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ALL-STORY



FEB.

# DETECTIVE



**BLACKMAIL  
BREEDS  
BULLETS**

by **JOHN D.  
MacDONALD**

**THIS COP  
FOR HIRE**

by **CARL McK.  
SAUNDERS**



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**DEAF**

and is Tired of  
Straining to

**HEAR**



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YOU HEARD ME!  
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COSTUME!

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WHERE'D YOU GO, LEFTY?  
THE BOYS'LL HAVE THE CAR  
AT THE GATE IN 10 MINUTES.  
WE'VE GOTTA WORK FAST

OKAY.  
LET'S GO

LINE UP, FOLKS! THIS  
IS A HOLDUP! COVER  
THE DOOR, LEFTY!

I'M COVERING  
YOU, CLOWN!  
DROP THAT GUN.

WE'VE GOT THE OTHERS.  
LIEUTENANT, HERE ARE  
THE CLOTHES YOU  
LEFT OUTSIDE

GOOD! TAKE THIS  
BIRD ALONG. I'LL  
BE DOWN AFTER  
I CHANGE

15  
MINUTES  
LATER



BUT,  
DAD,  
HOW...?

LIEUTENANT ROGER'S  
STORY CAN WAIT TILL  
HE SHEDS THAT COSTUME.  
FOLLOW ME,  
"CAPTAIN KIDD"



HERE'S  
THE CURE  
FOR YOUR  
WHISKERS

THANKS,  
MR. DAVIES



WHAT A SWELL  
BLADE! TWO DAYS  
STUBBLE GONE  
LIKE MAGIC!



THIN GILLETTES  
HAND OUT QUICK,  
EASY SHAVES  
EVERY TIME



I KNEW LEFTY WAS  
COMING AS "CAPTAIN  
KIDD", BUT I COULDN'T  
IDENTIFY HIS  
PAL, SO...

GREAT  
WORK!

JUST THE CHAP  
TO HEAD UP OUR  
ATOMIC SECURITY  
FORCE

M-M-M-  
HANDSOME

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# ALL-STORY DETECTIVE



Volume 1

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Number 1

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# THE HEEL WAS NAILED

**S**TOP now! Look at the sole of your shoe! How many nail holes do you have in your rubber heel? If there are eight, you can breathe more easily. However, if you find nine, take the advice of Hosea Coston of the New Jersey State Penitentiary and replace them with the conventional heels with eight holes. If Coston had been cautious about his heels, he would still be a free man.

In May of 1946, Chief George Spatz of the Belleville, N. J., police department was very concerned about a series of unsolved robberies. All of them were well executed and the thief had left no clues behind. Chief Spatz assigned to the investigation Captain of Detectives Elmer Leighton, one of his top men.

Several days after Leighton started on the case, another robbery occurred in a local scientific laboratory. Over \$25,000 in platinum wire was stolen. Captain Leighton checked every detail carefully, but once again the thief had been thorough. The thief had climbed a cherry tree near the building and then jumped to an open skylight. Skillfully, he removed all fingerprints.

It was near the cherry tree that Leighton found his only clue—the imprint of a man's heel. Leighton was immediately disturbed by something odd about this heel. It just didn't look right. He counted the number of nail holes and found nine. He checked these against the holes in his heel and those of his assistant, Detective Harry Winfield. Theirs had only eight.

Leighton now moved rapidly. He wired several manufacturers of rubber heels. Most of them told him that their products had the standard eight holes, but near the end of his list, Leighton spoke to one outfit that had recently sent a shipment of nine-hole heels to a Newark, N. J., shoe store.

Unfortunately, the men in the Newark store could not give Leighton much help. They hadn't even noticed the odd heels. From there, the captain started making the rounds of local repair shops. He thought that since all the robberies had been confined to the Belleville area, the criminal might still be a resident. At a small cobbler's store he was told by the proprietor that one of his customers, a Mr. Hosea Coston, had recently had a pair of shoes resoled. The shoe repairer remembered the shoes well because of their unconventional heels.

Leighton knew that he had a definite suspect when he discovered that Coston was an employee of the laboratory that had been robbed. Coston, picked up for questioning, admitted that he had broken into the laboratory, and although he didn't confess to the other robberies, they ceased as soon as Coston was sentenced to the state penitentiary.

The thief was crestfallen when he learned of the minor clue that had led to his conviction. Once in prison, however, he met with a peculiarly just retribution—he was put to work in the penitentiary's shoe repair shop!

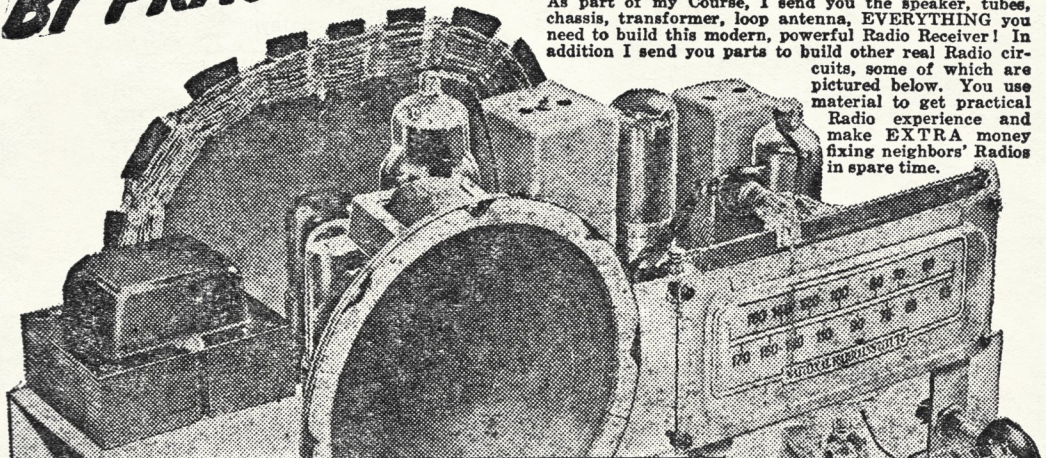
————— **By JIMMY NICHOLS** —————



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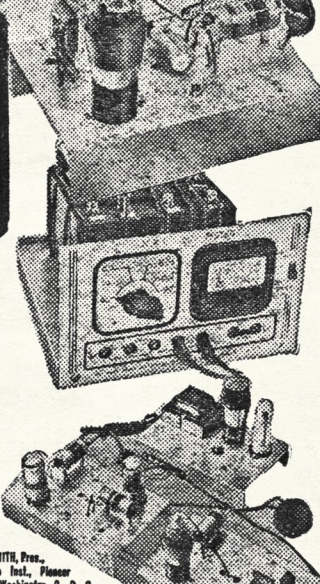
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#### I TRAINED THESE MEN

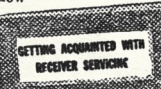


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# CHARRED FACTS

ON A cold wintry day in December, 1937, a farmer of Plymouth, Vermont, glimpsed a fire a short distance from his barn. Alarmed, he hurried in the direction of the blaze. As he approached he saw that two men were tearing up and burning a number of papers. Before he could reach them they got into their car and drove off.

On impulse, the farmer took down the license number of the car. When he examined the site of the small blaze, he found that the ashes had been dumped into a nearby stream and that what remained of the charred paper had been thoroughly heeled and stamped into the ground.

The night before, the safe at the CCC camp at Plymouth had been looted. The burglars had not been seen, and had made good their escape. Believing that the little incident he'd just witnessed might have something to do with the robbery, the farmer called the sheriff's office, thinking it of little importance.

The sheriff arrived at the scene, accompanied by a number of his deputies. The sheriff knew that with the loot that had been taken from the safe there was a number of papers which, if found in the possession of the robbers, would be damning evidence. He also knew that the FBI's technical laboratory in Washington could identify any paper, and what had been written on it, no matter how badly the paper had been charred or burned. They worked wonders.

But the two strangers had done a thorough job of scattering the burned fragments of paper. The deputies scoured the area, but it wasn't until they looked into the trees that they met with reward. There they found several tiny fragments clinging to the leaves. They also found several tiny

bits of charred paper clinging to bushes.

A few days later those tiny pieces of charred paper, carefully wrapped in cotton, arrived at the FBI's technical laboratory in Washington. No one believed that anything could be done with them, least of all the sheriff who had sent them. Anyway he tried.

But the FBI technicians placed the fragile fragments in a small chamber and subjected them to a high degree of humidity for several days. When the pieces were removed they were no longer brittle, but flexible. Carefully, they placed them on a smooth plate, flattened them out, and then began a long series of camera shots, using many different types of filters and a large variety assortment of photo plates, including infra-red.

Their painstaking efforts bore fruit. One of the photos clearly showed that the paper was from one of the printed forms that had been in the safe robbed at CCC camp.

Working on the license number clue, FBI men finally took into custody Nicandro Atella and Anthony Perrino, who were charged with the crime. The Federal prosecutor's case against the two rested solely on the FBI's photos, which had been enlarged sixty-four times for presentation at the trial, and the testimony of the farmer who'd witnessed the barn-side burning. The jury took one look at the photos and samples of the original forms—and promptly found the two guilty. The convicted men were sentenced to two years in the United States Penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

The FBI had chalked up but another score in its long string of accomplishments in the realm of the impossible!

J.W.Q.



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# BLACKMAIL



He heard a soft sound behind  
him. . . .

*A Fast-Thinking, Fast-Shooting Novelette*



# BREEDS BULLETS

... when a double-crossing dick gets involved with a ritzy blonde and a hypo-happy psychiatrist.



## CHAPTER ONE

### The Wire Noose

**T**HE dim hallway bulb being kaput registered on Lew Bardock's mind, a lesser annoyance among greater annoyances. Sherry's two rooms was the

By **JOHN D.**  
**MacDONALD**



only 'apartment' on the fourth floor of the aged and shabby brownstone, but the rent was enough for the landlord to have a live bulb in there night and day, even if it was only twenty watts.

Lew Bardock was worried about the hot money in Sherry's apartment, and so the dead hallway bulb awakened no warning bells in the back of his mind.

Lew reached for the keyhole of Sherry's door—and was conscious of two things at once. A tiny streak of light at the door frame, a streak which shouldn't have been there. Also something that brushed the sleeve of his dark suitcase as he reached out with the keys.

Before he could react his right arm was yanked violently up in the air, his fingers punching through the opaque glass of the tilted transom, something hard biting into his wrist.

Lew gasped with the pain of it. Only his toes touched the floor. The door of Sherry's apartment swung open. A strange young man reached and tapped the left side of Lew Bardock's chest. He then patted Lew's suitcoat pockets.

Lew felt blood on his hand and wrist. The strange and very pretty young man whistled softly through his teeth. He had an out-of-season tan; more than a suggestion of wave in his hair; perfect and regular features and large eyes, luminous in the half light.

"What do you want?" Lew demanded.

The pretty young man kept whistling. He took a crisp white handkerchief out of his pocket and wrapped it around his knuckles. Lew realized that the strange young man had been waiting, a loop of wire suspended in front of the doorknob, the wire leading through the partially open transom, his eye at the crack in the door. And now the wire was firmly tied inside the room.

Lew struck out clumsily with his left, but he was unable to brace himself. It was a feeble blow which missed its mark, hit

the whistler on the chest, knocked him back a half step. The young man smiled cheerfully, stepped in and chopped Lew under the right eye with a short right. It put new strain on Lew's wrist and the pain nearly blacked him out.

He half spun around. The pretty man caught him with another chopping right as he swung back. Again Lew tried a feeble punch, then buried his face in his crooked left arm. The right hook into his middle was like being hit with a sledge.

Lew took four more in the middle and he could not hold his left arm up any longer. It sagged and he lost count of the blows. The pretty man had stopped whistling. He was beginning to grunt with the effort. Lew saw him through a deep red haze of pain. Then the blows stopped hurting. They were merely thick sounds in Lew's ears.

He hung slack in the wire and waited for the next one. The next one didn't come. He opened his eyes. The pretty young man was gone.

Going high on his toes to take some of the torment off his chest, Lew felt inside the door frame with his left hand. For a long time he could not find the end of the wire. At last, reaching up, he felt it. It was looped around and around the lever that worked the transom. He unwound it. The tension was suddenly released and he fell full length, half in Sherry's apartment. He squirmed the rest of the way in, kicked the door shut and lay on his back.

So this was Dr. Auglitz' response! Neat and to the point. Not a word spoken. But the inference was clear: *keep your nose out of my business, Bardock.*

Lew rolled onto his hands and knees, grabbed the corner of the couch and got dizzily to his feet. He stumbled over to the scarred record player, lifted the lid, pulled up the turntable, slid his fingers under the edge of it and took out the four folded bills. So pretty boy hadn't located it.



Lew had a feeling that he would very much like to meet pretty boy again. Auglitz had hired amateur talent. A pro would have fixed him for a ten-day hospital stay.

He didn't examine his lumps until he took a long cold shower. The wrist was the worst. The braided wire cable had bitten into the flesh. He stared at himself in the mirror, said softly, "Aren't you the one!"

He was a big man with sloped, powerful shoulders; coarse black hair; hard, tight planes in his white-skinned, muscular face. There were two bad cuts inside his lower lip, bruised swellings on each cheekbone and a lump on his left temple.

His watch said quarter of two. No time to feel sorry for himself, or nurse wounded pride. Rance, his boss, was expecting him at three. Lew began to hurry, moving with a hard economy of motion.

He had known that Sherry would not be in. And he had planned where he would hide the money. Sherry as usual was at one of her perennial double features. There was a razor-blade slot in the bathroom medicine cabinet. Lew took the bottles out, and unscrewed the cabinet from the wall. He folded the four bills into a tiny wad and wedged them down in the hole with the rusting blades. Then he replaced the cabinet.

Just as he was tightening the last screw, he heard Sherry's key in the lock. He turned the water on quickly, turned it off after he was certain she was in the apartment. He walked casually out.

"Why, Lew darlin'!" Sherry said. "What on earth happened to that big old ugly face?"

He grinned at her. Just to look at her was enough to twist a warm knife in his middle. Ever since that night at the Village spot. Right from the moment she had stepped into the spotlight. She couldn't sing. He knew music and he could hear the little quintet struggling to back her up when she shifted the key on them.

What had hit him was the contrast.

That fragile and delicate and beautiful face, just as clear in every line as a fairy-tale princess, combined with that wise, mature and earthy body which seemed to have a life of its own—a sardonic, mocking, life independent of the wide and innocent gray eyes in the doll-like face.

And then she had become a fever in his blood. The job of hers had folded and she couldn't get another. Lew had realized, with a sudden awareness of his own helplessness, that she was absolutely devoid of any moral sense. She would leave him in a moment to go to someone who could buy her the thirty-dollar shoes, the fluffy and expensive dolls she loved, the five-dollar nylons, the forty-dollar perfume, the huge rare steaks, the chill and golden martinis.

Sherry ran to him and held him tight and muzzled her doll's face in his throat and made little purring sounds—while he remembered the way his savings had melted, the salary which, at a hundred a week had seemed ample, but was suddenly a very minor income indeed.

He thought of the shameless way he had padded his expense account, and he held her close and buried his lips in her pale hair. And he thought of this new thing he was doing, this shady thing that would soon mean no more job, no more future—and he hated his own helplessness, his own inability to pull free of her.

But he couldn't visualize existence without her, without the way she would curl into his arms and run her fingers through his coarse dark hair.

She had the constant greedy look of a child asking for candy; a child with sticky lips, glutted with candy, but asking for more, and more, and more.

She looked up into his face and said, "Lew, darlin', a stinky little job that pays you peanuts—and you have to take beatings! We ought to be in the big money, Lew. You're smart. But you're just a man that people walk on, darlin'. I want somebody who'll kill dragons for me, and bring



home the hide. Green hide with big dollar signs on it, darlin'. And all you bring home is a busted face."

She pouted and whirled out of his arms. "No, go away, Lew. Don't touch me."

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her about the money he had hidden, and how he had gotten it, and why he was going against all his training and double-crossing both the agency and the client. But she might queer it, and there was more where that four thousand came from.

He left, slamming the door behind him.

**R**RANCE was a human praying mantis. Painfully sharp and lean, elbows threatening to punch through the shiny blue sleeves. Small head, enormous eyes and the look of being about to pounce.

As Lew shut the door behind him and took the chair across the big walnut desk from Rance, he said, "Sorry I'm late."

"Oh, we're all glad you could break away, Mr. Bardock. We're unimportant down here. We just employ you."

Lew sighed and looked around at the paneled office, the duty old pictures of the original John Brill standing beside the train robbers he had captured back in the days when the agency was a pup. The discreet "new look" of the agency was due to the efforts of Socialite John Brill III, a man of fifty who knew the right people and knew how to solicit their business delicately.

"My master's voice," Lew said, tipping his hat back off his forehead, lighting a kitchen match with his thumbnail.

"When do we stop taking money from the baby-food king, Lew? And who has been beating on your face?"

"I can't answer either question. Not ethically, Rance. Hell, you know that we agreed with Mr. Tobias Schane that the little business he gave the agency was to be strictly between him and the agent in question. We're charging him for that privilege. He hates to think of what might

happen to any report I might send in."

"Seventy-three years in business," Rance moaned, "and still they think we're dummies. They think we have people working here who would pick up a juicy hunk of data and cut themselves a slice. How's the job going?"

"I can't even tell you that. We give the man what he pays for."

Rance insisted, "Suppose it's too big for you? Suppose I read your name in the paper, Lew?"

"A detailed report will be mailed the day after my obit hits the paper. Then, for the honor of the team, you can rush out and avenge me."

"Lew, there's a new one coming up. One where I can use you. A very plush Fifth Avenue men's shop. It looks like the manager, the cashier and two of the salesmen are in on it together. We may get confirmation to go ahead with it tomorrow morning."

"Don't count on me, Rance." Bardock thought, *don't count on me from now on because I've stepped over the line, Rance.*

As he went out the door Rance called after him, "Watch yourself, Lew!"

Lew headed away from the office, thinking that the world looked different. Before he had started the double-cross he could walk down any street and look any man in the eye. He could still do it. But only with an effort. There was something crouched and dirty inside his mind, something that made him want to turn his eyes away.

But of course the answer was to think of the hot sun on some faraway beach, of Sherry's golden body soaking up the sun, of a nice little stack of dough, enough for long idle wonderful days with Sherry—until the money ran out. . . .

Linda Schane was late. Lew Bardock stood under the clock in the hotel lobby, glad that the interview with Tobias Schane was over. Both Tobias Schane and Rance were getting impatient.

The memory of Schane's red puffy face,



the irritation in his voice, was clear in his mind. "Damn it, man! You knew two weeks ago that my daughter, Linda, had gone through her bank account, sold her jewels, mortgaged her car. You knew two weeks ago that she flatly refused to tell me who was bleeding her. That spells blackmail, man."

Lew had finally quieted Schane by telling him that these things couldn't be rushed without endangering Linda. At last Schane had let himself be convinced and had paid another week's fee in advance, plus certain questionable expenses which he didn't question.

Lew leaned against the wall under the clock and moodily wondered what puffy Tobias Schane would say if he knew that Bardock was also working for Linda Schane. He cautioned both of them against speaking to the other about employing him.

At last he saw her. She came quickly through the crowd. He thought of her as a girl fashioned of the clearest and bluest ice. Each line of her perfect body was autocratic and aristocratic. An odd one to be mixed up with Auglitz.

"Sorry I'm late," Linda Schane said. He noticed that she did not do two things that Sherry would have done. Linda did not offer any excuse for being late, and she did not comment on the battered look of his face.

He grinned at her and took her arm and walked her toward the cocktail lounge. The faint blue lights around the circular bar were the only lights in the room. They took a table along the wall, sitting side by side on the padded bench.

He saw that she was troubled. She spent too long taking off her gloves, aligning her purse with edge of the table, finding her cigarettes. He held the light.

"He—he phoned me today, Lew. Just as I was leaving the house to drive down. In that nasty, silky voice, Auglitz told me I needed another treatment. An expensive

one, Lew. He wants me to come in tomorrow at three."

"How much?"

"Five thousand."

Lew turned on the bench. Her clear oval face was dim in the light. "Linda—why won't you tell me what he has on you?"

"No, Lew. No. I—won't tell you."

He shrugged. "You just make it tougher. You make me go in cold. And now I've got to hit you too. But not for so much. My expenses are running high."

"I brought two hundred."

"It'll have to do." In the darkness she pressed the folded bills into his hand. She had removed her gloves. Her fingertips were cool.

He said, "Can you pay Auglitz tomorrow?"

"I can pay him a great deal now, Lew. I told you about the bonds. I finally got George to sell them and agree not to tell father. George put the money in my account. Quite a sum of money. Of course, it will cut my income quite a bit."

"Okay, you pay Auglitz tomorrow. Get the money in twenties. Make a list of serial numbers." Lew cleared his throat before asking, "No—did you put on your thinking cap like I asked you?"

"Why do you have to know the names of the others, Lew?"

He made his tone angry, "I told you that I can't hit the guy cold. You gave me four names. Three were right and one was a dud. Who else has gone to Auglitz that you know of."

"I can only think of two. I heard that Marcia Quate used to go to see Auglitz. And Ronny Kriss, the automobile designer, went to him. The other people I saw in Auglitz office were strangers."

"Why did you go to him in the first place, Linda?"

"I—I had a bad experience when I was quite young. A year ago I started dreaming about it again. Beth Lovell told me



about Dr. Auglitz, how wonderful he was, and how he could really get down into your subconscious and relieve the tension."

He mused, "Funny you should be the one in the family that needs a head doctor. That sister of yours is the—"

"Gerry doesn't enter into this!" she said sharply.

"It must be rough on her, Linda. Two sisters, one built like a race horse and the other one like a mud pudding."

"She—she is very dear to me, Lew." There was a hint of tears in her voice.

He ordered a second round of drinks. He said, "Can I buy you a dinner?"

"No thank you. I'm going back to the house. When will I see you again, Lew?"

"Tomorrow night at seven under the clock. I don't want to keep harping on this, Linda, but if you can try to think of anyone else who may have gone to the guy . . ."

Back in the lobby she turned and looked up into his face. He was surprised to see tears in the eyes of the girl who was made of ice. "Lew," she said softly. "If you can—do anything, I'll be forever indebted to you."

"This is just a job with me," he said harshly.

Bardock watched her walk to the exit, tall, slim, controlled. He wondered for the hundredth time what sort of dirty mess Linda had fallen into that gave Dr. Auglitz the hold over her.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Prescription—Blackmail

SHE had told him how Auglitz had operated. His sales talk. "My dear Miss Schane. The common psycho-analytical method is all very well. The specialist eventually gets to the root of the matter. But it is all very tiresome, very long and very expensive. In Vienna just before the war we perfected a better way. It was used by your own armed forces.

"You must trust me of course. Rather than listen to you talk all around the subject for many months, I inject you with a harmless drug called sodium-amytal which, shall we say, relaxes the censor in your mind. Then I subject you to standard hypnotic technique and I question you, I find the black places in your mind. When you recover, we talk it all over and you are immediately cured. It is that simple. Miss Schane."

Linda had told Lew Bardock how she had thought it over and then had come back to keep the appointment for the treatment. The drug had given her a faraway feeling, a misty remoteness, through which her words came but dimly. She remembered very bright lights, insistent questioning, the monotonous sound of her own voice.

When Linda came out of it she found that had told Dr. Auglitz everything. Whatever that could be.

At the next appointment, Auglitz had taken her back to a tiny projection room beyond his office and had seated her in a comfortable chair.

On the screen had flashed her face, slack and dull. She had heard the whole story over the sound track. The film had been edited to remove Auglitz' questions.

When the lights had gone on Linda had turned to Auglitz in fury, and he had explained that it was an expensive, but more accurate way of taking notes.

Her anger had faded away. Back in his bright office the doctor had faced her across the desk, smiled gently and said, "The quickest way to remove this guilt of yours, my dear, is to have a private showing of my film record to your father, sister and fiancé." He held up his hand to still her protests. "If that is distasteful to you, we can possibly cure you without calling them in. If you will come back one week from today, I can give you an appointment. A half hour will cost you five thousand dollars."



The sunlight was shining through the office windows. Auglitz had a calm smile. But there was nightmare in the office.

Linda had refused. He had told her to think it over. Auglitz got his five thousand, in cash. Since then there had been other treatments, other payments, more nightmare in the sunlit professional office where Dr. Auglitz wore a crisp white jacket and a calm smile.

"Some people are never entirely cured," he told her. . . .

Ronny Kriss opened his apartment door. Kriss was a brown little man with sharp eyes, a seamed face and a look of alertness. His hand was in the pocket of his smoking jacket.

Lew Bardock lounged by him, smiling, waited until he heard the door shutting, then whirled, clamped tight on Kriss' arm at the elbow, dipped into the pocket and took out the flat automatic.

Kriss rubbed his arm. Lew smiled and handed him the automatic. "This is just to show you that it isn't that sort of a conversation."

Kriss took the automatic, laid it gently on a table. He led the way into a study-workshop. A model automobile stood on a big table, its lines sleek and lovely. Lew looked at it with interest.

"A Los Angeles outfit is setting up to make a sports car," Kriss said. "Like it?"

"Very much."

The air was tight with strain. From a tray in the corner Kriss took a bottle, said, "Plain water?"

"Straight, please."

Kriss sat opposite him, the glass held firmly in a brown hand. "You intrigued me over the phone, Mr. Bardock."

"Didn't I, though! You bit like a hungry bass. The pressure is really stiff, hey?"

"I don't say a word, Bardock, until you prove to me that you know what you're talking about."

Bardock shrugged. "Dr. Auglitz is a clever and unscrupulous blackmailer with

a new working method. I am a private operative. I have a client who has hired me to unjam her. I think I can do it. But it's not police stuff. I just move in and untie one knot and move out. Auglitz stays in operation. I have reason to believe, confirmed by the gun business at the door, that he has you in a knot too. For a consideration I will extricate you at the same time."

Lew was watching closely and he saw the sudden gleam of hope in Kriss' sharp eyes. "How much?" he said.

"This isn't a shake-down, Kriss. It's an employee-employer relationship. I take your money and do a job for you."

"How much?"

Bardock had been estimating the cost of the apartment, the value of the furnishings. "Two thousand. In cash." He remembered the thousand dollar bills. "Nothing over a hundred dollar bill."

"How do I know you can do it?"

"You don't."

"How do I know you even have any chance of doing it?"

"I know three little words. Sodium-amytal, movies, psychoanalysis."

Kriss finished his drink. He smiled. "You come considerably cheaper than Auglitz. But you'd better be good, Bardock. I could have Auglitz killed for five hundred. But I know and he knows that killing him would guarantee just the sort of publicity I can't stand."

"Put the money in a sealed envelope and I'll pick it up here tomorrow night at the same time."

**I**T WAS a brick colonial in a very good neighborhood, surrounded by ample lawns. The walks and the asphalt drive were powdered with snow. A maid ushered him into a long living room where a white birch fire was laid, ready for the match.

Marcia Quate walked quickly in, her eyes alert and feline, tiny puffs of flesh under them, lines across her throat.



"Yes?" she said haughtily.

"I phoned. I'm Bardock."

Something collapsed behind her proud eyes. Something went out of her. She didn't ask him to sit down. Bardock went over to the couch, sat down and tapped his cigarette on a blunt thumbnail.

She was more difficult than Kriss had been, this Mrs. Quate. Far more difficult.

But he had seen the collapse inside her and, hating himself, hating his methods, using sharp and brutal words, he drove Marcia Quate into tears, and from the tears he got the answer he wanted. There was a wall-safe and Lew took the seven hundred and made arrangements to pick up the other three hundred.

Six thousand. When it broke he'd have enough to take Sherry across the border, enough to grease a few palms and buy citizenship in some other country. Ten thousand was the target.

Lew needed more names.

Not one of them could raise enough for him. Auglitz had bled them dry.

Bardock left Marcia Quate and went back to the city. . . .

In the evening Linda Schane was waiting under the clock. Lew went over to her and they walked toward the lounge. But they were stopped at the door by a young man whose eyes blazed with anger.

"I thought I'd find out what this was all about, Linda," the young man said coldly.

"Don't be a fool, Tommy!" she said wearily. "Don't play parts for me. I don't appreciate it."

Tommy mimicked her tone. "Tommy, I'm sorry, dearest. I'm busy tonight. And tomorrow night too and the night after that." He changed back to his normal voice, "If you want to break it up, Linda, for heaven's sake do so! Don't sneak behind my back and meet this—this gentleman friend."

"Please, Tommy."

"I'm going to your father and find out what this is all about. He will certainly be

mighty interested in who you're seeing."

"You wouldn't!" she gasped.

"Oh, but I would." Bardock could see that the boy meant it.

Lew said harshly, "Come inside and have a drink on me, kid. I want to tell you something."

"Thank you. I will," Tommy said.

At the table Bardock said, "Kid, you had to follow her and get into something that doesn't concern you and—"

"Anything that concerns Linda—"

"I know. I know. But this is a little different. This is out of your range, kid. Your girl friend, if you'll shut your mouth long enough to listen, has gotten herself involved with a professional leech. One of those people who prey on past indiscretions. This leech has been bleeding your girl friend. I'm hired by her to get her out from under."

Tommy stared at her. "But Linda! Why couldn't you tell me? What on earth have you ever done to get blackmailed for?"

Linda gave him a long look. "I'm afraid I'll never tell you that, Tommy."

"But there shouldn't be any secrets between us."

"This is going to remain a secret, Tommy."

Bardock saw the look of doubt on the young man's face, saw the way he was wrestling with the idea that his princess had clay feet. So Bardock said casually, "This leech has taken almost her last dime, kid. You ought to feel sorry for her, not give her a bad time."

Tommy's face was impassive. He said, after a long pause, "Linda, unless you can tell me what you did to be blackmailed for, I think we'd better call the whole thing off."

Bardock saw her lips tremble once and then tighten. "Nice to have known you, Tommy."

The young man got up and left the table without looking back.

"Well that," Linda said, "seems to be



that." She caught her breath and then began to laugh. The laughter was out of control. The woman of ice was breaking up before Lew's eyes. Linda turned streaming eyes to him and said, "You saw it, didn't you? You saw he was interested only in my money, and that's why you told him I was broke. Thanks, Lew. Oh, thank you!"

He reached over and held her hand tightly, saying, "Easy, Linda. Easy."

She put her other hand over his and bent over. Her shoulders shook silently. A tear struck Lew's wrist, like a drop of wax from a tilted candle.

Bardock watched her fight for control, watched her win, watched her lift a proud chin and smile at him. "You know," Linda said, "it's good to find out. I mean, to find out now—instead of later."

"It's easier to find out than it is to stop loving them," Lew said. He thought of Sherry and of what he had done to himself for the sake of Sherry.

By the end of the week Lew had his ten thousand, garnered from seven employers. Sherry was at the movies. He sat in her apartment, staring at his shoes, smoking one cigarette after another.

The money belt around his middle was plump with the smaller bills. The big bills, six thousand worth, were behind the medicine cabinet in the bathroom.

Lew had just come from the office. Rance had looked at him queerly and had said, "This is dragging out too damn long, Lew. Obviously it's a blackmail case. Why haven't you broken it, or asked for help?"

Rance had demanded a target date and Lew had named one. The day after tomorrow. According to plan he would leave tomorrow on the plane with Sherry. Rance didn't know that. Lew lit a cigarette from the butt of the other. He tried to think of how it would be.

The ten thousand would last for a long lazy time in Guatemala. But what would

happen when it was gone. Bardock thought of killing Sherry. That would be the logical end of it. Killing her would be akin to breaking a glass against the fireplace, a glass from which you wanted no one else to drink.

There would be hate in killing her. Hate because of what she had made him do to himself. Hate because of what he had become. Bardock felt soiled and stained and old.

Tomorrow was the day to leave. He had to leave. Rance would soon be wise to him. And Auglitz had already sent the pretty boy around for that neat and clever job. That unprofessional job. Since that time Lew had been continually on guard, and he had started wearing the belly gun tucked inside the waistband of his trousers.

The phone rang and when he picked it up a man's voice said, "Sherry?"

"Not exactly," he said dryly. The line clicked and went dead. He wondered who was calling her. It didn't make much difference. Not as long as she was leaving with him tomorrow.

Lew put on his topcoat and left for his own apartment. Time to pack. The cold rain was freezing in shale ice on the sidewalk. In the morning he would pick up Sherry and the rest of the money from the hiding place and catch the plane. The night was dark. He reached inside his coat pocket, felt the crackle of the envelope that held the plane tickets. He tried to find reassurance, and found nothing but a sense of guilt and pending catastrophe.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Man in the Shadows*

**B**ARDOCK'S coat collar was turned up against the wind. As he started up his steps to the outside door Lew saw a faint movement from the corner of his eye. Another move from



Auglitz. He hoped it was the pretty boy. He saw that the man was in the heavy shadows. There had been a furtiveness about that faint movement that had given the man away.

Bardock snapped his fingers in the gesture of a man who has forgotten something. He went slowly back down the steps, walked into the wind. When a gust hit him he grabbed his hat brim and bent low enough so that he could risk a backward look. A bulky shadow had drifted out and was following him. It was not the pretty boy.

Lew decided that it would be best to let the man give away his hand, even if it meant the risk of a bullet. It seemed almost obvious that if it was a case of bullets, he would have been shot the moment he first noticed the slight movement.

Yes, the man was big. Thick through the shoulders.

Bardock paused to look at a window display. He watched the reflection in the glass, saw the big man slow his pace, glance behind him, pull his right arm back. Another amateur!

Lew pulled his lips back against his teeth in a mirthless grin. He whirled under the big man's punch, getting the full power of back and shoulders into a left hook deep into the man's middle. The man bent sharply at the middle, his mouth sagging open. Lew saw, as the streetlight struck the man's face, that he was a sullen, powerful-looking man in his late thirties or early forties.

Lew smashed him under the ear as he fell, then cursed silently as he heard an official voice fifteen feet away roar, "What goes on here!"

The cop's black raincape shone in the light, and he was scowling.

Lew grabbed his assailant's arm and tugged at him and said, "Officer, my friend slipped on the ice."

"It looked to me like you hit him."

"Hit him! I was trying to grab him as he fell."

The blow in the stomach had rendered the man beyond speech. He came slackly to his feet.

"He looks funny," the cop said. "Has he been drinking?"

"Just a little," Lew said. "I've got to get him home." As Lew said that, his foot somehow slipped violently over and knocked both the big man's feet out from underneath him. Lew had hold of his shoulder and as the man fell, he turned toward Lew. Lew was down on one knee. The man's mouth slammed against Lew's other knee.

"You lost him again," the cop said. "Here, I'll help you get him up."

Between them they got the man on his feet. He was making small mewling sounds.

"Hit his mouth that time," the cop said. He cautiously let go of the man.

Lew said, "Come along now." He tugged on the man. A shade too hard. The man lurched toward the wall. Lew fell against him and the man's head hit the wall solidly. He went limp. Lew made violent efforts to hold him upright, but Lew himself slipped to his knees. Lew came up fast and felt the thud as he butted the man squarely in the face, heard the second thud as the back of the man's head hit the wall again.

The man slumped and his chin bounced off Lew's knee and he lay on his back.

"Slipped," Lew said helplessly.

"By dam', I wouldn't want you helping me home, fella. You're the clumsiest dam' man I ever saw! You nearly killed him that time."

"Officer, will you watch him for a minute. My car's right up around the corner. I can bring it down here and we can get him in it."

"Maybe it ought to be an ambulance he should be having."

"He's fine. See? He's breathing."



When Lew got to the corner he looked back. The cop and three morose bystanders were staring down at the man on the sidewalk.

He circled the block, went up to his room and took a bottle from the closet floor. He drank deeply. The liquor didn't seem to touch him. It hadn't touched him ever since he had started taking the money from Auglitz' victims.

\* \* \*

"Did you get the tickets, Charles?" Sherry asked. The pretty young man with the out-of-season tan slid onto the stool beside her and patted his pocket meaningfully.

They were in a cocktail lounge in Pennsylvania station.

"It worked just like I told you it would," Sherry said. "Lew put two more thousand behind the cabinet the day before yesterday. Beating him up hurt his pride."

"Don't you think you ought to let me hold onto the money?" the pretty man said.

"No, darlin'. Sherry can take care of it." She giggled. "I took the money and left Lew a note. I told him thanks for everything."

The pretty young man licked his lips. "Was that smart? Bardock will go over there and find your clothes gone and find the note and maybe he'll catch us."

"Not a chance, Charles. He called up and I told him to stop around at four. Our train goes at five after, doesn't it? How can he figure out in five minutes where we are?"

Charles looked dubious. "He could stop by earlier. With this sleet the planes are grounded. He might figure it right, that we'd be taking a train from Penn Station."

"You worry too much, darlin'," Sherry said, yawning.

# Country Doctor

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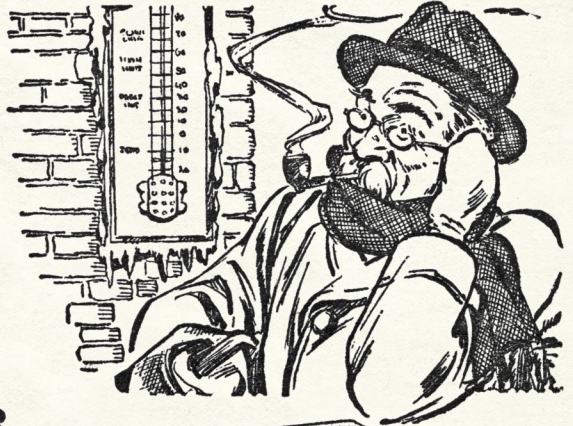
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The pretty young man stood up. "Finish your drink. The train is made up. We'll get the bags from the checkroom and go aboard."

They quit the cocktail lounge and went out into the station.

\* \* \*

Lew felt like a man in a dream. Sherry would head south with the money. She hated the cold. She would never travel by bus. The planes were grounded. He walked down the underground platform. The second porter he asked said, "Blonde lady? One come on this car a half hour ago, sir. A fella with her. They're in Compartment C. Tickets through to Miami. I'll show you."

Lew gave him the bill. "Never mind. I'll take a look."

He went to the end of the car and tapped lightly on the door of Compartment C.

"Tickets, please," Lew said softly.

He heard the bolt click back. The moment the door started to open, Bardock threw his shoulder against it, knowing that if he was wrong, apologies would be almost impossible.

Sherry sat on the seat, her legs tucked under her. Her high-heeled snakeskin shoes lay on their sides half under the seat. A bottle rested beside her.

Pretty boy, his face white, was scrambling to his feet in the corner.

"Lew!" Sherry whispered. "Lew, darlin'!"

Lew leaned his back against the closed door. He knew that he was going to kill Sherry.

Pretty boy rushed him. Lew took a hard right over the ear, shook his head to clear it. Pretty boy was biting his under lip, his eyes wild as he threw another punch.

Lew counterpunched, chopping down with his right fist, opening pretty boy's mouth, turning him into a wavering scarecrow. But pretty boy reached for the neck of the bottle.

Lew took the belly gun from the waistband of his trousers. Sherry gave a whispered scream as she saw the gun. Pretty boy lifted the bottle. With a full arm swing, Lew slammed the revolver flat against pretty boy's mouth and nose.

Pretty boy staggered back. He swung the bottle wildly to the side to regain his balance. It swept in a horizontal arc, hit with a sickening smash against Sherry's delicate face, smashing her nose to a flat pulp.

Pretty boy fell to his knees. He lifted both hands and held them to his ruined face. His eyes melted with tears and the blood ran between his fingers. His shoulders shook with his silent weeping.

The compartment reeked with the stench of the spilled liquor. Spilled liquor, Sherry's perfume, and the tiny salt-sweet odor of blood.

Lew lifted the revolver and aimed it at Sherry's throat, his finger tightening on the trigger, the hammer beginning to lift. A few ounces more pressure.

Sherry looked at him and her eyes were glazed with an enormous fear. Lew felt the need of her die inside him. He faced a stranger, a gun leveled to shoot a stranger.

He cursed softly, replaced the gun in the waistband of his trousers. Sherry's purse was beside her. Lew took it, backing away from her hands that reached out like claws. The money was there. He shoved it into his pocket, threw her purse back on the berth.

He knew that plastic surgery would never return Sherry and the pretty boy to their original appearance.

As Lew reached the end of the car the train had begun to move. He stepped off onto the platform, leaned against one of the pillars and watched the train disappear down a dark curve underground. His eyes stung for a moment.

It had been all loss and no gain. He thought of the beating he had taken, of



the look that Rance would give him. The anger welled up inside him, as clear and cold as water from a deep spring.

Bardock called the Schane home in Westchester from the station. After a long wait he got Linda on the line.

"This is Lew Bardock. I want you to come to the city. Immediately."

"There's a cocktail party here and—"

"Come to town. There's something I want you to do."

After several seconds Linda said, "All right, Lew. I'll make some excuse."

"Drive down, Linda. I'm taking a room at the Traynor. I'll be in the room. Phone me from the lobby and come up."

He saw Linda's quick look of distaste

\* \* \*

as she glanced around the room. A bed, a chair, a window, a table, a bureau and a worn rug. All rancid and old with too much life, too many people, too much despair.

Lew shut the door. Linda looked steadily at him and said, "I talked to Mr. Rance today."

"Rance!" he gasped.

"Yes, Lew. And I don't know why I came here. We talked for quite a while. You see, I know now that you don't intend to do anything on my case."

"Then why did you come?"

"A woman's reasons. Curiosity, maybe. Or maybe only because you have looked so—so unhappy. So very unhappy."

Lew lit her cigarette and his own. She sat on the chair by the window. He looked down into her eyes and told her exactly what he had done and why he had done it, and how it had come out. He did not spare himself. At the end he said, "Pretty, isn't it? A delicate and sensitive little epic of love in the big city."

Linda reached out and held his wrist tightly. "It's over, Lew. Don't keep hurting yourself any more."

Lew smiled grimly. "I'm hurt all right. I'm all through. You know that. So does

Rance. But I've been pushed around a little. Tonight I do what I should have done in the beginning. And I do it right, Linda."

"How do you mean?"

"Tonight, with your help, I take Auglitz. No holds barred. From force of habit I cased him a little. He lives on the top floor of that two story building. His man servant lives in, and the office girl goes home at night. She'll be long gone by now. There's the phone. Call him up and say you want to buy his films with a lump sum payment. Make it forty thousand. That ought to make his tongue hang out."

"But won't he suspect something?"

"He will, but he'll also be curious."

"What good will it do?"

"He doesn't know me by sight. I'll be just a family retainer you brought along to sit in your car and hold the dough until you make the deal. There's what we'll use for the money, the two phone books. I picked up some paper and string. It ought to get me in the door. The rest is up to me. That's when you get behind the furniture and keep low."

Linda made the phone call. Bardock listened to her. She did a good job of it. She hung up. "He wants me to come over at nine-thirty."

Suddenly she was in his arms. He held her tightly, looking down into her eyes, feeling the birth of something between them. Her lips were not cloying, candy-sticky, greedy. A woman's lips. Clear and true.

Lew pushed her away. "Forget it, Miss Schane," he said roughly. "Forget you know me. I'm just doing a job for you and after that's done, Rance will figure out whether to prosecute me or not." He laughed. "I thought you were made of ice or glass."

"Glass has been known to break under an abrupt change of temperature," she said demurely. "Be careful tonight, Lew. Very careful."



## CHAPTER FOUR

## Shoot Fast—Think Fast

AT LAST the door opened again and Linda stood there. She beckoned to Lew. Linda had her coat off and she hugged herself, elbows in her palms, the wind touching her hair. Bardock snapped his cigarette out into the street, picked up the carefully wrapped package and went up the six stone steps to the front door. He could see someone behind her.

Dr. Auglitz was a smiling, middle-sized man in his fifties, thin hair brushed carefully across a bald spot. He wore a maroon felt smoking jacket.

As Lew came into the hallway, Dr. Auglitz shut the door, lightly patted Lew's pockets, armpits, waist. "If you don't mind," he said politely. "We can't afford chances. Please take your package straight down this hall and put it on the desk inside the office."

Lew walked straight ahead. Linda and Auglitz followed him. He placed the package on the corner of the desk and turned, keeping his right hand close to the package.

The big man who had attacked him on the street appeared behind Auglitz, said loudly, "He is Bardock!" The man wore tape across his nose and his mouth was puffed.

Dr. Auglitz lost his ready smile. He stepped aside and said, "Punish him, Andrew."

Andrew, his eyes venomous, rushed Lew. He rushed with a clenched right fist drawn back, a fist as big as a sledge.

Linda screamed once. Lew poised himself, watched the fist smash toward him. He turned abruptly to the left and snapped his head back so that the big fist went by his nose. As it did so Lew clamped both hands on the thick wrist, turned the rest of the way so that his right shoulder was

tucked firmly under Andrew's armpit. He levered down on the wrist, bending over as he did so, utilizing Andrew's forward rush. The big man completely cleared the desk, his arms flailing the air. He struck the far wall with a thud that shook the floor and collapsed, face down, motionless.

Before Andrew even hit the floor, Lew had turned toward Auglitz. He started forward, then stopped his arms slowly lifting. Auglitz had a look of complete determination and the wide muzzle of the Army Colt, pointed at Lew's middle, was as steady as a rock.

"Please sit down, Mr. Bardock. In that chair."

Lew tried to estimate the man's determination. He did not move toward the chair. He heard a soft sound behind him and his knees sagged as something thudded against his skull behind his right ear. Lew moved one step toward the chair and sat down.

Andrew moved around so that Lew could see him. His bruised lips were smiling. He reached out with an animal quickness, his fingers splayed on Lew's forehead, his thick thumb pressed into the corner of Lew's eye, sending crimson needles of pain into his brain. Lew tried to fight away, but his head was firm against the high back of the chair.

"Not yet, Andrew!" Auglitz snapped. The pain went away. Lew saw Auglitz' face through spinning dots of flame.

"Mr. Bardock," Auglitz said, "You shouldn't have given Mr. Kriss your right name. Under the drug he told me of you. I sent Andrew after you, but I'm afraid you used him rather badly. Check the package, Andrew."

Thick fingers tore open one corner. "Telephone books," Andrew said with disgust.

"I am disappointed in you, Miss Schane. This is going to cost you a great deal of money. You obviously need a good many more treatments. But first Mr.



Bardock needs encouragement. Prepare an injection, Andrew."

Andrew went to a wall cupboard. His thick fingers were surprisingly quick and adept in preparing the needle, filling it from the upended vial.

He came toward Lew with it. Lew braced himself in the chair.

"Take your injection like a little man, Bardock," Auglitz said, "Or Miss Schane will have an unfortunate accident. She might trip and fall against the barrel of this gun. It's quite hard, you know."

Lew realized that Andrew could knock him unconscious and give him the injection while he was out.

"It's just sodium-amytal, Mr. Bardock."

The needle stung. Lew shut his teeth hard against the sensation of sleepy lethargy that began to sweep over him. His vision misted slightly and the room wavered. Auglitz, smiling, took a gold watch from his pocket, let it swing back and forth in a leisurely arc a few feet from Lew's eyes. Lew found that he couldn't keep his eyes from tracking the path of the spinning watch.

"You are having a hard time, Mr. Bardock," Auglitz said. "You are very tired. You can barely keep your eyes open. So sleepy. Sooooo sleeepy. Go to sleep. Go to sleep . . ."

Lew let his eyes follow the watch and he fought back the lethargy, the terrific willingness to give in. He thought of the pain behind his ear, and he concentrated on that pain, on Linda's lips, on anything that would enable him to struggle against the soft voice, the invidious influence of the drug.

Lew let his eyes shut, trying to remember Linda's vague description of how she had acted while under hypnosis.

He sat very still. Auglitz voice cracked like a whip. "Open your eyes!"

Lew opened his eyes, stared blankly at Auglitz.

"Your name!"

He made his tone dull, and it was no great effort to do so. The drug made him feel as though he were moving in a thick gray fog.

"Lewis Bardock."

"What is your business?"

"I am an operative for the Brill Agency. Private investigations."

"Hired by Miss Schane?"

"Yes sir."

"What was the object of this infantile trick?"

"I was going to make you talk and tell where we could get the films."

"How absurd, indeed! A boy scout antic. You must be of enormous value to your agency. What proof do you have against me?"

"Certain documents. Signed."

"Where are these documents?"

Lew remembered how Linda had said that even under the drug she had refused to answer certain questions. He did not speak.

"You hid the proof carefully?"

"Yes."

"You hid the documents where I could not find them?"

"Yes."

"But you stupidly brought them here with you, didn't you, Lewis?"

"Yes."

Dr. Auglitz face looked three times normal size. He was smiling in triumph.

Auglitz said to Linda, "You see how we must step carefully around the question which he refuses to answer. I had to do the same with you, you know." He turned back to Bardock.

"Which pocket are they in?"

"They are not in my pockets."

"So? Do you think Linda still has them in her purse?"

"Linda hasn't got them."

Auglitz frowned. Then his frown went away. "Of course! Very devious of you, Lewis. The phone books! Get them, Linda."



Bardock bit down again on the inside of his lip, fighting for self will. It would depend on the next ten seconds.

Linda brought the package in. "Open it," Auglitz said, "and find the papers for me, Linda. I am curious to know which of my clients were so bold."

Bardock heard the sound of the paper being removed from the phone books. He moved, so that Auglitz' eyes would shift back to him.

**T**HE sound of the shot came to his drugged ears sounding as though it had been fired in a box of cotton wool. It was followed immediately by a second shot. He pushed himself to his feet, moving with turgid effort, with muscles that were like slabs of cold lard. The stentorian roar of the automatic in Auglitz' hand seemed oddly to jar his foot and, looking down he saw that the slug had bitten a half circle out of the protruding sole of his shoe.

Auglitz staggered over to the desk, stood with both palms flat against the glass, blood dropping slowly and heavily onto the glass, each drop making a tiny pattern of red exclamation points in a circle around it.

Lew knew that he had to move, and quickly. Linda Schane stood with the automatic sagging in her lax hand, her eyes wide and strained. He knew that she would be no good for several minutes. Feet thudded toward Linda. He could not get to Linda in time.

The automatic was close to Lew's foot. He bent with painful slowness and picked it up. Something about the drug made it feel soft and loose in his hand. He brought the weapon up in a slow arc, not able to move it quickly enough.

Andrew clubbed him with a heavy fist, turning from the girl to answer this new challenge from a man supposedly heavily drugged. Lew felt himself float backwards, strike the floor without pain.

Andrew kicked at him and Lew got his

hand on Andrew's ankle, the man fell across him. Lew got his left arm around Andrew's neck, hugged him close and with nightmare slowness, with muscles that would not respond properly, he chopped Andrew again and again behind the ear and on the back of the head with the barrel of the heavy gun.

Lew stopped only when Linda, sobbing in fear, caught his arm. She helped him out from under the limp weight of the servant, helped him to his feet.

Auglitz had slid down to his knees, the bridge of his nose resting against the edge of the desk.

Bardock shook his head, but he could not clear it completely. The room was still a place of loose and shifting angles.

He walked heavily to Auglitz, pulled the man back so that he sat down. Auglitz looked up at him with a white face, with vanished composure.

"Very few people can fight against that, Lewis," he said weakly. "If you will fix a tourniquet—"

Blood soaked Auglitz' white jacket at the chest and at the elbow. The arm seemed to be bleeding the most.

"First you talk and then you get the tourniquet," Bardock said.

"I'll soon be too weak from loss of blood to talk. One bullet ripped across my chest and the other shattered my elbow." There was an undercurrent of anxiety in Auglitz' voice.

"Where are the films?"

"Please. My arm."

"Doc," Lew said heavily, "I don't care if you bleed to death. I really don't."

"Wall safe. Behind the print on the far wall."

Bardock motioned to Linda. She went and took the print off the wall, disclosing the barrel safe. Auglitz said:

"Left eleven, right eighty-six, left forty-one, right six."

Auglitz had to repeat it. Linda, moving like a frightened ghost, got it open. There



was a box of labeled film reels, 16 mm. Bardock saw her find the one with an adhesive tape strip on the metal labeled "Schane."

"The tourniquet," Auglitz gasped.

Bardock had trouble thinking clearly, but he felt as though the effects were lessening a bit. "No tourniquet. You're too smart a guy to have your eggs in one basket, Auglitz. Where are the copies? You had prints made."

"No. I swear."

"Then bleed to death, damn you."

Garrison Trust. Safety deposit box. Name of John Butler. Box number three eighteen. Copies of each film. Andrew has key, rented box—"

Auglitz slumped over onto his side. His breathing was getting shallow. Bardock stirred him with a heavy foot. "Wake up, pal. Only one line of defense. Come on now. Where's the other copies?"

"No. I swear. Tourniquet. Quickly. Please."

Linda, her teeth chattering, clung to Bardock's arm. "Don't let him die, Lew. Don't. I shot him, Lew."

He pushed her away. "Give, Auglitz. Give quick or I'm going out."

Auglitz' voice was a weak whisper. "False back in—in wall cabinet—behind my desk . . ."

Bardock sighed. "Phone police emergency, Linda." He found a towel, tightened it above Auglitz elbow with the letter

opener from the top of the desk. Auglitz had barely the strength to hold it.

**T**HERE were five people in Rance's office. The windows were gray with dawn. Bardock sat near the old-fashioned desk.

Linda, her eyes shadowed and a wisp of hair across her pale forehead, sat trim and erect near the fireplace.

Rance knelt by the fire. The hardwood logs burned steadily. From time to time he threw a loose film spool onto the logs.

The police official stood, his back to the room, staring out the window, sucking at his pipe. The man from the District Attorney's office perched on the edge of the big desk.

The phone rang. Rance stood up and took it.

"Auglitz will pull through," he said.

"When we check," the police official said, "I have a hunch we'll find his credentials are faked."

"Of course," the D.A.'s man said, "we don't know what the hell you're doing at that fireplace, Rance. Destroying evidence is quite a serious matter. You wouldn't be doing that, would you?"

"Hell, no," Rance said.

"Tomorrow, I mean today," the D.A.'s man said, "we'll take that Andrew to the bank. There might be some evidence in that box. But Andrew tells me he's been storing something for you there."

# HEADACHE

UPSET  
STOMACH

JUMPY  
NERVES



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"Yes. Some home movies. Nothing to do with the case, you understand."

"Let's go, Bill," the police official said. "Meet us at the bank at ten, Bardock, so you can pick up your—home movies."

The two of them left. Rance tossed the last of the duplicate set on the fire, dusted his palms as though to brush off filth.

Rance sat down at the desk. He said to Lew, "You understand, Lew, that after you deliver the reels to me, the ones from the bank, you're all through here."

"It would seem that way," Lew said wearily.

"When you came in yesterday, Lew, you should have remembered to pick up your paycheck. You've been eager for payday lately. Not picking up the check looked funny. That's what started me investigating you, you know."

"I don't see why a man should be penalized for using his head," Linda said firmly.

Both men stared at her. Linda said, "Tell Rance what you told me, Lew. Tell him how you decided to pretend to represent those other people just so they'd tell you more about Auglitz. Tell him how you wanted to give me the money to hold in my account where it would be safe, with instructions to give it to Mr. Rance if anything happened to you. But I was afraid to take the money."

Rance stared at her. "But, Miss Schane! Why, when I talked to you, didn't you say—"

"Should I have trusted you on sight, Mr. Rance? I had to check with Lew first."

Rance stared in consternation at Lew. "Is this true?"

Lew shrugged and swallowed hard. "I work in my own way, Rance. You heard the lady."

"Why didn't you squawk?"

"If you want to think I'm crooked, I'd

just rather not work here. In fact, if you want me back, you'll have to boost the ante a little. He stood up, unstrapped the money belt and tossed it on the desk. He tossed the wadded bills on top of them. "Stick this stuff in the safe, Rance. I'll distribute it tomorrow."

"Lew, I can't tell you how sorry I am," Rance said.

Lew grinned. "The obvious fooled you the same way it fooled Auglitz. He didn't stop to think that with a razor blade a phone book can become a good place to hide a gun. I put it there because I knew I'd be searched at the door. I was going to open the package and grab it. Then I had to hope that Linda would have the guts to use it."

"I'll clear your raise with Brill."

Bardock walked to the door. "Come on, Linda. We both need coffee . . ."

Fifteen minutes later, sitting beside Lew on a stool, Linda stirred her coffee, looked up at him and said in a small voice, "Auglitz was blackmailing me because I told him about what I saw the day my sister—"

Lew reached over and touched her lips with one finger, cutting off her words. He said, "I don't want to know. I've been such a heel that I'd like to go on thinking that maybe you were one once. It will give us something in common."

Linda smiled at him. Her eyes danced. "You sound as though you would like to have something in common with me. Is this a proposition?"

"Lady, you own me. With a little quick thinking, you bought back my reputation."

"And bought you along with it?"

"I'm a rough commodity," he said.

She leaned closer to him. Through parted lips she whispered, "And let the buyer beware."

They both began to smile. Outside the morning sun broke through the mist and the city began to come awake.



# THREE TO MAKE MURDER

Her hand was wielding a large, smooth stone.



By  
**TEDD  
THOMEY**

Jealous Margie would surrender her Don to only one person—the undertaker!

**T**HE wave was one-story high, green with a foamy mane. Just as it broke, Don Thomason dived under it. The water buffeted his muscles and sang in his ears and then the roaring



monster was gone. Puffing a little, Don popped up in quiet water.

His sunburned young face crinkled and there was a flash of white teeth as he grinned and brushed the dripping, reddish-brown hair off his forehead.

At the moment, trouble was far from his thoughts. He was thinking it was swell to be knocking around in the surf just after sunrise. Too bad his vacation was almost over.

But abruptly he frowned. Fifty yards away, the shadowy beach was no longer deserted. A girl in a two-piece bathing suit was striding into the water. Margie. Now why the blazes was she up so early?

Skillfully, she waded out toward him, leaping the high waves and holding one hand mysteriously behind her back.

"Hi!" she smiled, when she was a few feet away. Don had to admit Margie was a fine hunk of girl. She was tall and broad-shouldered, and her figure was golden-brown, slim and firm. Drops of spray sparkled in her long black hair and across her trim little nose.

Another big wave was rolling in. Don braced his feet on the smooth, sandy bottom. He and the girl were both lifted high and they came down closer together. Margie still kept her hand hidden.

And then suddenly her hand was high in the air and she was wielding a large, smooth stone.

There was no time to duck. Don caught a glimpse of her eyes, flinty with hatred. Her mouth was a twisted, crimson bow and the tendons in her brown hand stuck out like sticks. Then the rock crashed across his forehead.

A fire-like pain leaped across his skull. His knees were tissue paper. His head flopped forward and he sucked up brackish water. He thrashed his arms and with a frantic effort managed to free his face.

Vaguely, he realized that was a mistake. The stone smashed down again. And again—

A greenish blackness closed in. Don felt his shoulders scrape bottom. Far overhead—maybe a thousand miles up—another wave broke and sent long fingers probing for him, strong fingers which spun his lean body head over heels like a rubber doll. He needed air. Horribly, he needed it. Once he thought his head was out of water. He gulped hungrily and drew in more foul, sickening saltiness.

Hours went by, or was it years? The water beat at him and he coughed and choked—coughed and choked!

Then everything was quiet. So this was what it was like to be drowned. It was so comfortable, so cool and pleasant.

Gradually, Don realized he was lying on his back in the sand, and foam was playing about his toes. Somehow the waves had tossed him on the beach. But another big one might drag him back. He forced himself to crawl six feet across the wet, spongy sand. And then he collapsed, shivering, the pain piercing his brain and digging its spikes into every fiber of his body.

He lay there a long time before he could manage to stand. He tugged up his trunks and looked around. Margie was gone, of course.

Strangely, there was no anger in him now. He'd relish that later. Now he had the tremendous problem of climbing one-hundred and fifty steps before he could get to the cottages. One-hundred and fifty steps before he could feel Paula's cool fingertips soothing his skull.

Don was completely exhausted by the time he climbed the rickety, wooden stairs which led from the beach to the cliff top. The three yellow cottages were back a hundred yards from the edge. His was No. 2, but he didn't want to go there. He headed for No. 1, Paula's cottage.

Pushing open Paula's door, Don stumbled in—then great, new shudders racked his body and he felt his face fall apart and his fists pound his taut thighs. Paula was



lying on the rug beside the bed. The varnished handle of an ice pick stuck out of her breast just above the tight-fitting top of her white sun dress.

She had bled very little. But she was dead.

**P**AULA'S shiny yellow hair fanned across the cocoa-brown rug. Her eyes were a staring blue, and her mouth, once so soft and warm, was distorted with shock. One arm was twisted under her slender waist. The other held her heavy, plastic hand-mirror. It was cracked.

Don knelt beside her and rubbed the cold hand. And then rage swelled his chest. This was the girl he was going to marry! He'd kill whoever had done this to her! He'd tear her killer apart bit by bit!

He wanted to scream and pound the floor and kick out the walls of the cottage. He wanted to break windows and bawl. But he did nothing—because he didn't know what to do.

The screen door slammed behind him. He spun around. Margie was standing in the doorway. She now wore a yellow sport dress, and a sly smile disturbed the smooth lines of her face.

"They're here," she said.

Don didn't know what she meant and he didn't care. He hurtled across the room and his fingers found her supple throat. She had time for half a scream before he shut off her windpipe and shook her like a handful of weeds.

Numbly, he heard footsteps hurry across the wooden porch. Hard hands fell upon his arms and dragged him away from the girl. Suddenly, the rage left him and he slumped, exhausted, into a straight-backed chair.

"You trying to kill her?" demanded one of the two khaki-clad men.

Don didn't say anything. He sat there, feeling the weakness well up inside again. The two men knelt briefly beside Paula.

"Pretty, isn't she?" said one. "Too bad."

Their eyes roamed, business-like, around the small room, taking in the unmade bed, the big dresser with the bottle of whiskey and glasses ringing its veneer. They stepped out into the cottage's other room, the tiny kitchenette; checked the tinier bathroom, and returned.

"I'm Sergeant Shannahan," said the older of the two men. He was thin, leathery-cheeked and gray at the temples. The black patch on his left sleeve was embroidered with the words: "San Diego County Sheriff's Office." A gun was holstered at his hip and its belt held copper-coated bullets in little leather loops.

Shannahan looked at Margie. "You the one that called?"

Margie nodded and her black curls brushed her shoulders. Then she ran over to Don and put her arms around him. Her lips were hot against his mouth and cheek and her skin was warm against his shivering shoulders.

"I'm s-sorry, Donny." She was crying now. Big tears. Her long lashes fluttered and put little shadows under her eyes. "Y-you know I still love you. B-but I had to call them, I had—"

The rage went through Don again. And he was confused. He couldn't tell what the hell she was babbling about. But one thing he knew—he hated her. He put his hands against her shoulders and shoved—hard.

Margie fell back, long brown legs flying. Then she returned, beseechingly, her long fingers pinching his elbow. "Don't you see, Donny? They'll understand. They'll know you didn't mean to d-do it—" Her voice trailed off.

"He killed her then. That it?" Sergeant Shannahan's voice was sharply inquisitive.

"Y-yes." Margie's eyes were innocent and as round as targets. "But he didn't mean to. It was almost an accident—"



**F**URIOUS again, Don sprang from the chair. The lying hellcat! She must have killed Paula! And now in her tricky way she was trying to nail it on him.

Fists flailing, he got halfway to her before the two officers seized him and threw him back on the chair.

"Listen here, son," said Shannahan, quietly, puffing a little. "Try that again and we'll knock you sillier than a cross-eyed goat!" His eyes went back to Margie. "Tell us about it."

She was very coy. She made the officers draw the story from her.

"W-we had a little party here last night," she began. "Paula and Donny and me." She glanced at the whiskey bottle. "Donny probably had a little more than was good for him—"

Don started to shout that she was lying. That he'd had only two drinks. But the sergeant ordered him to wait till Margie finished.

"Paula had a little too much, too," she continued. "And she got jealous because Donny was paying me more attention than her. She's always been jealous because she knew he loved me and wanted to break their engagement. Donny kissed me—and she came over and slapped me. And then I slapped her. S-she got real mean then—"

Margie's voice broke and her chin quivered. She wouldn't look at Don, who was sitting rigidly on the hard chair.

"Donny tried to hold her, but Paula was crazy. She picked up her mirror in one hand and the ice pick in the other and she hit him on the head two or three times with the mirror. And then—it was a-awful!"

"I know it's hard." Sergeant Shannahan's voice was gentle. "What'd she do with the ice pick?"

"She hit Donny on the head with the mirror again. And then she broke away from him and came after me with the ice pick. Donny tore it out of her hand and

I don't know what came over him. He—"

Margie abruptly ran across the room again to Don. She fell to the floor and put her warm arms around his sunburned legs. Her back shook with sobs. "Donny, I'll stick by you. Y-you know I'll always love you, don't y-you?" She looked up at him, her eyes miserable, her lipstick smeared.

Don shoved her away again. "Can't you see she's lying?" he yelled. "I didn't—I wasn't even—"

"Quiet," said Shannahan. "We'll listen to you next." He helped Margie to her feet. "Now finish your story, young lady."

She stared down at the rug and her voice was small and quiet. "I don't know why he did it—I guess he couldn't stand the thought of her trying to kill me. S-suddenly he drove the ice pick—into her. And then he passed out."

"Lies!" Don shouted. "All lies! I wasn't even here when it happened!" He charged at Margie, wanting to knock the truth out of her.

The officers slammed him into the chair again and his head struck the wall. His skull rang like an empty dishpan and a haze dropped before his eyes. He sensed that Sergeant Shannahan was pushing his hair aside gently. Then he heard him say:

"I guess she hit him on the head with the mirror all right. He's got bumps to show." There was a pause and then the Sergeant's voice came again, as if from a distance. "We'll hear you now, son."

Don found it difficult to talk. His tongue felt thick. He explained how he'd had the two drinks around midnight and then gone to his cottage, leaving the girls together. He told how he'd gotten up at sunrise and gone swimming and how Margie had come out and hit him with the stone.

"You mean to say you let a girl walk out in the ocean and slam you with a rock?" Sergeant Shannahan sounded incredulous. "A big fellow like you?"



Don realized he hadn't explained it very well. His head just wasn't clear enough yet. He heard a metallic snap and through the haze saw that the sergeant had opened a pair of bright new handcuffs.

"I'M SORRY, son," said Shannahan. "We're going to have to run you in. Get yourself a good lawyer and maybe—"

While the officer talked, Margie had lifted her large, red leather purse from the dresser. She got out a handkerchief and dabbed her eyes. She eased over until she was standing in front of Don, her back toward Shannahan and the other officer.

Her long brown fingers went into the bag and came out with a gun. A trim, blue-steel thing. Eyes wide and frightened, she whispered urgently:

"Escape, Donny! Escape!"

Don was still dazed. He saw the girl spin around and point the gun at the officers. They stiffened, the skin compressing around their mouths.

"Don't be a fool!" snapped the Sergeant.

Margie shouted: "Run, darling!"

Don just sat there, feeling his nerves hum and the tightness in his head.

Confused thoughts flashed through his mind. In her strange way, Margie did love him, there was no doubt about that. And the handcuffs were so final. They spelled iron bars and thick walls. Sergeant Shannahan took a step toward him—and that did it.

Don sprang from the chair and staggered across the rug. He got to the door, fumbled with the doorknob and then he heard Margie cry weakly:

"I—I feel f-faint!"

He twisted around in time to see the gun slip from her fingers, to see her fall gracefully to the floor. Her eyes were closed, but the sly smile was back on her lips.

Don got the door open and was out on the porch before he heard the first sharp

report. He winced as splinters and chips of yellow paint flew from the porch post. The gun fired again. But by then he was sprinting down the gravel road.

Fear forced the haze out of his mind and lashed strength into his legs.

Halfway down the road, Don cut to the left and ducked between his cottage and No. 3. Maybe the deputies hadn't seen him turn and would think he'd headed for Highway 101. He ran behind the cottages and arrived at the cliff edge. Without hesitating, he plunged over. The cliff sloped down sharply one-hundred feet to the beach. The reddish-yellow dirt was soft and as he jumped and skidded along, he kicked up billows of dust. Brambles raked his shanks, rocks cut his heels. He gave a big jump near the bottom and hurtled the last ten feet to the white beach.

A look over his shoulder told him the two officers, guns drawn, were starting down after him. Their boots kicked up a flow of loose rock and dirt. Suddenly behind them a large section of soft earth gave way. It crashed down, caught them hip-high and knocked them over. Elbows and ankles tangled, they rolled down the cliff, born along by the waterfall of dirt.

Don raced up the beach, running as close to the cliff as possible without knocking his right elbow and knee against it. His lungs hurt and his mouth was drier than sawdust. Giddiness was beginning to ooze across his brain again.

He was running aimlessly. He didn't know where to go. When the officers got down on the flat, monotonous beach, they could spot him ten miles away. And the cliff was too steep here to climb.

He flashed past another wave-hollowed cave before he remembered. Somewhere along here there was a deep, crumbling hole that went far into the cliff. If he could just find it—

Where the hell was that cave? Another hundred yards he went, stumbling occa-



sionally, sick with the realization that his speed was little more than a drunken walk.

At last he got to the cave. It was in bad condition. The soft, yellow sandstone had fallen in great, irregular blocks around the entrance. Wide cracks branched up the cliff's face. As he hesitated, breathing in long, raw spasms, a small rock tumbled from far overhead, when it reached the beach it was involved in a young avalanche. There was no doubt about it. Just frown at that cave and it might collapse.

It was dangerous—but it was his only hope. Don crawled in. The entrance was about three feet in diameter, but the cave was wider inside. He turned around and looked out. A wave sloshed up to the cave's entrance. Well, that was a break—it would wash away his footprints.

But wait a minute!

Maybe it wasn't a break. A good heavy wave might knock the whole cliff down!

**D**ON shuddered. There was no choice. The cave was his only hope. He crawled back further, wishing there was less light.

About twenty feet in, his way was blocked by a tremendous fall of material. It almost filled the end of the cave. Don was certain this fall hadn't been here when he'd peeked in a few days ago with Paula. The cave should extend behind it. Down near the floor of the cave there was a hole a little wider than his shoulders. He poked his feet in first and then, wriggling like a lizard, got the rest of his body into the tiny room. Loose dirt fell into his hair.

Suddenly he heard muffled shouts outside. One voice, he was sure, was Sergeant Shannahan's.

Don lay there panting, staring out through the little hole, feeling rivulets of cold sweat on his cheeks.

Khaki-clad legs appeared in front of

the entrance, wading through the shallow water.

"Did you check this one?" The voice belonged to the younger deputy.

Don heard a far-away reply which sounded like "No." He stopped breathing as the deputy knelt in the water and peered in. The deputy's face was pinched with curiosity. He unhitched the flashlight from his gun belt and flashed its beam around the blocks of sandstone on the floor.

Don's lungs felt like rubber life rafts. Desperately, he wanted to release the stale air, but he didn't dare. In the cave's silence, mere breathing could be the same as saying: "Come in and get me." Bells began to ring in his ears, black spots played hopscotch before his eyes.

The deputy started to crawl in.

But a piece of rock and a few pounds of sand fell from the roof to his shoulders. He changed his mind and scurried out fast—apparently convinced that anybody would be a fool to hide in there.

The deputy stayed in front of the entrance for a moment. Another pair of torn-khaki legs joined his and Sergeant Shannahan said angrily: "I tell you he led us that way deliberately, knowing the ground would give way! Why, we could've been killed!"

Both pairs of legs strode away.

In huge, sucking gasps, Don grabbed all the fresh air he could hold. He closed his eyes and just lay there, sick from fatigue and the knowledge that the officers thought he'd tried to kill them. He realized now that he'd been a fool to break away like that. Margie had tricked him so beautifully. Now he was in real trouble. If he just hadn't been so punchy from those cracks on the head.

Strength slowly flowed back into his muscles. When he opened his eyes a few minutes later, he didn't like what he saw. The waves were washing into the cave. They were knocking sand off the walls.



One of these days—maybe today—the whole cave would collapse with a roar. Don decided not to think about it. There were a lot of other things on his mind. First, Paula. They'd had so little time together. Only six months ago Paula and her good friend Margie had gotten jobs in the stationery department just across the aisle from men's shirts where he worked.

Damn that Margie. She'd hung around from the very beginning. She had to come along practically every time they went to a movie or dancing. Always flapping her eyelashes at him and rubbing her cheek against his whenever Paula told him to dance with her. Paula never realized what a scheming little tigress Margie was. Margie could have hooked a guy of her own, but she had wanted him, and she had pursued him cleverly and relentlessly.

She had manuevered things at the store so three of them had the same vacation time. Of course, Paula had to invite her along to Solana Beach, the little resort town twenty-odd miles north of San Diego. The three cottages were half a dozen blocks from the rest of the town. Paula and Margie shared No. 1, he was alone in No. 2, and No. 3 was vacant. Despite Margie, it had been a lot of fun, until—

Now they thought he'd killed Paula. Don couldn't prove that he hadn't. And

by running away he'd practically proved that he had.

Don was trembling. It wasn't just the cave's dampness which made him shiver. He was watching the water lap higher, minute by minute, forcing bits of rock to tumble from the soft walls. He was wondering how long it would be before—

THE tide went out late in the afternoon. After it was dark, Don crawled from the cave. He was tired and frightened. But he had a plan.

There were bonfires on the beach near the stairs a few hundred yards away. People roasting weenies and marshmallows, no doubt. But they could be dangerous. The word probably had spread that a criminal, a murderer, was loose around here. Donald Lincoln Thomason, murderer. A hell of a note. In all his life, he'd never shot even a gopher—and now he was being hunted like one.

A splinter of moon rode the western sky and it cast a little light on the sudsy surf and white sand. Don walked slowly, looking for driftwood. He ignored the heavy logs and pieces of planking, halting beside a twisted orange crate. He broke off a small piece of wood, keeping it in his palm as he walked along.

Approaching the fires, he hugged the cliff. He came to the place where he had descended that morning and went on another dozen steps. Then, using hands and

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 CREAM-  
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**HELPS YOU PASS  
 THE F-N TEST  
 Contains LANOLIN**

**Now  
 WILDROOT  
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**WILDROOT  
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**WILDROOT  
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**EASY TO USE  
 NO WASTE OR SPILLING  
 HANDY FOR TRAVELING**



knees and hoping he wouldn't start another slide, he climbed over the soft, cool dirt, feeling certain he was too far away to be seen by the campers. He dug the stick into the ground and it helped keep him from sliding backward.

After a while, Don got to the top and walked behind the cottages. His cottage was dark. There was a light on in Paula's and Margie's. Margie's slim silhouette was moving around behind the drawn shades. So far, so good.

Still holding the small piece of wood, he eased in the back door of his cottage. Feeling his way in the darkness, he went through the kitchenette to the bedroom and rummaged in the dresser. He found the German P-38 pistol, a war souvenir, he'd brought along to show Paula. He set it on the small end table near the front door.

Still working in the dark, he broke off a thin section of wood from the stick and wedged it under the trigger-like mechanism in the phone's cradle. This caused the dial tone to sound, although the receiver was still in place. He lifted the receiver off and replaced it—the dial tone buzzed on quietly undisturbed.

Don knelt on the floor beside the bed, lit a match and flipped through the phone book for the number of the sheriff's office. He lit another match and dialed. Shannah's companion answered.

"Is the sergeant there?" said Don. His words were much calmer than he'd expected.

"No. He's out."

"Well, this is Don Thomason, the man you're looking for—" There was a sharp intake of breath on the line's other end. "Please stand by on the phone to hear what I hope will be some pretty good evidence. It may take some time, but will you stay?"

The deputy agreed, but he was full of sharp questions. Don refused to answer any. He placed the phone back on the

hook. As long as there was no dial tone, Don knew the deputy was holding on.

He walked over to the wall light switch. He paused. A little thing like flicking it could cause him a hell of a lot of trouble if his plan didn't work. And this was his last chance. He flicked on the light.

Immediately, Don started manufacturing noises. He banged the drawers in the dressers, slammed his suitcase on the floor. Pretty soon he heard soft steps on the porch. He kept his back to the door. The screen door opened.

And then came Margie's voice, edgy as a razor blade. "They'll make me chief of police for this!"

Feigning surprise, Don spun around. Margie was pointing the German gun at him. Her eyes glittered like silver.

"I HATE you!" she said. Suddenly her eyes were misty. "I loved you—but you made me hate you!"

"You're wasting your talent," said Don, sarcastically. "The sergeant isn't here now."

Margie became sullen, but in an instant she smiled. "I was pretty good this morning, wasn't I?" She stepped toward him, adding brightly: "I'm out on bail, you know. For helping you escape. Wonderful, wasn't it, how it proved you did it?"

Don ignored the thrust. He wanted her closer to the phone, but he had to keep her from using it to call for help. The only other nearby phone was at the gas station six blocks away.

"You were the one who was drunk last night, weren't you?" he said, gently. "Why did you kill her, Margie?"

Margie stepped closer. "Yes, I had a little too much—and she made me sick, sitting there mooning about you." The hardness left her face. She said huskily: "You made me kill her, Donny. I bought that gun and put it in my purse the day you announced your engagement. Loving you, seeing that she had all your love,



made me—well, I hated her. I felt good when she fell and broke the mirror. I guess I always hated her. All through high school, she pretended to be nice and all the time she was taking away my boy friends.”

“That’s not true!” snapped Don. “It was the other way around. Why do you always twist things? You always tried taking away her boy friends, didn’t you?”

Margie’s eyes suddenly looked glassy. Her voice was dull and flat. “You still love her. You’ll always love her, won’t you?” She walked over toward him, the gun shaking a little. “That’s why I hate you. That’s why I tried to kill you out in the water this morning. And that’s why I’m going to call the police and turn you in. Get away from the phone.”

Don didn’t move. He asked: “How would you have explained my death if you had succeeded this morning? And Paula’s?”

“It would have looked like you dived on a rock and drowned. I’d have said a robber killed Paula.” She paused. “I said get away from that phone!”

Don didn’t care now. Margie had said enough and she’d been standing fairly close to the phone. “Help yourself,” he said, turning to look at the phone.

And then his legs wilted. He felt the blood drop out of his face.

The chip of wood had fallen from the phone.

His careful plan was shot full of holes. Margie had confessed the whole thing—and the deputy probably hadn’t heard it! Margie, damn her soul, still had the upper hand!

Dazedly, Don watched her step over to the phone. She laid the receiver on the

table and poked her finger into the dial wheel. Then, suddenly her eyes flickered over Don’s shoulder to the front door. She dashed across the room, shouting shrilly: “Get in here or I’ll shoot!”

Sergeant Shannahan pulled back the screen door and walked in. Carefully, he raised his hands. He tried to conceal the sheepish look on his face by saying fiercely:

“You’re all through, sis! Thomason’s out-figured you. I heard everything you said to him. Been out on the porch ever since I got word over the car radio that they traced his phone call here.” Shannahan’s face was stiff with concentration. “Better give up. The joint’ll be surrounded by deputies!”

“Relax, Sarge,” said Don. He started to walk toward Margie. As he approached, her eyes became big and round with terror and her face got ugly. He reached for the gun and she screamed and pulled the trigger once, twice—three times. There were three steely clicks and then Don twisted the gun free.

“You think I’d leave a loaded gun handy?” he said bitterly. “With a wild witch like you around?”

Margie collapsed on the bed, yelling hysterically, kicking her long legs and tearing the bedspread with her red fingernails.

Sergeant Shannahan hitched up his pants. He cleared his throat noisily. “We sure had you pegged wrong, kid. Thanks for unloading that gun. Thanks one hell of a lot.” His horny hand patted Don’s shoulder. “You look beat. Anything I can do for you?”

Don was thinking of yellow hair fanning across a cocoa-brown rug. Slowly he shook his head.





# DEATH'S GRINDING WHEELS



He snatched for the gun, and I  
used my fist on him.

*Book-Length Novel of Danger  
and Death*

By **ROBERT  
MARTIN**



This was the screwiest set-up I'd ever seen  
—a factory that manufactured death . . .  
while its manager made whoopee.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Dead on the Job

**T**HE short fat man in the overalls shifted his tobacco from one cheek to the other, bolted shut the heavy steel door of the testing drum and pressed

a button. There was a high whine as the testing spindle inside the drum began to whirl. The whine climbed to a screeching roar.

Black numbers on a white dial moved smoothly and swiftly to 14,000, and the roar subsided. The fat man turned to the



huge drum, flipped open a clasp on its door, lifted an eighteen inch, gray-colored grinding wheel from the spindle and placed it on a steel platform on the cement floor beside the testing apparatus.

The fat man said: "That baby's okay, Mr. Ackerman. If she'll stand that speed, she'll stand anything."

Alan Ackerman nodded, and said to me: "Gordon, you can see for yourself. That grinding wheel is perfect. The recommended speed for that size and type is nine thousand surface feet per minute. You just saw it revolved at fourteen thousand, and it didn't break. Every wheel which leaves this shop is tested that way, and the tester signs a notarized statement of the testing speed."

"And yet," I said, "yesterday a man in a foundry in Toledo was almost killed when one of your wheels broke in operation?"

Ackerman nodded gloomily. He was a tall, slender man, about forty, with a lean face, a thin nose and firm chin. He wore shell-rimmed glasses, a gray double-breasted suit, a dark red tie. He jingled some silver in his pocket and turned away. I followed him.

We walked past the row of testing drums and out into a vast room filled with men and many lathes and the scream of diamond cutting tools biting into the surface of flint-hard grinding wheels. Above the roar, Ackerman shouted at me: "Finishing room. The wheels come out of the kilns rough, and this is where they cut them to exact dimensions."

I nodded and followed him across the big room. We picked our way between long lines of lathes and he opened a heavy steel door. We entered a paneled hallway, and the door swung shut behind us. The vibrating roar of the finishing room was suddenly deadened. Ackerman opened a glazed glass door marked: *A. R. Ackerman, Personnel Manager. Walk in.*

Ackerman nodded to a chair, and I

sat down. He leaned against his desk, his hands in his pockets, still jingling coins. From an adjoining office came the clatter of a typewriter.

"I've got to get to the bottom of this breakage. It's murdering our biggest account, the Portage Foundry, at Toledo, where the man was hurt yesterday. A wheel breaking in operation is a wicked thing—it's like an exploding bomb, or shrapnel, even with a guard on the grinder. And when a man is badly injured by a wheel—well, that kind of thing gets around in the industry fast."

The clatter of the typewriter in the adjoining office had stopped.

I said: "It seems to me that this is a job for your engineers, your technical men, not for a private detective like me. I don't know anything about grinding wheels, but it seems to me the fault must be in manufacturing, someplace along the line."

Ackerman held up a hand. "No, no, Gordon. We've checked that over and over. The wheels are made correctly all the way. You saw how they are tested. Any wheel that size which can stand that speed will hold up on operation. But still they keep on breaking. It's driving the whole organization nuts, and the big boss has dumped the whole mess in my lap. 'Stop that breakage,' he says, 'at any cost.'"

Ackerman jingled coins in his pocket and laughed bitterly. "During the war," he went on, "I had a lot of tough jobs handed me, but this is the toughest one yet to come under the heading of personnel. That's why I called you. You've got to do something."

"Why me?" I asked. "I chase people for other people. I can't use a .38 on a grinding wheel."

Ackerman leaned forward and said: "Look—" He paused, and glanced toward the open door of the adjoining office. The typewriter began to clatter again.



Ackerman said loudly: "Miss Donovan."

The typewriter stopped abruptly, and a girl appeared in the doorway. She was about five foot four, around a hundred and fifteen, and she was stacked like a gal in a press agent's dream. Long, straight legs, slim waist, erect, trim shoulders. She had clean-looking brown hair done in an upsweep effect with a thick braid around her well-shaped head. It gave her a regal look. Brown eyes, a straight nose—a trifle too long, but still nice—a red-painted mouth, a round firm chin. She was wearing a simple light blue summer dress, a pair of white sandals.

Her cool, impersonal gaze flicked from me to Ackerman.

Ackerman said: "Dorothy—Miss Donovan—this is Mr. Gordon. Mr. James Gordon, from Cleveland."

She nodded slightly, and looked enquiringly at Ackerman. He said: "Mr. Gordon will be working with us for a few days."

She nodded, said, "Yes, sir," turned and went back into her office. The typewriter began again, and Ackerman stepped over and closed the connecting door. He turned back to me.

"What I started to say," he said, "was that this thing is caused by a person, or persons. It has to be that way. Your job is to find out who—and how. As a private detective you have methods, and I'll help you all I can. Don't spare the horses. The Buckeye Grinding Company will pay the bill."

"All right," I said, "but I won't guarantee anything. This is a new racket for me."

"I understand," he said. He handed me a small numbered badge. "This will get you past the guards. You've got the run of the place. Where do you want to start?"

I put the badge in my pocket. "I don't know. You tell me that the trouble isn't

in manufacturing. The wheels could be damaged in transporting them, or someplace along the line after they leave here. Have you checked that?"

He nodded. "I even went along with one shipment myself, and so did our chief ceramist, Gil Folly. We watched those wheels every minute of the way, and we checked their mounting on the grinders. And yet, ninety percent of them broke in operation."

"No visible flaws?" I asked. "No signs of tampering which might have weakened them and caused them to break in operation?"

He shook his head. "The wheels looked perfect."

The telephone on Ackerman's desk began to jangle. He picked it up, said: "Ackerman speaking."

I could hear the angry crackling of a voice on the other end of the wire. Ackerman's thin face went grim, and he said: "All right—yes, sir—I understand, sir—Yes, he's here now. We'll get right on it."

He hung up. There was sweat on his temples. "It's happened," he said. "At Portage Foundry. One of their men was just killed—by one of our wheels."

I GOT to my feet and put on my hat. "Let's see your man in charge of production."

Ackerman picked up his phone again. "Sit down. I'll get him in here." He said into the phone. "Put on Mr. Folly's call, please."

"Two-one is his call," Ackerman said. "He'll answer in a minute."

His phone rang. Ackerman picked it up, said: "Gil?—Can you come over to my office right away—No, right now. It's important." He hung up. "A hell of a thing," he said to me. "That guy getting killed—"

"Don't they have guards, hoods, on those grinders?" I asked.



"Yes, sure, but half the time they don't use them. It's the same with goggles. It's a state law that grinding wheels be guarded, but you can't watch every man every minute."

The door opened, and a man entered. He was short and thin, with a big beak of a nose, bushy black hair, a scraggly black mustache. He wore thick-lensed steel-rimmed glasses.

"Al," he said, "what in hell do you want? I'm busy. We got wheels to turn out in this shop."

Ackerman said: "Gil, another wheel just broke at Portage Foundry. It killed a man."

For a second the skinny man didn't say anything. Then he said: "That's tough, but why pester me with it? I'm in the clear. The wheels are tested, aren't they? Get after the truck lines, and the railroads. Make 'em understand that a grinding wheel is a delicate precision instrument, scientifically blended and fused—"

"Yes, yes," Ackerman said impatiently. "I'm not blaming you. This gentleman wanted to talk to you." He nodded at me. "Mr. Gordon meet Gil Folly, our chief ceramist in charge of production. Gil, Mr. Gordon is a private investigator. He's going to work on this breakage problem for us."

"Why in hell didn't you say so?" Folly said. He held out a claw-like hand to me. "Glad to know you, Gordon. What do you want to know about artificial abrasives?"

"A lot," I said, "but not now. Right now I want you to make a little trip with me—to the Portage Foundry."

"O.K., I'm on my way, Al," he said, grinning. "Anything to get out of this rat trap for a couple of hours. I'll be ready as soon as I get my hat, Mr. Gordon."

Ackerman said severely. "Don't be so eager, Gil. After all, a man is dead—

killed by one of our grinding wheels."

"So what?" Folly snapped at him. "Didn't Portage Foundry have a man here for a month checking every step of manufacture? Did he find anything? You know damn well he didn't. Those wheels are made as perfectly as grinding wheels can be made. Everything is checked. Don't look at me that way, Al. You can't pin it on me. If those stumble-bums on the trucks wouldn't slam the wheels around, and if you could teach the guys at the freight station to handle grinding wheels like eggs, you could stop this breakage. You wouldn't know about it," he went on scornfully, "but it may interest you to know that we ran some tests on how much of a fall an eighteen inch wheel can stand, and we didn't only test our wheels—we also tested wheels from five other companies—and we found that a ten inch drop, flat, mind you, resulted in close to a hundred percent breakage in operation. It breaks down the bonding materials, but you can't see it, not even under a 'scope. Don't talk to me about breakage—check on those half-witted truck drivers and freight handlers."

Ackerman held up a hand soothingly. "All right, Gil. Relax. Go along with Mr. Gordon and see what you can find out." He opened a desk drawer, took out two flat keys on a ring and tossed them to Folly. "Take one of the company cars."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Murder Machine

FOLLY caught the keys and went out. I looked at my wrist watch. It was ten o'clock in the morning. "How far is Toledo?" I asked Ackerman.

"About fifty miles. I hope you can dig something up. When do you want your



fee—now, or when you finish up here?”

“Fee and expenses,” I reminded him. “I’ll collect when I finish. If I can do you any good, I’ll know in a couple of days.”

He nodded gloomily, jingled coins, and stared out the window. The door opened, and big burly man entered. He had a thick chest, wide shoulders, short thick legs, a broad face and little pale blue eyes. Ackerman turned, said: “Hello, Mike. What’s on your mind?”

The big man said: “Do you want to see them Portage Foundry wheels before we pack ’em?”

“No, Mike,” Ackerman said. “If they aren’t right now, they never will be. All of them test O.K.?”

The man called Mike tossed a sheaf of forms on Ackerman’s desk. “There’s the tester’s reports. All of ’em certified at fourteen thousand SFM.”

Ackerman nodded. “Good.”

“When are those wheels going out?” I asked.

Ackerman smiled wryly. “I don’t know—maybe never. Portage Foundry hasn’t cancelled yet, but they might, after what happened.” He nodded at the man standing by his desk. “This is Mike Brandon, foreman of our shipping room. Mike, meet Mr. Gordon. If you see him out in the shop, tell him anything he wants to know.”

We shook hands, and Brandon went out.

Gil Folly poked his head in the door. “Let’s go,” he said to me.

I nodded to Ackerman and followed Folly out the door. We crossed the gravel driveway to the main gate of the plant. The guard on duty said: “Hi, Gil.”

Folly said: “Hello, Ben. I’ll be back sometime this afternoon. Tell the switchboard, will you?”

The guard nodded, and Folly and I walked down a cement sidewalk to a row of buildings. Folly unlocked a door, went inside, and climbed behind the wheel of a blue sedan. I opened the swinging doors while he backed the car out of the garage. Then I climbed in beside him, and we headed for Toledo.

It was eleven-thirty when we reached the plant of the Portage Foundry Company. The noon whistle blew as we pulled up beside the office entrance, and men and women poured out of the door. A big man in a gray tweed suit stopped in the doorway to light a cigarette. Folly said, “Come on,” to me, and he got out of the car and walked over to the man in the doorway.

“Hello, Mac,” he said. “I hear you had a little trouble this morning.”

The big man looked up. “Hello, Folly,” he said, and he didn’t smile. “I was wondering if you would bother to show up. You can go along with me and explain to the widow just how it happened. And incidentally, we’re shipping

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every damned one of your wheels back to you—for full credit. This is the pay-off—we're buying from Erie Abrasives from now on."

Folly held up one of his skinny hands. "Now, wait a minute, Mac. How do you know it was the wheel's fault? Was there a guard on that machine? Did the operator have the wheel tight on the spindle?"

"That don't make any difference," the big man said. "Nick Pagano was one of our best grinders, and a good boy. And now he is dead. One of your wheels killed him. You can't explain that away with technical bellywash."

Folly's dark face grew stubborn. "Mac, I'm here to find out how it happened, and why. This is Mr. Gordon, a private investigator. He's working on it, too. Gordon meet George McIntyre, superintendent of the Portage Foundry."

The big man nodded grimly at me and kept his hands in his pockets. Folly said to me: "Where do you want to start checking?"

I said the only thing I could think of to say. "I'd like to see the body."

McIntyre grunted: "Sounds like a cop on a murder case. Well, it was murder, all right."

"Don't talk like that, Mac," Folly said. "Where did they take Pagano?"

"Alonzo Funeral Home, on Cherry Street."

Folly moved towards the car, said over his shoulder: "We'll see you later, Mac."

McIntyre didn't answer. He stood silently in the doorway and watched us drive out of the gate.

We found the Alonzo Funeral Home without any trouble, and the undertaker took us down some stairs to a white-painted room filled with bottles, rubber tubes and gleaming white enameled furniture. On a steel table in the middle of the room was the body of a man.

He was a mess.

**T**HE undertaker stood by and supplied us with details. Nicolas Antonio Pagano, American-born Italian. Twenty-seven, married, three children. "They brought him from the hospital about a half hour ago. I was just beginning to prepare him for burial."

Folly turned away, and I saw that his lean face had turned gray. I leaned over the body of the dead man. There was no longer any blood, but the results of the bullet-like impact of the jagged chunks of broken grinding wheel were sickeningly in evidence. The dead man's face and chest were a mass of ugly, jagged wounds. A machine gun couldn't have done a more complete job.

As far as I could see, this whole thing was a job for an industrial safety engineer, or maybe a grinding wheel expert, like Folly—most certainly not a job for a gun-toting private dick. You couldn't convict a grinding wheel for murder, and accidents happen in factories every day. I felt helpless and ignorant, but I had promised to give this business a look, and I decided to go ahead in the only way I knew.

I thanked the undertaker, and we left. Folly's face was still gray. "A hell of a thing," he said, as we drove away.

"Tough on his wife and kids," I said. "I wonder if he carried any insurance."

"The Industrial Commission of Ohio will pay her seven thousand, five hundred dollars more if they can prove negligence on the part of the employer," Folly said.

"You've checked all steps in manufacturing and shipping?" I asked.

"Hell, yes. Over and over. I even went along on the trucks to see that they were properly handled—but still they break. It don't make sense. But if we don't stop it, it's going to ruin the Buckeye Grinding Wheel Company. They won't be able to get a man in the industry to run one of our wheels, let alone buy them. Portage Foundry is our biggest



customer—over fifty-thousand dollars worth of wheels a month. Eighteen-by-two wheels run into money, and they use a lot of them for smoothing rough castings.”

We parked outside the office of the Portage Foundry, and went in to a chrome and leather reception room and told the girl at the desk that we wanted to see Mr. McIntyre. She asked us our names, and picked up a phone.

In a couple of minutes, McIntyre came into the reception room. “Well,” he said, “did you make sure he was dead?”

“Dead as hell,” I said. “How’s chances of seeing the machine and the remains of the wheel?”

“There isn’t much left of the wheel,” he said, “but you can look over the scene of the crime.”

“Now, look, Mac,” Folly protested. “There’s no reason for you to talk like that. You had a man in our plant, and he couldn’t find anything wrong. Accidents happen.”

“Accidents, hell!” McIntyre snapped. “Twenty-three of your wheels have broken in operation here in the last three weeks, and yesterday a man was injured, and today a man was killed. I don’t call that an accident. You’re wheels are just rotten, that’s all.” He stalked out of the room. Folly and I followed him.

Nick Pagano’s grinder was one of a long row of machines manned by goggled workmen. Pagano’s machine was idle, and there was a big square of black oilcloth draped over it, like a shroud.

McIntyre said in my ear: “An old shop custom. No production on this machine for the rest of the day.”

Folly lifted the oilcloth and pointed a bony finger. “No guard,” he said to McIntyre. “Where’s the pieces of the wheel?”

McIntyre turned away, his heavy-featured face grim, and walked across the vast room. We followed him into an al-

cove where there was a glass-enclosed office. McIntyre closed the door, and the hum of the grinders outside grew fainter. On the desk in the middle of the room was a pile of jagged, gray-colored chunks of stone-like material. Gil Folly picked up one of the chunks and examined it closely.

McIntyre sneered: “You can’t tell a thing about it now, and you know it. That machine Pagano was on only turned up about eight thousand surface feet per minute, and when that wheel broke it was not near up to standard speed. In fact, the boys tell me that Pagano had just put it on and had started it up when it let loose.”

“Sure,” Folly said bitterly. “If you would make your man obey instructions, Pagano would still be alive. You know damn well that new grinding wheels are supposed to be run for at least a half a minute before any work is applied to them. And he wasn’t even using a guard—and I saw plenty others right now without guards.”

McIntyre’s heavy face was flushed. “Nuts,” he said. “If we followed all the silly instructions, we’d never move any castings out of this shop. Pagano was on piece work, and he wanted to turn out a day’s production. Those wheels are supposed to be okay when we buy them, and I’m telling you right now that we’ll never buy another Buckeye wheel again—not if I’ve anything to say about it.”

A voice from the doorway said: “You haven’t got anything to say about it, Mac.”

The three of us turned. Two men were standing in the doorway of McIntyre’s office. One of them was short and chunky, with fat cheeks and a keg-like chest. He was wearing gray tweed slacks and a white, short-sleeved sport shirt. The other man was tall and slender, black-haired, blue-eyed, smooth looking. He was wearing a light blue summer



weight suit, a dark tie, tan panama hat, brown and white shoes.

The chunky man said: "I'm still purchasing agent for the Portage Foundry, Mac. Leave the buying up to me. You know well as I do that we get more production from Buckeye wheels than from any other kind."

"When they don't fall apart," McIntyre sneered.

The chunky man ignored him. He nodded at Folly. "Hello, Gil. How are things down your way?"

"Terrible," Folly said. "This breakage has got us crazy." He nodded at me. "This is Jim Gordon. He's helping us to check it. Jim, meet Bill Koller, purchasing agent for the Portage Foundry."

The chunky man shook my hand. He introduced the tall man beside him in the blue suit. "Larry Simmons, sales representative for the Erie Abrasive Company."

Simmons flashed a set of white teeth and shook hands with Folly and me. "Looks like I stopped in to see Bill at the right time," he said, grinning. "Maybe my company can get a trial wheel in here now."

"And about time," growled McIntyre.

Koller said to me: "Are you an abrasive man, Mr. Gordon?"

Folly said bluntly: "He's a private detective."

There was silence in the office for a couple of seconds. And then Koller said: "Then you don't think the breakage is caused by flaws in manufacturing?"

Folly shrugged his narrow shoulders. "What do you think? The wheels are tested before they leave our shop."

McIntyre said: "They look all right—but they're rotten inside."

Koller was watching me. "How do you figure it, Gordon? Got any ideas?"

"Maybe," I said. "I've got to check a couple of things first."

"I've got work to do," McIntyre said

abruptly. He went out of the office and slammed the door.

Koller grinned a little, and Gil Folly put the chunk of broken grinding wheel in his pocket. "I want to give it a going-over in the lab," he said.

Koller nodded. "Let me know how you make out," he said. "I'd like to continue buying your wheels, but—well, you understand."

"Sure," Folly said. "I understand. But we'll get back on the beam."

"I'm sure you will," Koller said, smiling, and we all followed him out of the office and down a corridor.

Simmons, the tall man in the blue suit, walked beside me. He leaned towards me and said in a low voice: "Meet me in the bar of the Commodore Perry in fifteen minutes. It's important."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Dough for the Dick

**A**T THE end of the corridor Koller opened a steel door and we stepped out into bright afternoon sunlight. The four of us strolled around a corner and came to the entrance where Folly had parked the car.

Folly said to Koller: "Okay if I stick around and do a little snooping?"

"Sure, go ahead," the chunky man said. "I hope you can dig up something." He shook hands with me. "Good luck, Gordon."

Simmons, the salesman, said something to Koller in a low voice. Koller said: "Yeah, Larry, I'll let you know."

Simmons waved a hand at us and walked through the gate. He got into a gray convertible and drove away.

Folly talked to Koller a few minutes, and I lit a cigarette and leaned against the brick wall. Folly started for the plant entrance and said over his shoulder: "Coming, Jim?"



"No, not right now. I'm going down town for a little while. Let me have the keys to the car."

Folly stopped and turned slowly. Both he and Koller looked at me silently. And then Folly reached into his pocket and tossed the keys to me. "Sure, sure," he said suddenly. "Meet me here at the gate."

I caught the keys and walked to the car. As I backed out of the parking space, I saw Folly and Koller in the rear-view mirror. They were still watching me from the plant doorway.

I found the Commodore Perry Hotel without any trouble, parked along the curb, went into the lobby and up to the bar. I looked around, but I didn't see anything of Larry Simmons.

And then he got up from a booth on my left and waved a hand. I moved over to the booth and sat down beside him. His expensive tan panama lay on the seat beside him, and he was drinking a double Martini.

A waiter came up and I ordered a brandy and soda.

I accepted a cigarette from Simmons' silver case. "Thanks for coming, Gordon," he said. "I was afraid you wouldn't."

I didn't say anything, and he held a lighter to my cigarette. He seemed a little nervous. "I get about quite a bit," he said, "and I've heard of you—up around Cleveland. You've got a reputation, you know."

The waiter brought my drink, and I took a swallow. "What's on your mind?" I asked. "I've got to get back to the plant."

He sipped at his drink and regarded the two olives in the bottom of his glass. His sleek black hair was beginning to thin a little at the temples. He had a rather large, slightly hooked nose, thin lips, a sharp pointed chin. The silky material of his tropical-weight suit hung

on him with expensively tailored looseness.

Simmons looked suddenly up at me, and his blue eyes met mine. "What do you plan to do about Pagano's death?" he asked.

"Find out what caused it," I said. "If I can."

"A grinding wheel caused it," he said, smiling slightly. "A Buckeye grinding wheel. I work for Erie Abrasives, as you know. Buckeye is our main competitor. I don't mind telling you that Portage Foundry is a nice account—and I want it. Now is the time for me to get it—before Folly, or you, or somebody finds out what the trouble is. Koller is about ready to give me an order, and I've got to work fast." He paused and took a swallow of his drink.

"Go on," I said.

He reached into his inside coat pocket and brought out a silver embossed leather wallet. He extracted five one-hundred-dollar bills and laid them on the table beside his cocktail glass. "Take it," he said. "Look around a little, if you must. Make it look good and collect your fee—but don't find anything."

"Aren't you worried about what Folly will find—or have you seen him, too?" I asked.

He smiled. "I'll take a chance on Folly."

I reached out and picked up the bills. I folded them over once and stuck them into my left hand pant's pocket. Simmons leaned back in his seat and laughed softly. But there was a little sweat on his high narrow forehead.

"You aren't robbing yourself," I said. "Portage Foundry is a fifty-thousand dollar a month account." I changed the subject abruptly. "Do you know what's causing those wheels to break?"

His face took on a serious expression. "No, I don't. Really. And I don't want you, or anybody else, to find out. If they



stumble on to something that looks hot, try and steer them away from it. This is a break for me, but if Buckeye Grinding should suddenly begin to deliver good wheels again, my company will be out in the cold."

"All right," I said, and I went out.

AS I PARKED the car outside the office of The Portage Foundry, I saw Gil Folly was waiting for me. He crossed the parking lot and leaned in the window of the car.

"I can't do anything more here," he said. "As near as I can find out, the damned wheel just broke—that's all. We may as well go home, unless you've got any ideas."

"Only one," I said. "Wait here for me a minute."

I got out of the car and entered the plant. I didn't bother with the girl on the reception desk, and I found George McIntyre's office without any trouble. Through the glass partition I saw him sitting at his desk, and I walked in.

"I thought I was rid of you guys," he said.

I smiled at him. "Don't act so tough, McIntyre. I'll be out of your hair in a couple of minutes. How's chances of seeing the Industrial Commission report on Pagano's death?"

He nodded at a long blue form lying on his desk.

I picked up the form and read through the usual data—name, address, social security number, date of accident, time of day, *Was claimant on duty when the accident occurred?* and a dozen other questions. Near the bottom of the page I saw the heading: *Description of Accident*. I sat on a corner of McIntyre's desk and read it through. It was short and to the point:

*Claimant was a grinding machine operator and he was regularly en-*

*gaged in smoothing rough gear castings. He had just put a new 18" diameter, 2 inch thick grinding wheel on the spindle of the grinder and while standing in front of the revolving wheel and while applying the rough edge of the gear casting to the surface of the spinning wheel the wheel broke and disintegrated. Flying segments of the broken wheel struck claimant in head and chest, fatally injuring him. First aid was administered, and he was taken to the hospital immediately, but he was dead upon arrival.*

Farther down the page, I read a section headed, "Remarks," I read:

*There was no guard on machine at time of the accident. Claimant had been repeatedly warned about this carelessness, but he persisted in the practice, claiming that the guard interfered with his work.*

I said to McIntyre: "Who wrote this?"

"The nurse on duty, from information supplied by Pagano's foreman. I'll have to sign it before it goes in to Columbus."

"Mind if I copy some of it?"

"Hell, no. Anything to get you out of here."

I made notes on the back of an envelope, thanked McIntyre, and moved to the door. "Off the record, McIntyre," I said, "what do you make of this?"

He looked up at me. "You want to know? Check on Gil Folly. I've known him for years. We used to work together at Erie Abrasives, before he went to Buckeye." He paused.

"Go on," I said.

"Folly got let out at Erie because they caught him peddling wheel formulas to the competition."

"I see," I said. "You think that Folly is deliberately making bad wheels in order



to throw business to some other manufacturer?"

"I wouldn't put it past him," McIntyre said.

"But the wheels are tested before they are shipped."

McIntyre sneered. "For a big shot dick, you act damn dumb. Folly could make those testers read anything he wanted them to—say, nine thousand surface feet, when they are only turning up three or four thousand. Even a rotten wheel wouldn't break at that low speed."

"Very interesting," I said. "Got any more ideas?"

"Dig up the rest yourself," he said. "You're getting paid for it."

I went out, got into the car beside Folly, and we headed out of town. We drove along a road overlooking the Maumee River, and Folly didn't say anything until we crossed the big bridge at Perrysburg. Then he asked: "What did McIntyre tell you?"

"Not much, I got the dope from the Commission report."

Folly drove sullenly, his bright black eyes on the road ahead. "I mean about me," he said.

"He said that he once worked with you at Erie Abrasives."

"What else?"

"He doesn't like you," I said.

"That's obvious," Folly said. "I beat him out of a job once, years ago. It was a good job, in those days, and they picked me. He never got over it—still holds it against me."

"Some guys are like that," I said.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Testing for Murder

**W**HEN we got to the Buckeye plant I went straight in to Ackerman's office. A cozy little sight met my eyes.

Alan Ackerman had Dorothy Donovan in his arms, and they were kissing like they meant it. They sprang apart as I entered, and Ackerman whirled toward me. His face was red all the way to the bare spots above his temples. Dorothy Donovan merely stepped back and smiled slightly.

"Will that be all, Mr. Ackerman?" she asked coolly, and there was faint amusement in her eyes.

"Yes," he mumbled, rustling some papers on his desk, not looking at me.

She nodded seriously, keeping her face straight, entered her office and closed the door gently.

Ackerman sat down at his desk and lit a cigarette.

"Sorry," I said. "I should have knocked. But the sign on the door, you know . . ."

"Don't apologize," he said, and he smiled shamefacedly. "I—I guess I forgot myself.—"

I grinned at him. "I don't blame you at all."

He cleared his throat, rustled some papers, and tapped on his desk with a lead pencil. He was suddenly very business-like. "What did you find out at Portage Foundry?"

"Well, I saw the body. And there was no guard on the grinder—"

"That don't help us any," he broke in. "Guard or no guard, our wheels aren't supposed to break."

"You shipping any more to them?" I asked.

"Koller called me this afternoon. There is another shipment due to go out tomorrow morning. Koller said he would give us one more chance. If this bunch is not perfect, he's buying from Erie Abrasives from now on. Koller's boss, Ed Cochran, he's general manager of The Portage Foundry, has given us a break this long, but he won't stand for any more breakage. In fact, if Koller had had his



way, he probably would have cut us off long ago. This is our last chance to hold that Portage account, and I don't mind telling you it's a hell of a big chunk of our year's business."

"Yeah, I know," I said. "What time is that shipment going out?"

"Around four-thirty in the morning. Interstate Truck Lines is picking it up. They're packing the wheels now."

"Use one of your own trucks, and your own driver. I'll go along with it. One thing more, do you sell other companies the same type of wheel that Portage uses, identical size and specifications?"

"I suppose so," he said.

"Have they had any trouble with the wheels?"

He shook his head. "None reported—just Portage Foundry."

"Who else buys the same kind of wheel?" I asked

"I'm afraid I can't tell you, offhand. Folly would know." He reached for his phone. "I'll call him."

I held up a hand. "Leave Folly out of this. How about Brandon, your shipping foreman? Would he know?"

"Probably. Shall I get him in here?"

"No, let's go over and see him."

Ackerman looked at his wrist watch, said: "All right, it's still a little while before they quit."

We walked through the plant to the vast shipping room. About a hundred men were busy getting various shapes and sizes of grinding wheels ready for shipment. They were packing the larger wheels in wooden barrels. A man would pick up a wheel from the steel platform beside him, lean over a barrel and lower a wheel into it. Then he would shovel in some sawdust, tamp it down, and put in another wheel. The smaller wheels were packed in sawdust in wooden boxes, and in special cardboard containers.

We found the burly Brandon busily working around a group of barrels into

which he was lowering big, round, flat, gray-colored grinding wheels. As we approached, I heard the sharp click of a wheel as it fell into its place in the barrel. Brandon straightened up when he saw us. He grinned and wiped the sweat from his face. The first two fingers of his right hand were wrapped in blood-soaked bandages.

Ackerman nodded at the partly filled barrels. "Packing the Portage wheels yourself I see, Mike."

"Yeah, Mr. Folly told me to handle this shipment personal."

"A good idea," Ackerman said. "What did you do to your fingers?"

"Caught 'em between a couple of wheels just now. The nurse said I might need a couple of stitches, but I ain't got time now."

"Take care of them," Ackerman said. "Mike, who else do we ship those eighteen-by-two's to, the kind Portage uses?"

Brandon ran a big hand over the stubble on his beefy jaw. "Alexander Steel for one." He nodded at a group of men who were working nearby. "The boys are packing some now."

I walked over to the nearest man. The sides of the barrels around him were stenciled in big black letters: "Alexander Steel Co., Pittsburgh, Pa."

I walked back to where Ackerman and Brandon were standing. "When are those Alexander Steel wheels supposed to go out?" I asked Brandon.

"Tomorrow night, but they're just about ready now."

"Is there enough of them to fill the Portage order?" I asked.

Brandon looked puzzled. "Yeah, but the Portage wheels are all ready, too—or they will be pretty soon."

"Hold up the Portage wheels," I said. "Re-stencil those Alexander Steel barrels. Mark them for Portage, and ship them to Portage. Got it?"

Brandon looked at Ackerman.



Ackerman's face was expressionless. "Okay, Mike," he said. "Do it that way."

**B**RANDON nodded his big head, and walked over and talked briefly to the group of men who were packing the Alexander Steel wheels. Ackerman and I headed back for his office. As we entered the inspection room and started past the row of testing drums, I heard a high protesting screech, a wilder, more uncontrolled sound than the ordinary whine of grinding wheels being spun at the borderline of their endurance.

Ackerman stopped in his tracks, and all over the big room I saw men pause and look up from their work. It reminded me of England during the war when a buzz bomb stopped sputtering somewhere over your head, and you knew it was headed down.

Without thinking, I flung myself to the cement floor. In the same instant the big room was rocked by a terrific explosion. And then there was a vast metallic sound, followed by a clattering roar. Something ripped through the air over my head, and Alan Ackerman rolled on the floor beside me.

His face was a bloody pulp.

The roar of the testers stopped, and men began to shout. I got to my feet, and I saw that the floor all around me was littered with jagged chunks of abrasive,

like sharp pieces of broken stone. Mike Brandon ran in from the shipping room, and I helped him pick up Ackerman and carry him to the first aid room. We laid him on a narrow white bed, and a black-haired nurse began to gently bathe his bloody face.

"Call the doctor," the nurse snapped at Brandon.

The big foreman wheeled and went out the door. I hung around and watched the nurse. "His pulse is weak," she said crisply. "Broken nose, lacerations and contusions on cheeks, chin and lips. Maybe concussion, too—maybe fracture of the skull. The doctor will want sutures." She turned to a glass-enclosed cabinet. "What happened?" she asked me over her shoulder.

"Wheel in the big tester let loose," I told her, "as we were walking past."

She made a quick sucking sound with her lips, and deftly placed instruments on a white metal table.

"I'll get out of your way," I said, and I went out and walked across the plant to the row of testing drums.

Men were gathered around the big drum on the end of the line. The fat operator was chewing tobacco with rapid motions of his jaws and pointing at the heavy door of the drum hanging by one steel hinge.

"All of a sudden she started to screech," he was saying. "And then she

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busted in a million pieces. I told the repair crew yesterday to fix the clamp on that door, but they ain't done it yet."

Gil Folly pushed through the crowd, "All right, boys," he said. "It's still five minutes until quitting time."

The crowd of workmen thinned out, and Folly said to me: "I just came from First Aid. They took Ackerman to the hospital. How'd it happen?"

I shrugged. "He and I were just walking past the tester when the wheel inside broke. I ducked, but some of the flying chunks struck Ackerman in the face. Isn't this steel door supposed to be clamped shut, in case a wheel breaks inside the tester?"

Folly's razor-thin face was grim. "Yes. I knew the bolt was broken, but I thought it had been fixed."

He bent over to examine the testing apparatus, and I walked away. The factory whistle let out a long blast, and men began to hurry past me towards the time clocks. In a couple of minutes the big plant was empty. I headed for Ackerman's office. Behind me a voice said: "Hey, Mr. Gordon."

I turned. Mike Brandon was hurrying towards me. "I had to get back to my crew before they punched out," he said. "How bad is Mr. Ackerman hurt?"

"Bad enough," I told him. "Folly just told me that they took him to the hospital."

He shook his big head. "A hell of a thing. Lucky it didn't kill him on the spot."

"Sounds to me," I said, "like a grinding wheel is a dangerous weapon."

"No," he said seriously, shaking his head, "they ain't—not at all. But you gotta follow the rules."

"I guess you're right," I said. "Don't forget about marking those Alexander Steel wheels for Portage Foundry. I'll be here at four-thirty in the morning to go along with the shipment."

He nodded, and I moved away. When I got back to the shipping room, everyone was gone, and I walked over to the group of barrels marked for shipment to The Alexander Steel Company. Using a pencil, I leaned down and marked a tiny "X" at the bottom of each barrel. Then I walked through the silent factory to Alan Ackerman's office.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Dusting Off a Drunk

DOROTHY DONOVAN was standing inside the door powdering her nose. She looked over a small mirror in her hand and smiled at me. "Just in time to take me down town," she said.

I grinned at her. "Oh, you've been waiting just for me?"

"Sure," she said. "Do you think I'd be here twenty minutes after quitting time for any other reason?"

"Come on," I said, and we went out the door and walked to my coupe in the parking lot. I drove out of the company's drive and nosed into the main street leading to the center of town.

"Where are you staying?" the girl beside me asked.

"Sandusky Hotel."

"Good," she said. "They make delicious cocktails there."

"What is this—a pick-up?" I asked.

She lit a cigarette, inhaled smoke, and gave me a slow, sidelong smile. "Of course," she said.

In a few minutes we were in the center of town. We parked a block from the Sandusky Hotel, and walked back. The bar was cool and dimly lit. The girl sat opposite me in a roomy leather-cushioned booth.

I said to her: "Too bad about Ackerman."

"What's too bad?" she asked.



"His getting hurt. I thought you knew. Just before quitting time. He's in the hospital."

Her brown eyes widened. "You're kidding," she said.

"Hell, no. A wheel broke as he was passing a tester."

"I—I didn't know," she said. "No one told me, and I never get out in the shop. Is he—seriously—?"

"Made a mess of his face," I said.

She lit a cigarette with a hand that shook a little. "I need a drink," she said.

I motioned to the bartender, and he walked over to our booth.

"Whiskey, Luke," she said. "Straight. Water on the side."

"What happened to those delicious cocktails?" I said.

"Later, flatfoot," she said.

I ordered a double Manhattan, and the bartender moved away. "Where do you get that 'flatfoot' stuff?" I asked her.

She lifted her slender shoulders. "Alan—Mr. Ackerman told me all about you," she said carelessly. "I know why you're in town."

"How about Ackerman?" I asked. "Do you really go for him?"

Her shoulders moved again beneath her thin blue dress. "He's my boss."

"Ackerman married?" I asked.

She nodded. "Of course. my friend. He has two kids, a boy and a girl. Cute, too."

"Are you? Married, I mean?"

"Not any more," she said. There was a faint bitter twist to her smooth red lips.

"You know about this Portage Foundry business?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said.

A man entered the bar. He was a tall, good-looking guy in a light blue suit and a tan panama hat. He looked quickly around the bar, and then he moved straight across the room to our booth. He ignored me and smiled down at Dorothy Donovan.

"Hello, baby," Larry Simmons said.

She glanced up at him, and she didn't smile. "Hello, Larry," she said. "What are you doing in town?"

"Looking for you baby," he said. "I did want to see your boss, but they tell me he's in the hospital."

She said: "Larry, this is Mr. Gordon."

Simmons glanced at me for the first time. "We've met," he said shortly. And then he added: "Knocked off work for the day, Gordon?"

I nodded. I didn't say anything.

"And how are you getting along with your work?" he asked. There was the start of a sneer around his thin mouth.

I wanted to slap him. It was plain that he figured if I took his money, I would take anything.

Dorothy Donovan said: "You two seem to be well acquainted."

Simmons laughed. "In a sort of business way," he said. He laid his hat on the table and squeezed into the booth beside the girl. She was forced to move towards the wall to make room for him.

I felt mean. "You might ask permission before you sit down," I said.

He flung an arm around the girl's shoulder. "Donovan and I are old friends, aren't we, baby?"

She moved her shoulders under his arm and looked into her glass. It was then that I realized that Simmons was a little drunk. The bartender came up and stood silently by our booth.

"Scotch," Simmons said. "And soda."

"I'm sorry," the bartender said. "We don't have any scotch."

"No scotch?" Simmons said loudly.

"What kind of a cheap dump is this?"

"Give him rot-gut," I said to the bartender. "He won't know the difference."

Simmons slowly took his arm from around Dorothy Donovan's shoulders. His slickly barbered face was a faint pink color, and his blue eyes narrowed. "Who put a nickel in you?" he said. "Don't you



have some important investigating to do, or perhaps some clues to delve into?" Without taking his gaze from me, he said to the waiting bartender: "All right, dope. Rye—the best you've got."

**T**HE bartender moved silently away. I didn't say anything. Simmons laughed and turned to the girl again, ignoring me. He put his arm around her waist and pulled her towards him. She averted her face and said in a low voice: "Stop it, Larry."

"Leave her alone," I said.

Simmons said a couple of words at me in a too-loud voice. Luke, the bartender, heard him, and he started around the end of the bar with a determined look on his face. But I beat him to it. I flung back my right hand and I slapped Simmons across the mouth. He said some more bad words and struggled to get out of the booth. I got one hand on his coat lapels and jerked him back down, and I hit him again, harder. Blood spurted from his lower lip, and his handsome face went white. His right hand shot beneath his coat, but I was expecting that, and there was a ripping sound as I dragged a little silver-plated automatic from his inside pocket. His fingernails scratched my hand as he snatched for the gun, and I used my fist on him. He thudded down into the booth, and his eyes glazed over.

The bartender appeared beside me. He leaned down and pulled Simmons out of his seat, jammed his hat on his head, and guided him to the door. "Nice work, mister," he said, grinning over his shoulder at me.

Dorothy Donovan said: "Thanks." She smiled, and there was a friendly light in her eyes. I pulled the tiny clip from Simmons's little .22 automatic, saw that it was full of slugs, clicked it back into place, and dropped the gun into my coat pocket. I thought about the five hundred dollars I had of Simmons' money.

"I'd hate to see you get really mad," Dorothy Donovan said.

"He's a type," I told her. "A lot of his kind around. They pick up a few chips, dress fancy, put on a front and think that their dough and devastating personality will get them anything. What do you know about this Simmons?"

She lowered her eyes and took a sip of her drink. "Not too much. He's a salesman for Erie Abrasives. He's been in to see Alan a few times. That's how I met him."

"Why Ackerman?" I asked. "He doesn't do any buying for Buckeye Grinding, does he? What good could he do Simmons?"

She finished her drink and smiled at me. "Why ask me? I'm just Alan's secretary—remember?"

I almost made a crack, but I changed my mind.

A kid poked his head in the doorway. "Mr. Gordon," he yelled.

I motioned to him. "Here, son."

He came up to our booth. "Telephone, sir."

I said, "Excuse me," to Dorothy Donovan and followed the kid out to the lobby. He pointed to a phone on the end of the clerk's desk. I flipped the kid a quarter and picked up the phone.

A man's voice said: "Gordon?"

"Yes."

"This is Koller, Bill Koller, purchasing agent for The Portage Foundry. I met you this afternoon. Remember?"

"Sure," I said.

"Gordon, I've been thinking about what Folley said—about you being a private detective working on their breakage problem—and I wondered if you'd uncovered anything yet."

"Not much," I said, "but I think I can guarantee that the shipment of grinding wheels going to you tomorrow morning will be O.K."

"I hope you're right, Gordon. We've



used Buckeye wheels for a good many years, and I'd hate to change now. But after all—a man injured seriously, and a man killed by Buckeye wheels, well, you can see my position—?”

“Sure,” I said.

“Well, Gordon, I'm glad to hear you say that you think you have the trouble licked. Do you mind telling me what was causing it? Naturally, I'm interested . . .”

“I'm afraid I can't tell you right now,” I told him. “Maybe tomorrow. I'm coming along with the shipment, and if the wheels are all right, maybe I can tell you then. By the way, I appreciate the way you went to bat for us with McIntyre this afternoon.”

“That's all right,” he said. “Mac's a good man, but he holds a grudge. He's got it in for Folly.”

“So I gathered,” I said. “Any truth in it?”

“Well, I'd hate to say, Gordon. After all, it's none of my business. But I'm interested in how you make out down there. Call me, will you, if you uncover anything important?”

“All right,” I said, and hung up.

I went back to the bar. Dorothy Donovan was gone. Beneath her empty glass was a note penciled on a paper napkin.

*Galahad: Sorry to run out on you, but I just remembered a previous engagement. Thanks for the drinks—and everything.*

## CHAPTER SIX

### Shot in the Dark

I HAD dinner in the grille, went up to my room and telephoned my secretary, Taffy Roberts, at her apartment in Cleveland.

“Taffy,” I said, “anything new at the office today?”

“Well,” she replied, “you've got two jobs waiting for you when you get back.

I collected a deposit on both of them. That's about all. How are you making out down there in the sticks?”

“Not very good. I need your expert assistance. I want you to check on some people for me. Find out all you can about them. Call the police, or anyone you have to, but have as much information as possible ready for me by midnight tonight. I'll call you then to see what you've found out. First, take these names down.”

I gave them to her slowly. “Alan Ackerman, Miss Dorothy Donovan, Gilbert Folly, George McIntyre, William Koller, Lawrence Simmons, and Michael Brandon.”

Then I went back through the list and gave Taffy all the information I could about each person. When I finished, I said: “Got it?”

“Yep,” Taffy said. “You know, I had a date tonight, but The American Detective Agency comes first—first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of its employees. Anything else?”

“No. Ask your date up. It'll be a good excuse for you to spend a cozy evening with him.”

“Who wants a cozy evening?” she asked, and hung up.

I put on a shoulder clip, checked my .38, stuck a small flat flashlight in my hip pocket, and went down to the street. It was dark, but the summer sky over the town was still gray with the last light of the day. A cool, soft breeze had sprung up, and as I walked to my car I thought that it was a fine night for almost anything but what I had to do.

I went to the hospital first. There was a big “No Visitors” sign on Alan Ackerman's door, but I peeked in anyway. A pleasant-faced black-haired girl in an attractive print dress was standing by the bed. Ackerman lay very still, and his face and head were covered with bandages. Only his mouth and eyes were exposed.



His eyes turned towards me, and the girl looked around.

Ackerman said: "Hello, Gordon." His voice sounded muffled and thick.

I stepped into the room.

Ackerman said weakly: "My wife, Gordon."

I nodded, said, "Pleased, Mrs. Ackerman," and to the man on the bed: "Sorry to bother you, but I wanted to ask one question."

"He's not supposed to talk," Mrs. Ackerman said. "There—there is a slight concussion—"

Ackerman held up a limp hand. "What, Gordon?"

"Do you have any ideas how it happened—or why?"

He moved his head on the pillow. "Damned wheel broke—that's all."

"Did you know that the bolt on the testing drum was faulty?"

"No, didn't know that."

Mrs. Ackerman said to me: "Please."

"Sorry," I said, and I tip-toed out.

I said to myself: *That could be me. Maybe it was supposed to be me, and the wheel got Ackerman instead.*

I drove out to the plant of the Buckeye Grinding Company, and I parked outside the main gate, which was closed and locked. I walked up to the small white-painted guard house and looked in the door. I showed the guard my badge. "Okay if I go in the plant for a while?"

He checked the number of my badge against a thumb-tacked notice on the wall. "All right, Mr. Gordon," he said. "I'll check you in at eight-forty-five."

The plant was silent and dark, with only an occasional light burning in doorways and far dim alcoves. I moved silently through the vast finishing room. I came to the wide archway leading into the testing room, and I moved slowly, listening. The rows of round testing drums loomed darkly, with a tangled mass of belts and pulleys in the shadows above

them. The drums were arranged along a wall, and the connecting belts and drive shafts disappeared into openings cut in the wall, close to the high ceiling. I heard a slight metallic sound, and I saw a movement in the shadows by the big tester where Ackerman had been struck by the flying chunks of the speed-shattered wheel.

I moved closer. I saw the form of a man standing by the dials on the panel behind the testing drum. He held a small flashlight in his hand and he was shining the beam on the row of speed indicators. I stepped up behind him and flicked on my own light.

The man whirled.

"Take it easy, bub," I said.

GIL FOLLY laughed nervously. "My God, Gordon, but you gave me a scare." He flicked off his light, and I lowered the beam of my own light to the cement floor.

"Rather hard to see, isn't it?" I asked. "Why didn't you turn on the overhead lights?"

"No use advertising it," he said. "I've been thinking about poor Alan, and I came out here tonight to do a little checking on this tester when there was nobody around to stick their nose in."

"Sorry to interrupt," I said.

"Oh, I don't mean you," he said hastily. "I'm glad you came out here. This place is getting on my nerves. That wheel, breaking like that—it's uncanny, not natural. I can't find anything wrong with the tester."

"This would be a dandy time for you to adjust anything that *was* wrong with it," I said, watching him.

For a couple of seconds he didn't say anything. Then he said: "Gordon, you don't think that I tampered with this tester to make the wheel break just when you and Ackerman were walking past it?"

"Something caused that wheel to break



when it did," I said. "It's tough that Ackerman got hurt, but it might have been me. I don't like that."

Folly sighed, turned and flicked his light on the testing dials. They looked a lot like over-sized automobile speedometers. Beside the dials were two buttons, one red and one black, marked "On" and "Off."

On this particular type tester," Folly said, "the speed is automatically set at 14,000 surface feet per minute, the standard testing speed of the wheel which broke. But the testing chart indicates that the wheel which broke this afternoon was doing close to 20,000—a speed that will shatter almost any grinding wheel into little chunks."

"How about the fat guy who runs this tester?" I asked.

Folly shook his head. "Nothing there. He couldn't change the speed if he wanted to. It's set—automatic—like a governor on a car."

"The clamp on the door was broken," I said.

He shook his head again. "Of course, the door should have been clamped securely shut, but ordinarily it wouldn't make any difference. A wheel breaking at standard testing speed would fly in the direction the wheel was running, around the inside rim of the drum—not outward. The fact that this wheel flew outward, bursting open the door, indicates the terrific speed to which it was suddenly subjected."

"What's behind the wall back of the testers?" I asked.

"Just a kind of a partition. It separates this room from the finishing department."

"Let's take a look," I said. I walked to the end of the wall, opened a door and flashed my light inside. Folly stood behind me. As he had said, it was just a narrow hallway filled with all sorts of junk. The drive shafts and belts ran overhead. Midway down the partition a

wooden lever hung downward from the ceiling. I walked to it and flashed my light upwards. The lever was bolted to the main drive shaft, and by standing on tip-toe I could touch the end of it with my fingers. On the wood, close to the tip, were two faint brown stains.

"What's this lever for?" I asked Folly.

"Throw-out clutch," he said, "for the overhead drive shaft. The repair crew uses it once in a while when they put on new belts and things like that."

"I'm no mechanic," I said, "but it seems to me that if this lever were pulled, it would throw the testing drums out of control and cause the wheel on the spindle to spin at terrific speed, regardless of where the speed dials are set. Right?"

"Just a minute," Folly said. "We may as well have some decent light." He turned and went out the open door at the end of the narrow partition.

I flashed my light beyond the lever and peered at the maze of pulley, gears and greasy belts.

From outside the partition there came a sharp report. A bullet zipped past my ear. I flopped to the floor, flicked off my light, and waited in the dark silence.

There was a momentary flicker as the fluorescent lights outside in the testing room came on. I got my gun in my hand and stood up, facing the entrance. I heard a pounding of feet on cement, and Folly poked his head in at me.

"What—what happened?" he asked. "I was over by the far wall, turning on the lights. It sounded exactly like a gunshot—"

I moved towards him. "It was a gunshot, my friend. Damn near got me, too. You wouldn't, by any chance, be carrying a rod?"

He backed up. "Dammit, Gordon. What's going on? You don't think—?"

I felt him over. If he had been lugging any hardware, he had ditched it. "Folly," I said wearily, "you're all I've got so far.



I want you to conduct me around this factory, and I want you to move easy."

"Dammit," he said, "I don't know anything about this."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Call the Cops

THE guard who had been on the main gate came running across the shipping room. He stopped, panting. "Sounded like a shot," he said.

"Correct," I told him. "Anybody in or out of the gate tonight—besides Folly and me?"

"Miss Donovan," he said. "About an hour ago. She came in."

"Anybody else?"

He shook his head.

"How many guards on duty at night?"

"Just me, right now," he said. "I'm on from seven to eleven, at the main gate. Gus makes the rounds on the same trick. He's the night watchman inside the plant."

"Does he punch a clock?" I asked.

"Yes. Every hour, at different stations."

"Where would he be about now?"

The guard hauled out a watch and looked at it. "It's nine twenty. He's due at the press room station at nine-thirty."

"All right," I said. "Get back on the gate. Don't let anybody else in tonight until I see you."

"Yes, sir," he said, and he moved away.

I said to Folly: "Press room."

We walked for about three minutes before we came to a vast room filled with the shadowy bulks of huge hydraulic presses. Folly stopped beside a doorway. A small steel box was bolted into the brick wall. A brass key on the end of a steel chain dangled from the box.

"He hasn't punched this station yet," Folly said.

I looked at my wrist watch. It was nine-twenty-six. "We wait," I said.

The minutes ticked by. Folly began to walk around in a circle. Suddenly, he turned towards me. "This is ridiculous. That shot came from the finishing room."

"That's right," I said. "But whoever it was won't be there any more." I looked at my watch again. Nine-thirty-one. "Where's the stop the watchman is supposed to make before this one?"

Folly thought a minute. "Laboratory, I think," he said.

"Let's go," I said.

Folly opened a door and we stepped out into the soft dark night. We walked on gravel through the darkness, and then I saw a long building looming up ahead of us. Folly said, "Lab," and he opened a door. We entered and I stood still while he switched on lights. I saw a gleaming array of bottles, test tubes, microscopes, huge sieves and various instruments. A lettered sign on the frosted glass of a door to my left read: *G. A. Folly. Private.*

Folly nodded towards a dark alcove opening off the laboratory. "The time clock station is there," he said.

I moved over to the alcove. It was very dark, and Folly pressed a wall switch.

We both saw the man's body at the same time. He was lying on his face beneath the dangling key-chain of the open steel box of the punch station. He was an old man, short and fat, with a gray fringe of hair around a bald head. A ring of keys lay on the floor beside him. There was an ugly wound on the back of his head. A little blood had dripped to the floor.

Folly knelt down, touched the man's shoulder. "Gus—" he said.

"Don't touch him!" I snapped, and I pushed Folly back. I leaned over the form of the old watchman. "He's dead," I said. "Not long—within the last half hour."

Folly muttered: "Did he fall?"



I stood up. "Hell, no. Somebody smacked him from behind. Is there a phone in here?"

"Yes, but it's not connected after the switchboard closes. There's a direct line in Ackerman's office, and in the guard house."

"Come on," I said. "This is a job for the cops."

Folly moved like a man in a daze. I followed him back through the plant to Ackerman's office. As we approached it from down the hall, I saw that there was a light inside. I opened the door, said, "Hey," and the sudden clatter of a typewriter began from the office adjoining. I walked back, opened the door. Folly followed me.

Dorothy Donovan looked up from her typewriter. She was still wearing the same blue dress. "Oh, hello," she said smiling.

"I thought you had a date," I said.

"I did—with a typewriter. I didn't get finished this afternoon, and Alan wanted some letters to go out today, and so I came back to do them. I thought I'd mail them at the post office when I go home."

"Leave them," I said, "and get out of here. There's somebody—or something loose in this plant tonight. We found Gus, the night watchman in the laboratory—murdered."

Her face went pale, and she dropped her hands to her lap. "Murdered? How?

Who? What could anyone possibly have against Gus?"

"I don't know," I said. "How did you get out here?"

"I came in a taxi. I—"

"Go home in one. Now."

"All right," she said, a little uncertainly. "If you think it best—"

As soon as she was gone, I picked up the phone on Ackerman's desk and called the Police Department. "This is Gordon," I said, "of the American Detective Agency, out of Cleveland. I'm out here at the plant of the Buckeye Grinding Company. A man has just been murdered—yes, murdered. Get out here right away. And another thing—Miss Dorothy Donovan—about twenty-five, five foot four, a hundred and ten or fifteen pounds, light blue dress, no stockings, white sandals—will be leaving here in about five minutes, or as soon as she can get a taxi. Will you put a man on her tail, and keep him there, until I tell you to stop? I'll check with you, later."

The cop on the phone grunted something about checking with the Chief and hung up.

I walked back to the adjoining office and looked at the single sheet of paper in Dorothy Donovan's typewriter. It was a Buckeye Grinding letterhead, and at the top she had typed: *Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party.*





I REPLACED the cover on the typewriter and went back into Ackerman's office. I said to Folly: "Looks like you're in the clear on this. Want to help?"

"Certainly," he said. "If you think you can trust me." There was a bitter edge to his voice.

"Sorry," I said, "but in my business you have to check all the angles." I reached into my pocket and took out the little silver-plated .22 I had taken from Larry Simmons. "Here. It's not much of a weapon, but it will be some protection—in case you need it. Let's take a swing around the fence, on the inside. I'll meet you at the rear of the plant."

He put the gun in his pocket and got to his feet. His face was expressionless. "All right," he said. "I'll take the north side, you take the south. I'll meet you by the west fence, near the railroad siding."

"All right," I said. "You got a flashlight?"

"I can get one from the guard."

"Good. But before you start shooting, blink the light twice. If it's me, I'll answer with three blinks."

We left the office and went out to the guardhouse. Dorothy Donovan was standing inside, waiting for her taxi. The guard gave Folly a flashlight. I walked towards the south side of the plant. Folly moved in the opposite direction.

I cut across the grass in front of the plant, passed the white-pillared main entrance-way, and turned the corner. The steel fence was about twenty feet from this section of the building, and it rose to a height of eight feet, with a triple strand of barbed wire on top. The fence was made of heavy, twisted wire, and was supported at intervals by sturdy steel poles. There were lights on top of the fence, fifty or sixty yards apart, but between the lights the shadows were deep, and I used my flashlight frequently.

I came to a wooden outbuilding, a storage shed, I figured, and I stopped in its

shadow. I watched the dark windows of the plant.

Inside the plant, beyond the dark windows, I saw a light glimmer and go out. I watched and waited. The light reappeared at another window, disappeared again. I thought: *If it's Folly, he's off his beat.*

I moved slowly along the wall of the long wooden building, keeping abreast of the flicker of light as it moved past the factory windows. I reached the corner of the shed, and I stopped. I could no longer see the light, and the factory was dark and silent. Directly opposite me was what appeared to be the factory boiler room.

I heard a faint sound, like a door closing softly, and I saw a sudden, furtive movement beside the boiler room door. I slipped my gun from its clip and flattened myself against the wall of the shed.

"All right," I said. "Come out of there." My voice was shockingly loud in the stillness.

A gun spat at me from the shadows, and I saw the bright stab of flame. A slug smacked the wall of the building beside me, and I opened up with my .38. I heard a kind of a scrambling sound, and a door slammed. I knew I had missed. I ran across the open space to the wall of the factory, and I slid along the wall to the boiler room door. My hand found the metal latch on the door, and I opened it, stepped quickly inside.

The place was filled with the slow hiss of steam, and the clean smell of oil and metal. A dim bulb burned over a bank of gauges and bright brass fittings. Beneath the light stood a thin little man in overalls and a striped peaked cap, like locomotive engineers wear. His narrow little face was covered with grease, and he held a long-snouted oil can in one hand.

"What's—what's a-going on here?" he quavered.

"Quick, pop," I said. "Did a man just run in here?"



"I—I don't know, mister. I was just checking the water tubes, and I heard sounds like a car a-back-firing, and I heard a door slam, but I was back by number two stoker, and I don't see very good."

"All right," I said, and I stepped in quickly and slapped the old guy's overalls. He stared at me open-mouthed. "No offense, pop. I'm just a suspicious so-and-so." I turned and went out the door leading from the boiler room into the factory.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Tell-Tale Threads

THIS section of the plant was apparently devoted mostly to storage. I came to an open space, and I saw a cement ramp leading up to an open box car sitting on a siding outside. I flashed my light into the car, saw that it was empty, and I climbed down to the track between the car and the building. I found that there was a string of box cars on this siding, and I worked my way silently along them, hugging the building. When I came to the last car I saw that I was at the western extreme of the plant boundary. A light on the fence fifty yards away showed me that there was open countryside beyond.

I moved over to the fence and walked along it until I reached the darkest section. I turned on my flashlight and I walked about ten feet before I found what I was looking for. Beside a steel pole a gaping hole had been cut into the twisted wire of the fence. I examined the edges of the cut wire. Clinging to the sharp points were several threads of cloth, gray and white, the kind of threads that go into a gray tweed suit. I plucked the threads from the wire, and put them in my pocket. Then I walked back to the shadow of the box cars.

I waited in the darkness maybe five minutes, but I didn't see any sign of Folly. I moved back along the fence to the shed opposite the boiler room. I flashed the light on the wooden wall at the spot where I had been standing. The bullet was buried deep, and it took me several minutes to dig it out with my pocket knife. When I had the pellet in my fingers, I knew that it had been fired from a small caliber gun. It was flattened and out of shape, but I guessed it to be a .22.

I started back for the front of the plant, and as I walked through the darkness, I thought: *Sure, you dumb yokel, you had him and you let him go. When you going to stop trusting people?*

When I arrived at the main guard house, I found a couple of cops chewing their fingernails. Dorothy Donovan was gone. The guard looked relieved when he saw me. "Mr. Gordon," he said, "these men tell me that you called about—about a murder. I don't—"

"Sorry," I broke in. "I thought I'd be on hand before they got here."

One of the cops said: "I'm Sergeant Nelson, and this is Patrolman Greenway."

I shook hands with both of them.

"Have you got a man watching Miss Donovan?" I asked Nelson.

"Yes, we have," he said. "She was just getting into a taxi as we came up. Now, where is the body?"

"Come on," I said.

They followed me out to the laboratory, and I went in ahead of them. I switched on the lights, and moved over to the alcove. But even before I turned on the light there, I began to sweat.

The body of the night watchman was gone.

Even the blood on the floor had been cleaned up. Gus, the watchman, had disappeared, keys and all. I stood and stared at the floor like a half-wit, and the two



cops exchanged glances indicating they doubted my story.

"Well, fellas," I said, "he was here a half hour ago. Do either of you know Gil Folly?"

Sergeant Nelson said: "I know Mr. Folly."

"He was with me when we found the body. And now Folly has disappeared. I told them what had happened during the evening.

When I had finished, Nelson said: "Very interesting. And what do you want the police to do, Mr. Gordon?"

"Look over the grounds," I said, "and keep a couple of men here the rest of the night. There's a hole cut in the southwest side of the fence, down by the railroad siding. Just kind of stick around and see that nothing else happens."

He looked doubtful, but agreed to do as I suggested. On the way back to the guardhouse, I said: "You got a guy in the jug name of Larry Simmons?"

"We did have, earlier in the evening," he replied. "Disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace. He paid his fine, and we released him."

"How long ago?" I asked.

"Oh, a couple of hours. Right after I came on duty."

"You should have kept him," I said.

He said, "What?" but we had reached the main gate and I got into my car. I said, "Never mind," and drove away.

It was a quarter after ten when I entered the side entrance of the Sandusky Hotel. I skipped the elevator and climbed two flights of stairs to my room. I shaved, showered, and got into pajamas. Then I took a bottle of bourbon out of my bag, poured a water glass a quarter full, added water from a tap in the bath room, and settled down to wait until time to call Taffy. The whiskey was half finished when somebody knocked on my door. I got up and opened it. Larry Simmons stepped inside.

HE HAD lost a lot of his slick appearance. His well-tailored blue suit was wrinkled, and there was a black smear on the crown of his panama. I closed the door behind him, and he stood facing me. His eyes shifted away from mine.

"Gordon," he said, looking at the wall behind me, "I'm sorry about this afternoon—in the bar. I guess I made a fool of myself."

"Yes," I said, "you did. And pulling that rod wasn't good."

"I was angry," he said. "I—I didn't intend to use it. I travel alone a lot, and I carry it with me. I have a permit for it."

He looked at the tips of his fancy brown and white shoes. About our arrangement—I want to call it off."

"A deal's a deal," I said.

He flushed and looked directly at me for the first time. "But I've changed my mind. I—I've decided that it's a rather underhanded trick—and, well, I don't want to do it. Just forget about it. If you can do anything for Ackerman—about the wheel breakage, I mean—go ahead."

"Getting a little deep for you?" I asked.

He waved a hand impatiently. "No, nothing like that. I just want to call it off. Give me my five hundred dollars, and I won't bother you any more."

"Where have you been since they let you out of jail?" I asked.

He was getting mad, and trying not to show it. "Downstairs in the lobby, waiting for you."

I moved to the telephone, picked it up. "This is Gordon," I said to the clerk. "Room 202. Was there a big guy parked in the lobby for the last two hours? Light blue suit, panama hat, brown and white shoes, thinks he looks like Cary Grant, only his nose is too big?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Gordon," the clerk said. "As a matter of fact he asked for your room number when he first came in.



I rang your room, but you were out."

"Thanks," I said, and hung up. Simmons could have paid off the clerk, but I couldn't check every little angle.

Simmons said: "If you'll just let me have the money—"

"Tell me something," I said. "What scared you off?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said stiffly. "I just changed my mind, and I want my five hundred dollars."

"What five hundred dollars?" I asked. I moved towards the chair where my gun hung in its clip.

He opened his mouth, but he didn't say anything. His gaze flicked quickly around the room, and suddenly he wheeled for the door.

"Hold it!" I snapped.

He kept on moving, and I made the chair in one leap. I swung with my gun in my hand. Simmons was half out of the door when I squeezed the trigger. The slug caught him in the back of his left leg, just above the knee. He collapsed like a bag of hammers. I jumped across the room, dragged him inside, closed and locked the door. Then I called the police station.

Simmons lay on the floor, moaning a little, and pretty soon the cops came. I went through a routine with them, and they finally took Simmons away.

I still had almost an hour to wait before I called Sandy Hollis. Things were becoming a little complicated, and I had a feeling that somewhere along the line I had missed the boat. By getting the Portage Foundry business, Simmons had stood to gain a tidy sum in commissions. But he couldn't do it alone—not the way he planned to get the business. Somebody was doing the dirty work, somebody he was paying, or had promised to pay if the deal went through. The fact that Simmons had tried to buy me off proved that the fault of the wheels was not technical—

at least, not too technical, he figured, for a dumb cluck like me to stumble on to. That fact was encouraging, and I thought it all over in my mind, but I didn't get any place.

## CHAPTER NINE

### A Lethal Load

AT MIDNIGHT I called Taffy. She answered immediately.

"I hope I've got what you need, Jim. It cost me a date, and the agency a big telephone bill. Ready?"

"Go ahead," I said.

"Here it is," Sandy said. "All of it, just the way I wrote it down. First, comes Lawrence Simmons, salesman. About twenty-nine, divorced, no children, no police record; Alan Ackerman, executive, thirty-eight, married, two children, no police record, except two traffic violations. Former machinists supply salesman from St. Louis. Employed ten years by the Buckeye Grinding Company; Miss Dorothy Donovan, secretary to Mr. Ackerman. Divorced, no children, no police record, twenty-five years old—Jim, are you sure this is all strictly business?"

"Strictly," I said. "Go on."

Sandy continued. "Gilbert Folly, ceramic engineer, formerly with the Erie Abrasives Company, now working for Buckeye Grinding. Single, about forty-five. Arrested in Elyria, Ohio, ten years ago. Charge: appropriating confidential company formulas. Not convicted; Michael Brandon, foreman, fifty-two years old, married, one married daughter. Arrested last year for drunkenness and disorderly conduct, no other police police record; George McIntyre, single, forty-eight, superintendent at the Portage Foundry Company, formerly with Eerie Abrasives. Incidentally, he was a witness for the prosecution against Gilbert Folly, but his testimony didn't hold up in court. . . .



"Are you still listening to me, Jim?"

"Sure," I said. "Who's next?"

"William Koller, purchasing agent, Portage Foundry, married, been with the company about twenty years. Picked up last November in a police raid on a gambling house outside Toledo, no other record. Does any of this stuff help?"

"No," I said, "but you did a nice job."

"I knew I should have kept that date," Taffy said. "When are you coming home?"

"Tomorrow, I hope. I'll call you if I can't make it."

"All right," Taffy said. "Watch yourself—hey, I forgot something."

"What?"

"Dorothy Donovan is the ex-wife of the salesman, Lawrence Simmons—the local Chief of Police down there volunteered that information."

"That helps," I said. "Is there anything else you forgot?"

"Nope, I had that in shorthand on the back of my pad here."

We talked a little longer, and I hung up. I figured I could catch about four hours sleep before I had to get going again. . . .

I awoke at four o'clock, had wanted to be awake at four. The rain had stopped, and a gray light filled the room. There was no sound from the street below my windows, and the hotel was silent. I dressed, strapped on my .38, and went down to the street.

It was twenty-five minutes after four when I pulled up at the main gate of the Buckeye Grinding Company. I went through the badge mumbo-jumbo with the guard on duty.

"Are the cops still here?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "Nope. They been here off and on all night, but the last of them left an hour ago."

"Did they find anything?"

He gave me a sidelong smirk. "Not a thing."

I went into the plant and walked straight to the shipping room. Mike Brandon was already directing the loading of the barrels of wheels into a truck parked in the loading pit. Two men were doing the loading. As I approached, I heard Brandon say: "Cheer up, boys. You get time and a half for this."

One of the men laughed, and Brandon grinned and spat on the floor. I walked up to him. "You're on the job early, Mike."

He turned. "Good morning, Mr. Gordon. It is kinda early, but I wanted to be sure the stuff was loaded by four-thirty, like you said. We're just about ready to roll. The wheels ought to be in Toledo by six."

"That's fine," I said.

I strolled over to the truck and looked inside. There were eight barrels of wheels already loaded, and the two men were rolling more up the ramp. It was dark inside the truck, and I couldn't make out the lettering on the barrels. I struck a match, and I saw that the clean white wood was neatly stenciled: *Portage Foundry Co., Toledo, Ohio.*

The Alexander Steel stencil had been blotted out, as I had directed. I glanced at the bottom of the nearest barrel, but I couldn't see the tiny "X" I had made in pencil. I heaved on the barrel and rolled it to the edge of the truck where the light was better. I looked all around the rim, but there was no sign of my identifying mark.

I CALLED to Brandon: "Mike, you'll have to change this load." He came hurrying up, asking what was the trouble. I said: "These aren't the wheels I told you to ship."

He looked bewildered. "Why, yes, they are. What's wrong?"

I walked over to a group of barrels beside the loading ramp. They were stenciled *Portage Foundry*, all right, and the



original stencil had been blotted out. I examined the bottom of the nearest barrel, and I saw my small penciled: X. I walked around the group of barrels, and my mark was on all of them.

"Mike," I said, pointing, "these are the wheels which are supposed to go."

He ran a hand over his big jaw. "Dammit," he said, "I knew I shoulda checked with you. But Mr. Folly called me right after supper last night and said that you had told him to tell me that you had decided to ship the original Portage Foundry wheels after all. We had already changed the stencils, like you said, and so we changed 'em back again."

"I see," I said. "But you should have asked me about it."

"Well, it's a mistake easy fixed," he said. He turned and shouted at the two workmen. "Take 'em out again, boys." He pointed at the barrels beside us. "This bunch is supposed to go instead."

It took them about twenty minutes to make the transfer. When the second group of barrels were loaded, one of the men wiped his face with a red handkerchief and said: "Well, I'll guess we're ready to roll."

"You driving the truck?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Let's go," I said. "Come on, Mike."

Brandon looked startled. "Hell, I can't go—"

"Sure," I said. "It's all right. I'll fix it with Ackerman. I want somebody along who knows something about grinding wheels."

"Sure, I'll go along, if you want me," he said.

Brandon and the driver got into the cab of the truck, and I sat on the outside of the wide seat. We pulled out of the loading pit and circled around the plant to the main gate. The guard waved to us as we rolled past.

Once we were on the highway, Brandon began to doze. We hit the early morning

traffic in Toledo around six o'clock, and pulled up at the Portage Foundry at twenty after. Brandon jerked up his head and rubbed his eyes. A uniformed guard strolled out to the truck, and our driver said: "Load of wheels from Buckeye Grinding."

The guard swung open a wide steel gate and motioned us to the far side of the big plant. We wheeled in a wide half circle and backed neatly and quickly into a long down-slanting cement ramp. A man was standing on the loading platform, and as I climbed down out of the cab of the truck I saw that it was Koller, the purchasing agent.

He smiled at me. "Hello, Gordon. This is what I call service. Aren't you a pretty high-priced trucker?"

I shook hands with him. He was wearing a gray gabardine suit, and his eyes looked sleepy. "A hell of a time to get out of bed," he said. "Especially since we had a little party at the house last night. But I wanted to be sure these wheels were tested this time before we put them on production."

"I don't blame you," I said. "One man killed is plenty. That's why I came along—I wanted to watch the test runs."

"Good," he said. "I sure hope this batch is okay. The Old Man is just about fed up, but as I said on the phone last night I hate to cut Buckeye off."

"Sure," I said. "I understand."

## CHAPTER TEN

### *Blood Will Tell*

**B**RANDON and the truck driver slammed down the end-gate and began to roll barrels out of the truck. Two workmen appeared from inside the plant and began to haul the barrels away with hand trucks. A big, beefy man strolled out to the platform. It was George McIntyre. He was smoking a pipe,



and he was wearing the same shabby gray tweed suit he had worn the day before.

"Hello, Gordon," he said. "I see you're in at the kill."

"I hope not," I said. "I've got a hunch that these wheels are okay."

"Not if G. A. Folly had anything to do with making them," McIntyre said.

Koller grinned at me and winked. "Don't mind Mac," he said. "He's a natural-born pessimist."

We walked into the plant and Koller led us through a maze of machinery to a grinder bolted to the cement floor in a corner of a big room filled with other grinders. The two Portage Foundry workmen were already breaking open the barrels and stacking the wheels beside the machine. Brandon and the truck driver came up with a hand truck loaded with two barrels.

"That's the load," Brandon said.

"Thanks, Mike," I said. "Stick around."

He yawned, said, "All right," stuck his little finger and thumb awkwardly into a paper of chewing tobacco, while the bandaged first two fingers stuck out at an odd angle.

"How're the fingers coming?" I asked.

He thrust a chew of tobacco the size of an egg into his mouth. "Doc says he won't have to cut 'em off," he said.

The truck driver guffawed loudly.

The two Portage Foundry men lifted one of the big grinding wheels to the spindle of the grinding machine and bolted it on. Then they turned and looked at Koller.

Koller said: "All right, boys. Start her up." He moved backwards a little.

The rest of us moved backwards too, and we stood at a safe distance behind the grinder. One of the two men beside the machine pressed a button, and both of them sprang backwards. The wheel began to revolve, slowly at first, and then faster and faster until it was a gray blur on the

spindle. There was a high, rising humming sound.

"Look out!" McIntyre shouted.

But nothing happened. The grinding wheel continued to run smoothly.

Koller shouted at one of the men: "What's it turning up?"

"Ten thousand," the man shouted back, and Koller nodded in satisfaction.

McIntyre edged backwards a few feet more. "There's bound to be a good apple in a barrel of rotten ones," I heard him say. "But watch out now."

Instinctively, we all moved backwards a little, including Koller. The grinder started again. Nothing happened. The wheel ran like a schoolboy's top. There was no shattering crash, no zing of deadly chunks of broken abrasive.

They ran another wheel, and another, until they finally lifted the last wheel of the shipment off the spindle of the grinder.

Mike Brandon was chewing hard on his tobacco and grinning broadly. "There you are," he said. "All of 'em perfect."

McIntyre said: "I'll be damned."

Koller said to the two grinding machine operators: "That'll be all for now, boys. Thanks."

As the man moved away, I said to Koller: "Does Buckeye Grinding still have your business?"

"They sure do," he said smiling. "There's nothing wrong with those wheels. The old man will be glad to hear about this. We get better production from Buckeye wheels than any other kind—but that breakage had us worried."

"Not to mention the death of Nick Pagano," I said.

He nodded gravely. "Yes, that was too bad."

I had followed this trail too long, and I was tired, and I didn't want to take any more chances. I sighed, and I slid my .38 from its clip beneath my left arm.

"Too bad, hell," I said. "It was murder."



**K**OLLER looked blankly at the gun in my hand, and Brandon's jaws suddenly stopped their chewing motion. McIntyre, standing at my right, took two quick steps away from me, like a colt shying at a dog. A gun speaks a language all its own, and my gun shocked all of them there into temporary silence.

Koller spoke first. "Stop kidding, Gordon—and put that cannon away. It makes me nervous."

But I was watching Brandon. There was a cunning look in his little pale eyes, and a stubborn slant to his heavy jaw. I figured if I was going to have trouble, it would come from Brandon.

"Koller," I said, "you and Mike Brandon had a nice little racket worked up, but you won't collect. Simmons is out of the deal, and he won't pay off. He got scared, and I don't blame him. He was willing to cut you both in if the business got switched from Buckeye Grinding to his company, Erie Abrasives, but he didn't count on lives being lost to get it. You talked Brandon into spoiling the wheels before they left Buckeye Grinding's plant. You knew that a few shipments of bad wheels would justify you in the eyes of your boss into giving the business to Erie Abrasives, and you could collect a nice little monthly cut from Simmons' commissions. So you get Brandon in on the deal, and promise him a share of the take if he would see to it that Buckeye grinding

wheels were delivered to you in a faulty condition.

Brandon took care of that in fine shape. Instead of placing the wheels carefully in the barrels after they were tested, he dropped them, flat, one on top of the other. He was smart enough to know that it doesn't take a very high drop—eight to ten inches—to break down the cementing agents in a grinding wheel and cause it to shatter in operation. And no cracks or flaws will show on the surface. Folly told me that yesterday morning, and I remembered it in the afternoon when I saw Brandon personally packing your wheels, and I heard the wheels clicking together as he dropped them.

The other men packing were lowering the wheels in gently, between layers of sawdust. So I switched the wheels on this shipment. Brandon switched them back, but I caught him at it, and he tried to put the blame on Folly. The wheels you just tested were supposed to go to someone else, and consequently they are perfect. Too bad, Koller."

He just stared at me, his face slowly reddening.

Mike Brandon spoke: "You're out of your head. You can't prove anything like that."

"The hell I can't," I said. "You tried to kill me with that wheel in the big tester yesterday afternoon. Right after I ordered the shipment switched, you suspected that



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I was on your tail, and so you run and plant yourself in the partition behind the testers and when Ackerman and myself walk past you grab the overhead lever, throw the drive shaft out of control, and the wheel in the tester ran faster than its testing speed—and shattered, as you knew it would.

"You knew that the clamp on the testing drum was broken, and you figured that the force of the wheel breaking inside would force the door open. It did, only I ducked in time, and you got Ackerman instead. And another thing—when you told me this morning that Folly had called you about the shipment last night, I knew you were lying—because Folly had no way of knowing about it."

Brandon laughed loudly, and spat tobacco juice to the floor. "What a story. You better sober up. You still can't prove any of it—even if it was so."

"There was blood on that lever," I said softly. "Blood from the bandages on your fingers. Your blood. That's as good as fingerprints."

Brandon turned to Koller. "How about this, Mr. Koller? You going to let him talk like that?"

"Gordon," Koller said, "this is ridiculous. Of all the fantastic—"

"Where are those tweed pants you had on yesterday?" I asked. I was beginning to sweat. It wasn't working out.

Koller looked down at his gray gabardine suit, and back at me. There was a puzzled expression on his face. "What's that got to do with it?" He nodded at McIntyre. "Mac's wearing a tweed suit—not me."

McIntyre swung towards Koller. "Damn you—"

I held up my left hand. "Take it easy. You both were wearing gray tweed yesterday. McIntyre is wearing gray tweed today. You're not, Koller. Do you want to know why? Because you tore your pants crawling through the hole in the

fence at the Buckeye plant last night. The threads I found on the wire will exactly match the torn places in your pants. That's why you changed clothes today. And that's why I knew McIntyre was in the clear—he was still wearing the same suit today that he had on yesterday. He doesn't like Folly, but he had nothing to do with this deal."

I turned to McIntyre. "Call the cops," I said to him.

McIntyre nodded, and moved away fast.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *Galalah's Good Deed*

**B**RANDON said: "Aw, hell, what crap." He turned carelessly away. As he turned, his hand shot to his hip pocket and a little black automatic appeared suddenly in his hand.

Koller shouted: "Mike, you fool!"

"Shut up," Brandon snapped, his jaws working rapidly on the tobacco in his mouth. "Mister," he said to me, "what are you going to do now? Want to shoot it out?"

"Put that gun away, Mike," I said. "It'll only make it tougher for you. I know you shot at me twice in the plant last night, but after you cut the wire and let Koller in, what did you do with Gus, the night watchman—and Gil Folly?"

He laughed harshly, and there was a sudden brutal slant to his jaw. I knew in that split second that there was no use talking any more. I squatted down, and I scooted forward. In the same instant his little gun barked, and lead zinged past my ear. I squeezed the trigger of my .38 then, and Brandon swayed on his feet as the slug hit him. He began to shout at me like a madman, and he weaved sideways, firing wildly.

I pumped three bullets into him as fast as I could pull the trigger. The shots ran together in a hammering roar, and they



pounded back and forth through the vast empty factory. Cement dust from Brandon's bullets spattered upwards into my face. I kept moving sideways, like a crab, and I thought my bent knees were going to break. I fired once more. Brandon pitched suddenly forward.

I straightened up. I got a glimpse of Koller running across the factory and dodging between pieces of machinery. I took careful aim, and I fired once. Koller dropped out of sight.

I found him lying on his back, his knees drawn up, his head against the steel base of a swing frame grinder. His eyes were open, and there was blood seeping through his shirt beneath the knot of his necktie. My slug had caught him in his left collar bone, close to the base of his neck. I bent over him.

"Koller," I said, "what did you do with Folly and the night watchman?"

He looked up at me. His eyes were filled with fear and pain. "Brandon," he said. "Brandon did it. I swear he did. He cut the fence—so I could come in. He told me about you knowing, and he said he had tried to kill you—in the partition by the testers, and out by the boiler room. The night watchman saw us, and—and Brandon killed him. I couldn't stop him. He—he was like a madman. Then—then we ran into Folly—by the tracks. Brandon—got him—from behind."

"What did you do with the bodies?"

He squeezed his eyes tight shut, and tears ran down his cheeks. "Brandon—carried them—into Number Four Kiln. I—I couldn't stop him."

I looked at my wrist watch. It was ten minutes after seven in the morning. I bent lower over the wounded man. "Koller, can you hear me? Did Brandon say what time that kiln was to be fired?"

He turned his face to the cement floor. "He—said—six-thirty this morning—"

I left him then, and I ran across the factory. I met McIntyre in the doorway

of the shipping room. There were two cops with him. "Where's the nearest phone?" I snapped at him.

He nodded towards a glass-enclosed office in a corner.

I called the Buckeye Grinding Company, and I got the guard at the main gate. "This is Gordon," I said. "Get the hell in the plant and tell them to draw the fire under Number Four Kiln and knock the door in. There's a couple of men inside."

He shouted something I didn't get, and banged the receiver in my ear.

I walked slowly back through the factory. I met McIntyre. He looked at an electric clock on the wall above us. "Ten minutes 'till whistle time," he said. "They just carried Koller and the other guy out. What happened?"

I told him, and then I asked: "What you got against Folly?"

He looked down at the floor and shifted his feet. "Kid stuff, I suppose," he said, and his face got red. "He beat me out of a job once. I was young and ambitious. Maybe he was the better man, but I hated him for it."

He looked away from me. "The police want to see you," he said.

I talked to the cops a while, and when I finally got loose it was after eight o'clock.

**I**T WAS after nine when we drove through the gate at the Buckeye Grinding Company. I climbed down out of the truck and walked to Ackerman's office. As I opened the door, I heard the clatter of a typewriter, and I walked back to Dorothy Donovan's office.

She looked up and smiled.

"Did they get them out of the kiln?" I asked.

She nodded, and shivered slightly. "Yes—just in time, thanks to you. The whole plant is buzzing about it. The kiln gang had sealed the door, and the fire



had been started. They found Folly and Gus at the far wall."

"Both dead?"

"No—just poor old Gus. Folly is in bad shape, but the doctor thinks he'll be all right."

I shivered a little myself. Slow death by roasting inside a big brick kiln was a hell of a way to die.

I said: "Why didn't you tell me that you used to be married to Simmons?"

She looked down at the keys of her typewriter. "He's such—a heel. I guess I was ashamed to admit it."

"All right," I said, "but what were you doing in the plant last night? When you typed that drivel about 'Now is the time for all good men,' when you were supposed to be typing letters?"

She looked up at me. "You don't miss anything, do you? Yesterday morning I overheard you and Alan talking about the wheel breakage at Portage Foundry. I'll admit that I may have eavesdropped a little. But I knew that Larry had been in to see Alan several times recently, and I—I was afraid that Alan was mixed up in the breakage at Portage. And I knew why the company had hired you. Knowing Larry Simmons as I do, I suspected some sort of an underhanded arrangement, and I was worried about Alan's possible part in it. After he got hurt, I was more worried than ever, and so I came out here last night to see if I could find out anything. I wanted to cover up for Alan, if I could. And then when I heard you come in the door I began to type, to keep you from becoming suspicious. I typed the first thing that came into my head."

"Simmons came to see me tonight," I said. "Did you tip him off about the trouble out here?"

"Yes," she said. "Maybe I shouldn't have—but, well, I still feel sort of responsible for him."

"Women," I said. "My God. Listen, his kind will always get into trouble. How is Ackerman?"

"He'll be all right," she said. "A few scars maybe." She looked out the window, and I saw tears in her eyes.

"Kind of go for him, huh?"

She nodded silently, and her lips trembled.

"How about him?"

She shook her head slightly. "He treats me like I want to be treated, and he likes me—but not enough."

"Tough," I said. "What are you going to do about it?"

She shrugged her slim shoulders. "Nothing. Go away, I guess."

"If you get to Cleveland," I said, "maybe I can fix you up with a job."

She turned and looked at me, and her lips curled a little. "Your generosity is very touching," she said.

I headed for the door. "Forget it," I said.

I had my hand on the knob, when she said: "Wait—I'm sorry. I—I guess I forgot that your name is Galahad." She smiled. "I'll see you in Cleveland. Thanks."

I grinned at her. "Call me when you hit town." I went out.

I drove down to the Sandusky Hotel, packed my bag and checked out. But before I left the lobby, I got a couple of hotel envelopes from a desk in a corner. I addressed one of the envelopes to "Mrs. Gus, Wife of the Nightwatchman, care of The Buckeye Grinding Company," and the other to "Mrs. Nicholas Pagano, care of The Portage Foundry Co." Then I got stamps from the clerk and change for a hundred dollar bill. I put two hundred and fifty dollars of Simmons' five hundred in each envelope. Then I dropped them in the mail box in the lobby.

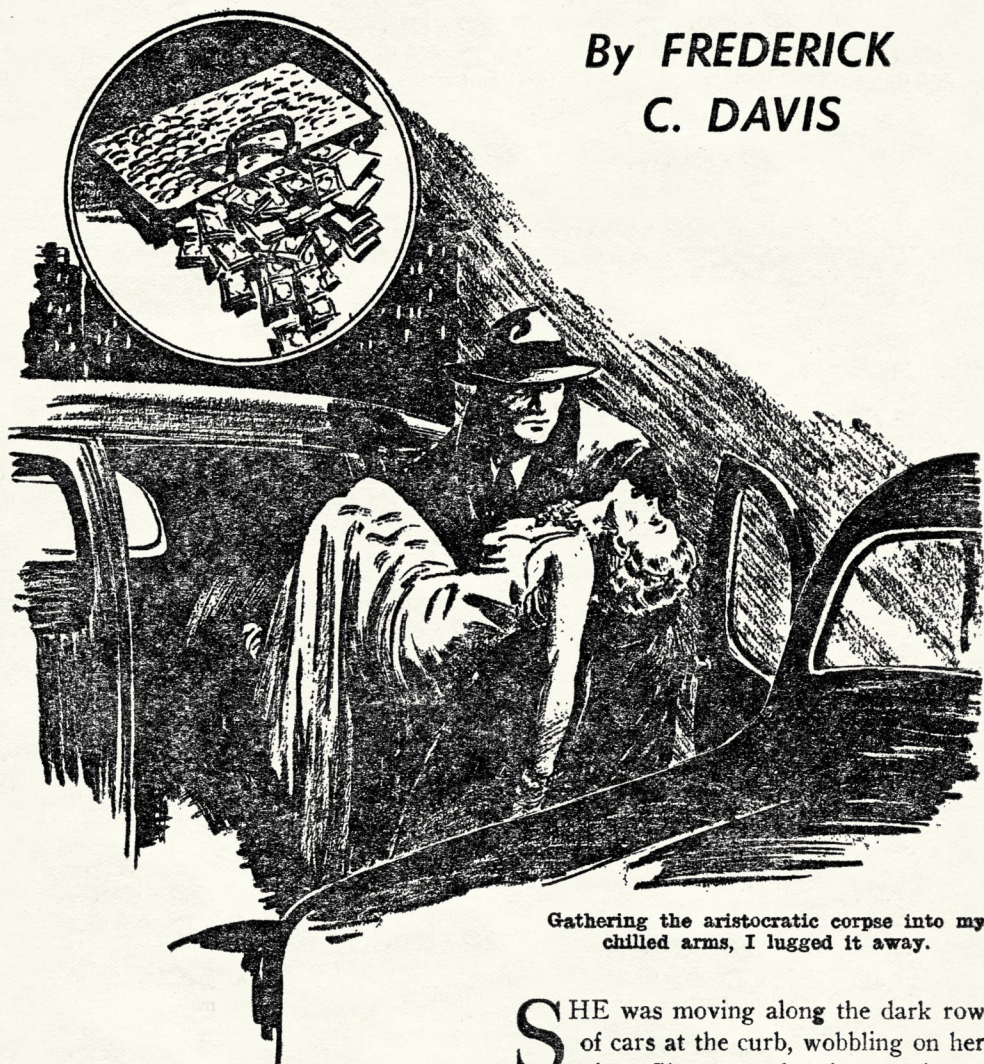
I wished it was more.

**THE END**



# LOVELY TO SHOOT AT

By *FREDERICK  
C. DAVIS*



Gathering the aristocratic corpse into my chilled arms, I lugged it away.

Private-eye Hartley had to choose fast — the hot twenty grand, the sensational strawberry blonde — or a one-way ticket to the Death House.

**S**HE was moving along the dark row of cars at the curb, wobbling on her pins. She stopped to lean against a sedan, her breath a series of gulping sounds, then lurched on to the next car and steadied herself again. There being almost no light except the Christmas-tree glow of the bar-and-grill behind me, I couldn't see just what grade of rum-bum



she was. Her jerky progress showed that she was pretty desperate to push herself off from here and too far gone to make it.

Realizing this herself, she managed one last stumble to the next car in the line, wrenched at its door handle and spilled herself in.

"Please, madame!" I said.

The coupe she had chosen to fall into was mine.

I crossed the sidewalk to my car with no hospitality in my heart. Having just spent two hours and my last five bucks in my favorite tavern, I had emerged feeling cheated, because I was still sober, and loving nobody. I was in no mood to welcome any stray dame who might choose to nose-dive into my heavily mortgaged car. This sort of thing would not enhance my reputation as a one-man private detective agency. I opened the door and leaned in with the intention of explaining to this boozy babe, not too politely, that I would prefer her to pass out elsewhere.

She was already out and definitely she was no vagrant.

The evening gown she was wearing had cost a bit more than my coupe. Besides this she was wearing enough ice to buy and sell me sixty times over. This jalopy of mine was undoubtedly the crummiest surrounding she had happened into in years.

I recognized her, from having seen her picture in our local papers many times. Mrs. Randall Sylvester. In our town Mrs. Randall Sylvester's position socially was the equivalent of Queen Elizabeth's in England, except that it was harder to get chummy with Mrs. Sylvester and she probably had more dough.

"My dear Mrs. Sylvester," I said, reaching out to her white-powdered shoulder to shake her gently.

That was no good either. She didn't feel like getting up. She was too dead.

Drawing back my hand, I looked at the blood on it. I hoped that the two holes in

the center of Mrs. Sylvester's chest had been made by bullets of more than ordinary quality, because even in the matter of getting murdered she would have insisted on the very best of materials.

Mrs. Randall Sylvester was lying murdered is my car. *Mrs. Randall Sylvester! Murdered! My car!*

I moved fast.

Shifting to the opposite door, I looked hard in the dark direction from which Mrs. Sylvester had come. The street was pooled with midnight hush and for reasons which I could not understand she had left no ripples behind her. The big building on the corner, its rear turned in this direction, was the Hotel Criterion, where some sort of high social event was taking place this evening, but it was elegantly quiet also. Conditions were exactly right for what I had to do.

I pulled the aristocratic corpse of Mrs. Randall Sylvester off the seat, gathered it into my chilled arms and began lugging it away.

It was a nightmare moment. I did not particularly care for the cops in this town, and they knew it, which made the feeling mutual. It would have been disastrous enough if they had found the remains of Mrs. Sylvester inside my car, but if one of them should spot me actually toting them up the street like this—!

**I** RISKED it no farther than the next car, the next one toward the hotel from which Mrs. Sylvester had evidently come. With all due respect for the city's newest and classiest cadaver, I eased her inside the space behind its front seat. This was a new Rolls, a much more appropriate setting for the body.

Avarice pinched my heart as I straightened up. There in the gloom Mrs. Randall Sylvester's diamonds sent up an alluring glitter. It was easy to assume that probably no one knew just which among her collection of bracelets and chokers she had



chosen to deck herself with this evening. Neither was anyone aware, so far, that I had been anywhere near her—and if I kept moving fast no one would ever get hep. Just one of those bright little baubles would pay my back rent, buy me the new suit I'd needed since last spring and restock my liquor cabinet with choice Scotch—not to mention putting me high up on easy street for life.

As lush as the future looked, however, I managed to hold onto my head. Heavily insured trinkets of that kind get too hot to handle and would certainly route me up-river for a long sojourn. It would be a chump's play.

Reluctantly I shut the door on the dead dowager and her quarter-million bucks' worth of frosting and firmly turned myself away from temptation.

Back at my coupe, I slid under the wheel with the intention of tooling out of there and getting clear with no wasted motions. My right foot pushed at something lumpy, something lacking the familiar feel of the starter pedal. I reached down and brought it up out of the dark. It was a briefcase of shiny black cowhide.

It seemed unlikely that Mrs. Sylvester, in her evening spangles, would have dropped this business-like case when falling dead in my car, but offhand I couldn't account for it otherwise. Curiously I opened the catch, fished inside and brought out a handfull of neatly rubber-banded packets of paper.

One of the packets consisted entirely of checks. A quick flip through them showed that they bore some of the city's most impressive, top-rank signatures. The amounts ranged from fifty dollars to about two thousand.

The paper in the other packets was strictly G. I.—government issue bank notes. The briefcase was packed fat with more such manna. Whatever the lot might add up to, it was enough dough to make me drool.

Suddenly I was stuffing the money back into the case and the case out of sight under the seat. A man was zigzagging across the sidewalk from the bar-and-grill. How much he had seen I couldn't guess, my guesser being suddenly frozen with panic. Even if this character had noticed only a little, it was too much. He was Frank Voss, an ex-eye with a thoroughly polluted reputation.

Swaying a little, Voss held onto the door as he peered in with his rum-shot eyes. "How 'bout givin' me a lift, Mart, ol' pal?"

Voss was the chief reason for my ruined evening. I had been slowly enjoying my drinks in there at the bar until Voss strayed in. First he had tried to wheedle himself back on my list of piecework operators, even though I had crossed him off permanently months ago because he was a habitual souse and at heart a sly double-dealing crook. Next he'd tried to butter me up for a touch. I had had a belly-full of him already and another dose of him coming now, with that bagfull of somebody else's dough curled up at my feet, was tough on the nerves.

"Lift?" I said. "You don't need a lift. The handiest gutter will be your bed for tonight, same as last night and the night before. I'm not leaving just yet. Got work to do in the office. Anyway, you pickled creep, I told you to stay away from me."

While speaking I eased out through the opposite door. Voss was, I hoped, bleary-eyed enough not to notice the black brief case sliding out with me. He twisted away with a mutter, heading back toward the bar, while I eased back into deeper shadow with an even worse temptation than before tugging at my frayed heartstrings.

Mrs. Randall Sylvester's trinkets were pure jail-bait, but not this satchel full of folding money. The checks would be worth no more to me than the match to burn them, but the currency would remain



highly negotiable. Although I didn't know whose lettuce this was, the chances were good that it was carrying no identification marks and I could get away with it. Sure I could. Sure, with half this chance.

Satan was right there at my ear this time, murmuring loaded persuasions.

I SAID to myself dizzily, "If the cops nail you for this you'll lose your license, like Voss—you'll get jugged good and that will finish you. Then twice the dough in this bag wouldn't be enough to buy back the chance you still have to make good as an honest operator. Leave the dough with the dead lady and then blow, fast. This may sound a little boy scoutish at the moment, but nevertheless it makes good sense, doesn't it?"

It made excellent sense. I moved quickly and quietly alongside the next car, the Rolls in which I had dumped the diamond-studded corpse.

A glance backward revealed that Frank Voss had not yet stumbled back into the tavern to cadge more drinks. Instead, he was hovering at its neon-garnished entrance, gazing curiously across the sidewalk at the curb side of the Rolls. At the same time, with my hand tightening on the handle of the door on the opposite side, I caught men's voices speaking from that same spot.

One said, "Dripped blood along the sidewalk. She must have come at least this far."

The other answered, "For God's sake keep it quiet and make it quick. More men are coming along to help search. Start looking in all these cars right now."

Cops. Both officers. I glimpsed the golden glitter of their shields through the darkness inside the Rolls. They hadn't seen me. My pulse shifting into high, I next caught a view of a group of official-looking men in plain clothes already hustling from a service entrance of the Criterion. Dicks. They were moving up

rapidly and already spreading out. Their discovery of the corpse of Mrs. Randall Sylvester might come within the next few seconds.

I couldn't stay.

Crouched down, I scurried alongside the parked cars, away from the cops, then cut sharply across the street. Nobody yelled out an alarm, nobody started shooting at me. The cops seemed stunned, slow to get organized. Unnoticed, I reached a doorway beside a delicatessen halfway down the block.

I pushed in and climbed bare wooden stairs that had needed sweeping for weeks. On the first floor landing I went past the door marked *Acme Mending Service*, then the door marked *Resplendent Cravats, Inc—Fine Ties Wholesale* and went on back to the rearmost, which was lettered *Martin Hartley, Private Investigator*. That was me.

I unlocked the door, sidled in, shut it again, set the latch, snapped a switch, went to my second-hand desk and on it I placed that brief case stuffed with coin of the realm.

"Well anyway, I tried to put it back," I said to myself in short breaths. "I really tried."

Opening that case again, very slowly, as if handling beautiful sleek cobras, I removed all the little bundles. Ignoring the checks, I took a quick trial total on the money. It came out somewhere between twenty and twenty-four grand.

I sank slowly into my chair and sat there swallowing the same lump over and over while staring at the money in suicidal fascination.

Over on Grand Street was a long-established, solidly reputable private detective agency run by a man named Glintlock. The name of Glintlock was locally a synonym for Hawkshaw, Pinkerton or Sherlock Holmes. One reason so few clients came my way was that all of them, especially the classiest, turned automati-



cally to the old Glintlock agency. Bill Glintlock was keen-minded, kindly, lonely, getting along in years and tired of the grind of pulling in big fees.

"I need a partner, Mart," he had said only yesterday over the lunch he was buying me—the best meal I'd bolted in three weeks. "I'd like to train a keen young man like you to take over my agency in a few more years. What I'm looking for, you see, is not a hired assistant, but a partner who will feel a lively interest in the business because he has a real stake in it. Twenty or twenty-five thousand would buy you in, Mart. I do wish you would consider it, my boy."

THE tidy sum he had mentioned had been just as accessible to me as the contents of Fort Knox. Yet tonight, hardly more than twenty-four hours later, here it was, piled on my desk in actual cash—the exact sum I needed to buy me an unbeatable opportunity to get myself solidly set for life.

Suddenly I was jarred out of my rosy speculations. In an upsurge of panic I heard footfalls climbing the stairs.

While the footfalls came up rapidly I cleared my desk with one sweep of my arm—spilled all the little bundles back into the case. The footsteps had reached my door by the time I had yanked open the bottom drawer and stuffed the case inside. The drawer was closed when the knob rattled.

I told myself, "You might as well walk right up and shake hands with the worst, pal. You'll never be able to explain your way out of this one—never this side of the state pokey, twenty years or more from now."

Opening the door, trying to appear bored in a relaxed, man-about-town way, I expected to see a cop with a police positive levelled in one fist and a pair of cuffs ready in the other. Actually my caller was strictly unofficial and quite a different type.

She was twenty, with red-blond hair piled up in ringlets, and green eyes with a little fever in them. Her strapless white gown was flecked with gold and perfectly filled. She had a beaded evening bag in one hand, a half-burned cig in the coral-tipped fingers of her other, and something urgent on her mind.

She stood still for a moment, pearl-gray smoke drifting between her parted lips, seeming as breathlessly startled to find me here as I was to find her there.

She came in quickly, shutting the door behind her, her eyes holding to mine. In a soft, husky voice, she said, "I need you—on a case."

"You're in just under the wire," I said. "I don't usually accept cases outside of office hours, which run from twelve midnight to twelve midnight." I watched her as she moved to my desk to snuff out her cig. "By any chance are you just over

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from the shindig at the Criterion? Little excitement over there, I hear."

She left her beaded bag on my desk, caught up my last pack of cigs and fished out one of the two remaining smokes. "How could you manage to hear about it so soon?"

"Hartley sees all, knows all." I fired the cig for her while she gave me a searching, calculating look. "Knows all, I mean, except your name."

"Let's call me, say, Joyce Trent. It's a little nicer than my real name. In other words, I want this thing kept strictly under wraps." She trailed her beautiful white gown across my dirty floor as she moved over to a window, evidently to avoid my eyes. "I don't know just what happened over at the Criterion. There's some wild talk going around about a robbery, but nobody seems to know for sure. Some people are even saying they heard shots."

"Imagine that," I said.

A copy of yesterday morning's *Bulletin* lay on my desk. Headlines on its front page proclaimed a charity bazaar to be held tonight in the *Empire Ballroom* of the Hotel Criterion.

Rare Antiques, Heirlooms Donated for  
Auction. Mrs. Randall Sylvester,  
Treasurer of Fund, Hopes—

"I remember reading that the bazaar would be broadcast," I said, and I snapped the switch of the small desk radio which was one of the few things I still had left to hock.

The girl whose name was not Joyce Trent kept her lovely back turned. "Whatever happened over there, it's not the reason I'm here. I'm being blackmailed. A certain man put the bite on me again tonight, over at the bazaar, and I decided suddenly I'd had enough of it—it's got to stop."

"One moment, please, Miss Trent," I said. "I think I hear the unlisted phone ringing in my private office. Excuse me. I'll be right back."

SHE gave me a short glance over one ivory shoulder. I opened a door as little as possible and stepped through—into a cubbyhole serving as a lavatory. There was no phone in here, unlisted or otherwise, but I did have "Miss Trent's" evening purse. She hadn't noticed me slipping it off the desk and into my coat pocket.

Now probing into it, I found approximately forty bucks in folding money, lipstick, lace handkerchief and a plastic card case containing her driver's license. The name on the license was Rita Sylvester.

The address was the well-known one of the Sylvester mansion out on Poplar Drive.

The tasty chick in my office was the corpse's daughter.

There were sounds of movements around my desk mingling with the low chatter of the little radio. Making no sound at all, I eased the lavatory door open the thinnest crack. Through it I caught a slant at Miss Rita Sylvester, alias Joyce Trent.

She had her cig pinched in her red lips so as to free both her hands. Having just snooped into one drawer of my desk, she was now tugging at the handle of the bottom one, the one into which I had shoved the case full of money.

I thanked God that that drawer chronically stuck itself shut. She was getting nowhere with it. As a warning I made a noise with the knob, then stepped out. I found her back at the window.

She turned to face me now, her green eyes wide, and I answered with a long, hungry look. She was potent stuff. She was my strawberry, the one dilly for me. The limpid glimmer in her eyes gave me the heady feeling that I might almost stand a chance with her. The faintly teasing curve of her lips almost made me overlook the obvious fact that she had spotted me down in the street somehow and had boldly trailed me up here to find out, if



she could, how much I knew about the murder of her mother and a missing case full of cash. She was just my dish, yes sir—one tastefully laced with cyanide.

"I'm sorry, Miss Trent," I said, feeling cold prickling around my mouth. "That call just now was about an assignment that demands my entire attention tonight. Suppose we consider your problem a little later—say tomorrow?"

She looked at me through her long dark lashes in a puzzled, lingering way. Then without speaking she moved to the door.

"One moment, Miss Trent," I said. "Your purse."

Rita Sylvester's slender hand took it from mine. I told myself desperately that it would be fatal for me to imagine that that melting look in her eyes was anything but bait. She turned away again and the door closed to shut her away. As her high heels ticked down the stairs I stood there wondering why it must be that the loveliest girl in the world should be one that suspected me of murder and grand larceny—and not without reason, either.

I turned back to my desk and, yanking the bottom drawer open, wondered how many short minutes I would have before she came back flanked by a platoon of cops.

I lifted the loaded case from the drawer as the radio said, "We are now able to bring you additional details on the sensational robbery here at the Hotel Criterion, which we first flashed to you a few minutes ago."

Good, I said, standing behind the desk with the case in my hands and searching this cramped office for a safer hiding place. *Let's have it.*

"The robbery was committed by either two or three men—reports so far are confused on this point—impeccably garbed in tails, who had mingled with the guests. Watching their chance, they slipped unseen into the small room behind the main ballroom where Mrs. Randall Sylvester

and Mrs. C. Charles Wilberforce were checking over the receipts of the auction which had just been completed. Detectives were supposed to be guarding this room, but it appears they had been drawn away by messages faked by the crooks. It happened that the two women were alone there at the time. They were caught utterly unawares by the fashionably garbed crooks who stepped in unhindered, with masks over their faces, automatics in their hands and a demand for the night's receipts of the bazaar."

**T**HAT means the cops are plenty sore over their own bungling, I remarked, carrying the case toward the nearest window.

"What followed then was an act of unselfish courage on the part of Mrs. Randall Sylvester. As her dear friend Mrs. Wilberforce reports it, Mrs. Sylvester immediately grasped up the leather case full of money and said, in the very face of the guns, 'No, you shan't have it.' She backed with it quickly to a door in the rear of the room and at the same time one of the masked men fired."

*Well, think of that,* I said, pausing at the window with the money-packed case. *She really was a gutsy old gal. Or else she just wasn't very bright.*

"Mrs. Wilberforce—who was still, at last report, in a near-hysterical condition—declares that at least one of the bullets struck Mrs. Sylvester. She was not knocked off her feet, however. With amazing fortitude, she managed to get out of the rear door of that room. The door happened to have a latch on the other side and Mrs. Sylvester, although wounded, even had the presence of mind to fasten it. Thereby she cut off the pursuit of the armed robbers. It is believed that Mrs. Sylvester, still further to protect the money in her possession, negotiated the length of a service corridor and then let herself out a little-used-door in the rear of the hotel.



*It was amazing how the damnedest people do the damnedest things, I thought admiringly.*

"Mrs. Wilberforce, back in the room where the holdup had been attempted, reports further that Mrs. Sylvester's courageous act left the crooks with no choice but to attempt a quick, empty-handed get-away. The hotel is now being searched from cellar to roof-garden for the crooks. Another intensive search is under way for Mrs. Sylvester and the money she so bravely rescued from the armed robbers."

The radio went on chattering a resume of the excitement as I inquired, with eyebrows lifted, "What, aren't they even offering any reward for the return of the dough?"

All this raised several interesting questions. One: How far would I get trying to prove that I had not been one of the two or three stick-up artists who had pulled the job? Two: How could I ever jockey this dough back into the proper hands without begging for a murder rap? Three: If I chose to avoid running that risk, would the dough ever really be missed elsewhere half as much as I would miss it here? Four: Where could I safely cache this coin while finding the time to think it over?

There was an old green roller-blind in the window. I pulled its cord and peeled the blind all the way down. Then fishing up those precious packets again, I snapped off the rubber bands and divided them, making them thinner. These I fed around the core of the blind while slowly rolling it up. When I finished, all the checks and the money were wound up with it. Unless you were unusually sharp-eyed you would never notice that the rolled-up blind in this window was considerably fatter than the one in the other.

The empty case was another problem. Fortunately it was not monogrammed; it would be tough to identify. My best play might be to claim it as my own. I sprin-

kled a little water on it, then added an inkspot, put it on the floor and wiped my feet on it, then polished it with my sleeve and finally left it in plain sight on the top of my empty file cabinet.

A guy with a hot twenty-four grand hidden in his office would never dream of leaving his door unlocked when he went out, so I left my door unlocked.

As I had expected, the street was still busy in a grimly quiet way. Cops were clustered around the Rolls and an ambulance had drawn alongside it—evidence enough that the remains of Mrs. Randall Sylvester had not waited long for discovery. A restless prowling-about on the part of several dicks indicated also, however, that they were a little upset at not finding the money with her.

I decided it might seem a natural move for a bright, ambitious private op like me to prowl a little on his own, so I started off. After my first step I froze. A voice behind me said, "Hold it, pal."

**F**RANK VOSS was standing backed against the wall. Somehow he seemed woozy no longer. Something had exerted a sobering effect on him. His narrowed eyes had a sharp and greedy glint in them.

"Let's go back to the bar and talk things over, shall we, pal?" Voss suggested with a leer in his tone.

Frank Voss had lost his license and narrowly sidestepped prison as a result of a little fancy extortion. He had pulled it on one of the best of my few clients—a piece of cunning duplicity that he might have succeeded in putting over on me except for his weakness for getting himself oiled and blabbing too much. I had had to slap him down hard in self defense. Ever since then he had blamed me, rather than his own chicanery, for the loss of his license. This rat was out to get me for it if he could. The rasp in his voice seemed to warn me he'd found his chance.

"Just a few drinks, pal, while we talk a



little business?" he added, almost licking his chops.

I eyed him. "Let's have it, Frankie-boy. What do you think you've got me on?"

Voss's lips twisted slyly. "Those cops are tryin' to trace the dame's movements by the blood she dripped along the way. It happens they haven't found all the blood spots yet, though. There's a few more in a certain place—where I would tell 'em to look."

There was only one thing he could mean. Blood dribbled inside my car.

I curled my fingers around Frank Voss's throat. He grabbed my wrist in both his clammy hands and tried to pull it away, but I kept it there and squeezed. I pushed him back against the wall hard and squeezed some more.

"You were mistaken, Frankie. You haven't seen anything to tell the cops about. What you saw in my car was a little catchup that spilled the last time I could afford a drive-in hamburger. Wasn't it, Frankie?"

He choked out a sound of cringing fear. I pulled him away from the wall and gave him a shove that put him down flat on his back on the sidewalk. His head hit with a ripe cantaloupe sound. He gagged and coughed a few times, then pulled himself swaying to his feet. He stumbled off against the building fronts, coughing as he went.

I could never trust his word, I would have to bank on his cowardice. As for the rest of the situation, I couldn't even attempt to move my car, which undoubtedly did have a few samples of Mrs. Sylvester's rich blood inside it, without immediately attracting the interest of every dick in the block. I would have to leave it there and pray.

A sense of increasing crisis telegraphed itself up the street. I shifted through a growing crowd of curious onlookers gathered on the sidewalk opposite the ambu-

lance. Cops were keeping the crowd back but I managed to ease inconspicuously close to the line—keeping as much as possible in the shadow because there in the street, only a few feet away, I spotted Rita Sylvester, alias Joyce Trent.

She had draped her lovely smooth shoulders in a platinum fox jacket. "You really caught them?" I barely overheard her asking of a uniformed man at her side. "Really, the crooks who did it?"

The police officer was Captain Luke Cort, a seamy-faced veteran who possessed a flourishing dislike of all private operators, particularly me. He answered in tones so low I hardly caught his words. "Yes, cornered them in the furnace room. Two of them. There may be another one still to be grabbed, though. Remember, there may be a third."

Sure. There was a third, all right. Me. Never mind how ardently the real crooks might disown me and never mind what sort of an alibi I might plead. There was still a third killer on the loose and I was it.

NOW Rita Sylvester and Captain Cort had their heads closer together, speaking in inaudible whispers. They broke off when the ambulance began to move. In silence, her eyes brimming for a moment, Rita watched it carrying her mother's body away. This chick deserved rare credit. She was hard hit, but not having any hysterics. No sobs, no leaning on manly arms. There would be time for grief later. Right now there was a job to be done, that missing money to be found.

My nerves tight with thoughts about that money, I left Rita and the captain still whispering to each other and went back to my lowly entrance beside the delicatessen. My office was just as I had left it—and yet it wasn't, quite. Something seemed different here. Perhaps it was just a sense of an impending crash. Remembering Voss's sly snooping and the smart green eyes of Rita Sylvester, I could al-



ready feel the sharp bite of a sprung trap.

Closing the door behind me, I eased over to that one window. The roller blind was still fat with riches. Just to make sure, I pulled it down slowly a little way and when the first banknotes peeped out I eased it back up again.

Suddenly my blood was chilled again at the sound of a step behind me. I shifted swiftly from the window to my desk. At the same moment the door opened.

It was Rita.

"Why, hello, Miss Trent," I said. "Is it tomorrow already? I mean, that's when our appointment was, wasn't it?"

She gazed at me with one hand gathering her fur jacket at her throat. At the same time I became conscious of a distracting motion occurring on the opposite side of the room. At the window—the window—the cord of the blind was swinging. In leaving it so suddenly I had unconsciously given it a tug that had set it to oscillating like a pendulum.

Rita turned her lovely, wise, alert green eyes from me and looked all around the room. Her gaze stopped for a moment on the black brief case atop the file cabinet. Strangely she didn't look at that damned pull-cord on the window-blind that kept swinging, swinging. Instead her eyes came back to me and then she moved forward to my desk and sat on the corner of it.

"Cig?" I offered the thin pack.

"But it's your last," she said.

That could very well be, in more senses than one. "Well, then," I suggested, "let's share it."

I tore it in two. Her eyes again gave me that searching look as I fired the ragged end of her half. She was so lovely and so terribly knowing. It was so nice to have her near, and so dangerous. I wondered why I hadn't met this bewitching little strawberry top at a more favorable time, when I had less larceny in my heart. At the same time I called myself several

kinds of a sucker for imagining that her interest in me might involve anything other than twenty or twenty-four grand of other people's dough.

"Mr. Hartley," she asked in her softly husky voice, "how did you happen to become a—"

She had trouble with her cig.

"—a private detective?"

"Well, I'd have been a lawyer by now if the late war hadn't come up at the wrong time," I told her. "The Army's aptitude tests shunted me into the OSS. The work was so romantic, in a grim way, that I thought it would be fun to go on doing the same stuff in civilian life. It is—and it pays so well, too."

As she gazed around the office again, noting its slight lack of opulence, my heart spurted. That damned window-blind cord!

It was still swinging, swinging, as if it meant to go on swinging like that forever! But oddly, Rita didn't seem to pay it any attention. Her green eyes came back to me.

"The money that was stolen over there at the hotel tonight," she said softly, "was to go into the national cancer fund. Did you know that, Mr. Hartley?"

"It would," I said wryly. "It couldn't be a fund to provide pomade for the unkempt Patagonians or to indoctrinate the Eskimo with the benefits of a vegetable diet. Of course not. It would naturally be intended for research into ways and means of saving thousands of lives."

She gazed at me and knew. And I knew she knew. She had no material way of proving it—not so far, anyway. There was just a sort of natural communication between us that told her. And I couldn't deny it. Picking up a bag full of somebody else's coin was one thing, but denying it to Rita would have been dishonest.

"I ASKED Captain Cort to give me ten minutes," she said. "It will take him that long to get a search warrant. He



needs such papers to make it legal. I thought I might be able to do better without them."

"You're doing fine, honey," I assured her. "In fact, you're getting faster results than the whole police force put together."

"I can't take credit for a job of detecting," she said, her lips curving a little wryly. "It was just luck. I didn't even know anything was wrong at the time. I happened to be looking out of one of the hotel windows and saw you dodging into your door with a black leather case." She pointed her cig toward the file cabinet. "That one. It's mine."

"So?" I asked tightly. "What's your next move, Miss Sylvester?"

She asked a counter-question: "What's yours?"

I thought of Bill Glintlock and the solid future he had offered me. That was gone now. So was this stinky hole-in-the-wall agency of mine gone. But other things were left.

"You're running a reckless chance, you know," I said levelly. "Tender little girls like you should stay out of this rough sort of thing. For example, I doubt that you're packing a gun inside that lovely jacket. I can slug you down and be out of here in thirty seconds flat. That amount of cash can get me places fast. I know from experience just how to get there with a minimum of interference from the law. One move right now will give me a head start on a new life in lushier climes."

She asked softly, "Are you going to make that move?"

I said, "Yes."

Her eyes widened. She stared at that swinging pull-cord, got up suddenly and backed to the window. I stopped close, facing her, her eyes lifted full into mine.

She whispered, "Please!"

"You're a sweet dish, Rita," I said, "but after all, where will you be while I'm mouldering in the Big House?"

I swung the leather case off the file cab-

inet. I eased Rita aside and yanked the blind down. Money and checks fell in a downpour. Feeling Rita's eyes on me, I scooped them up by the handful, crammed them into the case—checks, banknotes, everything. Then with my hand gripped tight on the handle I strode to the door.

"Good-by," Rita said softly.

With my hand on the knob I stopped. I found myself feeling foolish, my face flushing like a school kid's. Suddenly and sharply I was aware of a momentous fact: no matter where I might be—whether in the state can or on Pago-Pago—what this little red-topped girl thought of me would always be extremely important.

I turned back. "I must be nuts," I said, feeling like the simplest sucker in the world. "I seem to be changing my mind. I'm not leaving after all."

Rita came toward me with her green eyes opened wide.

"Here." I proffered the case. "Take it

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along. Put it back where it belongs. I'll wait here until you get back with Captain Cort."

She took the case and as she turned away I said, "There's just one thing I'd like to add. It was nice knowing you, mighty nice, even as brief as it was."

She moved again toward the door and I thought to myself that this surely was a very messed-up life. An opportunity in a million drops into your lap and you have the dough to buy it, the only catch being that the money is stolen goods. You meet the girl of your dreams under such circumstances that you are promptly hustled off to the jug where you must live without her practically forever. All this on a technicality, too—just because I'd carried a brief case across the street in order that it might not entangle me in a crime.

**R**ITA'S fingers were on the knob of the door and she was on the point of opening it, when a rasping voice said suddenly, "Hold it, sister."

We stared at the other door near my desk, the one connecting with the lavatory. It was opening. The barrel of a revolver came out first. It was followed by a fist, a man's dark-sleeved arm and the liquor-flushed face of Frank Voss.

Following our clash in the street he had sneaked up here. The office had felt different on my return because of his foul presence hidden in it. He had heard and seen everything that had passed between Rita and me, including the money.

"I'm taking that dough the rest of the way, sugar," he said.

Startling me icy-cold, Rita answered him in just the same way that her mother had challenged the previous robbers. "Oh, no you're not!"

In a flash of reckless resolution she yanked the door open. Damned if she wasn't following in her mother's footsteps—acting just as her mother had done to

safeguard that same money! I was struck with consternation by the possibility that she might follow her mother's overly courageous example too far—to her death.

She had jerked open the door and was halfway out when Voss fired.

The pane dropped in big shards from the frame as I dove for Voss. He swung the gun at me in a swift glittering sweep. It blasted again, ripping across my left shoulder. As I clamped both hands on it and twisted it, Voss's head began bobbing in a series of odd jerks. Rita was behind him now, slamming at his head with that heavy case.

Voss's teeth were bared in his desperate striving to push the gun up into my face. I wrenched it up and over and it banged squarely, with Voss's own finger squeezing the trigger, squarely between his eyes.

Rita stood shuddering beside me, staring down at the bloody-faced Voss as Captain Cory came pounding up the stairs.

"Captain!" Rita blurted. "This is the man who had the money. He was hiding in here, in that closet. He must have thought we'd heard him because suddenly he started out with that gun. Mart Hartley stopped him, captain. It wasn't Mart who had the money after all, but this man on the floor—and it was Mart who stopped him from getting away with it."

Cort scratched his grizzled head and said, "Yup, Voss is the kind for it, all right. But all this sounds pretty complicated to me, especially because Voss is pretty dead now. You'll both have to come down to headquarters with me and tell me about it slower."

Rita rode close at my side in the dark rear seat of an official limousine. She asked softly, "How do you like being an honest man again, darling?"

"Now that you're in it with me, honey," I said, squeezing her hand, "I like it even better than before."



# HE DIGS IN THE NIGHT



**I**N PARIS in 1847, workmen at the Pere Lachaise Cemetery made a startling discovery. Excited and mystified officials at the cemetery called in the police. Someone, some *thing*, had opened a number of graves. Coffin lids had been ripped off or smashed asunder.

And he'd stolen rings and jewels and such other valuables as get buried with the dead. The police officials examined one victimized grave after the other, and found the same brute force and robbery at each.

But when the officials departed the cemetery one meaningful fact went with them. The graves had been opened without the aid of shovel, or anything resembling a shovel; the earth showed that it had been clawed up, dog fashion, by *human hands!*

The news hit Paris like a thunderbolt, left its citizenry astounded. Whose grave would be next?

The police welcomed the aid of soldiers stationed nearby. A night-and-day guard was thrown around the cemetery.

A spot was located on the ten-foot wall that showed evidence of being the point of many scalings. The army rigged up a booby trap. But, significantly, that trap was never sprung.

The watchers were soon rewarded. On several occasions they spied a figure in the night. A swift, elusive figure that darted among the tombs.

The dogs on each occasion, refused to chase the figure.

Finally, the night came when one of the guards glimpsed a weird figure scal-

ing the wall. He pulled up his rifle, fired. The figure, uttering no cry, dropped out of sight, vanished into the night.

A trail of blood was picked up. It led to—nowhere. But along that trail was found a small fragment of material. The fugitive's clothing had caught a snag and a small fragment had been torn away.

The next day the police were confronted with a report that could mean everything—or nothing. During the previous night a soldier had reported to the military hospital at Val De Grace to have a wound dressed—a wound caused by a rifle bullet.

When it was learned that the soldier's uniform was torn—and that the fragment matched—he was accused of the crimes. He confessed.

"Since I was a young boy I've felt strange desires to be out alone, in lonely spots, among the animals," he said.

He went on to explain that he went into deep sleeps in which he was aware of a terrible sense of metamorphosis—a change into another being! He became a digging animal in search of the valuables of the dead! Always the "attacks" seized him after sunset.

Sergeant Bertrand was brought to trial in Paris. The military tribunal found him guilty and sentenced him to *one year's imprisonment.*

After he'd served his term Sergeant Bertrand disappeared.

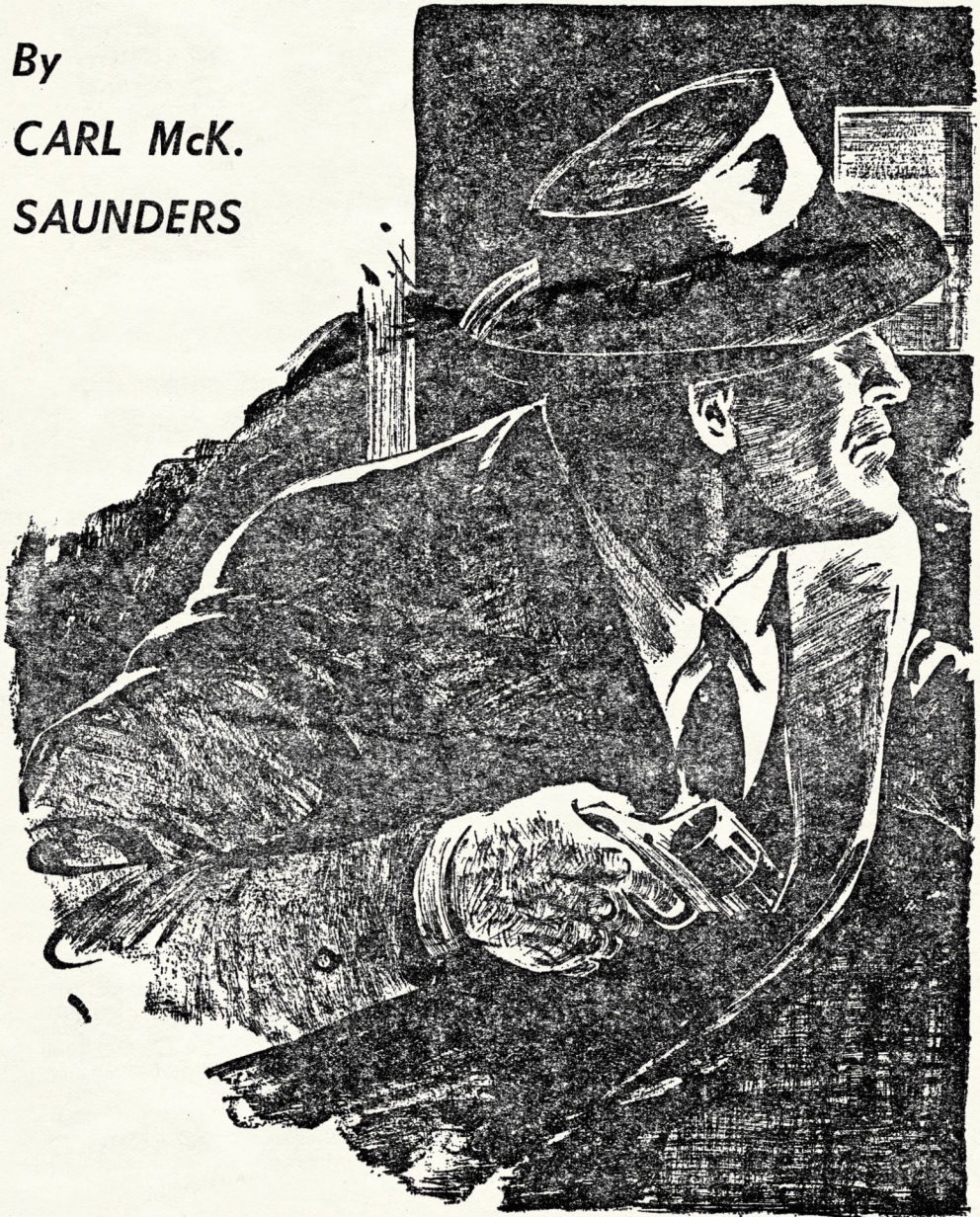
It is to be hoped that he soon departed the land of the living—that the dead might rest in peace.

—Richard Grant



# THIS COP FOR HIRE

By  
CARL McK.  
SAUNDERS





When a million-dollar dame's gang of homicidal high-school kids blasted into the murder picture, it looked like a guilt frame for Captain Murdock.



The kid screamed: "We'll blast our way out!"

## CHAPTER ONE

### Under Fire

*A Bullet-paced  
Captain Murdock  
Novelette*

THEY were gunning for him again. The newspapers, several radio commentators, half a dozen civic organizations, three members of the city council and the police commissioner, himself. A typical attack was one in the *Evening News*. Above a picture of John



Murdock, Chief of Detectives in Central City, it ran the following statement:

#### WE NEED A NEW MODEL

The picture was an old picture, a very unflattering picture. It showed Murdock dressed in a baggy, wrinkled suit. His face was unshaven. He was grinning, but the grin had a twisted, brutal look. The picture had been taken a dozen years before and on that occasion, Murdock had been hailed as a civic hero. Single-handed, he had tracked down and cornered the Stewart gang and had shot it out with them. In the course of this he had had no time to change clothes or drop in some barber shop for a shave. The picture, a dozen years ago, had been evidence of what he had gone through in the course of his work. It was now being used to hit him with.

The story below the picture spoke of the increase in juvenile delinquency. It hinted at the open gambling being permitted in Central City and of the extent of vice and narcotic violations. It listed the recent series of clothing store robberies and asked:

What Is Being Done to Stop This Increase  
in Crime?

It answered the question:

Nothing!

John Murdock had been Chief of Detectives in Central City for fifteen years. He had been on the police force for twenty-seven. He had started out as a rookie cop, pounding a beat. He had earned his promotions. He had reached the top grade in his profession and had found that while there were satisfactions in being at the top, there were also headaches.

This attack was not a new experience. Murdock had been under fire before, on

numerous occasions, but never had the attacks been more bitter or persistent than these. In the past he had usually been able to isolate the source of the opposition, but this time he was puzzled. He had only one fact to go on. A man named Sam Reno wanted his job. Reno, a former detective whom Murdock had broken, was close to the police commissioner and had been picked up by the commissioner and hired as a special investigator. He had probably kept needling the commissioner to give him Murdock's job, but Reno couldn't be the whole answer. Reno couldn't possibly have stirred up the civic clubs, the newspapers and the radio. He was a little man. He didn't have either the imagination or the ability to map out or promote an attack like this one.

The Detective Bureau was quartered in semi-basement rooms on the west side of the City Hall. There, John Murdock had one of a series of small offices. It was equipped with a battered flat-top desk, half a dozen chairs and a filing cabinet. The wood floor was worn rough by his pacing. He was working on it now as he stomped back and forth.

Murdock, at forty-seven, was a tall, square-shouldered man. He stood an even six feet high and weighed a hundred and ninety pounds, no ounce of which was surplus weight. He had an habitual scowl, intensified by a scar on his left temple which narrowed his left eye and made his occasional grin a little lop-sided.

Pacing back and forth was an old habit. Chewing a dead cigar was another and there was a cigar clenched between his teeth tonight. Eventually, he would throw it away, but not until he had reached some sort of decision. Bert Andrews, who was sprawled out in a corner chair in Murdock's office, knew this. Andrews, who was rated as a lieutenant, had been Murdock's closest associate for years.

Murdock stopped his pacing at his desk. He turned and stared at Bert Andrews.



He took his cigar from his mouth. "Fifteen clothing store robberies in the last three months," he grated. "All of them pulled in the same way, by the same crowd. Never a tip-off to the police. No trace of the stolen goods. No recognizable fingerprints at the scene of any job. No clues worthy of the name. When do we get a break? That's what I want to know. When do we get a break?"

"**WE** MIGHT go to work on all the open gambling in the city," said Andrews dryly. "Or we might take a crack at vice or the narcotic ring, or at juvenile delinquency."

"Nuts!"

"Maybe you don't read the newspapers."

"I read 'em," said Murdock. "Our juvenile delinquency rate hasn't increased as much as other cities. We have no open gambling, and you know it. There's no narcotic ring to smash. We could bust up a few weed parties, but that's not the answer, Bert."

"What about the red-headed woman?" asked Bert Andrews.

Murdock scowled. According to Ed Grover, local manager for the Greybar Detective Agency, a red-headed woman had visited five of the burglarized stores within three days' time of the robberies. She was described as sleek, sophisticated, high-society, and in the early twenties. She had bought nothing in any of the stores she had visited. She might or she might not have any connection with the gang. A teen-aged boy always accompanied her.

"It's not natural, Bert," said Murdock slowly, "for a case to run this long without some kind of tip to the police, without some kind of break. I don't like it."

There was a knock on the door. Murdock barked, "Come in." The door opened and Sam Reno stepped into the room. Reno was as tall as Murdock. He was

fifty pounds heavier. He had a round, pink-cheeked face, dark, sharp eyes. His hair was thin and almost blond. He was grinning, but his grin was close to a sneer. He said, "Hello, Murdock. You very busy?"

"I'm too busy to waste much time on you," said Murdock bluntly. "What do you want?"

"I just had a telephone call I thought you might be interested in," said Sam Reno. "There's a clothing store on Western Avenue near Spruce. It's called the Toggery Shop. It's going to be knocked off just after midnight."

Murdock's eyes widened. "You sure of that?"

"It was a pretty straight tip. If I had the men to call on I'd handle it alone."

"Where did you get the tip?"

Reno shook his head. "I can't tell you, and I can't order you to do anything about it. Maybe you'd better just sit here and read about the robbery in the morning papers."

"Maybe we will," said Murdock.

Reno shrugged his shoulders. He said, "Suit yourself, Murdock. It's your funeral."

Reno turned and left the room, pulling the door shut behind him.

For a full minute Murdock didn't speak. He chewed on his cigar, scowling at the door, trying to figure this thing out. If this tip was straight it was the break he wanted, but it wasn't like Reno to help him out. Reno wanted him to fail. Reno wanted his job. It would be more like Reno to give him a bum steer, yet if the Toggery Shop was knocked over and he ignored Reno's tip, he would be really up against it.

Murdock pulled his cigar from his mouth. He slammed it in the general direction of the spittoon near his desk. He said, "Damn Reno! Why did it have to come from him?"

"If it's straight," said Andrews, "what



difference does it make? It's a good tip."

"It might not be straight," said Murdock. "I don't trust him."

"What are we going to do?"

"Get Jimmy Spence. We are cautiously going to see what happens at the Toggery Shop just after midnight."

A truck pulled up to the curb near the alley back of Western Avenue just after midnight. After a few minutes, three shadowy figures left the truck and moved into the alley. From where he was hidden, Murdock watched them climb a telephone pole and swing over to the roof. Three detectives were already spotted on the roof, but they wouldn't close in until the burglars had broken through the skylight into the store. Spence and two others were across the street, in front. Bert Andrews was with Murdock in the alley.

"It was no bum steer," Andrews whispered.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Bum Steer

**M**MURDOCK grunted. He and Andrews waited. A flashlight blinked from the top of the building. This was the signal that the three men had broken through the skylight and were in the store. Murdock had anticipated this procedure. It followed the pattern of the other robberies. This gang always gained entrance to the stores they robbed through a skylight or even by cutting a hole in the roof.

In Murdock's pocket was a key to the back door which he had secured two hours before from the store's owner. Murdock drew it out. He said, "Come on, Bert," and crossed the alley. He unlocked the door, opened it, and stepped inside. Bert Andrews followed him.

They were in a small, back stockroom, but the door from this room to the front of the store was open and light from the

street sifted into the front salesroom through the wide windows. Murdock could hear the men in the salesroom working. He could hear the murmur of their hushed voices. Murdock moved forward and at the door to the salesroom he stopped. His gun was in his hand. He could distinguish the figures of three men. Two were removing clothing from the racks. The third was tying the clothing into bundles.

"The place is surrounded," said Murdock, suddenly, and his voice was sharp, hard. "Drop what you are doing. Move up to the front doors. Hold your hands in the air where I can see them."

The three figures stiffened. The one who had been tying the bundles came slowly to his feet. He started toward the front of the store, his hands high above his head. One of the others dropped an armload of clothing and moved after him. The third dived suddenly for the floor. "No you don't," he screamed. "No you don't. We'll blast our way out! Freddie! Tom!"

A gun roared. A bullet sang past Murdock's head and then another. Murdock dropped to his knees. One of the burglars who had started for the front of the store had ducked behind a showcase and was firing at him. Murdock, lying flat on the floor, answered those shots. Bert Andrews lay near him, his gun booming in Murdock's ear. Bullets were raining down through the broken skylight.

The man who had taken refuge behind the showcase, stumbled away. He dropped to the floor and lay there, motionless. The one who had started the battle hadn't fired after his second shot. The third man stood against the front doors, his hands high above his head.

Murdock slipped a new clip into his gun. He got to his feet. "All right," he called to the men on the roof. "You can come down. It's all over."

He moved on into the store and circled around to the front to click on the lights.



He stared at the man standing against the door with his hands above his head, and saw that it wasn't a man, but a boy of maybe sixteen or seventeen, a thin, frightened, pale-faced boy whose legs were trembling so badly they would scarcely hold him up. He looked at the two who were lying on the floor. Both were clearly under twenty.

"Kids!" said Bert Andrews, and his voice was strained and sounded unnatural. "Why did they have to start a battle?"

The scowl on Murdock's face was ugly. He put away his gun. "We didn't catch much, did we?" he growled. "Or maybe we caught just what someone wanted us to catch."

"I'll telephone for an ambulance," said Bert Andrews. He started for the stockroom.

Murdock collected a gun from the boy who stood against the front door. He turned to examine the other two. One was dead. The other had been hit through the shoulder and through the leg. He might have a chance to live. The boy who was dead had blond, curly hair and wide, vacant blue eyes. He had been a good-looking boy, husky, well-built. Murdock's stomach started churning. They called him a hard-boiled cop and maybe he was, but something like this was hard to take.

The detectives who had been on the roof came in. Spence unlocked the front door and came through it followed by the two men who had been with him. All these officers stood and stared at the two boys on the floor and at the one who had escaped. "A gun in the hands of a kid can kill you as quickly as a gun in the hands of a man," said one of the detectives. "But wait until the newspapers get a load of this. They'll crucify us."

Murdock was thinking the same thing. This night's work would serve as proof of all the charges against him. "Reno," he said under his breath. "I want to talk to Reno." But even as he said this he knew

that talking to Reno wouldn't be any help.

**B**UGS OLIVER straddled a chair in Murdock's office. Oliver was a reporter on the *Evening News*. He was a thin, stoop-shouldered man with sharp, pointed features, a constantly sour expression and a racking cough which now and then gripped him and drained what little color he had from his face.

"Don't blame me for the attitude of the rag I work for, Murdock," he insisted. "I don't determine the editorial policy. We get our orders from above and as it happens, Mr. G. Allison Dudley owns a huge block of the stock."

Murdock shrugged his shoulders.

"The rumor going around, now," said Oliver, "is that the kids who were robbing that store weren't armed."

"It's a damned lie!" Murdock roared.

"Maybe so, but even the hint of the rumor does its harm. What did you get out of Freddie Brock, the kid who wasn't shot?"

Murdock shook his head. "Nothing. He mentioned a contact man whom he knew only as Pete. His description of Pete would fit a thousand men. He knew of the red-headed woman. He doesn't know her name or where she lives. She and Bud Hamilton visited the places before they pulled the jobs. Bud was the leader of the three boys. He is the one who started the fight and he is dead."

"A red-headed woman," said Bugs Oliver. "What's this about a red-headed woman?"

"Talk to Ed Grover, head of the Graybar Agency. He can tell you about her."

Bert Andrews came in and asked, "Have you seen Reno?"

"I've tried to locate him," said Murdock. "I've not yet run him down."

"I just saw him enter the police commissioner's office," Andrews reported. "Dudley was with him."

Murdock's lips tightened. He scowled



at the telephone, knowing that he would soon get a call to report to the commissioner. He had been expecting it all morning.

Jimmy Spence came in. He shook his head. He had been out to talk to the parents of Bud Hamilton, the boy who had been killed. Murdock had picked him for this job because Spence had a nice way of dealing with people.

"I didn't get to first base, Cap'n," Spence reported. "They wouldn't even talk to me. They claim their boy was murdered. They feel he should have been given a chance and that he wasn't."

The telephone on Murdock's desk started ringing. Murdock answered it. He grunted. He said, "Yes, Commissioner. Right away," and hung up. He glanced around then at Bert Andrews, Jimmy Spence and the reporter.

"Give him my love," said Bert Andrews, "and tell him for me, where he can go."

Murdock chuckled. He said, "Thanks, Bert."

The four men waiting for him in the commissioner's office faced him in a stoney silence. Myron A. Galt, the commissioner, sat behind his huge, glass-topped desk. He was a thin, white-haired man, distinguished in appearance and usually able to hide his nervousness and irritability. Reno stood at the window. There was a smirk on Reno's face.

G. Allison Dudley sat on the edge of a chair near the commissioner's desk. He had tight, stern features. He was a prominent man in this town. He looked prominent. Only Ed Grover seemed worried. Grover had reason to be. Many of the victimized stores were protected by his agency. Grover stood near Dudley's chair. He was a tall, slender man of about thirty-five, personally attractive.

Murdock closed the door through which he had come. He moved deeper into the room, then stood facing these men.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Called on the Carpet

"WE HAVE been discussing the shooting last night," said the commissioner suddenly. "Was it necessary?"

"It happened," said Murdock in a controlled voice.

"Three boys," said the commissioner. "All in their teens. Two of them from good families. It's one thing to shoot down a dangerous and confirmed criminal. It's quite another when the victim is a boy."

"The victim could have been a police officer," said Murdock.

"There is still a question in my mind as to whether or not the shooting was necessary," continued the commissioner, and his voice was grim. "Those boys were not the real criminals. They were evidently looting a store, but someone sent them there. Someone planned it and would have disposed of the stolen goods. It is the job of the police department to strike at the source of crime, not only at its manifestations. You bungled the job last night, Murdock. You have placed the department in an embarrassing position. We are being highly criticized for what you did."

Murdock held his temper. He made no answer. There was no point in arguing with Commissioner Galt in front of an audience. He had discovered that long ago."

"What my final decision will be," said the commissioner, "I do not know. For the present, however, I believe it will be well to turn over to Captain Reno the responsibility for further work on this case. I have great confidence in Captain Reno's good judgment, ability and efficiency."

Murdock's face was flushed. This was almost more than he could take, but he



had to take it. To challenge the commissioner, now, in the face of what had happened, would mean suspension and he didn't want that. He had a feeling this case was about ready to break. He wanted to be around. He wanted to see where the solution would lead.

Dudley cleared his throat. He shook his head. "This will not do, Galt," he said bluntly. "In my opinion, the boy who was killed last night was murdered. When the true facts of this case are known, John Murdock will stand on trial for his life."

"The boy was armed, Dudley," said the commissioner.

"Whose word do you have for it?" snapped Dudley. "Murdock's. He should be suspended, at once."

"I have told you," said the commissioner, "that Captain Reno will look into your charges. If they are proven, Murdock will be suspended and will stand trial."

John Murdock rubbed his hands together. He hadn't slept much the night before. He wasn't proud of having shot Bud Hamilton, but it had happened. There was no way to change it now.

"Have you anything to say, Murdock?" asked the commissioner.

"You have seen my report," Murdock answered. "I have nothing to add to it."

"You understand that you are to give Captain Reno your full cooperation?"

"Captain Reno," said Murdock, dryly, "is a remarkable man. I doubt that he will need much help from me."

The commissioner frowned. He said, "That is all, Murdock. You may go."

Back in his office, John Murdock paced the floor, trying to work out the anger which half choked him.

"What do we do when Reno pops in here?" Andrews asked.

"Be nice to him," Murdock growled. "Kiss him on both cheeks."

"With plain knuckles or brass."

"Either or both," said Murdock. "Or

use your feet on him if you'd rather."

There was a knock on the door. Murdock barked, "Come in," then turned and scowled at the man who entered.

"I just want you to know, Murdock," said Ed Grover, "that I wasn't in on that deal in the commissioner's office."

"Why weren't you?" asked Murdock.

"Because I think we'd get less help from Reno than from you. Reno's a phoney."

Murdock shrugged his shoulders. "Anything new on the case?"

"Nothing new. Every man in the agency is working on it. Are you pulling out, turning it over to Reno?"

"No," Murdock exploded.

Ed Grover chuckled. He said, "Fine. Let's get together tonight and talk things over."

NOON came, and Murdock had heard nothing from Reno. He waited until twelve-thirty, then crossed the street to the Dutchman's for a glass of beer and a sandwich. He was back at his office before one and when he came in, his telephone was ringing. He answered it and heard Pat Carew's voice on the other end of the wire. Pat Carew was the jailer.

"About half an hour ago," Carew reported. "Captain Reno came up here and got Freddie Brock. He had an order from the police commissioner. The elevator man tells me that Reno took the kid to the sweat room. Reno said the kid was going to talk, or else. There were two patrolmen with him."

Murdock bit his lips. He said, "Thanks, Pat," and slammed down the receiver.

The sweat room was in the City Hall's sub-basement. It was a sound-proof room without ventilation. It was seldom used these days as it had once been used, but its psychological effect upon some prisoners was still important. Seated in the chair under the glaring light in the room, and surrounded by officers,



many a man had broken down and talked rather than face the ordeal his imagination had painted for him.

Murdock stormed down the corridor. He took the stairs to the sub-basement, two at a time. A uniformed officer was posted at the door to the sweat room. He didn't move out of the way as Murdock approached. He was a new man on the force. Murdock didn't know him.

"Stand aside," said Murdock sharply.

The man didn't budge. "Captain Reno is in there," he answered. "He gave orders not to be disturbed."

Murdock reached out. He caught the man by the front of the coat. He jerked him forward, then lunged against him, rocking the man backwards and away from the door. Murdock turned the knob, pushed the door open. He stepped inside and closed it.

Freddie Brock sat in the room's only chair, under a brilliant light. His nose was bleeding and he was crying. His hair was mussed. Perspiration showed on his chin and forehead. A uniformed officer stood to one side. He didn't look too happy. Captain Reno, his coat off, had been leaning over Freddie, but now he had straightened and was facing Murdock. His round, beefy face was flushed with anger.

"What's going on here?" Murdock roared. "What's the meaning of this, Reno?"

"I'm questioning a prisoner," Reno snapped. "I'm entirely within my rights."

"Not so long as I'm around," Murdock answered. "You're through. Get out."

Reno's hand lifted toward the gun in his shoulder holster. The expression on his face was ugly. Murdock started forward, then dived straight at Reno, as he was snaking out his gun. He caught the gun, twisted it from Reno's hand, and brought his other fist up in a swinging blow to the point of Reno's chin. As Reno

staggered backwards, Murdock followed him and hit him again.

He hadn't pulled either punch. Reno fell against the wall. He seemed to hang there for a moment, then slid slowly to the floor. Murdock looked down at him. A trickle of blood showed in the corner of Reno's lips. The man was momentarily dazed.

Murdock turned away. He faced the uniformed officer whose eyes had a wide, startled look. "What's your name?" he asked bluntly.

"Graves. George Graves," was the answer. And then in a rush, "I had nothing to do with this, sir. I was ordered to come along."

"There are some orders no good officer will ever take. And another thing. A man gets ahead by doing his job, not by currying favors."

"Yes sir."

Murdock glanced at the boy. Freddie was pale, frightened. His nose was still bleeding, but he didn't look badly hurt.

"Have you anything more to tell me, Freddie?" Murdock asked.

The boy bit his lips. He made no answer.

"Take him back upstairs, Graves," said Murdock. "Have Pat Carew look him over. Tell Pat to call up Doc Hauser if he thinks its necessary."

The two left the room and Murdock looked once more at Sam Reno, who was now on his feet, leaning against the wall. There was a blazing hatred in Reno's eyes.

"You've not heard the last of this, Murdock," said Reno, grimly. "You'll be sorry for this as long as you live."

Murdock shook his head. "I doubt that a lot." He stepped closer to the man. "Where did you get your tip on the robbery last night?"

"Over the telephone. It was anonymous. Some man. I don't know who it was."

"You told me the tip was straight."



"Well, it was, wasn't it."

Murdock sucked in a long, slow breath. He said, "Reno, I hope you're clean. If you're not, God help you. And if you ever try beating up a kid again, try it in some other city. Now get out. The sight of you makes me sick."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Redheaded Corpse*

**R**ENO got out and Murdock followed him upstairs and then branched off to his office. There, he rubbed the knuckles of his right fist and grinned. He had done, just a moment ago, something he had often wanted to do in the past, and he felt a real satisfaction in it. But he would have to pay high for hitting Reno. The man would go to the police commissioner with a highly colored account of what had happened and the police commissioner would get Murdock on the telephone. A suspension was coming up.

The telephone rang and Murdock answered it. He heard a man's voice on the other end of the wire.

"Hey, Cap'n. This is Bugs Oliver. Can you get away for about half an hour?"

"Sure," said Murdock. "What is it, Bugs?"

"I've got something here to show you. Something I think you'd be interested in."

"Where are you?" Murdock asked.

"Number six-hundred and twelve in the Bell-Haven apartments. It's on Fremont Street near Grove. Hurry it up."

"I'll be right there," said Murdock.

He hung up and then stood scowling at the telephone, trying to remember something but not sure what it was, puzzled and not understanding why he was puzzled. The telephone rang again and once more he answered it. This time he heard the commissioner's voice.

"Just a minute, Commissioner," Murdock said into the telephone. "Hang on."

He laid the telephone on his desk, reached for his hat, and left the office.

A taxi took Murdock to the curb in front of the Bell-Haven apartments. Murdock paid off the driver. He crossed to the entrance and stepped inside. The old man back of the desk glanced at him with only a casual interest. Murdock headed for the automatic elevator. He pushed the button and stood there, waiting for the cage to come down. And suddenly he knew why he had been puzzled after his conversation with Bugs Oliver. Never, so long as the reporter had known him had he called him Cap'n. Oliver had always called him Murdock, or occasionally, John.

The telephone connection, during their talk, had not been too good and it hadn't been a long talk. There was a chance, an awfully good chance, that it hadn't been Oliver to whom he had been talking.

A sudden, sharp excitement raced over Murdock's body. This could be a trap. He should never have come here alone, and he wouldn't have come alone if he had figured this out, sooner. The thing to do now was telephone headquarters and get someone else out here, but there was an argument against that, too. If this was a trap, whoever was waiting for him had doubtless seen him arrive. Any delay would make the man suspicious. By the time he could get men here from headquarters, whatever was waiting upstairs wouldn't be there. The only possible course he could follow now was to play this out the way someone wanted it.

The cage was down. Murdock opened the door, stepped inside, closed the door and pushed the button for the sixth floor. While the cage made its slow climb upwards, he checked his gun and transferred it to his coat pocket. His hand was on it as he stepped out and moved down the corridor. He came to number 611. The



name-plate over the bell was Frank Arbutnot. He lifted his hand toward the button.

"Steady, Murdock!" said a voice behind him. "You've got the wrong apartment. I made a mistake over the telephone. We want you in six-hundred and twelve. Take your hand out of your pocket."

The door to the apartment across the hall had opened noiselessly. A man was standing in the entrance, covering him with a gun. Murdock could guess that before he turned.

Murdock turned. Not one man but two were standing in the entrance to 612. Their guns covered him, and they were men Murdock knew. Half a dozen years before they had been sent up on a burglary rap. They had been out for six months. The taller of the two, Slick Foggarty, had a long police record. The other man, Dan Cathcart, wasn't so well known. He was originally from the west coast.

"Come on in, Murdock," said Foggarty. "We've got a mess in here. Maybe you can help us out."

THE two men backed into the room, still covering Murdock with their guns. Murdock followed them. It was a nice apartment. A radio was playing soft music and the faint smell of perfume was in the air.

"Kick the door shut," ordered Foggarty.

Murdock kicked the door shut. He leaned back against it. The first shock of his surprise was gone. He scowled at these two men. Neither of them, he figured, had the ability to have planned a thing like this. There was someone else pulling the wires.

The next time you two get sent up," he said slowly, "It will be for a much longer stretch."

"There'll be no next time," grated Cathcart.

He was a short, stocky, dark-haired man. His nose was crooked, broken. He had thick lips. He needed a shave.

"He's right," said Foggarty. "There will be no next time. It's a pleasure to help pay off the man who sent us up."

"Who are you helping?" asked Murdock.

Foggarty grinned. "A pal of yours," he answered. "Yeah, a pal of ours, too. Take a look in the bedroom." He motioned with his gun toward a door across the room.

"Why?" asked Murdock.

"Because I said to," Foggarty snapped. "Take a look."

Murdock crossed to the bedroom door. He opened it. He stiffened. A woman lay across the bed, her head hanging over its edge. There were livid marks on her throat. Her face was a mottled purple. The woman's hair was a coppery red.

"I told you we had a mess on our hands," said Foggarty. "Not our mess, of course. We didn't kill her. You know, Murdock, she wasn't a bad dame until she went soft. She didn't like what happened to the Hamilton kid."

Murdock's hands were clenched. Here was the red-headed woman Grover had told him about. Here was the first, real break in a problem which had baffled the department for months, but he was in no position to do anything about it.

Foggarty came up behind him. "Well, what do you think, Murdock? the man asked. "How will this do for a pay-off?"

"Who killed her?" Murdock asked. "Who—"

His voice choked off. A blinding pain struck him across the back of his neck, just at the base of his skull. He had no memory of pitching to the floor. . . .

There was no sounds in the room. Murdock lay on his back on the floor near the bed. He stared at the ceiling with eyes which at first refused to focus and which held no knowledge of where he was



or what had happened. He closed his eyes against an overpowering dizziness and when he opened them again he saw the head hanging over the bed, the horribly mottled face of the dead woman and the trailing, copper-red hair.

Memory of what had happened then returned swiftly. Murdock sat up, leaning against the bed and gritted his teeth against the throbbing pain in his skull. He heard no sounds anywhere. Foggarty and Cathcart, he decided, were gone. He remembered the last thing Foggarty had said and he puzzled over it for a minute. Foggarty had asked, *How will this do for a pay-off?* The question didn't seem to make sense.

After a few minutes he stood up. He made his way to the bathroom, turned on the cold water in the wash bowl, and bathed his face. His head was still splitting. Murdock opened the medicine chest, hoping to find some aspirin. He saw something else which startled him. It was a straight edge razor, one which he knew very well, one of the three he owned.

This did more to jar Murdock awake than the cold water. There was a shaving brush on the shelf, one of his, an old one. A half used tube of the shaving soap he favored was on another shelf.

Murdock returned to the bedroom. He took a look in the clothes closet. On a hanger was his old, flannel bathrobe. Next to it was an extra suit, one he hadn't worn for months. Several of his shirts were here. The rest of the space was filled with the red-head's clothing.

The set-up was clear. If he looked around he would find more of his stuff here. Someone had visited his apartment this morning and had made off with maybe a couple suit-cases of stuff. He was a bachelor. The red-head apparently had lived here alone. He had been moved in with her. It was a story a lot of people would believe without any more convinc-

ing proof than some of his clothing found here. And the plot went deeper. The red-head had been involved with the crowd which had been pulling the clothing store robberies. Tying him in with her, tied him in with those crimes. She had been murdered and this charge, too, he would have to face.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Murdock Gets Busy

MURDOCK crossed to the telephone. He called headquarters and got Bert Andrews on the telephone.

"Where have you been, Cap'n?" Andrews asked. "Things have happened. The commissioner has issued a directive, suspending you, and making Reno acting chief of detectives. Tonight, at six, Dudley is going on the radio and accuse you of being personally involved with the crowd which has been pulling the clothing store robberies."

This fit perfectly into the pattern. Murdock only grunted. "Where's Reno?" he asked.

"Reno lit out of here a couple of minutes ago with some of the boys. It was a rush call somewhere. He didn't ask me to go along. Spence, either, but Spence crowded in."

Reno's call wasn't surprising either. The man was probably on his way here. Murdock figured that maybe he had ten minutes before Reno came charging in.

"Call the lab, Bert," he ordered. "Get a homicide crew out to six-hundred and twelve, Bell-Haven apartments. Send the coroner out with a meat wagon. Get out here yourself as soon as you can."

"Anyone I know?" Andrews asked.

"The red-head," said Murdock. "Another thing. Send out a radio pick-up call on Dan Cathcart and Slick Foggarty. You can get their descriptions from the



files. A good many of the boys know them."

"You don't sound like you've been suspended, Cap'n," said Andrews.

"I haven't seen the directive," said Murdock grimly. "Get to work."

Murdock hung up and looked around the apartment. He wouldn't find much here that would help him, he knew. This place was probably set up for a police search. Through the window he heard the faint scream of a siren. Murdock dug a cigar from his pocket. He clamped it between his teeth and waited grimly for the arrival of Captain Reno.

The automatic elevator stopped at the sixth floor. It disgorged six men. Captain Reno was leading them. Jimmy Spence was one of the six.

"Apartment six-hundred and twelve," said Reno. "According to the call I got, it's a murder. Come on, men."

He started down the corridor. He came to a sudden stop. The door to 612 stood open and in the entrance to the apartment stood John Murdock, his hands on his hips, his unlit cigar cocked at a jaunty angle between his lips.

"It took you long enough to get here," said Murdock. "What happened?"

Reno gulped. His eyes held a startled look. His mouth had dropped open. "You—you didn't call me," he managed. "You—"

"Then who was it?" Murdock snapped.

Reno had no answer for that. He stared at Murdock. He didn't seem to know what to say. The men who had come with him, waited. Jimmy Spence had a half grin on his face.

"Well, who was it?" Murdock asked again.

Reno straightened. "You have been suspended, Murdock. I have been named in your place. Stand out of that door."

Murdock chuckled.

"Get away from that door," Reno screamed.

Murdock shook his head. "I can't hear you. Talk louder."

Reno looked around at the men who had come with him. They were old-timers who owed their loyalty to Murdock. They seemed to be enjoying this. Reno bit his lip. He faced Murdock. He tried once more.

"I order you to stand away," he shouted. "I'm in charge here."

Murdock again chuckled. "Jimmy, take charge of Reno. The poor man is suffering from delusions. He might even hurt himself. You'd better place him under protective arrest. Put some bracelets on him."

"Sure thing, Cap'n," said Jimmy Spence.

Spence moved forward. There was a sharp, brief struggle. Two others moved in to help. Handcuffs were snapped on Reno's wrists."

"Now take him out to the west side jail," Murdock ordered. "That's a nice, quiet jail and Lohman, who's in charge out there, was once broken by Reno when Reno was riding high. Lohman will take care of him for us. Get back here as quick as you can, Jimmy. We've got a murder case on our hands."

"What about this suspension, Cap'n?" one of the men asked.

Murdock looked blank. He said, "What suspension? I haven't heard anything about any suspension."

**B**ERT ANDREWS took charge of the preliminary investigation into the murder of the red-head, whose name, it developed was Myrna Jerome. Captain Phil Rogge, reporting for duty early in the afternoon, assumed general responsibility for the work of the detective bureau. Rogge had already stated in his report, one copy of which would go to the commissioner the next morning, that he had been unable to get in touch with Captain Reno.

The men's clothing found in Myrna



Jerome's apartment, according to a report to the newspapers, had not yet been identified. Various papers and old letters and bills found there, bearing the name of John Murdock, had been impounded by Andrews for an examination for fingerprints. Andrews knew he was skating on thin ice, but he had done it before.

Up to six o'clock, the search for Slick Foggarty and Dan Cathcart had produced no results.

At six o'clock, John Murdock and Ed Grover, the local head of the Greybar agency met by appointment in Grover's office. Jimmy Spence had come with Murdock. Two of Grover's agents were there.

"We're getting there," Grover said to Murdock. "Once the breaks start, they keep coming. A gang never holds together. That red-head was upset by the death of the Hamilton boy. She was ready to talk, so she was killed. Her death will frighten someone else. We're almost out of the woods, Cap'n."

"Yeah," said Murdock. "Almost."

"What's happened to Reno?"

"He's been temporarily put away."

"You're taking a lot of chances, but I think it'll pay off," Grover nodded. "They figured to have you under arrest for the murder of the red-head."

"Foggarty didn't hit me hard enough," Murdock grinned. "I was supposed to be still unconscious when Reno got there."

Grover rubbed his hands together. "I've a theory, a cock-eyed theory. Want to hear it?"

"Go ahead."

"There's someone back of these attacks on you. The main point of the plan is to get you out and get Reno in. Whoever is backing Reno, controls him. With Reno in your place, Central City can be opened up again, because Reno will play ball with his boss. The clothing store robberies were used as the opening wedge. The tip-off the other night was really to put

you on the spot. The kids robbing that store were pepped up to fight if they were trapped. But these robberies weren't important. Getting you out, Cap'n, was important. And the man back of the plan is no piker. It's not Foggarty or Cathcart. It's someone big."

"What about this G. Allison Dudley?" Murdock asked.

"It could be," Grover nodded. "Why don't we go see him. We could make him talk. Bluff the truth out of him."

Murdock shook his head. "We don't have enough to go on, Grover. If Dudley is the man we're after he's well covered. A straight bluff wouldn't work."

It might on Reno, if Reno knows anything. He's a man who would crack easy."

"You might have something there," Murdock agreed.

"I might have something else by ten, tonight," said Grover. "The best man I have is working on some sort of hot tip. I wasn't here when he called in and he wouldn't spill the story to anyone else. He said he would call again at ten. If he's got something and I need you, where can I reach you?"

"Try the Dutchman's," said Murdock. "I'll probably be using his back room as a temporary office."

Grover chuckled. He said, "Good for you, Cap'n. Keep on the job one day more and I've a hunch we'll smash this thing."

Murdock called headquarters. He got Bert Andrews on the wire and asked how things were going. Andrews gave his report, mentioning among other things, several calls from the police commissioner, who was about ready to blow his top. The police commissioner wanted to talk to Reno. He couldn't understand why Reno wasn't around.

"Call him up," said Murdock. "Tip him off that Reno has been arrested and placed in the west side jail. Telephone Lohman at the west side jail to release Reno when the commissioner jumps him. I'll have



Jimmy Spence out there to tail Reno. I'm anxious to see what Reno does. Maybe Reno will play straight. Maybe he won't."

Murdock gave Spence his orders. No man was more ideal for such a job than Jimmy Spence who was an old hand at shadowing a suspect.

"Telephone me every break you get, Spence," Murdock insisted. "I'll be at the Dutchman's."

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Commissioner's Callers

**T**HE BACK room at the Dutchman's was seldom used, except by Murdock. There was a pay-telephone in the corner. Over it he had been in touch with Bert Andrews in the City Hall across the street.

It was almost eight. Murdock paced back and forth across the room. There had been no report on Foggarty or Cathcart. There had been no report from Jimmy Spence. Reno had been released from jail at about seven o'clock, on order of the police commissioner. He hadn't appeared at headquarters. Bert Andrews was still covering up for Murdock on the death of the red-head.

It was eight and then it was after eight. Murdock continued his pacing. He had the feeling that he was awfully close to the break he had been expecting. He was an old hand at this game. This feeling wasn't merely a hunch.

The telephone in the corner started ringing. Murdock jerked around and answered it. He heard the voice of Jimmy Spence on the other end of the wire.

"This is the first chance I've had to call, Cap'n," Spence reported. "Reno didn't light until a minute ago. When he got out of jail he made a couple of telephone calls. One was for a cab. I don't know about the other. He took the cab

to forty-third and Spruce and made another telephone call. I don't know who to. He then rode to Sixth and Pine. He paid off the cab and waited on the corner. After a while he was picked up by a different cab. Some man was already in it. I didn't get a good look at him. They headed for the police commissioner's home and went inside. They're there now. So is Grover and Mr. G. Allison Dudley. They arrived separately, just after Reno and his unknown pal."

"Stick around, Spence," said Murdock bruskiy. "I'll be out there."

He hung up, dug a nickel from his pocket, and dialled headquarters. He asked for Bert Andrews.

"Hey," said Andrews, "the commissioner just telephoned. He asked where you were, then told me to stay glued to the telephone. He said he might have an important order in a few minutes."

"Let someone else stay glued to the telephone," Murdock answered. "Head for the garage. Pick up a car. I'll meet you at the ramp."

"Right away?"

"Sooner than that, Andrews," said Murdock. "And tell whoever answers your phone to stall the commissioner while he hunts for you."

Murdock hung up. He had a notion that this was it, that at the police commissioner's home he would find the answers, or at least a way to the answer. Reno was the man picked for his place, the man who had steered him into a gun-fight, and who had come charging out to the red-head's to arrest him. The police commissioner had backed up Reno, all the way. G. Allison Dudley had led in the attack against him. And Grover? Grover's place in this wasn't clear, but Grover had his agency job to defend and might be ready to play along in any way that would save him. The meeting at the commissioner's home was a meeting he meant to attend.

Andrews met him at the ramp.



"Head went down Main," Murdock ordered. "Use your siren until we're out of the business district, then choke it but don't slow down."

"Where to then?" asked Andrews.

"Edgemont Drive and Grove Street. Cut your lights before you get there."

"The commissioner's home, huh?" Andrews smiled.

Murdock nodded. He set himself for a hard ride. Bert Andrews knew how to wheel a police car.

THEY met Jimmy Spence at the corner, almost a block from the entrance to the commissioner's home. "They're still in there," Spence reported, "or at least they were a few minutes ago. The police commissioner seemed to be trying to get to someone on the telephone. Dudley was buried in a chair, smoking. Grover was pacing the room. So was Reno. Guess who the other man is?"

"Foggarty," said Murdock.

"That's right," Spence nodded. "Do we call the boys? A lot of 'em would like to be in on it when we knock over the commissioner."

"There's no time for it," Murdock answered. "This crowd won't stay set and we have no evidence for a raid. We'll just barge in gently and see what's going on. I'll be the front guy. You two keep in the background until we know the score. How do we get in."

"There's a side gate down Grove Street," said Jimmy Spence. "A curving walk leads up to the house. Maybe the front door is unlocked. If it isn't, there are French doors to the study opening off of a veranda. They're in the study and the French doors are ajar."

Murdock nodded. He checked his gun, transferred it to his coat pocket and headed down Grove Street. Andrews and Spence followed him. They came to the side gate Spence had mentioned. They opened it and moved up the curving,

shrub-bordered path toward the house. They came to the end of the path at the corner of the veranda and there they stopped.

"You can get close enough to hear the murmur of voices," Spence whispered, "but you can't distinguish what they're saying. You can see into the room through the back window where the curtain is crooked. The French doors are half way across the veranda. The front door is around this way."

"The French doors are quicker," said Murdock. "We'll go that way. You two hang back until I need you."

Murdock stepped up on the veranda and made his way silently toward the French doors which stood slightly ajar. He heard the murmur of voices, then as he neared the doors he could hear what was being said. The commissioner was apparently on the telephone, still trying to get Andrews.

"Well, where is he?" the commissioner shouted. "Where did he go? I told him to stick at the phone. Give me an answer. You said you would have Andrews call me in ten minutes. That was twenty minutes ago."

"Give him the story, Commissioner," said Dudley. "I don't care who he is. Let's get every man you have available out on a search for John Murdock. Let's give the stories to the newspapers."

"Hang on for a minute," ordered the police commissioner, apparently to the man at headquarters.

"We know where he'll be at ten, commissioner," said Reno. "We can pick him up at the Dutchman's, then. He might be there before ten."

John Murdock pulled in a long, slow breath. This statement lined Grover up with the rest of them. Grover was the man with whom he had made a ten o'clock appointment at the Dutchman's.

"I don't want to wait until ten," said the commissioner. "I want Murdock be-



fore ten and I want a talk with him before there is any publicity. This is going to be a hard thing for the department to face."

Murdock reached for the door. He pulled it open. He stepped into the room. It was a large room, comfortably furnished, well lighted. The commissioner stood at his desk, the telephone in his hand. A wide, startled look had come into his face. In a chair near the desk, Dudley had straightened up. Reno, in the other corner of the room, had stiffened, then had jerked up his gun and was covering Murdock. Foggarty, in a half crouch, had also grabbed for his gun. Ed Grover, of this entire group, was the only one who showed no surprise. Grover was seated on the arm of one of the big chairs. He held a cocktail glass in his hand. He nodded to Murdock. He said, "Hello, Cap'n. You're just in time. We've been talking about you."

Murdock shrugged his shoulders. He said, "Put up the telephone, Commissioner. You wanted me. Here I am."

"Reno," ordered the commissioner, and the strain of excitement showed in his voice. "Reno, put this man under arrest."

Murdock's hand was in his bulging coat pocket, tight on his gun. "If Reno is wise," he said bluntly, "he'll stay where he is. In fact, I'll make a bargain with him. If you gentlemen name and prove the charge you have against me, I'll hand over my gun without further argument."

Reno had started forward. He stopped. He eyed that bulge in Murdock's pocket and knew what it meant. He knew Murdock's reputation with a gun. Perspiration suddenly glistened on his forehead. His breath was coming fast.

"I hate this, Murdock," said the commissioner. "I hate it because of the black eye it will give the department, but I can't dodge my responsibility. "Mr. Delago saw you enter Myrna Jerome's apartment. He heard the struggle."

"Who's Mr. Delago?" asked Murdock. "The man with the gun standing near Reno?"

The commissioner nodded. "He's one of Grover's operatives."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Roaring Guns

GROVER had set his cocktail down. His smile was gone. His eyes were sharp, watchful. His body was suddenly tense. Murdock nodded. The pattern was becoming clear.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Commissioner," Murdock said slowly, "but the man you called Delago is known to the police as Slick Foggarty. He's one of the crowd we're after. He saw me enter the red-head's apartment because he was there, himself. She was already dead. He's possibly the man who killed her. We may know for certain when we get the lab reports. Why don't we all go down to headquarters and tackle this thing on a factual basis."

Foggarty took a step backwards. He took another. His face was ghastly. He shook his head. "No you don't, Murdock. I'm going nowhere with you, Murdock."

"If he's your man, Grover," said Murdock bluntly, "you'd better keep him here. You might need him."

Grover made no answer. His eyes glanced from Foggarty to Murdock and then back again and Murdock knew, suddenly, what was in Grover's mind. Grover wanted Foggarty to break, use his gun, start a battle. A battle in which Murdock might be killed. Then there would be a way for Grover to cover up. Grover was the man back of this. There could be no other answer. Grover had introduced Foggarty as his operative. Grover had known of the plan to blame Murdock for the red-head's death even at the time of the



conference in his office. There had been no publicity on the case. Murdock hadn't mentioned it to Grover, but still, Grover had known, and the only way he could have known would have been of his own guilty knowledge.

"Let me tell you something," Murdock said slowly. "When the police have the answer it's never hard to find the proof. We'll tie the red-head up with the man who killed her. She's already tied in with the boys who were robbing the store the other night. Foggarty will help us. It's his only chance to avoid a murder rap and I think he knows it. Incidentally, Foggarty, don't try to get away. I've got men outside."

The commissioner seemed puzzled. Dudley was still leaning forward. His mouth sagged open. There was a dazed, uncomprehending look on his face.

"A good bluff, Murdock," said Grover. "A good bluff, but it won't work. I played along with you, all the time half feeling that you were back of the crowd we were after. We can prove it now. You're finished."

He stood up. The hand which had been hidden by his body held a gun. He covered Murdock. His lips were tight and pulled back from his teeth. "Go get him, Reno," he ordered. "He doesn't have the guts to make a fight."

That was what Grover wanted. A fight. An excuse to use his gun. He was trying to force it. He had to make it look good, either to the police commissioner or Dudley, and that meant that the commissioner and Dudley weren't in this with him, that they had been fooled.

"Get him, Reno," said Grover again. "Delago and I will both cover for you."

Murdock glanced toward the commissioner. He shook his head. "Keep out of it, Commissioner," he said sharply. "I've got men outside. I've got—"

Grover's head jerked momentarily in the direction of the commissioner and

Murdock knew that he could expect no more of a break than this. He lunged sideways, twisting and dropping to the floor. He heard the roar of Grover's gun, of Foggarty's. He felt the tug of a bullet at the shoulder of his coat. He fired and saw Grover stiffen, then steady himself and try to aim his gun once more.

Bert Andrews came plunging into the room, his gun blazing. Jimmy Spence was right behind him. Foggarty was still firing. Reno had crouched behind one of the chairs. He hadn't used his gun. At the last minute, Reno had switched sides. "I'm not in this," he was shouting. "I'm not in this."



Slick Foggarty staggered back against the wall. He sagged there, his gun still hanging in his hand. He slid slowly to the floor. Grover had turned half around. He was bending over, holding his stomach. His knees gave way and he went down.

Murdock got to his feet. He glanced at Dudley who had come half erect when the shooting started and who now sagged back in his chair, his face drained of all color. The police commissioner was out of sight, behind his desk.

"Andrews," said Murdock sharply, "See if you can get anything out of Fog-



garty, if he can talk. Spence, you take Grover. I'll handle Reno."

He started across the room. Reno came to his feet. He backed away. His face was flushed. He was perspiring. He came to the wall and could go no farther.

"You've one chance, Reno," said Murdock grimly. "Talk and talk fast or you can join your two pals on a morgue slab."

Reno gulped. He nodded his head. He started talking.

**A**N HOUR had passed. A morgue wagon had called for Foggarty and Grover. Reno was on his way back to jail. Murdock sat at the commissioner's desk in the commissioner's study. He had been busy on the telephone, sending and receiving calls. This case was being wrapped up, fast. Reporters were waiting in the parlor for a statement from the commissioner, and perhaps from Dudley.

"It's like this," said Murdock to the commissioner. "Grover headed the gang. He was in an ideal place to do so. He headed the agency which protected the stores which were looted. In that way he knew the best stores to knock off, when it would be safe. His agency work gave him the contacts he needed with the underworld, but he used only a few men with records. Mostly he used the kids, who were cheap and who loved the excitement. The red-head was his contact woman with the kids. He turned the kids in, through Reno, guessing they would put up a gun battle, and figuring that if I shot a kid, I could be removed and Reno would get my job. Reno would play ball with him.

"The red-head had grown to like the kids. She kicked at what happened and was going to talk. Grover killed her and set a frame-up for me. It didn't work right so he brought Foggarty here, introduced him to you as one of his operatives, and tried to make the frame tighter.

"The stuff which was taken was dis-

posed of through the Midwest Outlet company in other states. Dudley is the chief stockholder in the company. Some of it we will recover. Tell the reporters anything you want to. You would, anyhow."

The commissioner bit his lips. He mopped a hand over his brow. "I was completely fooled in this, Murdock. Please believe me."

Murdock grunted. He looked at Dudley. He said, "Dudley, you will go on the air, tomorrow night, and retract certain statements you made. And the next time you start a reform, start it with your own business enterprizes."

"I—I may not be able to get the time on the air," Dudley faltered.

"Then buy it," Murdock snapped angrily.

He leaned back in the commissioner's chair. He was tired. He was glad this was over. He hoped the commissioner had learned something from it, but he was doubtful. The commissioner was a proud, stubborn man. Working with him wasn't easy.

"A drink, Murdock?" asked the commissioner. "I've some excellent bourbon here."

John Murdock scowled. He shook his head. "I like beer, and I buy my own."

He got to his feet and headed for the door. He looked back, "When you talk to the reporters," he said sarcastically, "don't make yourself too damned big a hero. Election's a long time off."

He pushed through the parlor, refusing to talk to reporters and knowing that his work, in the days ahead, might have been easier if he had tried some of the commissioner's bourbon. This brought a scowl to his face but after a time, it vanished.

"Nuts," said John Murdock. "I'd still rather drink beer."



It was a hundred-to-one chance that a dusty roll of film and a pretty wife would keep double-crossed Detective Gleason from a quick trip to the sizzle-seat.

By **DAY KEENE**



She wanted to scream and couldn't  
—there was someone on the stairs.

**CAUGHT  
BY THE**

**B**ESS GLEASON realized that in her haste she had forgotten to remove her apron. She untied it and crammed it into her coat pocket. "Is Jack hurt badly?"

"No," one of the detectives in the front

**CAMERA**



seat of the car assured her. "Not badly, Mrs. Gleason."

He was kind. Both men had been too kind. There was something almost ominous in their kindness.

She rode listening to the siren, counting the familiar blocks, watching her world fall to pieces behind her. Jack was hurt and in trouble.

The brick house was modern and near the high school. A half-dozen children of high school age were standing on the lawn. Bill Podlar the detective with whom Jack was teamed was waiting under the porch light. As Bess passed him he squeezed her arm. "Keep your chin up, Bess."

The living room was large and cluttered looking. Just outside a partly closed door two men were talking to a red-haired boy in a sweat shirt and a pair of dirty light yellow cords.

Bess had never seen a homelier boy. At some time in his life his nose had been broken and improperly set. His mouth seemed too wide for his face. He chewed gum constantly.

"Gee, was I scared," he was saying. "It was just like in the movies, both of them lying there and her with blood all over her left side."

One of the men turned and Bess saw it was Inspector Harvey. "Now just a minute, Mrs. Gleason," he attempted to restrain her. "I—"

Bess wasn't to be restrained. Pushing open the door, she walked in. Wearing only his trousers and T-shirt Jack was lying on a rumpled bed snoring soddenly. And he wasn't hurt. He was drunk. She could smell the whiskey three feet away. Other men with cameras and flash bulbs and test tubes were grouped around the other twin bed in the room. The woman on it was Marta, Marta wearing a house coat that had been white.

Bess asked if Marta was dead and Inspector said she was. "You knew about her?"

"About her," she admitted carefully.

She looked from Jack to the whiskey bottle convenient to his hand. He chose that moment to open his eyes. "Hi, ya, Mouse." Then he turned his head and saw Marta. Gasping, "Good Lord," he got unsteadily to his feet and bolted for the bathroom.

The two detectives who had called for Bess followed Jack. Inspector Harvey guided Bess back to the living room.

*I might have known*, she thought. No one but Marta could live in such a clutter and make it look artistic. Books were piled everywhere. Two small cameras of different types lay on a dust-filmed desk beside a dirty coffee cup and two partly filled highball glasses. Still a third camera stood on a tall tripod in a corner in a nest of reflectors and flash bulb stands.

Sitting on an arm of a chair wondering why she didn't faint, Bess realized Inspector Harvey was speaking.

"Of course we haven't heard Jack's story. He may have some explanation. I hope so. But on the surface the thing is obvious. They were drinking. Three shots have been fired from his gun." He nodded at the red-haired boy. "Junior Caldwell, there, found Miss Gildea dead and Jack passed out when he and a group of other youngsters kept their appointment to have their pictures taken for the high school annual. What can you tell us, Mrs. Gleason?"

*That sometimes Jack wasn't home for nights on end, nights he said he was working on his own, hoping for promotion?* No. She couldn't tell him that. She said, "Not much. I knew they had been married. But that was five years ago. It was a boy and girl affair that only lasted a few months. Jack told me it was over. I had no reason to doubt him."

**I**NSPECTOR Harvey turned to talk to a stocky, gray-haired man and Bess realized who he was. This wasn't a run-



of-the-mill murder. One of their own was involved. The gray-haired man was the big brass from downtown.

She sat on the arm of the chair dully aware of the nightmare continuing in slow motion around her. Men came. Men went. Men carried out something in a long, closed, wicker basket.

Jack's nickname for her was Mouse. She had never felt more mouse-like. Marta had been smart. She wasn't. She was only a housewife. Marta had been the best baby photographer in town. Her skill was in constant demand from the staff of near-by Mercy Hospital to the high school where she took the pictures for the annual.

Bill Podlar came in and stood beside her. "He did it, Bill?" Bess asked.

"It looks bad," he admitted.

"*Now take Bill,*" Jack had said. "*Thirty years on the force and he's still a third grade detective working out of a district station. Not me, Mouse. I'm getting up where the gravy is if I have to work twenty-four hours a day.*"

And all the time he had been lying to have more time to spend with Marta. Two detectives led Jack out of the bedroom. He had his shoes and shirt and coat on now. A third detective was carrying his hat.

His voice was fogged with whiskey. "I didn't do it, Mouse. Don't you believe 'em." He made a tremendous effort to speak distinctly. "Marta phoned the station. Said she had something important to tell me." Tugging one of his wrists free he felt his head. "Never even saw her. Something hit me as I walked in the door."

A dead silence followed the pronouncement. Then the big brass took over. "That's your story, Gleason? You don't know anything about it. Your former wife phoned and said she had something important to tell you and when you walked in the door you were slugged."

"Yes, sir."

"By whom?"

"I don't know. I didn't see him."

One of the technical squad men admitted, "There is a slight abrasion on his head, Commissioner. But I doubt if the blow was sufficient to knock him unconscious for two hours."

The big brass waved Gleason from the room. Bess studied her husband's face as his brother detectives urged him forward. He didn't look shamed or frightened. He was puzzled.

Parking a few doors from the district station Bess sat a moment watching the stream of men filing in and out. She found Bill Podlar in the cubbyhole that served him and Jack as an office. In the harsh light of morning his face was lined and gray as he looked up from the reports on his desk. "No," he answered her question. "There isn't a thing new, Bess. Jack is still sticking to the same story. His affair with Marta was over. He merely went there because she phoned and told him she had something important to tell him. She said it would be a feather in his cap."

Bess drew circles in the dust on the desk. "Maybe it's true."

THE elderly detective sighed. "You know better than that, Bess. You've been around. I've seen it happen a hundred times. I'm only sorry it happened to you and Jack. You're both nice kids and I like you."

"You knew he was still seeing Marta?"

"No."

"Then how do you know Jack's story isn't true?"

"The evidence all points the other way." Podlar consulted a report on his clipboard. "Ballistics says the shots came from Jack's gun. Chemical research says he was drunk. An officer assigned to talk to the neighbors reports—Bill read the report verbatim: "Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell who live in the next house to the north say they have observed Officer Gleason enter the Marta Gilden house on numerous occasions. Mrs. Olaf Peterson to the



south is not so positive in her identification of Officer Gleason, but states the dead woman frequently received male callers'."

Podlar turned to another report. "The physician in charge of Police Emergency says the blow on his head was minor. Chemical Research reports the alcoholic content of his blood was high. Face the facts, Bess. The old fire flamed up again. He started dropping in for a few drinks. Last night they quarreled about something and in a drunken temper he shot her."

"But why should he say he was struck on the head as soon as he entered the house?"

"What would you expect him to do, tell the truth and go to the chair?"

"And there's no possibility he was framed?"

Podlar admitted, "I kicked that around all morning. I think almost as much of Jack as you do, Bess. But no matter how big Jack talked about finding Baby Face or cracking the armored car robbery on his own time, he and I are only third grade district hacks. We're little people, Bess, too small to get in anybody's hair. I wouldn't know Baby Face if I saw him on the street. I doubt Jack would."

Bess smiled wryly. Baby Face. Oh, Jack had such big plans. The vanished bank robber and killer had been an obsession of his for two years. She knew his description almost as well as Jack did. Baby Face was big time. He was thirty-two years old, blond, five feet nine inches tall with a cherubic countenance that had given him his nickname. He was wanted for robbery and murder in a half dozen states, but he had always been smart enough never to leave fingerprints.

She asked hopefully, "What were you and Jack working on, Bill?"

His voice sour he told her, "The theft of a six dollar and eighty-eight cent paper suitcase containing one Elton High School baseball uniform, one sweat shirt, one first baseman's glove, and two used baseballs.

Said suitcase was stolen from a locker in the high school gym the night the team returned from licking the pants off Menominee."

"And you found the suitcase?"

"No."

"But you spent all day yesterday talking to people. Who?"

Podlar released the clip on a second clipboard and tossed a list of names across the desk. "Bess, don't be so silly. No one framed Jack. At least no high school kid on account of a paper suitcase. Face it. The smoke got in Jack's eyes. For some reason Marta tried to snuff it out and he killed her. All you can do is get him a lawyer—a good one."

Out in the car again Bess sat looking at the list of names. Ellis, Mayberry, Shultz, Wanger, Harris, Caldwell, Phillips, Mason, Hollister, Hart. They were local business and professional men. Their sons played on the high school baseball team.

There was something she should remember about Menominee other than that Elton had won the championship, but she couldn't recall what it was. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered now. She reached for the starter button and sat back realizing she was at a mental crossroad.

SHE could believe in Jack or she could believe the evidence against him. She had to believe he had been faithful, believe his fantastic story of Marta phoning him and his being struck on the head; or she had to believe with Bill Podlar and Inspector Harvey that he was just another man who had been having an affair with an attractive woman who once had been his wife, and when she had tried to end it he had killed her.

As she thought of the many things, little things and big things they had shared she pounded the sill of the open window. "No, damn it. I won't believe it."

She pushed the starter button, meshed



the car into gear, and shot out into traffic. The first thing to do was to call on Mrs. Caldwell. The woman had made an honest mistake. A lot of black Irishmen were tall and weighed two-hundred pounds. Marta undoubtedly had admirers. It was one of them Mrs. Caldwell had seen and mistakenly identified as Jack.

Enroute Bess passed the Elton First National Bank and recalled what it was she knew about Menominee. The afternoon Elton had won the baseball championship a lone man and a woman companion had robbed the Menominee bank of twenty-eight thousand dollars. Jack had laughed about it at breakfast the next morning. He said the whole state was laughing. With the exception of one lone patrolman every policeman in Menominee, including the chief of police, had been at the ball park watching the game. What with the size of the crowd in town and the lateness of the alarm it had been almost impossible for them to do a thing.

The street on which Marta had lived was elm-shaded and old, as were most of the houses. The Caldwell house was a three story relic set well back on an unkempt lawn. Junior Caldwell, wearing the same dirty cords and faded sweat shirt he had been wearing the night before, was throwing a ball up in the air and catching it in a fielder's glove.

Wiping sweat and a lock of bright red hair from his forehead he appraised her thoughtfully, and with obvious approval, as she came up the unswept walk. "Hi, Mrs. Gleason. What you doing around here?"

"I'd like to see your mother."

He continued to eye her. "Sure. Why not?" He chewed his gum a moment, called, "Hey, Ma. The wife of that detective who killed the lady next door is here to see you."

A faded blonde woman in her middle thirties opened the front screen door. "Come in, dearie," she smiled. "So you are Mrs. Gleason."

Inside the living room an older man in his shirt sleeves and stocking feet was asleep on a raddled sofa. Junior shook his shoulder. "Wake up, Pa. We got company. Mrs. Gleason is here."

The blond woman told him, "The wife of the detective mixed up in that nasty affair next door." She dusted a chair with the corner of her apron. "Sit down, dearie."

**B**ESS sat on the edge of a chair. "Thank you." She didn't like this house. She didn't like its atmosphere. She didn't like the way the three of them were looking at her.

"Oh, Gleason," the man said. He looked over his glasses at Bess. "It was your husband who shot the lady next door."

"I don't think he did," Bess said. "That's why I'm here. I think there has been a mistake. Are you folks positive of your identification? Are you positive it was Mr. Gleason who has been calling on Miss Gilden?"

The blond woman looked at Junior. He crossed the left side of his sweat shirt. "Cross my heart and hope to die on this spot."

"If we seen him once, we seen him fifty times, dearie," Mrs. Caldwell said.

"I don't believe you," Bess said. "It was some man who looked like Jack."

The blonde continued to smile. "Why should we lie to you, dearie? It's no skin off our nose."

"Noses," Junior said. "Our is plural."

Mr. Caldwell sat a little straighter on the sofa. "You stop talking to your mother like that, Junior, or I'll belt you. You've been too big for your britches ever since you got on the baseball team."

Junior's grin was a wide slash that cut his homely face in half. "I did okay in Menominee, didn't I? A base on balls, a single and a three bagger." He tossed the ball and caught it in the mitt. "The coach says I'm a natural for the big leagues."



Mrs. Caldwell explained to Bess. "You see the reason we know it was your husband who called on the lady next door was because we got a good look at him when he came here yesterday morning. He was with another detective. It seems someone broke into a locker in the gym and stole a suitcase the night the boys came home from the big game over at Menominee."

"Boy, was Buzz sore," Junior added. "He just got his mitt broke in nice and someone swipes it."

Bess got to her feet. *They're lying. They're covering up something,* she thought. What, she had no way of knowing. She did know she didn't like Junior. She didn't like his family. They said they had seen Jack and Marta together, not once but fifty times. They would so testify in court, and a jury would believe them.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Caldwell said. "I wish for your sake it could be different, dearie. But that's the way things go, I guess."

Junior dropped his ball and picked it up. "What I want to know is now the dame next door is dead who's going to take my picture for the annual." He mimicked a woman's voice. "'Come at eight o'clock, Junior,' she tells me. 'Not one minute earlier. Not one minute later.' So I do. But when me and the rest of the kids gets there does she take our pictures? Naw. She gets bumped off."

"Junior," Mrs. Caldwell said sharply.

Mrs. Caldwell's voice picking at Junior followed Bess down the walk. Out on the cross walk she stood looking at the brick house. She wasn't a detective, but if Jack had called on Marta frequently there should be some sign of his constant presence in the house. Marta had been too busy and too poor a housekeeper to remove all the familiar clues she knew: the way he flicked cigarette ashes back of a radiator if no tray happened to be handy; his habit of pinching a cigarette instead of

snuffing it out; cups scattered in every room, their bottoms coated with a thick residue of the unsweetened, black villainous brew that he called coffee.

The front door of Marta's house was open. The screen door was unlatched. Bess knew from things Jack had told her that there was probably a uniformed guard. There was, but lulled by the heat of the day he had removed his coat and taken refuge on a wooden chaise lounge under an apple tree in the small back yard. Bess considered awakening the guard, but didn't.

THERE were cigarette ashes everywhere, but none back of the radiators. The ash trays were filled to overflowing, but there were no neatly pinched butts in any of them. Bess found three unwashed coffee cups, but all three had curdled cream in their bottoms and nauseous amounts of sugar. If Jack had called on Marta fifty times he had refrained from either smoking or drinking.

She searched the basement where Marta's work rooms were. The small high windows were heavily curtained with dark cloth. There was a small studio, a dark room, and a general utility room. Marta had done her own developing and printing. The only pieces of equipment Bess could recognize were a projector and a screen. Uncapping a small round tube she held the roll of film it contained up to the light expecting to see a camera portrait. Instead she saw a net work of angry looking veins. This was probably part of Marta's medical work. A glance at the tube that had contained the film confirmed her guess. On it was printed "Mercy Hospital," a doctor and a patient's name, and a date.

Returning the roll of films to the tube Bess turned to leave. She gasped as the basement lights winked out. A brief black silence followed. Then the door at the head of the basement stairs snicked open and the top stair creaked as someone start-



ed to descend carefully down to the cellar.

Bess backed slowly away from the stairs. She wanted to scream, and couldn't. Her sudden terror was too great for her throat to give vent to the scream formed in it.

A second stair creaked, a third, a fourth. Then through the thickness of the basement wall she heard a tremendous yawn and a man's voice said, "Kind of gets you, this hot weather, doesn't it? What are you planting, neighbor.

There was a brief sibilant sound on the stair. Then Mr. Caldwell said pleasantly, "Morning glories. You don't happen to know, do you, officer, if they will grow as well on chicken wire as the do on string?"

The creaking on the stairs had ceased. Now it began again, more rapidly this time—ascending. The door at the head of the stairs snicked shut.

"I don't see why not," the policeman in the back yard said. "I had swell luck with sweet peas on chicken wire last year."

The silence in the basement roaring in her ears, Bess felt her way back to the foot of the stairs and stood listening. Hurried footsteps crossed the kitchen, ended. A moment later the screen door banged shut.

She forced herself to climb the stairs. There was no one in the kitchen, nor in the living room or bedroom. Looking out the bedroom window she could see the shirt-sleeved patrolman leaning on the fence talking to Mr. Caldwell. Mrs. Caldwell was shaking a rug from a second story window. Junior had resumed his game of catch.

Her knees no longer able to hold her, Bess sank into the nearest chair and found she was sitting at Marta's desk. Her fingers still shaking slightly Bess opened the dead woman's appointment book. Turning the pages to the day before she read down the page.

9 a.m. Pen and Pencil Club—Brevort Hotel (Group Picture)

10 a.m. I've baby—I've home.

11 a.m. Mercy Hospital (Dr. Christofferson's patient)

12 a.m. Rotary—(Installation of officers)

2 p.m. Tarrent baby—here. Murphy baby—here.

3 p.m. Thompson twins—here.

4 p.m. (Retake) Gwen Hooper, June Meyers, Bill Forrest, Sally Ecleberry, Tom Ceshire, Mary McNeil, Helen Farley, Rod Hawkins, Ward Lull, Bill James. (Damn!)

A blank period of four hours followed. Then the appointments began again.

8 p.m. (Retake) Junior Caldwell, Benita Harris, Jane Wanger, Max Shultz, Bill Mayberry. (Double damn!)

Bess' eyes traveled back up the page and stopped on the name Bill James. Bill was her kid brother. She wanted to know why Marta had to retake so many pictures. Bill could undoubtedly tell her, but so could Junior Caldwell.

CLOSING the book she crossed the lawn to the house next door. Junior was no longer friendly. There was a mature rasp to his voice as he asked, "Yeah? What do you want now? I suppose you got some more questions."

And suddenly Bess knew. She had no proof, but she knew why Junior was so old for his years. "Why did Miss Gilden have to retake so many pictures for the high school annual?"

"How should I know?" he demanded. "Maybe she got a bad roll of film. All I know about it was she asked a lot of us to come back."

"Oh," Bess said.

She felt eyes crawling on her and looking up she saw the blonde Mrs. Caldwell, no longer smiling, standing just over her head in an open first floor window. Out in the back yard, a few yards away, the voice of the patrolman droned on. "—and after they come into bloom you can use either



a liquid manure or a commercial fertilizer. But you want to be sure to pick off the old blossoms and keep a sharp eye for—”

Junior tossed his ball up and caught it again. “Why don’t you break down and be a sport, Ma?” he suggested. “Why don’t you invite Mrs. Gleason in for a cup of tea and a piece of cake?”

The blonde woman spoke without moving her lips. “Yes. Please do come in, Mrs. Gleason.”

Her throat as tight as it had been in the dark basement, Bess managed to say, “No. Thanks. I—have to go home now.”

The lawn seemed to slant up hill. She thought she would never reach her car. Behind her there was no sound but the drone of the patrolman’s voice and the thud of Junior Caldwell’s ball as it smacked into his mitt.

The three men crowded the small apartment. Inspector Harvey was frankly skeptical. “So your kid brother told you the reason Miss Gilden had to retake fourteen or fifteen pictures for the annual. He said it was due to the fact that at the sitters’ first appointment she had just returned from doing some work at the hospital and forgot she had infra-red film in her camera. How does that tie in with her death?”

Bess said, “It explains it.” She looked at Bill Podlar for support, then at the younger man who the mystified inspector had brought in through the back door, at her request, with Podlar. “You are a police photographer?” she asked.

“That’s right.”

“What would happen if you took an ordinary portrait picture with infra-red film in your camera?”

He grinned. “Nothing much, except I’d get a lousy picture. You see—”

Bess broke in hurriedly. She wasn’t interested in technical details. “But it would take a picture, and the negative on inspection might show scars or blemishes not visible on regular film or to the naked eye.”

The photographer said, “It undoubtedly

would. That’s why they use infra-red film. Now you take a picture of varicose veins—”

“Please,” Bess stopped him again. “If I’m right there won’t be much time.” She turned back to Inspector Harvey. “Jack didn’t kill Marta. He had no reason to kill her. For old time’s sake and because she was nice to people she did phone Jack and say she had something important to tell him, something that would be a feather in his cap. Jack was struck on the head as soon as he entered the house. The whiskey was poured down his throat after he was unconscious.”

Inspector Harvey was patient, “Now, Mrs. Gleason—”

“I know,” she hurried on. “But in Jack’s case it wasn’t difficult. One drink makes him giddy. Three will pass him out. Check Marta’s appointment book. She retook all the other sitters listed, including my kid brother, up until five o’clock. Her next appointment was at eight.

But some time between five and six o’clock she inspected the exposed infra-red film again and saw something that made her call Jack. I don’t know where that film is now. The killer probably destroyed it. But he knows I know. That’s why he followed me into the basement. I’d have gotten what Marta got. Only the patrolman woke up and frightened him away.”

Inspector Harvey humored her. “And who is this ‘he’, Mrs. Gleason?”

“**B**ABY FACE,” she told him. “His fingerprints weren’t in the police file, but his face was. So he had a plastic surgeon make him a new face that lopped twelve years off his age. He hennaed his blond hair. He got two members of his former gang to act as his mother and father while he posed as a high school boy. And he would have gotten away with it forever if Marta hadn’t accidentally taken his picture with infra-red film.



"Baby Face." In Bill Podlar's mouth the name was a prayer. "Of course. The Menominee job. They were running low on money. So while Baby Face played ball for dear old Elton High his 'mother' and 'dad' knocked over the bank and brought the loot back to the Menominee ball park.

"They stashed it in the one place they were almost certain wouldn't be searched. They stashed it in the suitcase of their beloved 'son'. But in their haste they got it in the wrong suitcase and that night they were forced to break into the gym and steal it a second time."

Crossing to the window, the Police photographer said, "That sounds okay to me. I'd buy that."

"Nonsense." Inspector Harvey got to his feet. "If Junior Caldwell is Baby Face and he knows you know who he is, if he was even suspicious you knew, you'd never have left that yard alive. He'd have killed you immediately you know that."

Bess reminded the inspector. "There

was a policeman present. Remember?"

Harvey scoffed, "Stuff. Then he'd be here now. He's due for the chair on that Shady Valley job. He couldn't afford to allow you to live."


From the window the photographer asked, "By any chance this guy's disguise doesn't include a pair of dirty cord slacks, a sweat shirt, and a baseball glove, does it?"

A grin spreading over his face, Bill Podlar told him, "he does," as he slipped his gun from its holster.


"Then it looks like the lady is right. The photographer peered from the side of the window. "Now he's crossing the street. Now he's taking a good look around. Now he's coming up the stairs. Damn. I would be caught without a camera."

*I'll have steak and onions for supper, Bess thought. Jack likes that best of all. And maybe a roquefort cheese salad. Getting her apron from her coat pocket she smoothed it on her knees as she happily waited.*





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# F.B.I. DETECTIVE

STORIES



# Abandon All Hope

By **BURT  
ARMSTRONG**



Something snapped inside his head when he saw them together.

Ox-like Polikai knew what he had to do when he found two-timing Wanda in the half-pint's embrace.

**I**T WAS late in the day when Polikai awoke. He blinked uncertainly at the bare gray walls of his room and sat up, the iron cot creaking in protest as he swung his massive legs to the floor. He grunted once or twice, rubbed his aching head with a huge hand, and swept the room with a disgusted flick of his eyes.



Polikai was down on his luck. And the room was an indication of it. It contained a washstand, a single newspaper clipping tacked to the wall at the foot of his cot, and the cot itself. Nothing more. Not even a chair. Especially not even a chair.

"The devil!" he growled. "Why did I ever come here?"

He thought of his room at Mrs. Koslowski's. There had been straw matting on the floor and beautiful pictures on the wall at Mrs. Koslowski's. Also, there had been a big chair with rockers on, and a large wooden bed.

Remembering, Polikai shook his close-cropped head regretfully.

"This room now—it is one lousy room. I will not stay here," he decided. "I will go away today."

His eyes shifted to the clipping at the foot of his cot. A picture, it was. A girl with black hair. Wanda Kubal's hair had been black, too, but this girl was not so pretty as Wanda. Yes, Wanda had been very pretty, and she had liked pretty things. Very fine things, Wanda had liked. Well, why not? Wanda Kubal had been one fine girl.

Wanda had lived at Mrs. Koslowski's, too. He remembered how she had tried to teach him this new American language when he had first gone there to live. It had been rather hopeless, although Wanda spoke very good American, herself.

"A crazy language it is," Polikai told her, shrugging his big shoulders. "It mixes me all up."

And then Wanda would laugh and sit on his lap in the big chair with rockers on, and talk to him in Polish—and in another language. A language that was neither Polish nor American, but one which Polikai could understand as well as any man. That was when he liked her best. If only she hadn't liked such pretty things. That was the trouble; Wanda had been too American.

And Joe Sekolowicz, who lived in the

front room across the hall—he had been too American, also. For one thing, he was always fooling with Wanda, and talking to her in this new language which Polikai could not understand. And when he remonstrated, Joe would merely laugh. Sometimes, if there were others present, Joe would say something in this new, strange tongue, and then everyone would laugh. Even Wanda would laugh. So Polikai knew it must be very funny.

"Scram, you great palooka, before I break your jaw!" Joe Sekolowicz would growl. "Wanda and me are going someplace."

And poor Polikai, bewildered by such fluency, would retreat in confusion before their gales of laughter.

"But what can I say?" he asked himself helplessly. "What else can I do with one who speaks such grand American?"

Still, even with such a handicap, Polikai was sure that things would have been different if Joe Sekolowicz had not won that thousand dollars in the money pool.

That was another American institution that was new and strange to him. One paid an agent a small sum every day and won hundreds of dollars—sometimes thousands. But not so often, Polikai thought. He had tried it every day for two weeks, but the agent had paid him nothing, so Polikai had stopped.

He would save his money, he decided. And soon, maybe, Wanda would open her eyes and see things straight.

"How could I have been so blind?" she would say. "Why did I waste myself with that little one, Joe Sekolowicz, when all the time Polikai was here? Big, strong Polikai, who will do anything I ask?"

Yes, some day, perhaps, he and Wanda would get married, and then they could use this money that he would save. With it they could buy a chair with rockers on, and a big wooden bed of their own. Then it would be his turn to laugh at Joe Sekolowicz.



So Polikai saved his money. At the end of three months he had saved nearly two-hundred dollars. And then one day Joe Sekolowicz came home with his thousand. That was what started it.

There was a big party at Mrs. Koslowski's that night. Polikai had become quite drunk. Joe Sekolowicz had become even drunker. And Wanda, Polikai thought, must have been the drunkest of them all. Otherwise she would never have gone into Polikai's room and let Joe hold her on his lap in the big chair with rockers on.

She shouldn't have done that. It was the one thing that made Polikai so mad. This chair was definitely fixed in his mind as being associated only with himself and Wanda.

**P**OLIKAI was drunk, of course—but his brain had sobered when he saw them there in each other's arms. Something snapped inside his head. He reached the chair in two strides, overturned it abruptly and sent them both sprawling upon the floor.

If the rocker hadn't broken, that would have been the end of it. It was when he saw the shattered cradle of his hopes that Polikai went really mad. He picked the big chair up in his own strong arms and crashed it down on the head of Joe Sekolowicz.

It was a pity, he thought, that things should happen so. There was Wanda—black-haired Wanda—cowering on the floor. He walked toward her, his big feet shuffling slowly, and reached down to

strangle her. He was thinking: "*What a fine girl she is—just the one for me, Polikai—and yet this is the way it has to end.*"

Afterwards Polikai had stood there, swaying slightly, not knowing what to do. His only thought now was:

"What a strong one she used to be. And she spoke American so grand. It is very sad."

And then the others had come crowding in, their mouths open, their dull eyes widening queerly. They stared at Polikai as though he were a stranger.

"They were sitting in my chair—together," he told them, feeling that it required an explanation. "In my chair with the rockers on."

But they continued to stare, and Polikai gave it up. They were very stupid, these others. But later, the police had brought him to this room with the washstand and the iron cot.

Polikai stood up and looked around the cold gray room.

"Yes," he muttered, remembering that much grander room at Mrs. Koslowski's, "this is one lousy place. I will not stay here another day."

Methodically he peeled off his shirt, draped it scarf-like about his neck and settled himself comfortably on the cot. Fashioning the sleeves into a sliding knot, he began to tighten them, slowly and steadily.

Polikai was a fine, strong man, yet with all his great strength it took a long time—fully five minutes, perhaps—before he was through strangling Polikai.

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### — TO OUR READERS —

We are constantly experimenting in an effort to give you the very best reading surface obtainable. For this reason, there may be occasional slight fluctuations in the thickness of this magazine. Now, as in the past, every magazine bearing the Popular Publications seal of quality will continue to have the same number of pages, the same wordage, the same unparalleled value in top-flight reading entertainment that has been and will continue to be our Popular Fiction Group guarantee—the best reading value obtainable anywhere at any price!



# Murder Isn't Merry

JUD went up the stairs to the nightclub owner's office. Magesteri looked up quickly from his desk.

Jud sank into the chair across from him, lit a cigarette.

In a wooden tone, Magesteri asked, "Do you want to talk about the dead prizefighter called Dutch?"

"Shut up, mister," a strange voice said behind Jud. He whirled. It was the driver of Big-Shot Sam Rice's car, the one called Mark.

Behind Mark the round face of muscleman Francey Silver beamed. "I warned you last night, you know," Francey said in a pleased tone.

Jud closed his hand around the bronze ashtray on Magesteri's desk, whirled and threw it with all his strength at Mark's face. Jud yanked the cord out of the ceiling fixture and, just as the room went dark, he saw the white face of Mark sliding slowly down the doorframe.

"You are a stubborn little man," Francey said softly.

"Where is he?" a new voice asked. Jud recognized the voice of Kid Douglass.

Jud ran full tilt at the door. He stamped on something soft, struck out with his doubled fist, yelled with hoarse joy as he felt a jolting pain run up his arm.

Then something crashed against his head. He fell heavily against the wall. Somebody toppled down on him. He grasped a necktie in his left hand, and drove his right fist into the darkness at an estimated distance above the necktie.

A match flared in the darkness just as he scrambled to his feet. He kicked up at the flame, heard a scream of pain as his toe connected with a wrist. By luck he stumbled over the bronze ashtray. He swung the ashtray in a wide arc at face level. It struck something solid and

bounced out of his fingers. A body tumbled heavily to the floor.

Jud ran down three steps at a time to the crowded sidewalk, slowing and straightening his clothes as he rounded the corner.

A block away was a drugstore. He got the desk at headquarters and asked to be connected with Lieutenant Tom Donnelly.

"Tom? This is Jud Haber."

There was an odd silence on the other end of the line. "Where are you, boy? I'll have a car pick you up."

"Don't make jokes, Tom. Look, three guys just tried to beat me up. They all work for Sam Rice. Francey Silver, Kid Douglass, and a fellow named Mark."

"Maybe they're sore about Jane Tour, Jud."

"Jane Tour! What has that fluff—?"

Tom's voice was heavy. "No jokes from you either, Jud. Three witnesses saw you leave the bar with her. And her landlady saw you leaving the Jane's room. It wasn't pretty, Haber. Strangling never is."

Jud Haber gasped. "Tom! Use your head, boy! This is a frame. Because I'm exposing the fight racket I'm getting in Sam Rice's hair. Dutch Jensen was murdered. Jane Tour knew the score. That's why she got killed. Sweat those witnesses a little. Hell, I thought you were a friend!"

"How many friends does a cop have? Better come in here soon as you can."

"I'll come in when I'm damn ready!"

Jud snapped, hanging up. . . .

The complete story will be told by John D. MacDonald in his novelette—"The Widow Wouldn't Weep"—in the next issue of All-Story Detective . . . published February 25th.

THE EDITOR.



The dream murder of his slashed wife haunted Soldier Crane's fear-crazed mind.

By **SHAD COLLINS**

CHAPTER ONE

Hooded Phantom

**Y**OU'RE safe now, you're safe now, the strident voice droned it over and over, but the terror was still there and he knew that it was going to happen again and that there was no way to stop it. It was as if he were strait-jacketed. He was unable to move. The coffin-narrow walls closed him in with the darkness and the terror.

Through a narrow crack like a slit in his eyelid he could see the drinking glass. The moon caught a part of the top of it. Beyond it, to the left of the double door with the glass upper halves, was the bed, and on it the dark huddle of death, hooded with the sheet, about which he did not want to think. Behind the bed was the bathroom and something terrible which he could not remember, but these were not the things which frightened him. It was the footsteps which he knew were coming. In a little while now they would be there. Nothing he could do would stop them.

He waited with a terrible expectancy. When the footsteps came, metallic and incisive in the funeral silence, he could feel little fingers of cold move up his spine. The steps came on, exact as the ticking of a heavy clock. He heard the little whispering sound of the fingers at the door. It swung open and he saw the familiar and terrible figure. It was hooded. There was no face, only a patch of blackness, as if the

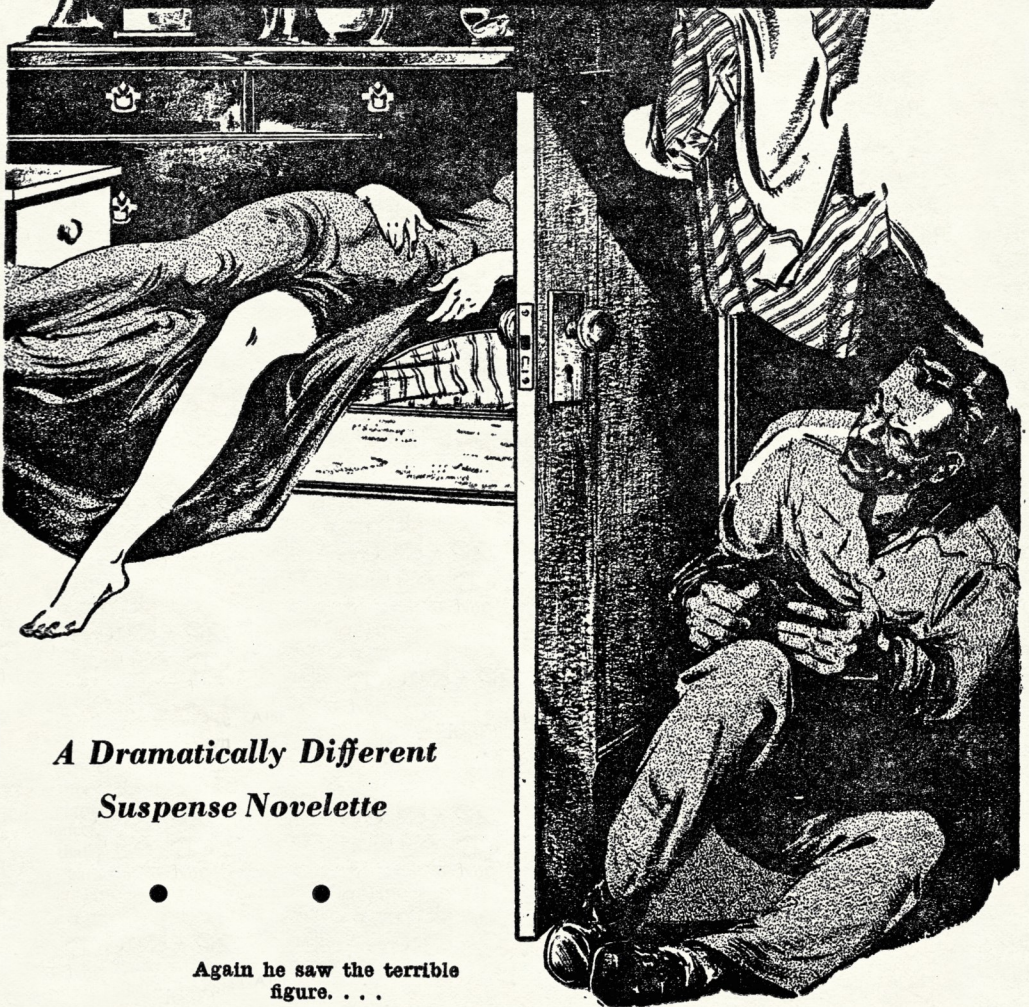


face were an opening into the night behind it.

The figure hung there in the door for a moment, and again he had the sick feeling, the most frightening of all, that he should recognize it, that in a moment he would have to recognize it and reveal himself. Then the figure came into the room, and the abrupt steps died in the carpet. He watched it go through the senseless pan-



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Again he saw the terrible  
figure. . . .



tomime, knowing before it moved what it would do next. Finally it crossed to the door, there was another little whisper of closing and he heard the tick of retreating footsteps and the strident voice, which he now recognized as his own, saying, you're safe, you're safe, over a heavy and continuous drone like blood in his ears. He jerked awake, knowing he had been dreaming and talking in his sleep.

He was lying on a small bed in a small dirty hotel bedroom. Outside on the street he could hear the throb of traffic and beyond the window loomed the great cliff of the railroad station. He turned over experimentally and the blood hammered in his head. His tongue felt thick and furry in his mouth.

"I must have gone on a good one this time. I wonder what I drank that makes me feel so bad?" Then he remembered the dream and his stomach contracted and he was afraid.

"Good Lord," he said aloud. "That was sure a hell of a dream. I must have dreamed that ten times last night." It did not seem so bad now that he was awake. "Crazy as hell," he told himself uneasily. The fear would not go away entirely, but it became familiar, and with it there came a dull sense of guilt for which he was unable to account.

"I don't know how I got here," he thought. "I must have drew a blank." The idea shook him a little and a heavy feeling of oppression settled on him. He could feel his nerves as if they were alive under his flesh, jumping like fish in a net. "I got to lie still a while," he thought. "I wonder if I'm AWOL?" He began to think how he had got there.

He could only remember as far as Bruno's tavern. The tavern was in Jersey and Bruno was an old war buddy. He'd gone out with Soletti. They were going to spend a three-day pass at Bruno's place. "All the food and liquor and women you want and everything on the house." That

was what Bruno had written in the letter, but now all he could remember of it was Soletti saying, "Have another drink, Jim, have another drink."

Now that he knew how he had got there he felt a little better about it and he got up and dressed. His stomach heaved inside him as if it were the first day on a ship, but he could stand. He picked up his garrison cap and went down to the lobby. It was noon on the big clock.

"Hey, buddy," he asked a bell hop. "What day is this?"

"Monday," the boy said. He took a second look; then he smiled. "You better get a shower and some sleep, Jack. You look like the end of a bad night," he added, staring critically at the slender soldier, a man of medium height with blond hair and blue eyes and a little scar on a forehead wrinkled with pain or puzzlement.

"Yeah." He nodded and started across the floor. Monday. That meant he was AWOL. He got the MP band out of his pocket and when he was on the street he fastened it on his arm. "Anyway I can turn myself in," he told himself, starting across to the station.

**I**T WAS mid-afternoon when he got in to Camp Grafton. The bus took him down the long street of barracks, most of them empty now after demobilization, and into the center of camp where his company was located. He got out and walked into the orderly room and over to the desk of the first sergeant, a smooth-faced youngster wearing glasses, whom he hated.

"You're a little bit late," the sergeant said dryly.

"Look, Burke, I want to see Captain Ber."

The sergeant shrugged and jerked his chin toward the door behind him. He heard the familiar voice of Ber and went on in. The captain was going through some papers and did not look up, and



since they were of the few remaining of the old outfit which had been in Europe, he would not have saluted anyway.

The soldier stood there before the desk and waited, feeling the crazy jumping of his nerves and the nausea creeping through him. He felt the guilt riding him like a kind of homesickness, but he could not put a name to it. Even the room seemed faintly menacing. *I got to get into the sack and sleep off this hangover,*" he told himself while Ber stacked the papers in front of him and looked up.

"AWOL again," Ber said, a slack and absent-minded smile pulling his straight mouth into a curve. Over it the dark brown eyes, depthless as lacquered buttons, were neutral. Taken with the blue-black hair, they made his face Indian-like, handsome and sullen.

"Damn it, Jim, you and Soletti and the rest of the old bunch have got to start taking it easy. Every time I save one of you from the guardhouse, it sours Burke and the rest of the new men. This isn't Naples, you know, and it isn't Bavaria. The war's been over a long time and if you guys are going to stay in the army, you've got to get used to that. Now what happened?"

"I passed out," he said.

"Is that all? You passed out before, that drunk you were on the last time they took your stripes."

"I mean I really passed out. I drew a blank for a couple of days."

"Keep that up and you'll make a good soldier yet. Who brought you in?"

"I brought myself in. I come to in a lousy hotel and I came in right away. Did Soletti come in?"

"He's in. Was he with you?"

"We were out at Bruno's. You remember him—the red-headed guy? When he got out he bought a tavern in Jersey. He's making good on it and he asked us out. That's where I got plastered, the second day."

"I'll see what I can do for you," Ber

stated. "But, Jim, this is the last time."

He pushed a switch on the communications box on his desk and spoke into it. "We're going to forgive Private Crane for his sins this time, Sergeant," Ber said. "Fix it, will you?"

He flipped the switch again and turned to Jim. "Sorry to hear about your wife, Jim," he said.

"She's dead," Jim said automatically. "Gay's dead."

*I must be crazy,* he thought. *Why should I say a crazy thing like that? I must be still drunk,* and he felt the panic leap in him again.

"Yes, I know," Ber said, as if he had not heard. "It's a terrible thing."

"She's no good," Jim said. He could feel the sweat on his forehead, the panic, and then he heard the footsteps. They came from beyond the door, a click and a whisper of leather, precisely spaced and implacable. There was the pause at the door and the faint soft rasping sound as of hands on wood and the door swung gently.

He could feel his speech choke and falter in his throat as he tried to call out. He knew that the door would open and there would be the masked figure, familiar and menacing, whom he would be afraid to recognize. He felt a grayness coming over his eyes and his bones becoming weak and rubbery. He fainted.

The familiar face of Captain Ber was bending over him when he awoke. Jim saw that he was still in the office, lying on a cot behind the captain's desk. He had barely noticed the cot when he entered the room. It must have been the cot, suggesting that frightening room about which he had dreamed, that had made him feel uneasy when he came in, he thought. And then the footsteps—he sat up wondering who it was that had come in, and saw Lieutenant Tyndall sitting on the edge of Ber's desk.

"Hello," Jim said, smiling weakly.

"What's the matter?" Tyndall said.



"You know each other?" Ber asked.

"Sure," Tyndall said. "Hell, we grew up together in Detroit. In the same outfit for a while in the States, just before we went over. What the hell's the matter, Jim?"

"He went on a bender and passed out," Ber said.

"Passed out?" Tyndall asked in a puzzled voice.

"He's a blank for the last two days."

"That's handy. I wish I could do it myself sometimes."

"You better get over to your barracks," Ber said to Jim.

Jim got up and put his cap on. His legs were weak, but he could stand well enough.

"I'll see you around," Tyndall said. "I'm going to be with Fox Company. Transferred. I just came in. Had a delay en route and spent it in Detroit."

"I haven't been there in two years," Jim said. "When I got back I went home, me and Soletti and Ransom and Brown from the old neighborhood. Once was enough for me. I'm not going back again."

"It's still the same," Tyndall said. "Say, I was sorry to hear about your wife—"

"I haven't seen Gay for a year. I don't even know where she is." Jim read the questions on the lieutenant's face and turned away quickly and left.

"What the hell do you call that?" Tyndall asked incredulously. "Is he still drunk?"

"Either drunk or a psycho," Ber laughed shortly. "Or maybe he hasn't read the papers. Or maybe all three."

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Dream of Death*

**I**T WASN'T until evening that Jim discovered it. He had gone to the barracks and slept for a while, awakening to

the sound of voices as the men came in and cleaned up before going to chow. He had found the paper on the bunk beside him. It had Gay's picture on the lower front page and the story was beside it. The picture was good. It couldn't capture the metallic sheen of her hair, but it had the decisive chin, the small finely-shaped nose.

The picture did not have her cruelty, nor her small-minded avarice, nor the calculated desire which had used him and then casually passed on to other men. He remembered Gay and the bitter farce of their marriage with a rich hatred. He covered the photo with his hand and turned to the story.

Reading it he began to seem unreal to himself, as if he were reliving an old experience. It was not the brute fact of his wife's murder that shocked him so much as the nightmare of the description of her apartment. The description was accompanied by a picture on an inside page. It was a picture of his dream. The bed was there, and the table with the whisky glass, and even the little closet where he had hidden. There was no one in the picture now. Gay had been taken to the morgue; there was no one in the little closet; there was no hooded figure at the door.

"It wasn't a dream," he whispered. "I knew it. That's why I said that to Ber about Gay being dead. That's how I knew."

The meaning of the dream and of what he had said to Ber flooded through his consciousness like a cold wave. "I'm scared," he told himself. "I'm scared." He went over it in his mind, slowly, once more. "I didn't know where she was living," he thought, suddenly. "Like I told Ber, I didn't know." It made him feel better and he began to hope that there might be some other meaning to the dream, but the sense of fear and guilt was still strong in him. "I better talk to Ber," he thought. "Maybe he can help. Any-



way, I didn't know where she was. And even if I did, how could I have got out there?"

Jim changed his clothes and shaved. Digging through the foot locker for a clean shirt, he came across the letter; it was addressed to him in Gay's extravagant script. Her address was on the left-hand corner of the envelope, a Detroit street number, and the letter was postmarked ten days earlier. A heavy scent of perfume drifted upward from the letter, as positive and clinging as the memory that came back to him. He remember that he had received the letter and that in it Gay had written that she was divorcing him. He had forgotten it somewhere in the last two days, but he could not forget it now. It took away the last hope he had.

Beyond the barracks the walks were covered with soldiers going to the mess hall or returning. In front of the orderly room he saw a state police car. The knowledge that he was being hunted gripped him like a kind of fatality, and instead of running away he stayed there in front of the bulletin board pretending to read while the policemen came out of the orderly room. The little bow-legged detective passed him with hardly a glance and a moment later the car rolled away.

"I've got to do something," he whispered to himself.

He pushed open the door of the orderly room. There was only a bored clerk with his feet on the first sergeant's desk reading a magazine. Jim went on past him and opened the door of Ber's office without knocking. The captain looked up, his eyes flat and unreadable.

"You're getting popular," Ber said. "You know who was just here?"

"I saw them leave," Jim said. "I've got to get it straightened out. I've got to tell somebody about it."

"It doesn't look very good, that's sure," Captain Ber said when he had heard the end of Jim's story. "What about the

dream? Do you remember that you dreamed you killed her?"

Jim shook his head slowly. "I don't think so," he said. "It was just that I was in the room somehow. I knew she was dead and that there was blood all over. There was whisky bottle and the glass. I took a drink and then remembered about fingerprints and wiped them off. That was when I heard the steps and got into the closet. There was a razor blade on the floor beside the bed. That's what he picked up when he came in. He took it into the bathroom. I could hear him moving around in there. Then he came out and took a drink just like me. Like he was imitating me. It was so crazy, I thought I'd laugh."

"And you say this figure was familiar, but you couldn't recognize him?"

"I felt that he was familiar. It's funny. That's what scared me most about him. But I couldn't recognize him. His face was kind of masked."

"Was it a real mask? Can you describe it?"

Jim wrinkled his forehead and frowned. "That's funny," he said. "I think I dreamed he was masked or hooded, but now I remember it was more like a shadow on his face. He was in the shadow, mostly."

"Was it the shadow that kept you from recognizing him?"

"I guess it must have been. I thought that was what it was—" He paused and rubbed his hand over his tired eyes. "Maybe—I don't know. Maybe—"

"Maybe you didn't recognize him because you didn't want to, or were afraid to?" Ber asked looking at him steadily out of his flat brown eyes.

"Yes," Crane said in a shocked voice. "Maybe. I'm not sure. What makes you think so?"

"I was just thinking," Ber said. "It could mean something."

"You think I did it?"






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"I don't know. A dream isn't much evidence, even a dream like that. What I want to know is if you could have been in Detroit that night. It wouldn't be easy."

"We could see about train schedules, see if I would have had time."

"Yes, we can check on them. Or on the planes," Ber added in a musing voice. "There are two possibilities in this. Either you went out there and were at that apartment and what you did or what you saw made an amnesia case out of you. Or else you read it in the papers somewhere along the way when you were blacked out from liquor and made up a nightmare to fit it. That would explain how you knew your wife was dead when you were in here this afternoon. Probably your fear of being dragged into it would have made you forget that you had Gay's address on the letter."

"I HOPE that's it," Jim said. He felt the fog of anxiety thinning around him. "It could be that way—" He paused. "I'm scared," he said.

"We can try checking on it," Ber said kindly. He got up and went over for his cap. "Let's try to find Soletti and see what you did after you left Bruno's place."

Tyndall was in the orderly room when they left the office. He wore the arm band and .45 of the officer of the day.

"Hello," he said. He looked at Jim. "How's the hangover coming?"

"All right," Jim said. "I feel fine now." I'm getting to be an awfully good liar, he thought.

"You want to go over to the club for a couple of drinks, Ber?" Tyndall asked. "I'm O.D., but I can take a break."

"Can't," Ber said. "We've got some chores to do."

"You're off duty."

"Jim thinks he may know something about his wife's murder," Ber said. "We're going to try to check on it."



"Really?" Tyndall said, looking at them with interest for the first time. When neither of them offered any more information, he closed the file of papers on the desk and stood up. "Well, I wish you luck. Gay was a nice kid. I hope you can do her some good now, Jim." There was an odd note of disapproval in his voice.

"What did Tyndall mean by that crack about doing some good?" Ber asked, after they had left.

"Tyndall and me both went with Gay back in the old days," Jim said. "Soletti and Ransom, too," he added bitterly. "Gay always had plenty of men, even then, before the war. I guess Tyndall figures I wasn't a very good husband. He probably wanted to marry her himself once. If he had, he'd know what a tramp she really was."

They couldn't find Soletti after an hour of search, but they were able to get Bruno by telephone. Jim had left the roadhouse

with a redhead, he told them. Yes, he might be able to get her address. Fifteen minutes later, he called back and gave it to them, and they left for town.

The apartment house was downtown in the Village, a comfortable-looking building, almost new, but not quite expensive enough to have a doorman. After a long wait the door clicked in response to their ring and they got into the elevator.

Jim stared at the red-headed girl who opened the door, trying to remember her. She was small and slender with a turned-up nose and blue eyes.

"Hello, honey," she said in an accusing voice. "You decided to come back? Well, you can just blow right out again. I don't want any part of you or your friends."

"Hold on a minute," Ber said. "We just want to ask you a couple of questions. When did you meet Jim?"

"What's the matter? Has he forgotten how to talk, too?"

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"He had a memory lapse. I'm trying to check on what he did."

"Brother! That's the craziest kind of a gag I've heard so far."

"I'm not kidding," Ber said. He put his heavy shoulder against the door so that it could not be closed. "When did you meet Jim?"

"The night before last," the girl said sullenly. "What's it to you?"

"At Bruno's place over in Jersey?"

"What if I did?"

"You brought him home with you?"

"Yes. What a dope I am," she said bitterly. "He was high as a kite and singing loud enough to wake the neighbors. Just when I think I'm getting him sober enough to be human, the heel walks out on me."

"What time was that?"

"About two in the morning."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"He just said 'You look too much like my wife' and put his hat on and went out."

"Sorry," he mumbled. "How did I leave?"

"Just like you came in. What kind of question is that?"

That was all they could get from her. They went down into the street again.

"The cops hadn't got there yet," Ber said. "It won't take them long, though. We've got to sift this out in a hurry."

"What do we try next?"

"If you took the subway, we're lost," Ber said. "But you might have taken a cab. You try the stands on that side and I'll try this."

"All right," Jim said. "But I hope we don't find anything."

"I hope we find one that took you to jail and locked you up for thirty-six hours."

Ten minutes later Ber called to Jim from down the street and he went over. Ber was standing beside a taxi talking to the cabby.



## Nightmare at Noon

"That's him, all right," the cab driver said. "About two o'clock in the morning, night before last. I don't get hauls to Jersey very often, so I remember him good. He was stinking drunk."

"All right," Ber said. "You take us out to Jersey then."

"I'm sorry, Jim," Ber said when they were in the cab.

"It's better to know, I guess," Jim said dully. "Where did he take me, anyway?"

"Newark. Out to the airport," Ber said carefully. "Don't worry about it. Maybe you didn't go any place after that. Take it easy, kid."

"I got a plane there," Jim said. "A plane for some field near Detroit."

"Do you remember that?"

"No," he said hopelessly. "I don't remember anything, but that must have been it."

"Take it easy."

"I'm scared, that's all."

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Killer's Return

JIM had taken the plane at Newark. No one at operations remembered him, but they checked the early morning flights and discovered the crew chief of the plane he had been on. He had been pretty drunk, the chief remembered, and even when they had flown back, coming into Newark again in the early morning hours of the following day, he had still seemed drunk or doped.

"Glassy-eyed," the crew chief said. "Kind of like he was walking in his sleep. I figured he hadn't got to bed in Detroit at all—or hadn't got any sleep anyway. Lot of guys we haul are like that, though. Guys hitchhiking a ride home on a short pass. They don't get much sleep and they come back all pooped out. I figured it was like that with him."

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## All-Story Detective

Ber told Jim this on the way back to New York. "He described you pretty well," Ber said. "There couldn't be any doubt it was you, all right. Blond hair, blue eyes, about five-eight in height, slender."

"That's it, then. I went out there and killed her. Now I got to turn myself in."

Behind them a police car swung out, raced past the car in front of it, and pulled back into a hole in the line of traffic.

"I guess I won't have to turn myself in," Jim said. "The cops are only about eight cars behind us."

Ber glanced through the rear window. "I saw them out at the airport," he said. "That little guy who was out at the post was there. I didn't think he saw me and I didn't say anything to you."

He leaned over and spoke to the driver, and five minutes later the cab swung into the heavier mid-town traffic and soon they were crawling into Journal Square. Ber tossed a bill forward to the driver and opened the door of the cab.

"Here's where we got off," he said, and they plunged into the chaos of car horns and cursing drivers. Shortly they were on the tube train.

"We made it," Ber said smiling. "It doesn't get us anywhere, getting away from the cops for a while. They'll be out at camp anyway."

"They won't expect you to go there. They'll expect you to take off for somewhere faraway. Meanwhile," Ber said without much conviction, "we'll try to figure something out."

"What about the man in the dream, though? Maybe—"

"But you didn't recognize him— I'm sorry, Jim, but they'd probably say it was yourself you saw coming in that door, and that you knew it but hid it from yourself because you didn't want to admit the murder."

"Let's try going over it again," Ber



## Nightmare at Noon

said tiredly. They were back in his office in the orderly room at the camp. "Maybe we can get something out of it if we work at it long enough." He rummaged through a desk drawer and brought out a bottle and a couple of glasses.

"Have a shot," Ber said. "Maybe it'll wake up that memory of yours. I'm going to keep you here all night if I have to. Damn it, Jim, try to remember all of it."

Ber took his glass and walked to the cot and leaned back on the pillows. He could see Jim's face under the sharp hanging light. It looked old and worn now.

"Start it over again," Ber said. "How did you get there?"

"I don't know."

"All right. Let it go. Start where you want to."

"I went with the redhead and then I got the plane for Detroit. We know that. The next part is from the dream. I was in the room and saw Gay. She was all cut up. It made me sick. There was a bottle on the table and I took a drink. Then I remembered about prints and wiped the glass off and then I heard the steps and hid."

"Did you think it was the cops?"

"No—how the hell do I know?" Jim asked irritably. "I was scared sick. I was afraid to breathe. Then he came in. He went over by the bed and picked it up. The razor blade, I mean. Then I could hear him in the bathroom. When he came out he poured a drink, just like I did, and then he left. That's all."

"It's not all," Ber said. "There's this figure that came in. Unless we get a line on that, you're just gone, that's all."

"It's no use," Jim said despairingly. "I can't remember anything to describe him."

"Go over it again then," Ber said. "There's got to be something."

"It's no use, Captain. It must be just like you said. The figure must have been

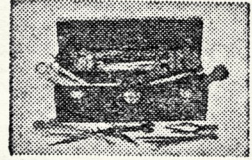
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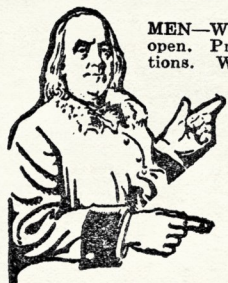
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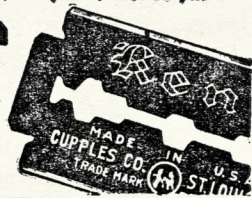
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**All-Story Detective**

me, and I'm scared to admit it. There's  
no use going over it again."

"Just once more," Ber said encourag-  
ingly. "We'll get a break yet. Just once  
more, Jim. Try to think about that figure.  
If it wasn't you, it must be someone you  
were familiar with once. Someone that  
knew Gay and that—"

"I never knew half her boy friends."

"Maybe we're trying too hard," Ber  
said sympathetically. He got up from the  
cot and came over to the desk. "I'm going  
out after some coffee for us. You sit here  
and keep going over it. Somewhere there  
must be an answer to this. You're just  
not remembering all of it. The shock  
wiped something out. Keep going over it  
while I go out."

When he went out, Crane picked up the  
bottle and drank. His mind felt tired and  
sluggish, like the mind of a prize fighter  
who has stayed in the ring too long or the  
mind of a soldier who has been too many  
weeks on the line. He sat there for a  
long time, trying not to think at all. Some-  
where out in the dark streets there was  
the sound of a jeep and he roused himself,  
looking at his watch. Ber had been gone  
over a half hour. "Just once more," he  
thought. "I'll try just once again."

"I went out to Bruno's," he said and  
went through the story mechanically once  
more. "I heard the steps, and I was  
scared." He paused a moment, feeling a  
memory of the fear coiling in his stomach.  
It was as if he could hear the footsteps  
again, faint and far off.

"They sounded funny," he said won-  
deringly. "Regular. They clicked." Again  
he paused. He was sure he could hear  
them, far off, as if outside, faint with dis-  
tance, but precise as clock-work. His eyes  
swept the room. There was the cot back  
in the shadow. The whisky bottle and  
glass were on the desk. He felt a powerful  
desire to laugh. "It's happening again,"  
he thought. "The room is changing back



## Nightmare at Noon

to that terrible one out there in Detroit."

Jim strained his ears for the sound of the footsteps and this time there could be no doubt about it—they were coming toward him, metallic and implacable. He felt the panic choking his throat. He wanted to cry out, to hide, but he could do nothing but sit there, rigid as a paralytic in his chair, his eyes hypnotized on the door, waiting. The steps were louder now, mechanical and triumphant. A cold finger of wind brushed his neck. He heard the little whisper of sound at the door; it swung and there was the familiar and menacing figure as before.

Jim waited for the space of a second, frantic with terror, and unable to move, trying to pray for the grayness to come over his eyes as it had before. The figure advanced one step into the room and the light from the drop lamp moved up along his body and lifted his face out of the shadow. Jim drew a great gulping breath.

"You!" he gasped. "It was you in that room with Gay. You killed her." He hurled himself out of his chair at the man, sensing the movement of the man's hand. There was a bright flash of light and then a blackness thicker than the dark.

IT WAS quiet and cheerful in the hospital ward with the late morning sunlight like yellow paint on the floor. Ber was sitting beside Jim's bed.

"So how much do you remember now?"

"Not much," he said. He wrinkled his forehead and a little knife of pain cut into him under the bandages above his eyes. "They told me some of it here, but it didn't make much sense. I remember Bruno's. I remember going out with a redhead. That's about all."

"You didn't remember the redhead before he shot you. Well, this is the whole story, including what you forgot. After you left the redhead—" Ber went on with the story. "So they checked the prints

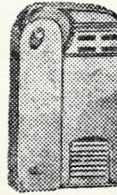
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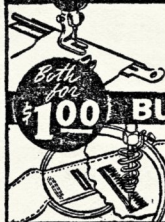
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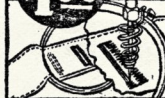


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on the lid of the water closet. That's where he put the razor and that was the noise you heard in there. They were his prints. Of course, there were so many prints there, including yours in the closet, that the prints alone might not have been enough. So it's a good thing he did try to shoot you. We had him for that, anyway, and I gave him the idea you were dead and he caved in right away."

"But how'd you know he'd come?"

"When I left the orderly room I didn't go after coffee. I went to see those who knew you and Gay from Detroit. I gave them the idea that you had some information on Gay's murder and that we were looking into it. Ransom is still on furlough out in Detroit now. But the other three, Soletti and Tyndall and Brown, I spoke to. I hinted that you had a pretty good idea who did it but weren't talking. I let them know where you were. I thought that if any of them had done it, he would show up, just the way Tyndall did, and that maybe you would recognize him. It was a long chance, but the chance it worked."

"Why the hell didn't you let me in on it?"

"I didn't know myself, until he shot you, that Tyndall was the one we wanted. I didn't know until then, for sure, but what that figure in your dream might be you. As I say, it was a pretty long chance."

"A pretty long chance with me, too. He might have blown my brains out, you know."

"Maybe it'll teach you to dream lucky next time," Ber said. "Besides," he added with a tight smile, "if it hadn't worked out, the law would have had you. If it comes to a choice between the chance of being shot or being hanged, you don't have much margin. I didn't think you'd mind if I chose for you."

**THE END**



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*Harlequin great Dane, "Major Ives of Diamond Lane"—owned by the popular ballad singer and "Wayfaring Stranger," Burl Ives—posed on the terrace of his master's California home.*

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