternoon will be satisfactory, if you have affairs of your own to wind up. Uh—you sign nothing, of course, but if any patient asks, tell him you committed yourself here for say, sixty days. At the end of that time, we'll know how satisfactory our arrangement is."

WE SHOOK hands and he sat down at his desk while I went to the door and opened it. I took one step to go into the outer hallway, and then I stopped short as though I'd run into a brick wall. I stood staring, and then I wrenched my eyes away and looked back at my employer.

I had to clear my throat before I could say: "Dr. Stanley?"

"Yes, Anderson."

"You have any homicidal patients here?"

"Homicidal? Of course not. That is —Of course not!"

"There is a corpse in the middle of the hallway, with the hilt of a dagger sticking out of his chest," I said. "Right over the heart."

"Eh? Oh, I should have warned you. That would be Harvey Toler."

It didn't faze him in the least. He didn't even get up from his desk or reach for the telephone. Was he crazy, or I?

"I don't care if it's J. Edgar Hoover," I said. "The fact remains that there's a knife in his chest."

I heard a sound in the hall and looked through the door. The corpse had got up and was walking away. He was a slender, dark young man with thick shell-rimmed glasses. He put something in his pocket that looked like the hilt of a dagger without any blade.

I looked back at Dr. Stanley.

"Harvey Toler," he repeated. "Uncontrollable exhibitionism. He must have heard I had a caller in my office. A strange case-arrested development in one respect only. A brilliant mind, but he cannot control impulses to shock people. I want particularly careful reports on his conduct among the other patients. I think you'll like him when you get to know him."

"I'm sure I will," I said. "Is that a favorite stunt of his, with the dagger?"

"He's used it before, but he seldom repeats himself. He may—Well, I'd rather not tell you too much about him. I'd rather have your impressions without prejudice."

Without prejudice, my grandmother, I thought as I walked to the bus line. If Harvey Toler pulled another one like that one, I'd take advantage of being a fellow-patient to pop him on the nose, exhibitionism or not. And maybe that would be the best cure, at that.

I went to my rooming house, told my landlady I'd landed a job and she could keep the rest of the week's rent I'd paid her.

Then I went to the hotel and woke up Kit. She'd had early breakfast with me and then gone back to sleep.

"Got the job," I told her. "And I'll have to live there. Hope it won't take

me more than a few days to decide one way or the other about whether I'm on the right track or not."

"What is the job, Eddie?"

"I'm in charge of the hypochondriac ward. It's confidential. I'd better not tell you about my duties."

"Eddie! Be serious. What is the job?"

I told her and she wouldn't believe me. But by dint of repeating it four or five times, I finally convinced her.

I packed a few things in a suitcase, rather regretfully leaving my automatic out of it. Hardly the sort of thing I'd be carrying, if I was what I pretended to be. But if I really found Paul Verne, it might not be any picnic to handle him. I took a chance on including brass knuckles, rolling them up carefully inside a pair of thick woolen socks.

Kit and I had lunch and then she walked with me to the bus. I told her I might not be able to phone her. I couldn't be sure till I knew the set-up at the sanitarium. And not to worry if she didn't hear from me for a week.

"Eddie, why didn't you tell me the truth?" she said.

"Huh? What didn't I tell you?"

"That Paul Verne is a homicidal maniac. That what you're going to do is dangerous, really dangerous. After breakfast this morning, I went to a newspaper office and I read their file of clippings on him. I wouldn't have tried to stop you, Eddie. But—but I want you to be honest with me."

From her face, I could tell she was being brave.

"Okay, honey," I said. "I just didn't want you to worry."

The bus pulled up.

"I won't, Eddie," she said.

I kissed her good-by and got on. She turned away, crying quietly, and I felt like a heel.

I was still feeling punk when I rang the bell that brought Garvey to the gate.

"You again?" he said, and opened it.

I grinned at him. "Well, I found it out," I said.

"Found what out?"

"I'm crazy."

"Huh?"

"That's it. I told you this morning

that if I was, I hadn't found it out yet. I found it out."

He digested that as we went up the walk.

"Oh, well, what I told you goes, then," he finally said. "If you want anything just let me know."

BY THEN we had reached the door, and he turned to leave.

I said, "Sssst," and when he turned back, I leaned over and whispered: "Can you get me a machine-gun?"

He backed off.

Dr. Stanley turned me over to an attendant, who took me to Room Twenty and told me it was to be mine. The attendant said if I wanted he would show me around the place, so I left my suitcase on the bed and went with him.

My room was at the end of the corridor and was the highest number on the second floor. My guide—fortunately he was over six feet tall, so I didn't have to study him as a possible suspect—told me that these twenty rooms, with five others on the first floor, were all the rooms assigned to patients, and that attendants and other employes had quarters on the third floor. He said that, counting me, there were now twelve male patients and seven female. The remaining rooms were empty.

He took me first to the main recreation room on the first floor. There was a bridge game going on in one corner. My friend Harvey Toler was one of the players. The others were a nondescript little woman with gray hair and mousy eyes; a gaunt, dissipated-looking man of about forty, and an anemic youth. They were introduced to me as Miss Zaner, Frank Betterman and Billy Kendall.

Betterman and Kendall went down on my list as possibles. As we walked on, I elicited from my guide the fact that Betterman was an alcoholic—a dipsomaniac—and Kendall, the anemic, was suffering from recurrent amnesia. Periodically, he would forget who he was and where he was and what he was doing there.

We saw another recreation room in the basement, with ping-pong tables and a shuffleboard set-up as well as one billiard table with warped cues and a few rips in the cloth. We encountered

several other patients in our walk around the outside grounds, and I was introduced to each.

Five men, out of eight I met, could have been Paul Verne.

III

MY GUIDE excused himself on the ground of other duties, and I went to my room to unpack. There was a lock on the door of my room, I noticed, but the only keyhole was on the outside. From the inside, one just didn't lock the door.

I stood looking out the window for a moment at a man who, standing in the middle of the driveway, was turning in slow, steady circles for no reason that I could discover. Then I turned into the room and reached for the handle of my suitcase to move it down to the end of the bed.

The pull nearly jerked my arm out of its socket. It felt as though someone had taken my clothes out of that suitcase and filled it up with paving blocks.

I stared at the suitcase. It was mine, all right. So I opened it.

My clothes were still in it, but packed much more tightly than I'd packed them, to make room for the object that had been added.

It was a Tommy-gun.

I lifted it out and looked at the drum. It was loaded to capacity and the bullets were real. I put it down on the bed alongside the suitcase and stood staring at it unbelievably.

So Garvey did little errands for patients, huh?

But he had backed off when I'd asked him for a machine-gun.

It just didn't make sense. Granting that he had taken me seriously, granting that he was screwy enough to be willing, where in thunder could he have got a Tommy-gun? And why, thinking me crazy, would he have given me one? He was supposed to be sane.

The more I thought about it, the crazier it got. Finally it occurred to me to look through the rest of my stuff to be sure it was all there.

It all seemed to be. Five shirts, one suit besides the one I was wearing,

handkerchiefs, socks. I hadn't counted the smaller items of laundry, but there seemed to be about as many of them as I put into the suitcase.

I had just thrown them in, though, and now they were tightly packed to make room for the machine-gun. To give my hands something to do, and my brain a rest, I moved them over to the empty drawers of the bureau. Shirts in the big drawer, handkerchiefs and socks in the upper smaller.

And then I remembered something. None of the rolled-up pairs of socks had been heavier than it should be.

I found the pair of thick, woolen socks into which I had rolled the brass knuckles. I didn't have to unroll it. I could tell merely by feeling. The knucks were gone. I unrolled the socks to be sure.

And then the humor of the thing hit me square and I sat down on the edge of the bed and began laughing as though I belonged there, laughing like a blasted loony.

Whoever had given me that loaded Tommy-gun had gone to the trouble of stealing my set of brass knuckles!

"Lovely," I thought, "perfectly lovely!"

Stanley Sanitarium, Paul Verne or no Paul Verne, was going to be an interesting place.

After a while sanity came back to me, and with it the realization that I had to do something about that Tommy-gun. What?

Take it to Dr. Stanley and tell him the truth about it? If he believed me, okay. But suppose he didn't—and I wouldn't blame him a bit. Suppose he thought, or even suspected, that I had brought it in myself? Out on my ear I would go, before I got another look at the sanitarium. Or I would have Hobson's choice of paying my fare and signing on as a bona-fide loony and committing myself.

On second thought, I doubted he would give me that alternative. He took "mild psychoses" only. Would he figure a man who pulled a stunt like that with a loaded Tommy-gun was suffering from a mild psychosis? Hardly. He would turn me over to the police for investigation.

And anyway, how could I do an about-face from being a man in need of a job to a man able to pay the plenty high tariff a place like this would charge?

Nope, Dr. Stanley might believe me, or he might not. If I took that chance, I was seriously jeopardizing my "in" here before I even began to accomplish my purpose.

But what then?

WELL, there was a tiny penknife on my watch chain. Using it as a screwdriver, I took the breech of the Tommy-gun apart and took out the firing pin and the tiny block of metal that held it. I took the bullets out of the drum, too.

Then leaving the Tommy-gun, with its teeth pulled, behind me, I went down the corridor a few doors and knocked on a door at random. Number Twelve. As I hoped, there wasn't any answer, and when I tried the door, it opened.

I went back for the Tommy-gun and put it in a drawer of the bureau in Room Twelve. The room was occupied, because there were shirts in the drawer. I didn't take time to try to find out whose room it was. Undoubtedly the whole place would know, when the occupant of that room found what was in his bureau.

Then I went downstairs, avoiding the recreation room, and went outside. I wandered about the grounds until I found a secluded spot behind a small storage shed, and there I buried the bullets. The firing-pin block I threw over the wall, as far as I could throw it. Somebody might find it some day, but they wouldn't know what it was.

I got back to the building just in time for dinner. A bell was ringing.

Dinner was unexciting, although the food was good. It was served in a dining room with half a dozen tables for four, at which the guests seemed to group themselves at will. I found myself with two table companions. Frank Betterman, dipsomaniac, sat across from me, and at my left sat a man whose only obvious claim for presence there was that he wore a folded newspaper hat, the kind children make.

Betterman ate without talking or taking his eyes off his plate. The man

with the paper hat talked only of the weather at first, but with the meat course he warmed up on human destiny and some complex theory of his that seemed similar to astrology except that the affairs of men were run, not by the stars and planets, but by volcanic activity within the seething core of earth.

I followed him, more or less, as far as dessert, and then was hopelessly lost.

On the way out, Betterman came up alongside me.

"Did you bring in any liquor, Anderson?" he said quietly. "I've got to have a drink or—Well, I've got to."

"No," I admitted. "I didn't. Have you tried Garvey?"

"Garvey!" There was the ultimate of scorn in his voice. "That man's on the wrong side of the fence here. He's mad!"

"In what way?"

Betterman shrugged. "Offers to run errands for you, and then doesn't. Laughs about it behind your back, to the other patients."

"Oh," I said.

Then anyone here might know the joking request for a machine-gun I had made to Garvey. Not that it helped me any to know that.

I played ping-pong in the basement with Betterman for a while, which gave me a chance to study him. Aside from being nervous and jittery, he seemed normal enough.

Lights out at eleven was the rule, but by ten-thirty I was ready to go to my room and sort out my confused impressions. Already all but a few of the patients had disappeared from the recreation room and those few were ones who interested me least.

I walked up the stairs and along the dimly lighted corridor. The door of Room Eleven, just across the hall from the room into which I had put the Tommy-gun, was open. There was a light on somewhere in the room, out of my range of vision.

I started past the open doorway, glanced in—and stopped abruptly.

On the wall opposite the open door was a shadow of a girl hanging by her neck from a rope. And she was nude! How had a girl got into this place? She was obviously dead, for there was not the slightest movement.

I stepped through the doorway and turned to the corner in which the girl must be hanging.

"Hullo," said Harvey Toler.

He wasn't disturbed by the nude, feminine corpse. He was sitting comfortably in a well-padded chair, reading a book. I saw his wall was covered by girlie pinups, most of them in sexy semi-undress.

"You're name's Anderson, isn't it?" he said. "Come in and sit down."

I looked back at the wall, and the shadow of the hanging girl was still there. It looked like a real shadow, not painted. I looked back toward the opposite corner and this time I saw the gimmick. Nothing more complicated than a bit of work with a black crayon on the white, translucent shade of the reading lamp. The five-inch nude figure there cast a five-foot shadow yonder.

"Clever," I said.

Toler smiled and looked pleased. He came over and demonstrated how it worked.

"Sit down," he repeated. "Care for a drink, perhaps?"

WITHOUT waiting for my answer, he opened a door in the front of the little stand upon which the lamp stood. He took out two glasses and a quart bottle of whiskey, already opened and with only about a fifth of its contents left.

"You'll find the whiskey Garvey brings in is pretty smooth stuff," he said. "He robs you for it, but it's good."

I took the glass he handed me.

"Here's to crime," I said, and we drank.

It was smooth, didn't bite a bit. The only thing wrong was that it wasn't whiskey at all. It was cold tea.

"Another?" Toler asked.

I declined enthusiastically. For just a moment I felt a deep brotherly sympathy with Frank Betterman. It was part of my job, maybe, to stay and pump Harvey Toler so I could report on him. But after that business with the tea, the devil with it.

Excusing myself on the ground of being sleepy, I went on down the corridor to my own room.

I looked into the drawers and the

closet but my stuff still seemed to be as I had left it, and nothing new had been added. I chucked under the bed the several items of silverware which I'd stolen from the dinner table, to carry out my role of a kleptomaniac, and then undressed. I was just reaching for my pajamas when the lights went out.

I lay in bed in utter, perfect darkness, trying to think. But the only thought that came was the thought that if I stayed here long enough, I'd go crazy myself.

After a while I could see a thin crescent of moon, and there was enough light in my room that I could make out the dark outline of the dresser and the doors.

Why, I wondered, in the name of sanity, had someone put that loaded Tommy-gun in my room? No sane person would have put it there. And how would an insane person have got it?

Was Frank Betterman right in thinking the gateman, Garvey, was on the wrong side of the fence in regard to insanity? If so, was Dr. Stanley crazy to hire a crazy attendant? Frank Betterman had seemed sane except for his craving for liquor, and while a dipsomaniac may get DT's, he doesn't usually suffer from fixed delusions.

I wondered what would happen if Toler offered Betterman a drink of that zero-proof whiskey of his. If I knew anything about dipsomania, there would be a bloody murder on the spot.

"The hell with it," I told myself. "I haven't been here long enough to get

any answers. I'd better go to sleep."

I had just shut my eyes when I heard the sound of the door opening. I didn't move, but my eyes jerked open and strained into the darkness.

Yes, the door was open all right and someone, or something, in white was standing there in the doorway looking at me. I couldn't make out any details, for if there was a light in the hallway, it had been turned off.

Just something white. An attendant's white uniform? Or the white pajamas of a patient?

Still without moving, I braced myself for quick action. As soon as he stepped inside the room, I would jump him. Luckily, my only cover was a thin sheet that wouldn't hamper me much.

Then suddenly the figure wasn't there any more. Blackness instead of gray-white, and the sound of the door closing. The hallway light flashed back on. I could see the crack of it under the edge of the door.

That meant I could see who my visitor had been. Quietly I got out of bed, tiptoed to the door and turned the knob.

The knob turned silently enough, but the door wouldn't open. It was locked.

IV

CALMLY I went back to bed. And lay there, getting less and less calm by the moment. It was silly for me to want to make any move tonight. I needed more time to study the people with whom I had come in contact.

But just the same I couldn't sleep, and the longer I lay there the less sleepy I got. My mind went in circles.

Finally I gave up and got up. I got the little pencil flashlight from the pocket of my suit coat and started to work on the lock. I got it open within ten minutes and figured that was pretty good, considering there was no keyhole on the inside.

The hallway was empty and all the doors along it were closed.

My bare feet made no sound in the hallway and on the stairs. The recreation room was dark, but there was a dim light in the corridor that led to the office.

The door of the office was locked, too,

WHO'S CRAZY NOW?



Who was acquitted of murder by reason of insanity by a jury in the State of New York, and, escaping from the asylum for the criminal insane, was tried by another jury in the same state, was declared sane and never tried for murder again?

As you probably recall—Harry K. Thaw.

and that cost me another ten minutes or so. But time didn't matter. It couldn't be later than about one o'clock and I had the whole night ahead of me.

I took a look around the office, shading my tiny flashlight so its beam would not show outside. I don't know just what I was looking for. I opened a closet door and jumped back when a skeleton confronted me. But it was a conventional wired medical skeleton and entirely harmless. An odd thing, it occurred to me, for a psychiatrist to have, but possibly it was a relic of his medical student days, with which he hated to part.

There was a safe, a big one. It looked to be well beyond my lock-picking abilities, and it probably wouldn't contain anything of sufficient interest to justify the attempt.

The desk would probably have what I wanted. And I found it in the first drawer I opened—a small card file of names and addresses. It was divided into two sections, one for patients and the other for employees. I quickly copied into a notebook the names and addresses of all the male patients and male employees.

Oh, yes, it was remotely possible that Paul Verne might be masquerading as a woman. But the more likely prospect came first. I found myself with a list of eleven male patients and four male employees. Then I began marking off those who couldn't possibly fit the description of Verne.

First the attendant who was over six feet tall, and another who was barrel-chested and had arms like a gorilla. A man can change his weight by taking on fat, but he couldn't take on that sort of muscular development.

Three of the patients were definitely too tall—including the man with the paper hat and the inverted astrological theories. One was too short—only about five-feet five.

Seven patients left, two employees. I didn't mark off any more names, but I ticked off with check marks four which seemed the most unlikely of the nine. All four had physical characteristics so different from Verne's as to put them at the bottom of my list, if not to eliminate them entirely.

That left only five names as my best

bets. They were not the only possibilities, but they were the ones who rated attention ahead of the others.

I picked up the telephone and, speaking so softly I couldn't have been heard outside the office, gave the number of the New World Hotel and then gave my own room number.

Kit's sleepy voice answered.

"Take a pencil, honey," I said, "and copy down these names and addresses. Ready?"

When she was, I gave her the names and addresses of Garvey, Frank Betterman, Harvey Toler, Bill Kendall and Perry Evans. The latter was a paranoiac whom I'd seen in the recreation room and at dinner, but with whom I had not yet talked.

"Got 'em, Kit? . . . atta girl. Now here's one more name, only get it for a different reason. Joe Unger. He has an office on the third floor of the Sprague Building here in town. Joe's a private detective and we've worked together before. I mean, when he has any work in Chicago he throws it my way and when anything I'm working on, when I'm home, has a Springfield angle, Joe handles it for me.

"Now, bright and early tomorrow—I think he gets to his office at eight—you look up Joe Unger and give him those names. Don't tell him where I am or what I'm working on, but have him get all the dope he can on each of those names."

Kit sounded wide awake now.

"How about the out-of-town ones?"

The ROAD to BIGAMY



In any state of the United States, is it legal to marry a second wife when your first wife is still alive, and you have not been divorced from her or had the marriage annulled?

Yes, if you can have her declared legally dead.

she asked. "One's in Chicago and one's in Indianapolis."

"Joe can handle them by phone, somehow. Main thing I want to know is whether they're on the up and up. One address might turn out to be a phony, and then I can concentrate my attention on that name. And any general information Unger can pick up will help. Tell him to get all he can in one full day's work."

"How shall I tell him to report to you, Eddie?"

"You can get the dope from him tomorrow evening. I'll phone you tomorrow night about this time. Oh, yes, one other thing I want him to check: What kind of a reputation Dr. Stanley has. Whether he rates as being ethical and honest."

"All right, Eddie. But why?"

"The bare possibility that Paul Verne might be here—if he's here at all—with Stanley's knowledge. Verne would have plenty of money, and he might bribe his way in and make it worth anyone's while."

"All right, I'll have Unger check on that. What's happened since you got there?"

"Here? Not a thing. Life is dull and dreary."

"Eddie, are you lying to me?"

"I wouldn't think of it, honey. 'By now. I'll call you tomorrow night."

I GOT back up to my room without being seen.

After I fixed the lock back the way it had been, I wedged the blade of my penknife between the door and the jamb, near the top. I sleep lightly, and if the door opened again during the night the fall of the knife onto the floor would wake me.

But the knife was still in place when I awakened in the morning.

Just after lunch I was summoned to Dr. Stanley's office.

"Close the door, Anderson," he said, "and then sit down."

I took the chair across the desk from him. I spoke quietly. "You want a report on what I've seen?"

"You needn't lower your voice. This room is quite soundproof, naturally, as

I interview my patients here. No, I don't have a report in mind. You haven't been here long enough. It will take you several days to get to know the patients well enough to—uh—recognize changes in their mental attitudes.

"What I had in mind was to ask you to concentrate for the moment on Billy Kendall. Try to win his confidence and get him to talk to you freely. I am quite disturbed about him."

"That's the fellow with recurrent amnesia, isn't it?" I said.

Dr. Stanley nodded. "At least up to now, that is all that's been wrong with him. But—" He hesitated, twirling the gold-rimmed glasses faster on their silk ribbon, and then apparently made up his mind to tell the rest of it. "But this morning the maid who cleaned his room found something strange under the bed. An extremely lethal weapon. A sub-machine-gun, to be frank."

I looked suitably surprised. "Loaded?" I asked.

"Fortunately, no. But the mystery is no less deep for that. Two mysteries, in fact. First, why he would want one. He has shown, thus far, no symptoms of—uh—that nature. Second, where and how he could have obtained it. The second question is the more puzzling, but the first is, in a way, more important. I mean, it involves the question of whether or not he is still a fit inmate for this particular institution. In short, whether it may be necessary to suggest his transfer to a place where they are prepared to cope with that sort of insanity. You see what I mean?"

"Perfectly, Doctor," I said. "I'll look him up at once." I stood up. "What room is Kendall in?"

It wasn't until I was out in the hall that I realized he had said Room Six. I had put that Tommy-gun in Room Twelve. Had the occupant of Room Twelve found it and passed the buck? Or what?

Billy Kendall could wait. I went to Room Twelve and knocked on the door. Frank Betterman opened it, and I pretended I had known it was his room and suggested a game of ping-pong.

So we played ping-pong and I couldn't think of any way of asking him if he had found a Tommy-gun under

his bed without admitting I had put it there. Which hardly seemed diplomatic.

I managed to sit at the same table with Billy Kendall at supper. But he wouldn't talk at all, except to answer my questions with monosyllables.

I swiped another pocketful of silverware.

A bridge game constituted the excitement of the evening and I began to think I had been telling Kit the truth in saying events were dull and dismal.

AFTER turning in, I waited until well after midnight before my second foray into the office to phone Kit. She didn't sound sleepy this time. She had been waiting for the call.

"Get anything exciting?" I asked quickly.

"Yes, Eddie. That Indianapolis address was a phony. There isn't any such street there."

The Indianapolis address had been that of Harvey Toler. I whistled softly. Was Harvey Toler the man I wanted?

"Thanks a million, angel," I said. "Now I can go ahead."

"Wait, Eddie. There was something funny about one or two of the others. Frank Betterman—his address was okay, a cheap rooming house, but he'd lived there. Used to be a reporter on the Springfield Argus. He got fired for drinking too much."

"But that makes sense," I said. "He's a dipso—"

Then I saw what she meant. Where would a fired newspaper reporter get the kind of dough to stay at a fancy sanitarium? Particularly a lush, who would hardly have saved his money while he was working.

"And Kendall, William Kendall," Kit said. "He used to work for a bank and left there under a cloud. There was a shortage, and he was suspected of embezzlement. But they couldn't prove anything and he was never arrested."

"Um," I said. "Maybe that's where he got the dough to stay here. And since he's got amnesia, maybe he forgot where it came from. What about my friend Garvey?"

"That one was okay. He's got a sister, married and with six kids, living at that address. The other patient, Perry

Evans, we couldn't get much on."

"That was the Chicago address, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and it's a hotel. A little one, Joe Unger said. All we could find out was that Perry Evans had stayed there for three months up to a month ago. They didn't know anything about his business, or wouldn't tell."

Nuts, I thought. That didn't eliminate Evans, by any means. For all anyone knew, Paul Verne could have stayed three months in a Chicago hotel under that name. But the hell with it. Harvey Toler had given a nonexistent out-of-town address.

"Okay, honey," I said. "I'll keep him in mind as second choice. What'd you find out about Doc Stanley?"

"He came here only a little over a month ago, rented the property out there. It had been built ten years ago as a small, select girl's school."

"And failed three years ago," I said, "and has been vacant since. Yes, baby, that was all in the newspapers. Also that Stanley came here from Louisville, Kentucky. What I want to know is about his reputation."

"Good, as far as we can find out. Joe Unger called a Louisville detective agency and they made inquiries there. He practiced as a psychiatrist for ten years there, then got sick and gave up his practice a year ago. His reputation was good, but presumably he didn't want to start at the bottom again to build up a new practice when he recovered, and got the idea of starting a sanitarium instead."

"I suppose somebody told him he could get this place here for a song," I said. "So he came to Springfield. Okay, honey. Anything else?"

"No, Eddie. How soon will you be through there?"

"Not over a few days, I hope. I'll concentrate on my friend Toler with one eye and Perry Evans with the other, and I ought to know pretty soon. 'By now."

V

HANGING up the phone, I sat there in the dark thinking. For some reason I can think better sitting in an office,

even in the dark, than in bed. The only trouble was that the more I thought, the less I knew.

Harvey Toler, the exhibitionist, had given a false address when signing on here. That might mean he was Paul Verne—if Paul Verne was really here at all. But it might mean nothing at all.

There are plenty of reasons why people give false addresses. I had given one myself and I wasn't Paul Verne. Maybe he was ashamed of being here and didn't want his friends to find out where he was. Maybe giving himself a false identity—if his name as well as the address was phony—was a facet of his exhibitionism.

And wasn't Perry Evans' case even more suspicious, on second thought? Paul Verne wasn't a dope. Would he give an address which a single phone call would prove to be false? Wouldn't he be more likely to have established an identity somewhere?

Say he had been hiding out at a little Chicago hotel. Coming here, he would use the identity he had used there, so if someone—like me—got curious, he could be checked back that far and no farther.

And if Perry Evans were genuine, and had enough money to afford this sanitarium, why had he been staying at a place like that? And where had a broken-down newspaper hack got the money to stay here?

And Billy Kendall, ex-bank clerk. Had he or had he not been guilty of embezzlement? And if so, where did he fit into the picture?

Only Garvey's case had been completely on the up and up. And Garvey had interested me most of the bunch. It had been Garvey I had asked for a machine-gun. And got one.

I went back upstairs. Maybe some sleep would do me good. I hadn't slept much last night and it was already two o'clock tonight. The light was still out in the upstairs hallway. I groped my way along the wall to my door at the end of the corridor.

I opened it, part way. It hit against some yielding but solid obstacle. Six inches, perhaps, it opened. Then a few more as I shoved harder. There it stuck.

I had the pencil flashlight in my hand,

although I hadn't been using it along the hallway. I reached inside the door and turned it on, aimed downward. I could barely get my head inside the door far enough to see what lay there.

It was a body, lying on its back. A man, in pajamas, with blood matted in his back hair. It looked like—

And then something hard and heavy swished through the air and grazed the top of my head. Just grazed it, luckily, for the blow was meant to kill.

Pain blinded me, but I didn't have to be able to see to jerk my head back out of that door. And my hand, still on the knob, pulled the door shut after me.

Whoever was in there could probably open it from the inside, as I had, but not for several minutes.

Then, as a shot roared out inside the room and a little black hole appeared in the panel of the door, I dropped flat. And as four more shots came through the door, at different angles, I rolled to a corner of the hallway and hugged the floor. None of them hit me.

Five shots were all that came through the door. That meant that the killer hadn't emptied his gun. A revolver holds six shots, and an automatic may hold more.

Then silence. I listened carefully but the man inside didn't seem to be working on the lock to let himself out. I stood up cautiously and used my handkerchief to wipe off blood that was running down my forehead and into my eyes.

There wasn't silence any more now; there was bedlam. From most of the rooms along the corridor came voices yelling questions as to what was happening, wanting to be let out. Several doors were being hammered by impatient fists.

I heard footsteps running along the corridor overhead on the third floor, which meant that attendants were coming. If I waited for them it would be too late to find out what I most wanted to know—which of the patients were still in their rooms and which were not.

I ran along that corridor, jerking doors open. In most cases, the occupant of the room was right behind the door. If he wasn't I stuck my head inside and played my flashlight on the bed. I didn't take time to answer questions or make

explanations, and I finished the corridor by the time the tall attendant, in white uniform, and Garvey, pulling trousers up over a nightshirt, came pounding down the stairs.

Two rooms had been empty. Harvey Toler's room where, just the night before, I had been given a toast in cold tea. And Room Four, Perry Evans' room.

Two gone, and both of them were in my room. One was dead and the other was a homicidal maniac. But why *two* of them?

PAUL VERNE must have learned, in some way, that I was a detective and had gone to my room to kill me. But had he taken someone along for the company, and then killed him?

And which was which? Both Harvey Toler and Perry Evans had black hair. Either one could have been lying there just inside the door. And Joe Unger's investigation outside had not eliminated either one. Toler's address had been a fake, and Perry Evans' address had been the little hotel in Chicago, an easy-to-get address that made him almost more suspect than a phony one.

Betterman had me by one arm and the attendant by the other, and both were asking questions so fast and getting in each other's way, I couldn't find an opening to answer them. Frank Betterman's face, I noticed, looked more haggard than usual.

Then Dr. Stanley, fastening the cord of a bathrobe, was coming down the stairs. His first question shut up Betterman and the attendant and gave me a chance to answer.

He took a quick glance down the hall at the bullet holes in the door of my room, as though to verify what I was saying, and then interrupted me long enough to send the attendant to phone the police.

"You don't know which shot which?" he demanded. "And you think the other one is Paul Verne?"

His face was white and strained. The name of Paul Verne meant something to him. Every psychiatrist in the country, as well as every copper, knew of Paul Verne.

I nodded. "I doubt if he's in there

now, though. He can't hope to get out this way any more, but there's the window. There's soft ground under it and he could drop. He's probably over the fence by now."

The words were bitter in my mouth as I spoke them, because I had failed. The police would have to take up the chase from here, and even if they caught their quarry, I wouldn't get a smell of that twenty-five grand.

If only I'd had a gun, it might have been different. But it would have been nothing but suicide for me to have gone through that door, or to have run around outside to try heading him off. I would do a lot for twenty-five thousand dollars, but suicide wasn't one of them. . . .

Police!

The place was run over with policemen, inside and out.

The body in my room had been that of Harvey Toler. And he hadn't been playing dead this time. The back of his head had been bashed in by somethin', that could have been, and probably was, the butt end of a pistol or automatic.

Perry Evans was gone and there was a little triangle of checkered cloth stuck on a barb of the barbed wire on top of the wall. Evans had a checkered suit and it was gone from his room. His other suits hung in a neat row in his closet.

Squad cars, every one available, were searching the neighborhood. Railroad and bus terminals were being watched. So were freight trains and highways. You know the sort of thing.

Apparently the shock of discovering he'd had Paul Verne among his inmates had slowed down Dr. Stanley's thinking a bit. Although I had told him the whole story, it still hadn't dawned on him that I had taken the job there solely for that purpose and that I would not be staying.

"We'll tell that to the police privately, of course, Anderson," he said. "Or the patients will find out you aren't really one of them and then your usefulness will be ended."

I shrugged and let it go at that. I was too annoyed at losing a chance at twenty-five grand to care whether the boss thought I was staying or not.

I talked to Captain Cross, who was in

charge, and to some of the other detectives, privately, and showed my credentials. And I avoided talking to the other patients so I wouldn't have to explain to them why I had not been in my room when the fireworks started.

Most of the patients were downstairs. Few were willing to return to their rooms. The whole building was lighted up like a Christmas tree.

I wandered outside and walked around the grounds looking for something—I didn't know what.

THE WHOLE place, inside and out, had been searched. The police had recognized the possibility that the bit of cloth on the barbed wire might have been a ruse and that Perry Evans might have doubled back and hidden somewhere here. They looked everywhere a man could hide and some places he couldn't.

I leaned back against a tree and stared at the building, particularly at my own window. The photographers were up there now.

What had happened in that room, in my room, tonight? Verne must have discovered who I was and what I was doing there and come to kill me. But how had Harvey Toler got in the way, and got his best chance to play the role of a corpse?

Harvey Toler worried me. More, dead, than when he had been alive. Why had he used a phony address?

There are plenty of reasons, aside from being a homicidal maniac, why a man might give a wrong address. Not all of them criminal reasons. But it was a coincidence, a devilish coincidence, that in this particular case a wrong address had been given.

And Billy Kendall, the lad who couldn't remember who he was part of the time. Who had maybe had something to do with money being gone from a bank, although they couldn't prove it.

And maybe he didn't have anything to do with it.

It started to go round and round inside my head and it didn't make any sense. Perry Evans was gone, so Perry Evans had been Paul Verne all right, but where had a broken-down newspaperman like Frank Betterman got the

dough to take his booze cure at a place like this?

It was nuttier than a fruit cake, and the more I thought about the whole thing the screwier it got. Screwier and screwier and finally, there in the dark, it got so bad it began to make sense.

There was *one* way of looking at it that added it up to something so monstrously crazy that it almost had to be true.

I grinned up at the lighted window of my room and then I went inside for a moment and borrowed a big flashlight from Captain Cross.

"Sure," he said. "But what do you want it for?"

"Maybe I can find Perry Evans for you."

"In the grounds here? We looked high and low."

"But maybe not low enough," I said. And before I had to explain what I meant by that, I made my escape.

There was one really likely place, and if what I wanted wasn't there, I would have to start a systematic search.

But I went to the likely place, and it was there.

VI

WHEN I went back in, I gave Cross his flashlight.

"Find him already?" he wanted to know. "Where's he hiding?"

"Back of the garage," I said. "He dug a hole and pulled it in after him. He's buried there, or somebody is."

He stared at me like I was the crazy one.

"That's the one place where the ground's soft and easy to dig," I said, "and you wouldn't have to pull up and replace turf. It's been smoothed over pretty carefully, but you can see where it is. It'll probably be pretty shallow."

He still just stared at me.

"Don't blame your men for not finding it," I said. "They were looking for a live man hiding, and live men don't hide underground."

There was still disbelief in his eyes, but he went to the other door and gave some orders, and then he came back.

"You mean he wasn't Paul Verne?" he said.

"I got to make a phone call," I told him. "Long distance. Come on in the office if you want to listen."

There was quite a congregation of patients in the office, talking it over. Dr. Stanley, still looking worried stiff, was trying to calm them. A plain-clothes man, looking bored, was leaning in one

WOMEN WOMEN WOMEN



THE SAINT had known all kinds in his day. But none equalled the girl he pulled out of the water one dark and murderous night off the coast of France.

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corner of the room. Except for the pitch of the voices, it sounded like a ladies' tea.

But I picked up the phone anyway, and said, "Long distance," and when the operator came on I said, "Get me the home of Roger Wheeler Verne in San Andria, California. . . . Yeah, I'll hold the line."

It was quite a while to hang on to a telephone, but it kept me out of local conversations.

After a while the operator said, "Here's your party," and a male voice said, "Roger Verne speaking."

This time when I started to talk, all the other voices stopped and everybody listened.

"This is Eddie Anderson, Mr. Verne," I said. "Private detective. I've located your son alive, and I'm about to turn him over to the authorities. I wanted to tell you first so there could be no dispute about the reward."

"Excellent, Mr. Anderson. I assure you there will be no difficulty about that."

"Thanks," I said. "You'll probably have another phone call shortly, as soon as the police have him."

As I put the phone down, Captain Cross growled: "What kind of chiselers do you think we are?"

I grinned at him. "I don't know. What kind are you? All I know is I've had difficulty with rewards before, so you can't blame me for playing safe."

There was tension in the room, plenty of it, as I turned around.

"Frank Betterman," I said.

He was standing behind Dr. Stanley's chair at the desk, and he looked startled and backed to the wall. I went on around the desk after him.

Dr. Stanley turned in his chair and gave Betterman a startled, frightened look, and then pulled open a drawer of his desk that had been partly open before, and his hand jerked out of the drawer with an automatic in it.

"Attaboy, Doc," I said, as I rounded the end of the desk. "Aim it at him. He's a killer! He might get you."

AS DR. STANLEY'S automatic swung around to cover Betterman, I was right beside Stanley, and I dived for the automatic. I caught his gun wrist in both my hands and bore it down to the floor as I pulled him out of the chair.

The gun fired once as his knuckles hit the floor, but the bullet buried itself harmlessly in the molding. Then I had the gun twisted out of his hand and had his arm turned behind his back, and it was all over. Even the strength of a homicidal maniac can't break an arm-twist like that.

"Sorry, Frank," I said to Betterman. "But if I hadn't played it that way, he'd have shot several of us before we got him. I saw his hand keeping near that partly open drawer and I knew there'd be a gun in it. Had to stall till I got near enough to jump him."

Frank Betterman wiped sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand.

"You mean Stanley is this Paul Verne?" he said.

I nodded. "I might have known he wouldn't be without an identity that would stand checking. He probably killed the real Dr. Philemon Stanley in Louisville, took over his identity and came here. He couldn't have impersonated him where he was known, of course, but it was easy enough here."

"You better be right, Anderson," Captain Cross said. "I don't get all of it. Why'd he kill those other two guys? I know a nut doesn't need a reason, but he had a good hide-out here and was not suspected."

"And he wanted to keep it," I said. "Those weren't motiveless murders, either of them. He wanted to kill me, because he found out why I was here and he knew I'd catch wise sooner or later once I suspected Paul Verne was here. Probably he heard me talking on the phone, via an extension, last night, and decided to kill me. So earlier in the night he killed Perry Evans and hid the body and—"

"Why?" Cross demanded. "What's killing Perry Evans got to do with killing you?"

I grinned at him loftily.

"So there wouldn't be an unsolved murder. I'd be dead and Evans gone, with a piece of cloth from his suit on the barbed wire. Two and two make four, and if the Verne angle pops up, why Evans was Verne and he killed me and scrambled."

"Umm," said Cross. "But what about Toler?"

"Toler burgled my room while I was downstairs tonight. I'll tell you why later. Skip it for the moment. And Verne—Dr. Stanley—was waiting here to kill me when I came back, and in the dark he got Toler by mistake. But he found out he'd got the wrong man and waited for me. It wouldn't have put any

crimp in his plans. Perry Evans, missing, would have taken the blame for two murders instead of one. But he missed killing me, even after firing a gun through the door. And I got a crowd in the hall outside so he couldn't come out after me that way, so he went back upstairs to his own room."

"You mean he dropped out the window, ran around the outside and went upstairs?"

"I doubt it," I interrupted. "His room is right over mine. I imagine he came in my window by a rope or something let down from his window. And all he had to do was climb back up and then come down the stairs, fastening his bathrobe."

"You were telling me some screwy yarn about a Tommy-gun," Cross said. "Where does that fit in?"

"Garvey was under orders to report to Stanley on the patients and any requests they might make. As a gag, I asked Garvey for a machine-gun and, of course, he told Stanley. And that's the one nutty thing that Paul Verne did. His macabre sense of humor made him put one in my room. That was before he knew I was a detective, of course. Maybe the first thing that made him suspect me was the fact that I ducked the gun in another room and didn't report it to him. If I'd been what I was supposed to be, I'd have come to him about it."

Cross and the plain-clothes man had relieved me of my captive by now and he was handcuffed and helpless. His sullen silence was enough of a confession for me, and apparently for Cross, too.

But there was a plenty worried look on the captain's face as his subordinates took Verne away.

"This is a new one on me," he said. "I mean, the sanitarium here. What the devil am I going to do about all the patients? Can the attendants take over, or did he have an assistant who can handle things long enough to find other places for these people to go?"

I grinned at him. "You didn't ask me yet, Captain, why Harvey Toler came to my room tonight."

He frowned. "All right, why did he? Not that that can have anything to do

with winding up the affairs of a sanitarium."

"It can have everything to do with it," I said. "Toler came there to spy on me, after he heard me pass his door to go downstairs. He wanted to look over my stuff, so he could report to Dr. Stanley, or to the man he thought was Stanley."

"Huh? Why? Wait a minute! You mean Toler wasn't really crazy, that he was faking exhibitionism like you faked kleptomania, and that Stanley hired him like he hired you, to watch the other patients?"

"Exactly, Cap. Now double that, in spades. . . ."

"You're crazy," Kit said when I got back to the hotel.

"No, angel," I explained patiently. "That is the whole point. Much as I deplore two murders—three if you count the original Dr. Stanley—that is what makes this case utterly and screamingly a howl. I am not crazy.

"And neither was anybody else in that nut house, except the man who ran it! I should have known it when we investigated a few patients at random,

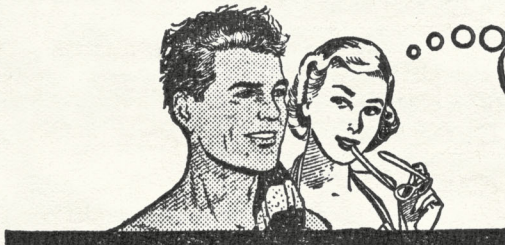
and not one of them seemed to have had enough money to pay his way, but every one of them was the type of person who would be looking for a job and reading want ads. Want ads like the one I answered, but worded differently.

"You mean there wasn't a single nut in that place?"

"Not a one," I told her. "It seems likely Verne would have had at least one genuine application during the month or so he had been operating there, but if he did have, I have a hunch he'd have turned it down. One or two legitimate ones would have spoiled the record, see? Lord, what a kick he must have got out of running that place, knowing that eighteen or nineteen people there were spying on each other at his orders and each of 'em acting crazy to fool all the others! And the whole shebang run by—"

I couldn't go on with it.

Besides, we'd have to stop laughing long enough to figure out where we were going to spend, with the aid of twenty-five thousand dollars, the rest of our honeymoon.



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By BENTON BRADEN



THE BODY IN THE STREET

—was the killer's first victim. Who would be second?

HARRY GRANGE was a television fan and this night he didn't turn off the set until the last image had faded from the screen. A tall, blond young man with an amiable but resolute face, he glanced at the clock and stretched. It was eleven o'clock and he decided that he might as well go on to bed.

At that instant someone knocked at the

door. Harry walked to the door and opened it. Two tall, well-built men stood there. They came on into the living room without waiting for an invitation. One of the men closed the door, then stood by it. The other man walked to the center of the room, glanced about, then turned and faced Harry.

"You live here alone, don't you, Grange?" he asked.

"I do," Harry replied, a bit of anger showing in his face. "I don't believe I've ever seen either of you before. What is this? A stickup?"

The man in the center of the room shook his head, turned back the lapel of his coat, showed a badge. "We're detectives," he announced. "I'm Sergeant Kramer. We're here on official business."

Harry Grange recognized that name. Detective Sergeant Kramer's name had appeared in the newspapers many times, nearly always in connection with murders. Harry had no idea of the reason for this visit. He stood there and waited for the sergeant to explain.

"You live here alone?" Sergeant Kramer asked.

"That's right," Harry affirmed. "My mother died six months ago. I've lived here alone in the house since."

"Where did you spend this evening?" Kramer asked almost casually.

"Right here. I haven't been out of the house. I've had my television set on all evening."

"You say your mother died six months ago? Any aunts or uncles living?"

"No. Just two cousins."

"Two?" Sergeant Kramer seemed a bit surprised at that answer. "My understanding was that you had only one cousin, Louis Grange."

"I have another cousin," Harry told him. "Michael Grange. He lives in California. Fresno. What is the idea of all these questions?"

"Your cousin Louis died tonight—if it's any news to you!" Sergeant Kramer replied, his words snapping a little. "He was hit by a car on Pine Street. Killed instantly. The driver of the car didn't stop. About nine o'clock."

"Louis—dead!" Harry exclaimed in stunned bewilderment. "Why—why wasn't I notified at once? It's been two hours—and I'm his only relative here."

SERGEANT Kramer's tone was brittle. "That's what we found out after we started investigating," he said. "When we got to the scene of the accident—or mur-

der—we were suspicious. There were no witnesses. We had a hunch it wasn't any ordinary hit and run case. So we were interested in finding out who might have had a motive to kill him, who might profit by his death. We decided to do some checking before we notified anybody. We found out that your cousin was rated at about fifty thousand dollars. I guess you'd get only twenty-five thousand of it—if you're telling the truth about this other cousin in California."

"You don't think I'd lie to you about it, do you?" Harry asked sharply.

"Sure I do," Sergeant Kramer replied coolly. "A killer will lie about anything to save his hide. You'd collect a small fortune on your cousin's death. You're hard up too, aren't you? This house is mortgaged, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," Harry admitted. "My mother had a long illness. We had to mortgage it to pay the expenses. But I'm not quite broke. I have a few hundred dollars."

"Still—you had a nice motive for killing Louis," Kramer said. "And you had another motive. Jealousy. Isn't it true that you and Louis were both courting the same girl? Edna Schott? And that Louis beat your time and you got pretty mad about it?"

Harry couldn't help but scowl a little at the injustice of that accusation. It was true he had gone with Edna Schott. But he hadn't been in love with Edna at all. In fact, he had introduced Edna to Louis and had been amused when Louis had quickly fallen in love with her. But people could twist things around, conclude that Louis had beaten his time in a hotly contested courtship.

"So you had a double motive in killing Louis," Sergeant Kramer went on. "Love! And dough! Two of the most common—"

"But I didn't kill Louis!" Harry protested. "I haven't been out of this house all evening. I had no idea Louis was dead until you told me. It's ridiculous of you to accuse me of the murder of my own cousin with nothing more to go on than possible motives and suspicion."

"Maybe we got a bit more than that, Grange." The sergeant's tone was grim. "Maybe you thought you did a very slick job of it. But you didn't. Like most amateurs at murder you got excited after you had done the killing. You were in an awful hurry to get things fixed up and get back in this house, be sitting in front of that television set so that you could pretend vast surprise when you were notified of Louis' death by a hit and run driver. We let you sit here on purpose—till we got the proof we were looking for."

"What proof?" Harry asked hoarsely.

He realized now that Sergeant Kramer wasn't making an unsupported charge, that Kramer had uncovered some evidence that had convinced him that he, Harry, was guilty of murder. Kramer was an experienced officer and wouldn't go off on wild angles.

"Come on and we'll show you," Kramer said shortly. "Don't bother to get your hat. You won't need a hat any more. Come just as you are."

They went out the front door, then turned to the right and went around the house to the rear, Kramer's assistant following them and using a big flashlight to light the way. They went to Harry's garage. The doors were wide open. Harry rarely locked his garage, but he remembered that the doors had been closed.

The first thing that Harry noticed was that the floor of the garage was wet. He couldn't understand that. Kramer soon enlightened him on that point.

"Here's where you slipped up on the kill," Kramer said harshly as they stood at the side of Harry's old sedan. "You got away with the hit and run angle. No witnesses saw Louis struck down—or saw your car speed away. But you knew that blood might have spattered on the car. You couldn't take any chances on that. So when you got the car back in the garage, you turned the hose on it. There's still some water on the floor. But you didn't want to display a light so you couldn't do a thorough job. You probably looked it over with a small flashlight after you had

finished with the hose. The car looked clean, but it wasn't. We found some small spots of blood and bits of flesh wedged in the crack where the fender is attached to the upright. More that had washed off on to the floor. We sent the stuff down to the laboratory to be checked, but that's just routine. You're sunk, Grange. You committed a murder, and then bungled it. You might as well admit it. Give us a confession right now."

"I might do that, except for one thing," Harry said. "I didn't kill Louis. I don't know how it—it got on the car. Someone else must have driven my car tonight. I had my television set on pretty loud. I wouldn't have heard anyone backing the car out of the garage anyway when I was at the front of the house."

"Okay!" Sergeant Kramer snapped. "Have it your way. I say you committed murder. We've got more evidence. You bought a new tire yesterday, didn't you? Had it put on a front wheel. You had an old tire there and you couldn't afford to take chances on it on a job like this. A blowout at the wrong time would have been disastrous. We've got enough on you right now to send you to the chair. We'll dig up more in the next twenty-four hours. The charge will be first degree murder and you won't get out on bail. Let's go."

HARRY realized that there was a lot of truth in what Sergeant Kramer was saying. This was terrible evidence that they had against him here. He'd be in jail without being able to make bond. He wouldn't have a chance to defend himself. The real killer had counted on that, knew that he would almost surely be safe because no one would take Harry's story seriously enough to make a determined investigation.

Harry acted partly in reason and partly in panic. The detective with the big flashlight stood just behind them. Harry turned, grabbed the flashlight, twisted it out of the man's hand. As he ran from the garage, he hurled the flashlight far down the alley.

Then he sprinted away in the darkness.

Sergeant Kramer yelled and tried to run after Harry. But the sergeant couldn't see a thing and after a few steps he had to stop and give vent to his feelings with explosive words.

"He caught me by surprise, Emerson," he said after a minute. "I didn't figure he was the type to try that. He hasn't got a chance to get away. We'll get him in no time at all."

"Yeah," Emerson agreed. "No chance at all. He grabbed that flashlight before I could move a muscle."

"Lost his head," Kramer said. "Just acted in panic. I should have put the cuffs on him before we brought him out here. You get to a phone while I look around for him. He'll probably run as far and as fast as he can. But he'll have a hard time finding a place to hide where we can't get him."

Sergeant Kramer was wrong about that. The night went by and daylight came and although every available cop in the city joined in the hunt no trace was found of Harry Grange. The day went by and evening came and still they didn't find him. Kramer was very bitter about it now. He was sure that Harry had managed to get on a bus or train and was many miles away by this time.

Kramer was wrong about that, too. Harry Grange was no more than a block from his own home. The Austins, his neighbors, had left by plane two days before on a week's trip to Seattle. As usual Tom Austin had left a key to his house with Harry, for use in case of fire or emergency. Harry had put the Austin key on his own ring. Harry had simply crossed a yard, run around the Austin house, and opened the front door and walked in. He had locked the door, then sat alone in the darkness for hours.

He had the best hiding place in the world, he reasoned. The officers would never think that he would try to hide out within a stone's throw of his own home. And he was fairly sure that no one else knew that he had the key to the Austin house.

But Harry knew he was in a very bad spot. If he were caught, he wouldn't have a chance. He had to find some evidence, prove himself innocent before he was caught. Once he started, he'd have to work fast.

He had one advantage over the officers in so far as a solution of the case was concerned. Harry knew he hadn't committed murder. He knew that he hadn't driven his car at all that day. Then who had driven it? Who else could possibly have a motive for killing his cousin, Louis?

So far as Harry knew, there could be only two suspects. One, of course, would be his cousin, Michael. He hadn't seen Michael for years, didn't know much about him. It was possible that Michael had become a criminal, had come back here and worked out the murder plan in order to get a share of Louis' estate.

The only other possible suspect was Louis' partner, Willis Truson. Louis and Willis Truson had been in the construction business. Louis was the outside man. Truson handled the office. They had been successful in a small way. Sergeant Kramer's estimate of Louis' net worth had probably been too small. Harry didn't know much about the details of their business, but Truson might have been having trouble with Louis. And might profit by Louis' death.

In either case, finding proof would be difficult. If Michael had committed the murder, he'd be far away by this time. It would be equally hard to prove, even if he found out that Truson had a motive for the murder, that he had backed Harry's car from the garage, waylaid Louis and run him down, and then returned the car to the garage. If Truson had done it, he had deliberately turned the hose on the car, taking special care not to wash the last bit of evidence from it.

Harry looked through Tom Austin's things. He found a .38 revolver. When, an hour after dark that night, Harry left the Austin house he had that gun in an overcoat pocket. He also was wearing Tom Austin's clothes which were a trifle

too large for him. He had found a wide-brimmed hat which pretty well concealed his face with the brim turned down.

Harry kept his hand on the gun, and his face was grim as he walked rapidly through the streets. He had decided on direct action. There was no use snooping around, trying to ask questions. He'd be picked up in no time at all at that game.

THIRTY minutes later, Harry climbed a flight of stairs to the second floor of the apartment house in which Willis Truson lived. His idea was to walk in on Truson, wave his gun in Truson's face, make Truson think he was desperate enough to use it. He'd make Truson talk, and Truson might make a slip. Then he'd look over Truson's clothes. If Truson had committed the murder, he had probably soiled his clothes when he had turned the hose on Harry's car and arranged the evidence to his liking.

As he reached the second floor landing, he saw the door of Truson's apartment open. A man came out. It wasn't Truson. It was a small, black-haired man with sharp eyes, a dark face and thin lips. The man was well-dressed, but his face showed that he was a tough customer.

Harry changed his mind as he passed the man. He waited until the man had started down the stairs, then turned and followed. When he reached the street again he saw the man getting into a car that was parked some fifty feet to the right. There was a taxi parked a few steps to the left. Harry ran to the taxi.

"Follow the man who's getting into that car," he told the driver as he opened the door and got in the cab.

"Not me," the cabbie said shortly. "I ain't lookin' for trouble. And I get quite a bit of business, taking sports out to his place. I wouldn't want Max Fournery to get an idea I was meddling in his affairs. He plays rough."

Max Fournery! The name registered with Harry.

"Maybe I've got the wrong man," Harry said. "I thought his name was Dickson."

"That's Max Fournery," the driver said

positively. "I've seen him a hundred times."

"He runs that place just outside the city limits, doesn't he?" Harry said. "Sort of club. He calls it the—"

"Falcon Club," the cabbie supplied. "Nice place—if you've got dough and don't mind parting with it. Good food and a few games if you like to try your luck. Oh, Max runs it on the up and up. Bein' outside the city limits all he has to get along with is the county cops."

"Sounds interesting," Harry said. "And I wouldn't be surprised that I'd find this guy, Dickson, that I was looking for, out there. Mind driving me out?"

"Not at all," the cabbie said. "I just didn't want to take right out after Fournery, let him get any idea I was taling him."

When Harry walked into the Falcon Club he was relieved to see that there were only a few diners seated at the tables and that the room was dimly lighted. He wouldn't be too easily recognized. A smooth-looking man in a dinner jacket came up, looked at Harry inquiringly.

"I'd like to see Max Fournery," Harry announced.

"What about?"

"Strictly business. Confidential. I'm from out of town."

The man took a long careful look at Harry, then said, "Straight ahead through that door at the end of the room. Turn to your right. You'll find Max in his office."

Harry crossed the room, turned to his right in a short hall. There was an open door and a lighted room. Max Fournery was seated at a wide desk. He hadn't looked at Harry as he had passed him in the apartment house and there was no sign of recognition in his eyes.

"My name is Dickson, Mr. Fournery," Harry told him. "I'm from St. Louis. My boss sent me down here to check up on a guy. This guy lost some dough in our place. He's been a little slow about paying off. I figured you'd know something about him."

"What's his name?" Max Fournery

asked sharply.

"Willis Truson. He came in our place about three weeks ago. He dropped four grand in cash in a game. He asked for credit, showed the boss some papers that proved he was a contractor here and had some assets. The boss let him go for five grand more. Now Truson promised to pay off in a week, but he hasn't. The boss doesn't like the idea of losing that five grand so he sent me down here to check. You know anything about him?"

"Plenty," Fournery said. "He owes me ten grand. But I'm not worried about it. I'm satisfied he'll pay me off in less than a week and he can pay you too—if you keep after him. Truson's partner was killed last night. Murdered by a cousin of his. They caught this cousin practically in the act. Now Truson and his partner had business insurance. If either one of 'em died the other was to get thirty thousand to protect the business. Truson will collect that thirty grand in less than a week. All you got to do is be on the job when he gets it."

"That's all I want to know," Harry said. "I didn't want to see Truson till I got a line on him. I'll go up and see him right away and get a promise, then be here to collect when he gets that insurance. Thanks a lot."

HARRY was smiling grimly as he sat in a cab on his way back to town. Truson had plenty of motive for the murder. He had been gambling and was hard pressed. He had probably gambled away the partnership money and knew that Louis would find out about it sooner or later. And Truson was afraid of what Max Fournery might do to him if he didn't pay off.

But knowing that Truson had committed the murder and proving it were two different things. Those spots of blood and bits of hair had been found on his car, not Truson's. How could he ever prove that Truson had used his car for the job?

Harry's eyes suddenly went wide as he got an idea. Truson hadn't used his car. Truson wouldn't have dared take a chance

like that. There would have been too much risk in being seen, in taking the car out and putting it back. Truson had used his own car. Then it had been a simple matter to come to Harry's garage, sneak in the dark, turn a hose on the car, and plant the evidence there. That would be enough for the cops.

It probably hadn't been a hit and run job at all. Truson had murdered Louis somewhere, then put the body in his own car. He had driven to Pine Street and planted the body there when there were no pedestrians on the street to see him. That was the way Truson had carried out his murder plan. It had been a good one, Harry had to concede. He had committed the murder and fixed the body in a place where there was no chance of being caught. The rest of it had been at minimum risk too.

Willis Truson opened the door of his apartment when Harry knocked. He stepped back quickly when he saw the gun in Harry's hand. Harry kicked the door shut with his right heel.

"I—I'm surprised to see you here, Harry," Truson stammered. "I heard on the radio—I thought that you had—"

"You thought I had thrown up my hands and run for it, didn't you?" Harry said. "You thought that I had decided that I couldn't possibly beat the frame, didn't you?"

"I didn't—I don't know anything about a frame. I—"

"You don't have to lie to me, Truson," Harry said harshly. "I know that I didn't kill Louis. Now I have every reason to believe that you did. At first I thought you had framed me by using my car. Now I think you used your own car. You've had plenty of time to clean it up, but still I think I'll take a look at it. But first your clothes. I want to look at your clothes, all of them. You probably ditched the outfit you had on when you killed Louis. You were bound to get them soiled badly in handling the body and dumping it on Pine Street. Still I'll take a look. There might be a suit missing when I check all around."

Harry saw the gleam of confidence in Truson's eyes. Truson wasn't going to be upset by any examination of his clothes. He had foreseen such a search and was prepared for it. Harry went ahead and looked at the clothes anyway. Truson made no protest, seemed almost anxious to display his wardrobe. None of them were soiled in the least.

"All I can say is that you're wrong if you think I killed Louis," Truson said as he showed the last articles. "I'm not saying that you killed him—even if the cops think you did. But I didn't do it. Louis and I were partners. We got along fine. We were making money. There was no reason for me to kill him."

"Except for the thirty thousand you get in insurance," Harry said shortly. "And the chance to cover up any shortages in the partnership funds you may have lost in gambling. You had plenty of motives."

"I might say the same for you," Truson retorted coolly. "At least the cops think you had. And how about this cousin you have in California? His name is Michael, isn't it? I've heard Louis speak of him, heard him say that you and Michael were his only relatives and that the two of you would take everything he had if he died. He said he hadn't seen Michael for years, didn't know much about him. So you can't know much about Michael either. You say that you didn't murder Louis. I know that I didn't. That leaves Michael. He had plenty to gain by Louis' death, particularly if he were broke and desperate. You'd better start checking on your cousin, find out if he is still in California."

"I'll check one of you at a time," Harry said. "Now we'll go down to your garage and have a look at your car. You've had plenty of time to clean it up. But you might have overlooked something."

"Anything you say," Truson said agreeably. "You're welcome to go over my car with a magnifying glass."

Harry didn't have a magnifying glass, but he had very good eyes. They went to the row of garages behind the apartment

house and Truson opened the door of his. Without protest he got in the front seat after turning on the overhead light. He sat there quietly while Harry looked over the sedan. It was a Dodge.

ALMOST from his first look Harry could see that he was going to be bitterly disappointed. There were bits of mud on the bumpers—and it hadn't rained in a week. The car was dusty. That couldn't be faked. And when Harry examined the upholstery he saw that it was clean, spotless. Except for dust. When he struck it lightly with his hand dust arose. No one could have cleaned that upholstery lately without disturbing and removing the dust. No bloodstained body had ever rested on these cushions.

It was the same story when he made Truson unlock the rear compartment. Dust was heavy on the steel. It hadn't been disturbed recently.

"I guess you win, Truson," Harry said finally. "Stay right where you are in that front seat for at least five minutes. I'll want a little headstart before you go in and call the cops."

To make sure that Truson didn't leave in less than five minutes Harry padlocked the door from the outside as he left. But he knew that Truson would yell for help and be heard shortly. Then Truson would phone the cops and the hunt would be on with renewed vigor. He had to get back to the Austin house where he could sit down and think, plan another course of action. He had to get back before the patrol cars got going. They'd stop every pedestrian on the streets then. If they got him, he wouldn't have a chance.

Harry knew he was back almost where he had started. All he had found out was that Willis Truson had a good motive for killing Louis. But he had uncovered no evidence. If anything, what he had seen tended to clear Truson. But the cops still had the same airtight case against him. A motive, the damning evidence of his car, the fact that he had bought a new tire the day before to replace a tire that was in extremely bad condition. Even

the fact about the tire would weigh strong with a jury. He had called the garage and they had sent a man out and put the new tire on in the garage.

That tire! For a moment Harry forgot that the police might come down this street at any moment. He stopped, stared thoughtfully into the blackness ahead of him. Then he hurried on, almost running.

But he didn't go to the Austin house. Instead he cut through the Austin yard, went to his own garage. The doors were closed but unlocked. He opened a door, went in, sighed in relief. The car was still in the garage. He walked around to one side of it, lighted a match, looked carefully, again gasped in relief.

He went to the back door of his own house, took out a key, unlocked it, went inside. He went into his bedroom, turned on the small radio there. He took off the clothes he had borrowed at the Austin house, put on fresh clothes of his own. Just as he finished, the radio music stopped abruptly for a special announcement:

"Flash! The police have just announced that the hit and run murderer of Louis Grange is still in the city. Harry Grange appeared at the apartment of Willis Truson, Louis Grange's partner, a short time ago. He demanded money, threatened to shoot Truson. Then he demanded Truson's car, but Truson managed to throw his car keys away in the darkness. Grange locked Truson in the garage and fled.

"All citizens are asked to be on the lookout for Harry Grange. But the warning is given that Grange is armed, desperate, and will try to kill anyone who attempts to apprehend him. Stay tuned to this station for further—"

Harry turned the radio off. He went into the hall off the living room and picked up the phone. A minute later he heard the voice of Sergeant Kramer.

"This is Harry Grange, Sergeant," Harry said calmly.

Kramer couldn't believe it. "This is no time for jokes!" he snapped over the wire. "We've got every cop in the city out look-

ing for Grange and we have no time for pranks."

"I'm not joking, Sergeant," Harry said. "This is really Harry Grange."

"You mean—" there was still doubt in Kramer's voice—"that you've decided to give up? Where are you?"

"I'm right where you found me the first time. In the living room of my own home."

Harry hung up and turned on the lights. He sat down in a comfortable chair and waited. He didn't have to wait long. He heard the car screech to a stop out in front, heard steps pound across his porch. The door flew open and Sergeant Kramer and Detective Emerson came in, stopped and stared.

"It's him, all right," Emerson said. "It was no gag."

"Well, you're smart, Grange," Kramer said crisply. "You were bound to be caught sooner or later. Are you ready to give us a written confession?"

"No, but I think that I can prove I was framed, Sergeant," Harry told him. "Just one question. My car hasn't been out of my garage, has it?"

"No. What's that got to do with it?"

"Plenty, Sergeant. You know you said that one bit of important evidence you had against me was the fact that I had bought a new tire. At the time I was sure that my car had been used in committing the murder so I missed an important fact. Now I know that my car wasn't used at all. The killer came here, turned the hose on it to make it look as though I had tried to clean it up, then planted the evidence on the car. Now the garage man came out here with the new tire and put it on in the garage. That car hasn't moved since. The killer didn't know about the new tire. Now if that tire had been run so much as a block there would be particles of dust and grit on it. I think if you'll have a man come out from the laboratory and look over that tire he'll tell you that that car has never been moved since the new tire was put on it."

Sergeant Kramer stared for a minute, then turned to Emerson and said, "Call

Leavitt, give him the dope, tell him to hurry out here."

WILLIS Truson came into Sergeant Kramer's office at headquarters. His eyes gleamed with triumph when he saw Harry Grange seated in a chair between two detectives who were standing. He turned and smiled at Sergeant Kramer and the relief in his face seemed genuine.

"I'm glad you got him, Kramer," Truson said. "I'll admit I've been scared since he tried to hold me up, tried to get my car for his getaway. He threatened to kill me later and he might have done it if you hadn't caught him."

"I suppose you are relieved, Truson," Kramer nodded. "You'd be glad to have him safely behind bars and on the way to the chair. Because you were a suspect too. Oh, we didn't overlook you. We found out you had been gambling some, found out that you would collect thirty thousand of business insurance on the death of your partner, Louis Grange. I don't mind admitting that we went to your apartment before Grange did and examined your clothes carefully. Also we took a look at your car before Harry did. But your car was clean. Had a little mud and dust on it. Couldn't possibly have been washed in the last few days. Your upholstery was clean, exceptionally so."

"Of course," Truson smiled. "That cleared me—convinced you that Grange, there, was the only one who could have killed him."

"Where did you get that Dodge?" Kramer asked suddenly.

"Why—I bought it from the Dodge dealer here in town," Truson answered.

"There's just one peculiar thing about that car, Truson," Kramer said. "We finally checked with the Dodge dealer. You'd bought the Dodge there all right. Model, equipment, colors all checked. But we're pretty thorough. We looked at the serial number, the engine number. They didn't check. That car we looked at in your garage wasn't the one you bought here. Now where is that original Dodge?"

Truson's mouth opened wide.

"I'll tell you where it is!" Kramer roared. "It's at the bottom of Lake Dawson. You drove it off the bluff there, after you you had killed Grange, and sank it in forty feet of water. We haven't got it up yet, but we will. You looked all over the Kansas City used car lots before you finally found a car exactly like yours. But you didn't dare drive that car here. Louis Grange knew your car too well. He'd have noticed the remarkably clean upholstery and little things. You've got a cabin out at Lake Dawson, a garage there. You drove this substitute car out there and locked it in your garage. When the opportunity came to kill Louis you had him with you in the original car. You killed him in that car. You drove right to Pine Street and dumped him when you were sure you wouldn't be spotted. You knew that Harry was a television fan and would be at home with his set. You drove near his house, went into his garage, used the hose, planted the evidence. Then you went to Lake Dawson as fast as you could drive. You drove your car to a bluff, pushed it over into the lake. You had clean clothes ready. You changed and dropped your soiled clothes into the lake. Then you drove back to town in the substitute car. When you heard that Harry Grange had fled us in a panic you were delighted. You figured there wasn't a chance in the world that you'd ever be caught. And I hate to admit that you came mighty near being right. All right, boys, lock Truson up."

After Truson had been taken away, Sergeant Kramer turned to Harry. He frowned a little.

"I didn't overlook the possibility that Louis might have been killed somewhere else and dumped in Pine Street," he told Harry. "But after we had looked over the upholstery of both cars, I gave up on that. I knew the body couldn't have been transported in either car without leaving traces that our lab men could have picked up. This case has taught me a lesson. I'll never take anything for granted again. I've found out that some killers are pretty smart."

DEATH

walks in circles



A Novel by
CYRIL PLUNKETT

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Detective

Bart found the man murdered, his body

still warm; and all the evidence

screamed the killer's name was—Bart!

I

PRACTICALLY all day Trelevan had been running around town trying to find the guy reported to have called on Krebbs the night he'd died. A guy in a blue suit, without a name. The Krebbs case was like that, and at

three o'clock Trelevan swore softly and climbed a cab back to the office.

The October day was raw and dreary. Streets seemed to huddle, shivering. They were a lot like the people he had encountered the past week, worried, sullen and afraid. They knew things they wouldn't tell. When the cab swung in at the curb before the four-story building that housed Donlon's office, he swore again. Reporting failure was getting to be a habit.

Trelevan took the elevator, removed his hat and wearily rubbed his high forehead.

The girl said, "You look tired, Mr. Trelevan."

"When have you seen me lately that I didn't?" he growled. "The boss in?"

"I guess so. Anyway, I didn't take him down. Any election news today?"

He answered darkly, "You mention that word once more and I—"

But by that time they'd reached the third floor, and Trelevan stepped out and went down the hall, almost to the rear stairs. It was a gloomy hallway which promised to open on a gloomy back office. The door had *Michael Donlon, Investigations* printed on the opaque panel. Beneath that was the name *Bart Trelevan*.

Trelevan went in, closed the door and stood frowning. Sue Temple wasn't at her desk.

Sue's absence wasn't unusual, but it was disappointing. She was blonde and pert and twenty-two. She was always cheerful. She had a way of making defeat seem less tragic than it was. Trelevan admitted to himself that he'd counted on looking into her blue eyes and saying, "Let's close up, kid, and go for a walk or something." He'd counted on talking to her and thereby talking himself out of the doldrums.

HALFWAY across the room, toward Donlon's private office, the door suddenly opened.

Little Mike came out, alone. He was red-haired, freckled, as Irish as his name. His fingers, chin and nose were blunt. So was his speech. His size had kept him from the career he'd wanted—like his father before him, the cops. But Little Mike, nearing fifty, hadn't

done so bad. He'd made money and a reputation. When his wife had died four years back he'd bundled his daughter off to Europe "to be a lady and not a red-necked Mick." He was a lot like a bantam rooster, fists always ready, voice like a deep foghorn despite his five-two in height.

Trelevan, scarcely more than half his age, considered Mike Donlon the world's finest. Three years they'd worked together, from the time Bart Trelevan, then a reporter, had run into murder and with Little Mike's help had solved it. Mike Donlon, that time too, had saved his life.

"Sure I can use you," Donlon had growled soon after. "You've got brawn and maybe a bit of brain. You've got background, and the people I don't know, you do. But it's me that's boss, understand? You play my game, my way. Mark me, lad, it's a straight line I walk, and if the day ever comes that you start cutting corners, we're through."

So far that day had not come.

"Hello, Mike," Trelevan now said. "The news is bad, all bad."

Little Mike pulled the door to a bare crack behind him. He stood there, his shaggy brows drawn, eyes curiously hard. He said, "Sit down."

"What the hell, Mike? What's wrong?"

"Sit down."

Trelevan pulled Sue Temple's chair around and sat down. The chair creaked under his near two hundred pounds. He was lean, however, for all his weight, wide-shouldered, long-limbed. He ran one hand through his curly brown hair.

"Three years we've worked together," Mike began harshly.

"Sure, and I hope it's thirty more."

"It won't be thirty minutes, Trelevan. We're through."

"Mike, you red haired—" Trelevan stopped, gray eyes squinting, puzzled. Mike wasn't joking! "Through? I don't get it."

"We started with a handshake, and I always told you if we reached an end it would be like the snap of my fingers."

Little Mike snapped his fingers. "It's over, Trelevan. Pick up what's yours in the office and get out."

"Mike—Mike, are you sober?"

"I'm sober."

"Hell, man, what's biting you then? Is there something I've done wrong?"

"You figure it out, Trelevan. But get this through your head. We're *through*." Donlon took a step forward, to Sue's desk, picked up the phone and called a number. Trelevan recognized that number. It was the newspaper he'd once worked for. Donlon gnawed his under lip.

"Hello—hello. Mike Donlon speaking. Yes, Donlon. I want a piece in your next edition. Bart Trelevan is no longer associated with me in business. If that isn't news, run it as an ad and bill me. Story? There's no story."

He hung up, and Trelevan came to his feet.

"Damn it, Mike—"

Little Mike Donlon turned and went stiffly back into his office. The door slammed, the bolt slid into place.

Trelevan just stood, staring, as though he half expected that door to open again, with Little Mike peeping out, grinning, admitting it was all a jest. But the door didn't open, and the silence suddenly became a roar in Trelevan's ears. He cursed once, wheeled and walked blindly back into the hall, down the front stairs this time, to the street.

He wondered if his eyes stung from the wind. They surely weren't moist. But they *were* moist and he knew why. He began to walk more swiftly with each step.

A little god, Mike Donlon. The kind of fellow you looked up to, respected and loved. Straight as a string, and straight thinking. Until today . . .

Six blocks farther on Trelevan turned into a doorway. Twenty minutes later he was seated on a high stool before a bar. He stared into his glass and saw nothing.

The place had class and glitter, but though he and Sue had sometimes stopped here for a drink and a chat with friends, he never had stayed long. There'd always been some work to take care of.

PEOPLE passed him; sometimes they spoke. Trelevan didn't answer. When Ronald Stace slapped him on the back

Trelevan turned with a scowl.

"I say!" Stace grinned. He was about forty, sleekly groomed. His face was always tanned, whatever the time of year, and except for crooked teeth, black hair and eyes and mustache markedly teamed to spell handsome. Stace was a broker, man-about-town, hail fellow well met. He had a thousand friends, and more than a thousand dollars for every friend. "You need company, Bart. Girl jilt you?"

Bart said, "Don't bother me."

"Hey, Charlie, give this guy a pill for his liver."

The barman came up with two more glasses.

"The dirty rat," Trelevan muttered.

"Rat?"

"Mike Donlon."

Stace frowned. "What's the matter with Donlon? I always thought he was aces in your hand."

"He's a rat," Trelevan said. "He thinks he's pulling a fast one. Well, he's not. I'm not dumb."

"Elaborate, Bart."

"Krebbs is back of it," Trelevan muttered darkly. "The dirty rat. I ought to kill him."

Ronald Stace downed his drink, got off his stool. "See you again, sometime—I don't hope."

In fifteen minutes Trelevan was back on the street, but he'd been kicked out of better places. Mike Donlon's office, for example. Sure the Krebbs case was back of it. And for a while he thought about Krebbs.

A little man, not much bigger than Little Mike, Krebbs had once worked for the city. He'd had reform on his brain. He was running for mayor on that platform. Ten days earlier he'd come into Donlon's office, blinking behind his glasses, spouting like a pouter pigeon.

A cool thousand dollars he'd laid on Donlon's desk.

"They're taking the city for a fortune!" he had cried. "I stand for civic betterment, Donlon. Dig to the bottom for this cancer. Get me evidence. Start with Rhode, the mayor, and Frost, his treasurer. Yes, and that contractor, Fagan. And meantime, I have a few lines out on my own. I'm going to prove

before election that an enormous sum in taxpayers' money is going into someone's private pocket!"

A thousand was a thousand. Besides, Little Mike had insisted he too hated graft. True, this Krebbs was a sort of screwball, but—three days later Krebbs was dead. A suicide.

The police had called it that. The case defied tagging it as anything else regardless of election and reform and enemies. Martin Krebbs, his wife and family away for the evening, had gone into his bathroom, and with his own gun in his own hand, had blown his brains out.

Donlon said afterward, "He's our client, alive or dead. We'll earn that thousand. This guy who was seen entering and leaving Krebbs' house before he shot himself means something. We're going to find out what."

That had been the Donlon whom Trelevan had known and loved. The Donlon who drove Trelevan and himself a week thereafter. Until today. Until. . . . Trelevan spoke the thought aloud: "Until they got to him and offered him a bribe. He knew he couldn't call me off, so he ditched me."

BY SIX o'clock the people who saw Trelevan were referring to the item in the newspaper. Some with questions; some with jeers. He ran into Fagan in a restaurant.

A powerful fellow, nearing sixty. Fagan, once a day laborer, had fought his way up. He had a brick-red face. A currently popular dancer was now on his arm. He was being seated at his table when Trelevan walked up to him.

"So you got to Donlon, you bloated son of—" The waiter anxiously pressed Trelevan's arm, hissing. Fagan put a cigarette in a short jade holder, seemingly oblivious of Trelevan's presence. But his hands shook.

"I won't shut up!" Trelevan roared. "This guy's lousy with dough. And why? Because he killed Krebbs! By God, Fagan, if I had a gun right now—"

Fagan said, "Waiter, we'll dine elsewhere, where we're not annoyed by drunken bums."

Trelevan followed him outside, but not through the same door. Trelevan

didn't walk out, either. He brushed himself off, shook his head and saw the hotel marquee ahead. What hotel he didn't know or care.

As he was crossing the lobby, someone said, "Hi'ya, Bart! I see by the papers Donlon tied a can to your coat tail."

Trelevan whirled. He couldn't see the speaker, but he had an answer ready nevertheless. The usual answer now. "The dirty rat. I'm going to kill him!"

As he spoke he glimpsed Sherman Rhode, bound for the dining room, and beside him, Manfred Frost, the city treasurer.

"Hizzoner, the mayor!" Trelevan called loudly.

Rhode stopped. He was silver-haired, immaculate. His face flushed when he saw who had hailed him. Frost, thin and saturnine, came to a stop also.

Trelevan drew in close, tapped Rhodes on the chest. "Now let me tell you something, both of you. You can stop Donlon with a bribe, b-but you can't s-stop me. You can't s-stop Bart Trelevan."

"You're drunk, Trelevan," Rhode said quietly.

"And in danger," Frost added thinly, "of losing your license. Trelevan, I would advise you—"

"You advise me!" Trelevan laughed loudly. He was still laughing when he hit the street. After that he tried the cheaper places, where they treated a guy like the gentleman he was. And in each place he told what he knew about Mike Donlon, the dirty rat, who was going to get his as soon as he, Trelevan, got around to doing the job.

At ten o'clock someone shoved him into a cab. The cabbie drove him home. He worked vainly at the keyhole, until he realized the door wasn't locked. Which was very, very funny, so he laughed. When he opened the door he noted with vague surprise that the room was softly lighted.

Mike Donlon was sitting there on the davenport.

Trelevan grinned crookedly. He elaborately closed the door and locked it. He staggered forward, his voice harsh and bitter.

"You dirty little rat. So you came

around to crawl, eh? You came around to—" Trelevan broke off suddenly, blinked, rubbed his eyes. A hazy doubt began to cross his sodden mind, then all at once gave way to realization of the awful truth facing him.

"Mike!" he cried.

Mike Donlon went right on sitting, stiffly. A little below one eye was a round black hole.

II

IT WAS a shock like diving into icy water. Mike Donlon was dead. Trelevan shook his head, stupidly, and gradually his nerves, half numbed these many hours, began to crawl. He closed his eyes, shuddered once, violently, and when he opened them his head was clearer.

He saw the gun, a .25 caliber Colt pocket automatic, on the floor at Donlon's feet. *His* gun, last in the desk beside the wall. He saw no sign of powder tattoo on Donlon's face. Donlon, therefore, most certainly had not fired it. He saw the nail file, Donlon's own, lying near the gun, meaningless in itself. Donlon had been murdered, yes, and so recently his body was still warm. And the circumstantial evidence screamed a killer's name: Bart Trelevan.

"Good God!" Trelevan breathed, dismayed. Then he stiffened, for coming up the hall were footsteps.

They were slow, doubtful. They reached the door and stopped. Seconds passed in silence, while Trelevan's blood raced madly. Then knuckles rapped up-on the door.

Who could it be? It didn't matter. All Trelevan knew was that the sudden presence in the hallway spelled acute danger. After his countless threats this afternoon and early evening, never in the world would anyone, finding him now, believe him innocent of Donlon's death. Arrest, trial, conviction would surely follow—and he'd be cooped up in jail meantime, with no chance to prove this a dirty frame-up.

The knock came again, louder, with greater urgency.

Trelevan could feel his heart pounding high in his chest, his throat, then seeming to stop with one great gulp.

The footsteps—they were going the way they had come!

At last Trelevan threw off the weight of fear oppressing him, and in his mind one thing loomed bright and clear. He didn't dare let Mike Donlon's body be found here. A thousand other flashes began to pour in after the first, but there was no time to consider them now. Time only to act.

He raised the body easily to his shoulder. He paused only to turn out the light. Then he was outside, locking the door after him, stealing on down the dark rear steps. The whole maneuver had taken him only a matter of seconds. Outside the building, he gasped gratefully the clean cold air. The shadows were silent, unmoving. The garage was not thirty feet away.

Trelevan raised the lid in the rear of his coupe, shoved Mike's body into the long compartment. But the ignition key wouldn't turn the lid lock. He cursed and turned to open the garage doors.

A minute later the motor was purring softly. He backed, swung about carefully, started for the street. Donlon had a cottage twenty miles away, along the river. No one at this time of year would look for him there.

"I've got to get there and back unseen," Trelevan muttered.

He slowed at the outer driveway, turned into the street. The corner was but fifty yards distant. Trelevan saw a car whirling around it.

The car cut across his path. A voice yelled, "Where the hell's your lights?" Police!

They were big men, Bales and Purdy. He knew them both, and they, of course, knew him. Purdy got out, square-jawed, grim.

"Trelevan, eh? I had a hunch it would be you when I saw you coming out of that driveway. Pete, here's our guy."

Pete Bales got out also, moon-faced, grinning. Pete said, "Hello, shamus." He leaned against the door and sniffed. "Hauling liquor? God, Trelevan, you smell!"

Trelevan eyed them, narrow-lidded. He pulled on his light switch, inwardly damning his oversight. "No damage done. I'm sorry, boys."

"Yeah, it proves drunks can't drive."

Were you going some place, Trelevan?"

"Out," Trelevan snapped.

"You hear that, Purdy? Okay, you take the wheel."

"Listen, Bales," Trelevan began desperately.

Pete Bales said, "Shove over, shamus. You're going back home."

"But I—"

"And you're going to explain, maybe, a little thing like a shot?"

"A shot?"

"You're damned right, a shot. We were in at the station when a guy phones he heard a shot in your place. Guy says it worried him, so he got up, dressed and went downstairs to your door. The lights were on, but nobody answered. So he played safe and gave the cops a ring. Was it pink elephants, kid—or alligators?"

AT LEAST they didn't suspect murder. But what would they suspect when they saw the room? And what if they should poke around and lift the car's trunk lid? Trelevan shivered. In the driveway once more, Bales jerked the keys, got out.

"That shot was an accident," Trelevan tried to explain. "I was fooling with my gun—"

"Just the same, shamus, we investigate. If you was sober, maybe we'd take your word. Up the stairs you go. Or do we carry you?"

Trelevan went up the stairs, swaying in spite of himself. He felt weak. True, his mind was clear, amazingly clear, but that was something others couldn't see. It came to him then that he'd been very likely on the front step at the moment Mike Donlon met death. The time would be about right. And he'd staggered around the building as the murderer was fleeing from the rear. On the face of it, coincidence—but he wondered.

A pattern was forming, fantastic and yet fateful. Suppose Mike Donlon hadn't come to crawl? Suppose Mike had tried all evening to contact him, failing because he, Bart Trelevan, had been an unmitigated fool. Because he, for the first time in his life, had tried to lap up all the town's liquor. Admittedly Donlon had made the kick-out sound convincing that afternoon, but why should

Little Mike, after all these years, have turned crooked?

Trelevan's nerves began to crawl again, for he suddenly saw what amazement and hot temper hadn't let him see before. Mike Donlon had carefully, too carefully, left his office door open a bare crack. Mike had called the newspaper. Mike had taken pains to let it be known that he was firing Bart Trelevan. He had taken pains to let the public know it, through the papers, and he had taken pains to let someone else know it, through that open door. *He had not meant it!*

"Open up, shamus," Purdy growled.

They had reached the apartment door. Trelevan, mentally groaning, produced his key, swung the door. Pete Bales shoved him in and snapped on the lights.

Pete said, "Yep, Purdy, there's the gun."

Purdy crossed the room and picked it up. Purdy put it on a Chinese lacquered cabinet. Purdy said, "You know, Bart, I heard tonight you were on a bat. I heard how you collared the mayor. News travels, and besides I'd read in the paper how you and Donlon split. When a guy goes around blowing off about the rats he's gonna kill and starts fooling with a gun, it looks funny. Pete, take a peek around this place to be sure he ain't got a stiff stacked some place."

Pete left the room, and Purdy stood rocking on his toes. Purdy's lips raised in a crooked grin.

"All on the up and up, eh, Bart? Only suppose you tell me now where's the bullet?"

Bart Trelevan had thrown himself on the divan. Partly because his knees were shaking, partly because he couldn't remember whether or not blood had stained that divan. His eyes had found no blood, but they had found something else. A straw instantly to grasp. He shook his head, looked up.

"Bullet? Why, here—here in the davenport."

There was a hole in the upholstery, small, jagged. His finger went in, ripped the cloth farther, spread it so that its ragged edges were not too obvious.

"Uh-huh," Purdy muttered.

Pete Bales came back that moment,

calling, "All clear."

Purdy kept on rocking, thoughtfully. "You know, kid, I got funny feelings. Like there's something wrong. I figure, Pete, we'd better take him in to sleep it off."

"You do," Trelevan warned, "and you'll be in trouble."

"Uh-huh," Purdy mused. "I ain't impressed. But you're home now, so maybe we'll give you a break. Pete, you got his car keys?"

Pete had. He pulled them out of his pocket, grinning, then put them back again. "I'll run his hack in the garage."

"That's it. That means, shamus, you stay put. We'll send your keys back in the morning."

They were gone then, tramping back downstairs. Trelevan's coupe purred beneath the window. He held his breath. But it went into the garage, the big doors closed. Footsteps pounded on out the driveway.

It was worse now than before. He still had Donlon's body. He hadn't reported Donlon's death. He'd obstructed justice and tricked the law.

HE WONDERED what next to do. He had a duplicate car key. He had within him, still burning like a flame, the same driving urgency to get rid of Little Mike's corpse. But there'd been time, between finding Donlon and the present, to think. And now the more he thought, the more convinced he became that Donlon had merely been playing a game that afternoon.

He lit a cigarette. He ground it out abruptly, reached for the phone. The wires sang, waiting for his connection. There was a click presently, a voice—Sue Temple's voice.

"Bart!" she gasped, when he spoke. "Oh, Bart, what's wrong?"

He frowned. "Why?"

"Mike has been trying to get you all evening. He had me trying, too, and I called at least a dozen times before I got you and you said you'd call me back. Bart, you sounded so—so strange."

"Did I talk to you?" he asked, puzzled.

"Not thirty minutes ago. You said you'd just come in. You said you'd ring me back."

"Are you sure it was my voice?"

"Why, I—Bart, I knew something was wrong! You didn't say it was or wasn't you. I just naturally assumed—"

"Listen," he cut in. "Did Mike have a visitor in the office this afternoon, about three o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Did you see who it was?"

"No. I was upstairs in the room over Mike's office."

"Upstairs? Mike didn't rent that room."

"Haven't you seen Mike?"

"He's dead," he told her quietly.

There was an instant gasp, an instant of sheer silence.

"M-murdered?" Sue whispered then.

"Murdered. Sue, get dressed. I'll be with you in fifteen minutes."

Trelevan hung up. He removed a handkerchief from his breast pocket, lifted the little automatic in it, carefully wrapped it. There was a slim possibility other prints than his and Purdy's might be on it. Temporarily that gun was going into the glove compartment of his coupe.

The bedroom bureau yielded his duplicate key and a .38 Colt Detective Special, stubby barreled, chambers fully loaded. Pocketing the .38, he turned out the lights and stole silently back down the stairs.

There was a strong probability that Bales and Purdy would still be cruising the neighborhood. It was a chance he had to take. But the darkness floated past without challenge, and anticipation as to how much Sue could tell him wormed itself to the uppermost regions of his mind.

Sue Temple lived less than two miles distant. Her downstairs rooms showed light behind drawn shades. Trelevan pressed the horn once, waited. Sue didn't answer. He got out of the car with a prickly feeling running along his spine.

Her door was unlocked, her two rooms empty. But a lamp lay on the floor, and the throw rug just inside the door was a wrinkled pile behind it. Not much evidence, but evidence nonetheless. Someone had got to Sue first. Someone who could only be Little Mike Donlon's killer!

III

TRELEVAN didn't pause or stare. Nothing now, he felt, could prove surprising. The force working in this night's shadows had mighty and long arms.

Krebbs had said, "Start with the mayor and Frost and Fagan." Krebs had died, and working for him, so had Mike Donlon. He, Trelevan, was to have been taken out on a frame.

Sherman Rhode and Manfred Frost and Fagan. But could he go to them, gun drawn, and expect to accomplish anything? Rhode, with his senatorial mien, would shout, "You're insane!" Frost would leer and call the police. Police would find Mike Donlon's corpse and Purdy would remember the gun. Fagan—he could almost see Fagan, apoplectic, blustering, but likewise secure.

No, a false move now would break and convict him. He needed proof to back his statements up, and as yet he had no proof. Moreover he had no knowledge of where Sue might be—Sue whom he was now more concerned about than himself, and who probably held the key to this whole foul mess without realizing it.

Trelevan was already in his car by this time, his mind blazing. He did see hope, however murky. Sue had said she'd been in the room above Mike's private office. There, or in Mike's office, could be a starting clue. There *had* to be the beginning, else Sue would not have been removed, he reasoned.

Yet, Trelevan realized, to guess was to court disaster. He had to *know* that each move he made would be right and safe, for no longer was his name and life alone involved, but Sue's as well. Ahead was the brownstone building that housed Mike Donlon's office.

He parked the car in the rear cement court where it would be unnoticed, went in the back way and on up the stairs to the third floor. He didn't turn on the outer room's lights, but went quickly to the inner office. This was Little Mike's own lair, and it was alive with Mike's personality.

Trelevan gritted his teeth, snapped on the shaded desk lamp and let his

gaze rove. The desk was cluttered, but without information. His eyes fell on the client's ash-tray stand beyond, one Mike Donlon never used. It had two cigarette butts lying in it innocently, until Trelevan saw their lip edge. But moisture had never touched them, nor had lips. They had the smooth round end that comes only from a holder. A holder! Trelevan's eyes blazed. Thousands used holders, yes, but so too, peculiarly, did Fagan.

He stood erect, exultant. A chuckling sounded softly behind him. Trelevan whirled, instantly froze. Lounging in the open doorway was a man known to the police in a dozen cities. Snipe Drago. And in his hand was a gun, bulky with silencer.

Drago said, "Reach, shamus! Up!"

Trelevan reached, for Snipe Drago was a killer. He'd beat a half dozen murder raps in his checkered career. He'd drifted to this city a few months before, and apparently the administration had found him handy.

Drago kicked the door shut. He had little eyes, jerky, jet. He stood perhaps five feet eight, heavy through the chest and shoulders. A cigarette, unlighted, dangled from a corner of his thin lips. A plaid cap almost completely hid his forehead. He motioned to the client's chair.

"Squat, buddy."

Trelevan sat down. He'd been followed, or they'd expected him to come here. Either way, it came out even. He wasn't guessing fast enough. And Snipe Drago didn't have that silencer on his gun for nothing.

Drago pulled back Little Mike's swivel chair and sat down, too. His free hand came up with a lighter, flipped it, touched the flame to his cigarette. He blew smoke impudently across the desk in Trelevan's face.

"Sucker."

Trelevan still said nothing.

"And dumb," Snipe went on. "Lock those hands around your neck. Swell. And now make yourself comfortable."

"What's the gag?" Trelevan asked then.

"No gag. Just sit there. Maybe I like to look at you. You're pretty good at that—from the neck down. A guy as

drunk as you were a few hours ago turning cold sober must have a lot of red corpuscles."

"Were you following me?"

"Maybe so. What difference does it make?"

"A lot, maybe." He was thinking that this tail had been put on him for purposes of timing the murder, so as to make sure that he would *not* have an alibi.

"Okay," Snipe grinned. His left hand reached again into his vest. "I'm in a sweet mood. Whatever you say goes."

"What do you want?"

"Nothing," Snipe said, and he brought out a blank cartridge, toyed with it, stood it up finally on the desk.

Trelevan stared. A silenced gun, he thought, and one shot. But one would be enough from Snipe Drago's hand. Drago wouldn't even have to hurry afterward—when he would reload with the blank and shoot again, muzzle close to the wound this time to spray its charge of powder. Then the blank would come out, the original cartridge would go back in. The silencer would come off this gun, and so too would the finger-prints. The stage would be neatly set for suicide.

LITTLE MIKE and he had often been here all night long. Light visible from the windows would cause no investigation, and Venetian blinds precluded anybody seeing in. A fine trickle of sweat moistened Trelevan's forehead. The minutes were passing, minutes he didn't dare lose.

And then suddenly Trelevan understood. Snipe Drago wasn't in a hurry because Trelevan's death didn't dare come too soon. Sue Temple had first to die and, like Mike Donlon, point in death to him as the murderer.

The moment he realized this his heart began to quicken, the beat of it to hammer at his temples. Those cigarettes in the tray, Fagan seated at his table hours ago fingering a holder—these things flowed together and became a picture. Fagan had Sue now. He had to reach Fagan quickly, before the time set for execution.

"Ants in your pants, shamus?" Drago asked. His gun rested on the desk, solid

as a rock. His chair squealed a little as he laughed. It brought Trelevan's mind to the chair. A swivel chair could be tricky to one not accustomed to it.

Trelevan acted instinctively. His knees were in the space beneath the desk, touching it. They rose in one fierce lunge.

The gun popped, all right, but not before Trelevan had slid down, hands following through to completely tip the desk. The bullet made a soft thud in the wall behind him. Snipe cursed as the force of the desk threw him back. His arms went out to stay his fall, and Trelevan's big body came flashing across the intervening space. They hit the floor together and Snipe gasped.

He tried to bring the weapon up, hammerwise. Trelevan wrenched it free, fighting with a cool desperation. When he got up, Snipe Drago's eyes were closed, blood snaking in tiny rivulets from his nose, his ears.

Concussion? Not unlikely. It mattered only because Snipe might not become conscious for hours. But with Sue in danger there wouldn't have been time anyway to pressure Snipe and make him talk. Trelevan took a precious three minutes to find a thick roll of adhesive tape in Donlon's desk, to bind Drago's mouth and wrists and ankles.

The rest of the roll went into his ulster pocket as he ran, frantically now, flayed by the realization that he might already be too late.

The dark rear court was silent and still as death. The place where his car had been was empty.

For a moment Bart Trelevan wanted to sob. They had Mike's body. They meant to expose it, to brand him beyond question as the murderer. There could be no other reason for lifting the car, for his foes had not thought he'd leave the office alive.

A part of his anguished mind considered that, foresaw police already spreading out to find him. But the other, the more urgent need of the car this minute—to get to Fagan's house in time to save Sue Temple—became torture. He raced for the street, praying he'd quickly find a cruising cab.

There was no cab at the corner. There was no cab at the next corner, either.

Treleван began to curse. Fagan lived, as he knew, about four blocks beyond his own address. Ten minutes at the very least, driving. God knew how long, running. Only God knew how long he could run, for that matter. The nervous and emotional punishment his body had taken this night was in turn taking its toll. He had to stop shortly, so ill he couldn't see.

When he could see, a cab was rolling by. Treleван dived for it, cried, "Grand Street! Hike it," and fell into the back seat, trembling.

A cigarette, its smoke feverishly inhaled, helped soothe his jangled nerves. He lit a second, called out where to stop, tossed a bill at the driver as they swung in at the curb and alighted on the run. He did not head for the Grand Street entrance, but around back, the alley. Then he slowed to approach with caution, revolver ready.

There was a garage, doors closed. The house itself was dark. But from where Treleван crouched, he could see the bright bumper of a car, glinting in the street light, parked at the front curb. Fagan therefore must have company. It wouldn't matter, for now Treleван knew his objective and did not mentally hesitate. A gun on Mr. Fagan at last, and the promise of a bullet if Fagan didn't talk. However slim the evidence of the cigarette butts, it was enough. Behind them, too, was now Snipe Drago.

TRELEVAN gained the back porch. The second key he tried opened the door. He went carefully up the hall, listening, frowning as he heard no sound.

If Fagan were not here, after all—but Fagan was here. The street light threw a pallid ray into a side room, upon chairs overturned in what had obviously been a struggle. Fagan's powerful body lay on the floor, sleeves torn, right forearm marked by savage teeth. Two small holes and a dark stain marred his starched shirt front. Fagan was dead.

Treleван knew an instant later that he had not been dead for long. The murder gun, moreover, was at his feet. A .25 Colt automatic Bart Treleван could well identify. It was the gun that

had killed Mike Donlon. His own gun.

The picture came into focus. Little Mike had taken a bullet in the brain, was stopped before he could arise. Twenty-fives, however deadly in the chest, had not stopped the bull-like Fagan. Perhaps his brute hands had been clamped around the killer's throat for an instant before he died—the teeth marks indicated the murderer's frenzy.

At all events, twice this night the little gun had killed. And twice, by luck and quick thinking, he, Treleван, had found it first. But to what end? He had a curious feeling that his hand was played out now. For Sue Temple was not here, had obviously never been here, and neither had Fagan been in Mike Donlon's office that afternoon. The cards and Fagan's death were all against it, else why had Fagan died?

The one bleak ray of hope still left was that Fagan's death, and not Sue Temple's, had been the motive for Snipe Drago's deferred murder attempt. It marked a startling and weird trail.

Treleван looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It was fifteen minutes past one. The night was still long. He put the little automatic into his right side pocket, retraced his steps out the rear door. This time he started around the house, but barely did he view the street when he stopped cold.

The bumper he'd caught a glimpse of before was on a car perched drunkenly over the curb. It was his own coupe! But it wasn't that fact alone that dismayed him. Pulled up alongside, its red fender light glowing, was a prowling car. And in the glare of its headlights, stood a big figure, moon-faced. Pete Bales!

Moreover, Bales had the trunk of the car open. Bales, cursing audibly, had found Mike Donlon's body.

Treleван was backing away softly, almost before he realized what he was doing. He came to the rear of the house again, turned to flee. They saw each other simultaneously, he and Purdy, but Treleван's right hand was still carrying his stubby revolver and he brought it up before Purdy could so much as gasp.

Purdy wheezed, "The guy who fools with his gun. Yeah—just went off by accident. did it?"

IV

FOR seconds they stood facing each other, Purdy's hands half raised, shoulders hunched as though ready to spring. But Purdy didn't spring. Purdy believed he faced a man kill-crazy and wasn't taking any chances. Not with his sidekick, Pete Bales, so near at hand.

Trelevan smiled fleetingly. "Turn around," he said.

Purdy growled a curse, but he turned. He put his hands behind his back, too, at Trelevan's curt command. The latter deftly lifted Purdy's gun and handcuffs, snapped the left wrist, caught the right. Purdy twisted, whirling.

The bracelets tinkled, flashing past Trelevan's jaw. He'd ducked in time. Purdy's hamlike fist next raked his temple, his roar blasting the shadows. But by that time Bart Trelevan had driven one hard blow into the officer's stomach, and his gun, clubwise, had found Purdy's thick skull. There was a sharp crack, a gasp. Trelevan caught Purdy's body and eased it to the ground. He stood crouched over it panting, as Pete Bales yelled, "Purdy? Purdy?"

Bales was coming around the house. Impulse, backed by an instinctive reasoning that Bales, getting no answer would hesitate, then proceed slowly, ruled Trelevan's actions. His fingers flew, handcuffed Purdy's right wrist to his left. He found the adhesive tape still in his pocket, tore off two strips for mouth and ankles. Quick, desperate action. He faded back as Purdy began to groan. A bare ten yards away the grass rustled beneath Pete Bales' stalking feet.

Bales came into shadowy view, gun faintly glinting in his hand. Bales whispered, "Purdy?" his moon-face taking form, grim and worried.

When he found Purdy's body and involuntarily stooped to examine it, Trelevan came up. His gun jammed against Bales' spine.

"Drop the pistol, Pete."

Bales stiffened, cursed, obeyed. Trelevan edged around, kicked the fallen Police Positive aside.

"Now pick up Purdy."

"What's the big idea?" Bales demanded.

"You two are in my way," Trelevan snapped. "But there's no sense in Purdy getting pneumonia."

"The benevolent murderer," Pete Bales sneered.

Trelevan sighed. "All right, if that's the way you feel about it. Up the steps, Pete, and into the house."

"I suppose you got Fagan?" Bales said.

"Fagan's dead," Trelevan admitted wearily. He opened the back door. "On the floor with Purdy. That's right. Now about-face, Pete, and head back around the house."

"So I don't get mine now?"

"You damned fool—" Trelevan checked himself. There was no advantage in telling Bales he wouldn't shoot him, while there was a definite advantage in Bales believing him trigger-crazy. They rounded the house, Bales walking stiff-legged.

"Into the car."

"Your car?" Pete asked cagily.

"Not much. I can't take both, and my bus won't attract the attention, parked, that the prowler car would. Get behind the wheel."

"By God, shamus, you're nuts!" Bales cried.

Bart Trelevan shook his head grimly. "Not so nuts, because I'm going to be beside you, and I'm going to keep you covered. Bales, I know what I'm doing. I've been going around in circles, not daring to strike first lest I find myself in jail. The obvious was—well, too damned obvious. But now an honest cop might come in handy."

"I don't get you, shamus."

"You will. For one thing, you're not my only prisoner. The other one's a rat, and if necessary the other one is going to rat. Does that make sense?"

Bales said earnestly, "Kid, turn in your gun. You'll get a padded room the rest of your life. I know you will."

Trelevan chuckled. He convinced himself he could chuckle. He'd followed every angle but the one so innocent, so obvious, he hadn't before given it a second thought. Finding Fagan had brought it into focus.

Little Mike had sprawled on the divan. At Donlon's feet had been the murder gun, and something else. The nail file

Donlon always carried.

"Wheel her left at the next corner," he directed Bales.

Pete took the corner. Pete obviously was content to stall, to bide his time. Doubtless Bales reasoned that he and Purdy would be missed, and a city-wide search for them would be under way. Too soon? Trelevan stirred restlessly. That depended on the nail file. Yes, and on something he dared scarcely believe true. The killer had made one slip.

BEHIND the apartment building, Trelevan handcuffed Bales' wrists, taped his lips, prodded him up the rear steps and on to the door of his apartment, then inside. Pete's face was a study in indecision, but he lay back meekly enough on the bed. When the cop's ankles were securely bound, Trelevan backed out of the room, turned toward the divan.

The nail file hadn't been moved, but it wasn't the file, oddly, that occupied his attention, after all. It was the slit in the upholstery through which he'd convinced Purdy earlier the bullet had gone. At the time that slit had seemed providential, but otherwise unimportant. Trelevan's murky mind hadn't let the fact register that there had been no tear in the cushion before tonight.

His fingers explored the hole, found nothing. He ripped out padding and a fine sweat began to form upon his forehead. Finally in desperation, he lifted the cushion and saw the key. A key to his own Chinese cabinet.

One moment he paused, key in hand, eyes blazing. The next he was crossing the room, opening the cabinet. There was a package inside that did not belong inside. And when he saw what was in the package, he sucked in his breath. Then he promptly let Pete Bales in on it.

The killer had slipped, not once, but twice!

Now Trelevan knew where he had to go, and went. As he neared the place, a clock somewhere distant tolled three.

It was an ornate house in the center of a wide and terraced lawn. Deep in the driveway were two cars, both big and shiny. A low license number marked one, well known. Sherman Rhode's. Trelevan crouched to read the initials

on the door of the other—M. F. Manfred Frost! He stole on, across flagstones, to the French window barely showing light behind drawn drapes.

The window was not open, but he could hear voices inside. Ear against the glass, they were quite plain. But Trelevan moved on, around to the back. There was a door here, flush with the curving driveway, a door unlocked. Minutes later, Bart Trelevan crept up a dusky hallway and stood listening.

"But good God, man, you're mad!" It was Sherman Rhode, and no longer were his tones assured and pompous. Rhode spoke now with fear.

A throaty chuckle answered him. "Rhode, you're like Fagan. A fool. The people don't know it yet, but Manfred Frost will be the next mayor!"

There was an abrupt snarl, the sound of a slap. And then a gasp. Not Rhode's but a woman's. Sue Temple was in the room!

"Bite me, will you? Girl, you know by now that we mean business. It's a lucky thing for us that you phoned Trelevan's rooms. I realized then that you knew something, too."

The slap came again, harder. "You took notes on Mike's conversation with me this afternoon."

"I didn't," Sue sobbed.

"You're a liar. I want those notes, and I warn you, we've been going easy so far. We've had other things to attend to first. Trelevan and Fagan, namely. Yes, and Rhode, but Snipe will be along any minute. When he and Clip Horgan start working on you—"

"I tell you I only know you called on Mike," Sue pleaded. "I—"

Rhode cried suddenly, "I can't stand this!" He screamed then, "Good God, you can't kill me!"

"Can't? For the stakes we're playing for, two years in which to loot the city, I'd kill forty men! One more death won't matter, Rhode, because I don't think you'll ever be found. You or the girl. The public can tie that up any way it wants to, but you're going to die."

"Is he?" Trelevan drawled from the doorway. He had his gun leveled, not on Rhode or on Manfred Frost, but squarely at the speaker. It was the playboy broker, Ronald Stace!

Sue Temple, tied hand and foot, uttered a glad cry. Rhode echoed her. Frost and Stace looked oddly at each other. Stace dropped his automatic, slowly raised his hands.

Stace said thickly, "So you beat Snipe out?"

"That's right," Trelevan told him. "You've had a high road to travel on, but there are always detours to death. You went too fast, Stace, to see them."

MANFRED FROST wet his thin lips nervously, and again his gaze and Ronald Stace's locked. Trelevan smiled.

"Don't try threats or intimidation with me, gentlemen. They worked with Krebbs, as I see now, and to an extent with Mike Donlon and Rhode, but these men had families to protect. Moreover, Krebbs was an idealist and a willing martyr."

"So the girl did take notes this afternoon!" Stace breathed, and his face was nasty.

"Wrong. Not in the way you think, but I know all the answers regardless. You, Stace, were the man in the blue suit who called on Krebbs before he died. You convinced him of your power, the willing killers like Snipe Drago you'd gathered around you. You gave him a choice of death or danger to his family. Krebbs had gone too far in his campaign to withdraw. Nor would he risk his loved ones, so he died. A suicide.

"You tried the same plan with Little Mike, using his daughter, now in Europe. She was so far away he knew he couldn't personally protect her, while realizing you might have agents there to kill or kidnap her. You phoned Little Mike and requested an interview, alone. You used the back stairs, doubtless, and thought Mike, expecting but another routine client, would be caught napping. The real purpose of that visit was twofold, since Little Mike wasn't the type to quit and kill himself.

"First, through intimidation, you forced Mike to establish a public break in our organization. This was to set up a revenge motive to Donlon's proposed murder which would frame and remove me. Second, you planted a subtle clue in cigarettes which, if there were repercussions to your visit, would finger

Fagan. And with Fagan slated to die also, he couldn't very well deny that he was the one in Mike's office. Dead men are poor talkers.

"Oh, you were very clever, Stace, even to capitalizing on my temporary freedom tonight to explain Fagan's murder. But Little Mike was clever, too."

"So he did leave a written testimonial of my demands?" Stace snarled. "That's no evidence, Trelevan."

"Wrong again. He left no written word before you murdered him."

"I murdered him?" Stace cried. "Damn you, you'll never be able to prove that!"

Trelevan's smile became hard. "You've admitted it, Stace. You saw an unexpected way to be assured I'd have no alibi—the ringing phone. You've said you answered my phone when Miss Temple called."

Stace's lips twitched, drew back to reveal his crooked teeth. He laughed. "You're pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?"

"Quite sure. These things, backed up by what I personally heard you say and the further testimony of Sherman Rhode and Miss Temple and Snipe Drago—"

"If you succeed in producing him," the broker cut in. "Trelevan, criminals sign confessions—and still beat them. You know that. The kind of evidence you've got won't hold water. For one thing, I'm not sure Rhode will testify."

Trelevan sensed Rhode's shudder and realized that Rhode had a deathly fear of both Stace and Frost and their power.

"For another," Stace went on, still grinning, "men of position, such as Frost's and mine, can make our word better than a drunken private dick's. Yes, and a girl who's reputation won't be so hard to tear apart. You're a sucker, Trelevan. You can't prove that we planned to gain control of the city through elections and thus loot it. You can't prove anything. May I suggest that you shouldn't have come here alone? Then perhaps—"

He stopped, eyed Trelevan suspiciously as the latter backed around the room, to the window. Question blazed in his dark eyes, unvoiced because Trelevan had reached the window.

"I didn't come alone," Trelevan chuckled, revolver still trained on the two before him. "I brought a policeman. A man who fortunately was willing to take a chance on me. A man who's been at that window listening. Pete, come on in and make your arrest."

The window squealed in opening. Trelevan read amazement on each face before him. He laughed softly, the laughter ending with a sudden gasp. Pete didn't draw alongside. Pete's gun jammed hard in Trelevan's back.

"Easy does it, palsie. Drop your pop-gun."

The voice wasn't Pete's!

Trelevan turned at last, his revolver clattering on the floor. He saw a stubbled chin, and eyes drooping in a fold of flesh. The man who stood there was as well known to the police as Snipe Drago. An oxlike man. Yes, and a man whose name had even been mentioned—whose eventual coming he should have foreseen. Clip Horgan!

V

FOR minutes Trelevan stared, or so it seemed. Inside him, like a pounding, cursing voice, came bitter denunciation. Time and again throughout this night he'd faced proof his foe was clever. Always a step ahead of him, fated seemingly in the end to win.

And this was, patently, the end. For Stace had picked up his automatic and Trelevan's stubby revolver, and Frost had quickly shoved Sherman Rhode into a chair. Sue Temple moaned, her blue eyes agonized as they found Bart's and read his misery.

"I phoned Donlon's office, like I went out to do," Horgan's deep voice was saying. "We didn't want a call traced here, and it's a good thing we didn't. Otherwise I wouldn't have been coming back and seen that bull at the window. I crept up and beamed him."

"Frost, drag the copper in," Stace ordered. His eyes were greedy in their exultation, narrowed, dancing. "You told one cop, Bart? Those were your own words—and how important they were! Now we know that no more cops will be coming. Fagan's death and Donlon's would have blown the town wide

open. Now we'll give them something to really talk about! Clip, couldn't you trace Snipe somewhere?"

"No answer at Donlon's office."

"We know the answer. This damn dick has got him—there or in his apartment. Time enough yet tonight to find Snipe."

Frost returned through the window, closed it, breathing heavily. He let Pete Bales' inert body fall to the floor. Pete's gun—actually Purdy's, which Trelevan had given to Pete—was still in its holster. Pete's holster, as he fell, was beneath his body. They had apparently overlooked that gun.

But what advantage could the gun be? Trelevan didn't know. He knew only that he had to act quickly, before they searched him and discovered the .25 automatic, the murder gun he'd twice salvaged. Its clip had been full. One bullet had gone for Donlon; two more for Fagan. That left three. In a heavier gun, perhaps enough. But the .25 would scarcely take out two men, armed, before they started shooting.

Trelevan groaned. He was conscious of Sue's eyes pleading that he look at her, demanding a comfort he could not give. He didn't look at Sue, but at Pete's prone figure, one arm beneath his fallen body. Trelevan mentally frowned. Pete's arm hadn't been beneath him! Pete had moved; Pete was conscious.

"Run the car around to the back door, Manfred," Stace was ordering in a cold, clipped voice.

"You're going to—to kill them all now?" Frost asked.

"They put away more than this in Chicago that St. Valentine's day," Stace snapped. "You fool, we'll have control of this town, and that means we've got a fortune involved. We've got to haul them away *dead*. The shots won't carry from this house. With you here to block investigation, it won't matter much if they do. The cops will take your word. Damn it, Frost, hurry!"

Frost grumbled, "All right," and went out. The back way. Ronald Stace licked his lips. "Clip, slap a gag on the girl's mouth so she can't scream."

Stace waited, keyed up, crouched. The *bon vivant* attitude was gone from

(Continued on page 128)

CRIME CURIOS

The Queen and the Crook

IN THE SPRING OF 1873, Queen Victoria of England laid the cornerstone of a public building at Chelmsford. As per custom the Queen had deposited a number of gold and silver coins in a hollow in the stone which was sealed up before the stone was set in place.

That same evening one of the workmen returned to the site of the construction, removed the cornerstone, broke it open and pocketed the coins. He was caught and charged with theft.

His lawyer pleaded that no theft had been committed. The coins had been placed there to be some day removed by a finder as souvenirs. If anything, his client was guilty of destruction of property (the cornerstone), a far lesser offense, and would make instant restitution, the value of the stone being less than a fifth the value of the coins.

"Very interesting," replied Baron Alderson for the prosecution. "The coins were placed in the stone for eventual removal, but it was pretty well understood by all that that meant possibly centuries hence. The coins would then be antiques and not currency."

"Merely a technical error in timing," answered the defendant's counsel.

"In that case," said the judge, "I must find the prisoner guilty of upsetting the time stream," and proceeded to sentence him.

Habeas Corpus

AMERICANS AND BRITONS pride themselves on possessing the Habeas Corpus Act which permits a plaintiff to be released from prison, when evidence against him is inconclusive, so that he may continue about his ordinary business and at the same time better prepare his defense. This law was passed in the House of Lords in 1679 because a whimsical clerk, who favored its passage, took it upon himself to count the aye of a very stout lord as ten instead of one vote.

Every Man A Cop

UNDER A LAW passed by Edward I of England in 1285 every man was required to be a policeman, primarily his own policeman. The law stipulated that each householder must own and keep ready at hand certain weapons according to the value of his holdings.

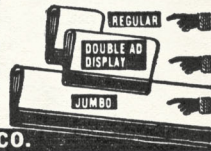
The lowest class—those whose possessions totaled less than forty shillings—was expected to own at least one bow and a suitable stock of arrows, two knives suitable for fighting and two "greisarnes," which were cutting blades

(Concluded on page 129)

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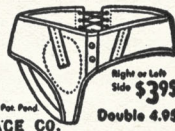
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DEATH WALKS IN CIRCLES

(Continued from page 126)

his manner. Stace, broker, man-about-town, was all killer now, eyes glittering yellow, fever bright.

"You take the dick and the dame, Horgan. Rhode is mine, and then I'll—"

"For God's sake, Stace!" Rhode pleaded.

Trelevan saw Clip Horgan's gun come up, saw that Clip was standing back at least ten feet. Stace beside him. Clip was watching Sue Temple; Stace's eyes were on Rhode. They weren't immediately concerned with Pete Bales, or with himself, this far from them.

BART'S right hand came down fast, for his pocket and the small automatic. He grasped it as Clip cursed and swerved his gun muzzle. There was one roar, but it wasn't Horgan's gun. The welcome sound came from the floor, from where Pete Bales had been lying.

Simultaneously, Trelevan fired from his pocket, and however small his weapon, he heard Stace scream. He was lunging forward then, as Pete shot once more. Past the crumbling Clip Horgan he darted, leaping the last five feet as Stace finally jerked his trigger.

Trelevan swung the same instant Stace's bullet fanned his cheek. His fist hit flesh, drove Stace against the wall. The broker twisted, broke free, tripped.

Pete yelled, "I got him, Bart. Watch for Frost!"

The window was already opening, but the man bounding into the room was Purdy! And behind him were two plainclothes detectives.

Two minutes later Purdy said, "I worked myself free, called headquarters and we started out cruising the town. We finally drove past here and a block down the street found the empty prowler car. So we fanned the neighborhood.

"The first shot came as Frost was climbing into the mayor's hack. We tagged him, conked him when he drew a gun. Then Pete yelled and we busted in."

"In time to help Pete make arrests," Trelevan said, removing the last bond from Sue. He helped her to her feet, held her shivering body close.

"Lies! All lies!" Stace was shrieking defiantly. "These others are your murderers; not Frost and I!"

Trelevan ignored him. "You see," he explained, "when Krebs proclaimed his reform platform, it gave Ronald Stace an idea. Rhode and Fagan may have been mild political cousins, as it were, but they were pikers to what Stace planned. Frost, on the other hand, proved fertile ground for Stace's scheme. Then Krebs came to Donlon and Donlon later stated he was going to find out why Krebs died, so we had to be put out of the way also. There was danger we would smear Frost before the election."

"How did you discover Stace was back of it all?" Purdy wanted to know.

"Because Little Mike, though seemingly intimidated, matched trick with trick. When I realized the significance of his nail file, and tied it to the slit in the divan's upholstery, the end was foregone.

"Mike expected me to walk into my apartment tonight. While he prepared for emergency by hiding his evidence in the cabinet, he wasn't prepared for sudden death. Stace got the drop on him, and probably with Clip Horgan's aid, found my automatic in the desk. Meantime, however, Mike jabbed the file into the divan—ostensibly in his despair, actually for a reason. The key to the Chinese cabinet had been lying on the divan beside him. It was easy to shove that into the cushion crack, but he had to leave some clue to help me find it."

"And in the cabinet?" one of the detectives pressed.

"Was a dictographic recording of Donlon's and Stace's entire conversation this afternoon. Then I knew everything, including why Sue Temple had been in that upstairs room, and why she'd been kidnaped. Then I was able, running the record off, to convince Pete Bales I was innocent of murder. Mike fired me because he didn't want me to share the danger he was running. Once it was known we'd split up, I would no longer be a target and would be better able to gain evidence from under cover."

"You fools," Stace cried huskily, "I'll make a jury yawn before that evidence. It points to collusion, perhaps, and to

intimidation, but not to murder. Trelevan, you're going up for the murders of Fagan and Mike Donlon as sure as—"

He broke off at Trelevan's quiet chuckle. "Oh, no," Trelevan answered gently. "Because you made *two* slips. Coming to Mike's office was the first. The second was literally closing your mouth."

"He's crazy!" Stace screamed.

"Teeth," Trelevan said grimly then. "And markings in casts and photographs are admissible evidence in court, Stace, because teeth are individual. Your crooked teeth will leave no doubt whatever of your guilt. So it's your second slip that will fry you. You see, in your struggle with Fagan you bit his arm hard, broke through the flesh—and left a perfect crooked-shaped imprint."

CRIME CURIOS

(Continued from page 127)

between nine and fifteen inches long attached to wooden shafts measuring between two and one half to four and one half feet in length.

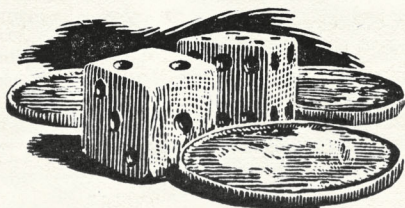
Considerably higher up was the man who owned land and goods to the value of fifteen pounds. His accouterments had to include at least one sword—which probably cost two to three pounds—one dagger and one hauberk or coat of mail in addition to bows and arrows, knives and greisarmes.

This arrangement proved very convenient when a band of thieves set upon a neighborhood or village. The local knight or baron had but to sound the alarm and a group of well-armed men would fall out to meet the occasion.

Roll Them Bones

In MANY primitive parts of Africa the work of the policeman falls upon the local witch doctor. His favorite "laboratory instruments" are a set of native dice. These are sometimes used as lie detectors. The witch-doctor asks the suspect a question and then tosses his dice to determine whether the man is telling the truth or otherwise.

On other occasions the toss of these dice is supposed to help the witchman determine in which direction the criminal has fled.



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THE CRYPTOGRAM CORNER

(Answers to cryptograms on page 83)

The Limerick

A sporty young man in St. Pierre
Had a sweetheart and oft went to sierre
She was Gladys by name
And one time when he came
Her mother said: "Gladys St. Hierre."

In solving this crypt, the letter A was no problem. Simple logic indicated that the four letter word followed by a quote was SAID. The letter E was spotted by its high frequency. After making these substitutions, the rest was pie.

A Gangland Message

MEET ME IN FRONT OF THE GA-
RAGE ON THE CORNER OF ELEV-
ENTH STREET WITH MACHINE
GUNS AND MASKS AT MIDNIGHT

A check of the frequency with which the letters occurred showed that V was used fifteen times and G ten times. Assuming that these letters responded to E and T, we substitute E and T for V and G. The sixth word becomes T E, and might be TIE, TOE or THE, or I, H and O are all high frequency letters. But if it were I or O, it means that both the 12th and 14th word would end with I or O, which is highly unlikely, therefore it seems the word must be THE. The 12th word of the code is: V O V E V M G S. Substituting T-H-E for G-S-V, we get: E E E T H. One of the missing letters, M, appears 9 times, indicating it is a high frequency letter. By a little trial and error we can soon discover the word is ELEVENTH.

The first two words of the crypt NVVG NV, after we make our substitutions now read: EET E. By experimenting, we can discover it can only be MEET ME. The 13th word, after making substitutions becomes T EET, and the word STREET is a fairly obvious solution.

When the solution is complete, we can see the code is simply the alphabet reversed.

We'll be back next issue with more tips on how to crack codes, and with more interesting crypts to test your ingenuity. Meanwhile, why not create a crypt yourself? Send it to us, together with your solution. **POPULAR DETECTIVE** will pay \$3.00 for every one found suitable for publication.

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BEFORE



AFTER

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BEFORE



AFTER

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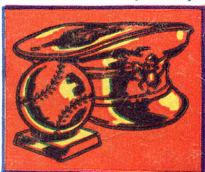
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