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1936

IN THIS ISSUE
**FREDERICK
NEBEL**



John Drew

"GUNS AT CYRANO'S"

By **RAYMOND CHANDLER**

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JOSEPH T. SHAW, Editor

VOL. XVIII No. 11

JANUARY, 1936

Contents

FIREARMS AND CRIME	7
GUNS AT CYRANO'S Raymond Chandler	8
A complete novelette <i>Ted Malvern, "All American sucker," wants to see for himself what is behind the guns at Cyrano's.</i>	
FAN DANCE Frederick Nebel	38
A complete novelette <i>Kennedy takes a whirl at action when MacBride is on the spot.</i>	
DEATH SONG Paul Cain	63
<i>Murder made spectacular.</i>	
G-MAN CHUCK THOMPSON Dwight V. Babcock	75
A complete novelette <i>Chuck Thompson follows the G-Men code which is not vengeance but unrelenting, implacable justice.</i>	
NUMBERS WITH LEAD W. T. Ballard	97
A complete novelette <i>The numbers racket hits the Coast and at the same time Bill Lennox, studio trouble-shooter.</i>	
WINNERS of the NINTH Monthly WARNER BROS.-BLACK MASK Contest ("The Affair at the Swimming Pool")	123
Continuing the GREAT WARNER BROS.-BLACK MASK Mystery Story Contest	124
25 Prizes each month, given by the magazine; 4 Grand Prizes at the end, given by Warner Bros.	
THE MURDER OF DR HARRIGAN	126
Mystery Contest Story No. 12, written expressly for this contest.	
IN FEBRUARY	128

Cover painting by John Drew. Headings by Arthur Rodman Bowker

IN FEBRUARY

"NO HARD FEELINGS"

By FREDERICK NEBEL

"PORTRAIT OF MURDER"

By GEORGE HARMON COXE

P. C. CODY, President and Circulation Director

JOSEPH T. SHAW, Vice-President

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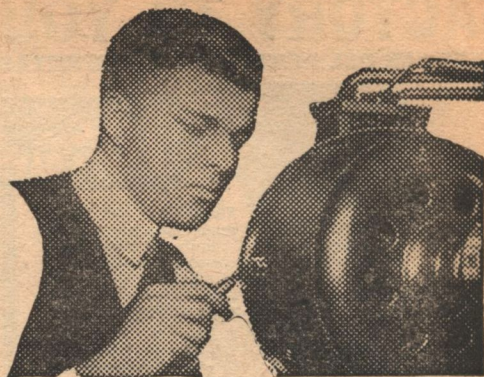
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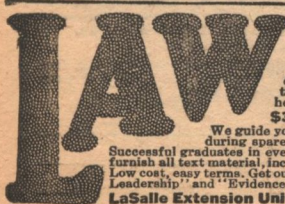
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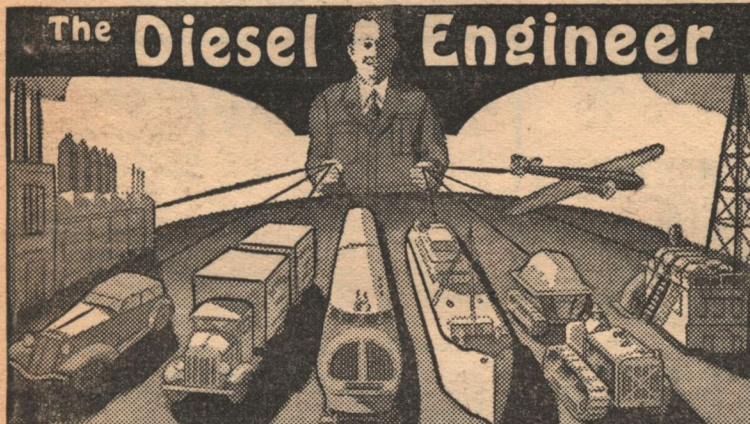
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BLACK MASK

FIREARMS AND CRIME

PEOPLE arguing in favor of laws which would partly or wholly disarm the private citizen in America frequently point to England as an example, asserting that that country's very small number of serious crimes, as compared with America, is due to the inability of most English citizens, especially those known to be criminals or of criminal associations, to obtain firearms.

Those opposed to what seems a deliberate purpose to disarm the people of the U. S., ask, "And how about Switzerland?" There is a country in which every male adult citizen is required by law to keep an army rifle and ammunition in his home, and in which there is absolutely no law prohibiting anyone from owning and carrying as many pistols and revolvers as he cares to. And its number of serious crimes, per hundred thousand population, is slightly lower than England's.

If ever these firearms-prohibition laws were flouted in the face, the recent gang leader massacres in two Eastern States furnished that occasion. In a New Jersey city, up to this time unapprehended killers walked into a restaurant and gunned out three men, using sub-machine-guns and pistols. Two hours later, these or similar killers confidently invaded a barbershop in the heart of New York City and wiped out two more. And New York State has the most stringent firearms-prohibition law in the Union.

Possibly the step contemplated, after the citizenry has been disarmed, is to prohibit firearms in National Guard armories and police stations, for, although it is against the law and quite unethical, criminals have been known to invade these places and help themselves to weapons of offense—then go out and shoot up the thoroughly unarmed citizen.

No, sir; it is a well contended belief that the extent of serious crime in any country is a matter wholly of the ability and willingness of the authorities and the people to capture, convict and punish severely those guilty. Laws that interfere with or prohibit the possession of firearms in this country are obeyed by the law-abiding and ignored by the criminal element, so that their only effect is to make the decent citizen just that much easier prey for the criminal.

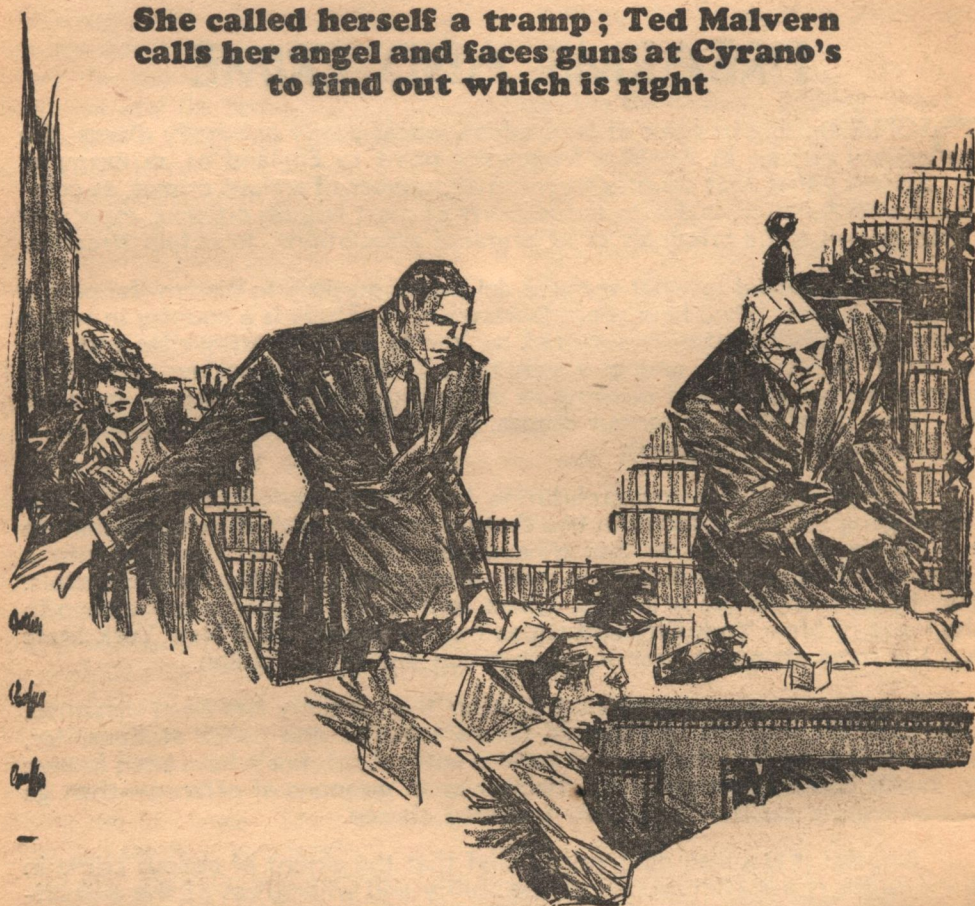
A loaded gun in the hands of a man who knows how to use it forms a pretty potent argument against a contemplated stick-up or the forceful entry of a store, a shop or a home. When the criminal minded **knows** that his intended law-abiding victim is **not** armed, that there is no weapon of defense in the place he plans to burglarize, when he himself **is** armed and can kill, without danger to himself, any who oppose him, he is certain to ply his nefarious trade in greater and greater volume.

And how do you like that?

The Editor

Guns at Cyrano's

She called herself a tramp; Ted Malvern calls her angel and faces guns at Cyrano's to find out which is right



ED MALVERN liked the rain; liked the feel of it, the sound of it, the smell of it. He got out of his LaSalle coupé and stood for a while by the side entrance to the *Carondelet*, the high collar of his blue suede ulster tickling his ears, his hands in his pockets and a limp cigarette sputtering between his lips. Then he went in past the barber shop and the drug-store and the perfume shop with its rows of delicately lighted bottles, ranged like the ensemble

in the finale of a Broadway musical.

He rounded a gold-veined pillar and got into an elevator with a cushioned floor.

"'Lo, Albert. A swell rain. Nine."

The slim tired looking kid in pale blue and silver held a white gloved hand against the closing doors, said:

"Jeeze, you think I don't know your floor, Mister Malvern?"

He shot the car up to nine without looking at his signal light, whooshed the doors open, then leaned suddenly against the cage and closed his eyes.

Malvern stopped on his way out,

By RAYMOND CHANDLER



flicked a sharp glance from bright brown eyes. "What's the matter, Albert? Sick?"

The boy worked a pale smile on his face. "I'm workin' double shift. Corky's sick. He's got boils. I guess maybe I didn't eat enough."

The tall, brown-eyed man fished a crumpled five-spot out of his pocket, snapped it under the boy's nose. The boy's eyes bulged. He heaved upright.

"Jeeze, Mister Malvern. I didn't mean—"

"Skip it, Albert. What's a fin between pals? Eat some extra meals on me."

He got out of the car and started along the corridor. Softly, under his breath, he said:

"Sucker. . . ."

The running man almost knocked him off his feet. He rounded the turn fast, lurched past Malvern's shoulder, ran for the elevator.

"Down!" He slammed through the closing doors.

Malvern saw a white set face under a pulled-down hat that was wet with rain; two empty black eyes set very close. Eyes in which there was a peculiar stare he had seen before. A load of dope.

The car dropped like lead. Malvern looked at the place where it had been for a long moment, then he went on down the corridor and around the turn.

He saw the girl lying half in and half out of the open door of 914.

She lay on her side, in a sheen of steel gray lounging pajamas, her cheek pressed into the nap of the hall carpet,



her head a mass of thick corn-blond hair, waved with glassy precision. Not a hair looked out of place. She was young, very pretty, and she didn't look dead.

Malvern slid down beside her, touched her cheek. It was warm. He lifted the hair softly away from her head and saw the bruise.

"Sapped." His lips pressed back against his teeth.

He picked her up in his arms, carried her through a short hallway to the living-room of a suite, put her down on a big velour davenport in front of some gas logs.

She lay motionless, her eyes shut, her face bluish behind the makeup. He shut the outer door and looked through the apartment, then went back to the hallway and picked up something that gleamed white against the baseboard. It was a bone-handled .22 automatic, seven-shot. He sniffed it, dropped it into his pocket and went back to the girl.

He took a big hammered silver flask out of his inside breast pocket and unscrewed the top, opened her mouth with his fingers and poured whiskey against her small white teeth. She gagged and her head jerked out of his hand. Her eyes opened. They were deep blue, with a tint of purple. Light came into them and the light was brittle.

He lit a cigarette and stood looking down at her. She moved a little more. After a while she whispered:

"I like your whiskey. Could I have a little more?"

He got a glass from the bathroom, poured whiskey into it. She sat up very slowly, touched her head, groaned. Then she took the glass out of his hand and put the liquor down with a practised flip of the wrist.

"I still like it," she said. "Who are you?"

She had a deep soft voice. He liked the sound of it. He said:

"Ted Malvern. I live down the hall in 937."

"I—I got a dizzy spell, I guess."

"Uh-huh. You got sapped, angel." His bright eyes looked at her probingly. There was a smile tucked to the corners of his lips.

Her eyes got wider. A glaze came over them, the glaze of a protective enamel.

He said: "I saw the guy. He was snowed to the hairline. And here's your gun."

He took it out of his pocket, held it on the flat of his hand.

"I suppose that makes me think up a bedtime story," the girl said slowly.

"Not for me. If you're in a jam, I might help you. It all depends."

"Depends on what?" Her voice was colder, sharper.

"On what the racket is," he said softly. He broke the magazine from the small gun, glanced at the top cartridge. "Copper-nickel, eh? You know your ammunition, angel."

"Do you have to call me angel?"

"I don't know your name."

He grinned at her, then walked over to a desk in front of the windows, put the gun down on it. There was a leather photo frame on the desk, with two photos side by side. He looked at them casually at first, then his gaze tightened. A handsome dark woman and a thin blondish cold-eyed man whose high stiff collar, large knotted tie and narrow lapels dated the photo back many years. He stared at the man.

The girl was talking behind him. "I'm Jean Adrian. I do a number at *Cyrano's*, in the floor show."

Malvern still stared at the photo. "I know Benny Cyrano pretty well," he said absently. "These your parents?"

He turned and looked at her. She lifted her head slowly. Something that might have been fear showed in her deep blue eyes.

"Yes. They've been dead for years," she said dully. "Next question?"

He went quickly back to the davenport and stood in front of her. "Okey," he said thinly. "I'm nosey. So what? This is my town. My dad used to run

it. Old Marcus Malvern, the People's Friend. This is my hotel. I own a piece of it. That snowed-up hoodlum looked like a life-taker to me. Why wouldn't I want to help out?"

The blond girl stared at him lazily. "I still like your whiskey," she said. "Could I—"

"Take it from the neck, angel. You get it down faster," he grunted.

She stood up suddenly and her face got a little white. "You talk to me as if I was a crook," she snapped. "Here it is, if you have to know. A boy friend of mine has been getting threats. He's a fighter, and they want him to drop a fight. Now they're trying to get at him through me. Does that satisfy you a little?"

Malvern picked his hat off a chair, took the cigarette end out of his mouth and rubbed it out in a tray. He nodded quietly, said in a changed voice:

"I beg your pardon." He started towards the door.

The giggle came when he was half-way there. The girl said behind him softly:

"You have a nasty temper. And you've forgotten your flask."

He went back and picked the flask up. Then he bent suddenly, put a hand under the girl's chin and kissed her on the lips.

"To hell with you, angel. I like you," he said softly.

He went back to the hallway and out. The girl touched her lips with one finger, rubbed it slowly back and forth. There was a shy smile on her face.

2



TONY ACOSTA, the bell captain, was slim and dark and slight as a girl, with small delicate hands and velvety eyes and a hard little mouth. He stood in the doorway and said:

"Seventh row was the best I could

get, Mister Malvern. This Deacon Werra ain't bad and Duke Targo's the next light heavy champ."

Malvern said: "Come in and have a drink, Tony." He went over to the window, stood looking out at the rain. "If they buy it for him," he added over his shoulder.

"Well—just a short one, Mister Malvern."

The dark boy mixed a highball carefully at a tray on an imitation Sheraton desk. He held the bottle against the light and gauged his drink carefully, tinkled ice gently with a long spoon, sipped, smiled, showing small white teeth.

"Targo's a lu, Mister Malvern. He's fast, clever, got a sock in both mitts, plenty guts, don't ever take a step back."

"He has to hold up the bums they feed him," Malvern drawled.

"Well, they ain't fed him no lion meat yet," Tony said.

The rain beat against the glass. The thick drops flattened out and washed down the pane in tiny waves.

Malvern said: "He's a bum. A bum with color and looks, but still a bum."

Tony sighed deeply. "I wisht I was goin'. It's my night off, too."

Malvern turned slowly and went over to the desk, mixed a drink. Two dusky spots showed in his cheeks and his voice was tired, drawling.

"So that's it. What's stopping you?"

"I got a headache."

"You're broke again," Malvern almost snarled.

The dark boy looked sidewise under his long lashes, said nothing.

Malvern clenched his left hand, unclenched it slowly. His eyes were sullen.

"Just ask Ted," he sighed. "Good old Ted. He leaks dough. He's soft. Just ask Ted. Okey, Tony, take the ducat back and get a pair together."

He reached into his pocket, held a bill out. The dark boy looked hurt.

"Jeeze, Mister Malvern, I wouldn't have you think—"

"Skip it! What's a fight ticket between pals? Get a couple and take your girl. To hell with this Targo."

Tony Acosta took the bill. He watched the older man carefully for a moment. Then his voice was very soft, saying:

"I'd rather go with you, Mister Malvern. Targo knocks them over, and not only in the ring. He's got a peachy blonde right on this floor. Miss Adrian, in 914."

Malvern stiffened. He put his glass down slowly, turned it on the top of the desk. His voice got a little hoarse.

"He's still a bum, Tony. Okey, I'll meet you for dinner, in front of your hotel at seven."

"Jeeze, that's swell, Mister Malvern."

Tony Acosta went out softly, closed the outer door without a sound.

Malvern stood by the desk, his finger tips stroking the top of it, his eyes on the floor. He stood like that for a long time.

"Ted Malvern, the All-American sucker," he said grimly, out loud. "A guy that plays with the help and carries the torch for stray broads. Yeah."

He finished his drink, looked at his wrist-watch, put on his hat and the blue suede raincoat, went out. Down the corridor in front of 914 he stopped, lifted his hand to knock, then dropped it without touching the door.

He went slowly on to the elevators and rode down to the street and his car.

THE *Tribune* office was at Fourth and Spring. Malvern parked around the corner, went in at the employees' entrance and rode to the fourth floor in a rickety elevator operated by an old man with a dead cigar in his mouth and a rolled magazine which he held six inches from his nose while he ran the elevator.

On the fourth floor big double doors were lettered City Room. Another old man sat outside them at a small desk with a call box.

Malvern tapped on the desk, said: "Adams. Ted Malvern calling."

The old man made noises into the box, released a key, pointed with his chin.

Malvern went through the doors, past a horseshoe copy desk, then past a row of small desks at which typewriters were being banged. At the far end a lanky red-haired man was doing nothing, with his feet on a pulled out drawer, the back of his neck on the back of a dangerously tilted swivel chair and a big pipe in his mouth pointed straight at the ceiling.

When Malvern stood beside him he moved his eyes down without moving any other part of his body and said around the pipe:

"Greetings, Teddy. How's the idle rich?"

Malvern said: "How's to glance at your clips on a guy named Courtway? State Senator John Myerson Courtway, to be precise."

Adams put his feet on the floor. He raised himself erect by pulling on the edge of his desk. He brought his pipe down level, took it out of his mouth and spit into a waste basket. He said:

"That old icicle? When was he ever news? Sure." He stood up wearily, added: "Come along, Uncle," and started along the end of the room.

They went along another row of desks, past a fat girl in smudged make-up who was typing and laughing at what she was writing.

They went through a door into a big room that was mostly six-foot tiers of filing cases with an occasional alcove in which there was a small table and a chair.

Adams prowled the filing cases, jerked one out and set a folder on a table.

"Park yourself. What's the graft?"

Malvern leaned on the table on an elbow, scuffed through a thick wad of cuttings. They were monotonous, political in nature, not front page. Senator Courtway said this and that on this

and that matter of public interest, addresses this and that meeting, went to or returned from this and that place. It all seemed very dull.

He looked at a few half-tone cuts of a thin, white-haired man with a blank, composed face, deep set dark eyes in which there was no light or warmth. After a while he said:

"Got a print I could sneeze? A real one, I mean."

Adams sighed, stretched himself, disappeared down the line of file walls. He came back with a shiny narrow black and white photograph, tossed it down on the table.

"You can keep it," he said. "We got dozens. The guy lives forever. Shall I have it autographed for you?"

Malvern looked at the photo with narrow eyes, for a long time. "It's right," he said slowly. "Was Court-way ever married?"

"Not since I left off my diapers," Adams growled. "Probably not ever. Say, what'n hell's the mystery?"

Malvern smiled slowly at him. He reached his flask out, set it on the table beside the folder. Adams' face brightened swiftly and his long arm reached.

"Then he never had a kid," Malvern said.

Adams leered over the flask. "Well—not for publication, I guess. If I'm any judge of a mug, not at all." He drank deeply, wiped his lips, drank again.

"And that," Malvern said, "Is very funny indeed. Have three more drinks—and forget you ever saw me."

3



HE fat man put his face close to Malvern's face. He said with a wheeze:

"You think it's fixed, neighbor?"

"Yeah. For Werra."

"How much says so?"

"Count your poke."

"I got five yards that want to grow."

"Take it," Malvern said tonelessly, and kept on looking at the back of a corn-blond head in a ringside seat. A white wrap with white fur was below the glassily waved hair. He couldn't see the face. He didn't have to.

The fat man blinked his eyes and got a thick wallet carefully out of a pocket inside his vest. He held it on the edge of his knee, counted out ten fifty-dollar bills, rolled them up, edged the wallet back against his ribs.

"You're on, sucker," he wheezed. "Let's see your dough."

Malvern brought his eyes back, reached out a flat pack of new hundreds, riffled them. He slipped five from under the printed band, held them out.

"Boy, this is from home," the fat man said. He put his face close to Malvern's face again. "I'm Skeets O'Neal. No little powders, huh?"

Malvern smiled very slowly and pushed his money into the fat man's hand. "You hold it, Skeets. I'm Ted Malvern. Old Marcus Malvern's son. I can shoot faster than you can run—and fix it afterwards."

The fat man took a long hard breath and leaned back in his seat. Tony Acosta stared soft-eyed at the money in the fat man's pudgy tight hand. He licked his lips and turned a small embarrassed smile on Malvern.

"Gee, that's lost dough, Mister Malvern," he whispered. "Unless—unless you got something ihside."

"Enough to be worth a five-yard plunge," Malvern growled.

The buzzer sounded for the sixth.

The first five had been anybody's fight. The big blond boy, Duke Targo, wasn't trying. The dark one, Deacon Werra, a powerful, loose-limbed Polack with bad teeth and only two cauliflower ears, had the physique but didn't know anything but rough clinching and a giant swing that started in the basement and never connected. He had been good enough to hold Targo off so far. The fans razzed Targo a good deal.

When the stool swung back out of the ring Targo hitched at his black and silver trunks, smiled with a small tight smile at the girl in the white wrap. He was very good-looking, without a mark on him. There was blood on his left shoulder from Werra's nose.

The bell rang and Werra charged across the ring, slid off Targo's shoulder, got a left hook in. Targo got more of the hook than was in it. He piled back into the ropes, bounced out, clinched.

Malvern smiled quietly in the darkness.

The referee broke them easily. Targo broke clean. Werra tried for an uppercut and missed. They sparred for a minute. There was waltz music from the gallery. Then Werra started a swing from his shootops. Targo seemed to wait for it, to wait for it to hit him. There was a queer strained smile on his face. The girl in the white wrap stood up suddenly.

Werra's swing grazed Targo's jaw. It barely staggered him. Targo lashed a long right that caught Werra over the eye. A left hook smashed into Werra's jaw, then a right cross almost to the same spot.

The dark boy went down on his hands and knees, slipped slowly all the way to the floor, lay with both his gloves under him. There were catcalls as he was counted out.

The fat man struggled to his feet, grinning hugely. He said:

"How you like it, pal? Still think it was a set piece?"

"It came unstuck," Malvern said in a voice as toneless as a police radio.

The fat man said: "So long, pal. Come around lots." He kicked Malvern's ankle climbing over him.

Malvern sat motionless, watched the auditorium empty. The fighters and their handlers had gone down the stairs under the ring. The girl in the white wrap had disappeared in the crowd. The lights went out and the barnlike structure looked cheap, sordid.

Tony Acosta fidgeted, watching a man in striped overalls picking up papers between the seats.

MALVERN stood up suddenly, said: "I'm going to talk to that bum, Tony. Wait outside in the car for me."

He went swiftly up the slope to the lobby, through the remnants of the gallery crowd to a gray door marked: "No Admittance." He went through that and down a ramp to another door marked the same way. A special cop in faded and unbuttoned khaki stood in front of it, with a bottle of beer in one hand and a hamburger in the other.

Malvern flashed a police card and the cop lurched out of the way without looking at the card. He hiccupped peacefully as Malvern went through the door, then along a narrow passage with numbered doors lining it. There was noise behind the doors. The fourth door on the left had a scribbled card with the name "Duke Targo" fastened to the panel by a thumbtack.

Malvern opened it into the heavy sound of a shower going, out of sight.

In a narrow and utterly bare room a man in a white sweater was sitting on the end of a rubbing table that had clothes scattered on it. Malvern recognized him as Targo's chief second.

He said: "Where's the Duke?"

The sweated man jerked a thumb towards the shower noise. Then a man came around the door and lurched very close to Malvern. He was tall and had curly brown hair with hard gray color in it. He had a big drink in his hand. His face had the flat glitter of extreme drunkenness. His hair was damp, his eyes bloodshot. His lips curled and uncurled in rapid smiles without meaning. He said thickly: "Scramola, umpchay."

Malvern shut the door calmly and leaned against it and started to get his cigarette case from his vest pocket, inside his open blue raincoat. He didn't look at the curly haired man at all.

The curly haired man lunged his free

right hand up suddenly, snapped it under his coat, out again. A blue steel gun shone dully against his light suit. The glass in his left hand slopped liquor.

"None of that!" he snarled.

Malvern brought the cigarette case out very slowly, showed it in his hand, opened it and put a cigarette between his lips. The blue gun was very close to him, not very steady. The hand holding the glass shook in a sort of jerky rhythm.

Malvern said loosely: "Yeah. You ought to be looking for trouble."

The sweated man got off the rubbing table. Then he stood very still and looked at the gun. The curly haired man said:

"We like trouble. Frisk him, Mike."

The sweated man said: "I don't want any part of it, Shenvair. For Pete's sake, take it easy. You're lit like a ferry boat."

Malvern said: "It's okey to frisk me. I'm not rodded."

"Nix," the sweated man said. "This guy is the Duke's bodyguard. Deal me out."

The curly haired man said: "Sure, I'm drunk," and giggled.

"You'r'a friend of the Duke?" the sweated man asked.

"I've got some information for him," Malvern said.

"About what?"

Malvern didn't say anything. "Okey," the sweated man said. He shrugged bitterly.

"Know what, Mike?" the curly haired man said suddenly and violently. "I think this—wants my job. Hell, yes. He looks like a bum. You ain't a shamus, are you, mister?" He punched Malvern with the muzzle of the gun.

"Yeah," Malvern said. "And keep your iron next your own belly."

The curly haired man turned his head a little and grinned back over his shoulder.

"What d'you know about that, Mike? He's a shamus. Sure he wants my job. Sure he does."

"Put the heater up, you fool," the sweated man said disgustedly.

The curly haired man turned a little more. "I'm his protection, ain't I?" he complained.

Malvern knocked the gun aside almost casually, with the hand that held his cigarette case. The curly haired man snapped his head around again. Malvern slid close to him, sank a stiff punch in his stomach, holding the gun away with his forearm. The curly haired man gagged, sprayed liquor down the front of Malvern's raincoat. His glass shattered on the floor. The blue gun left his hand and went over in a corner. The sweated man went after it.

The noise of the shower had stopped unnoticed and the blond fighter came out toweling himself vigorously. He stared open-mouthed at the tableau.

Malvern said: "I don't need this any more."

He heaved the curly haired man away from him and laced his jaw with a hard right as he went back. The curly haired man staggered across the room, hit the wall, slid down it and sat on the floor.

The sweated man snatched the gun up and stood rigid, watching Malvern.

Malvern got out a handkerchief and wiped the front of his coat, while Targo shut his large well-shaped mouth slowly and began to move the towel back and forth across his chest. After a moment he said:

"Just who the hell may you be?"

Malvern said: "I used to be a private dick. Malvern's the name. I think you need help."

Targo's face got a little redder than the shower had left it. "Why?"

"I heard you were supposed to throw it, and I think you tried to. But Werra was too lousy. You couldn't help yourself. That means you're in a jam."

Targo said very slowly: "People get their teeth kicked in for saying things like that."

The room was very still for a moment. The drunk sat up on the floor

and blinked, tried to get his feet under him, and gave it up.

Malvern added quietly: "Benny Cyrano is a friend of mine. He's your backer, isn't he?"

The sweated man laughed harshly. Then he broke the gun and slid the shells out of it, dropped the gun on the floor. He went to the door, went out, slammed the door shut.

Targo looked at the shut door, looked back at Malvern. He said very slowly:

"What did you hear?"

"Your friend Jean Adrian lives in my hotel, on my floor. She got sapped by a hood this afternoon. I happened by and saw the hood running away, picked her up. She told me a little of what it was all about."

Targo had put on his underwear and socks and shoes. He reached into a locker for a black satin shirt, put that on. He said:

"She didn't tell me."

"She wouldn't—before the fight."

Targo nodded slightly. Then he said: "If you know Benny, you may be all right. I've been getting threats. Maybe it's a lot of birdseed and maybe it's some Spring Street punter's idea of how to make himself a little easy dough. I fought my fight the way I wanted to. Now you can take the air, mister."

He put on high-waisted black trousers and knotted a white tie on his black shirt. He got a white serge coat trimmed with black braid out of the locker, put that on. A black and white handkerchief flared from the pocket in three points.

Malvern stared at the clothes, moved a little towards the door and looked down at the drunk.

"Okey," he said. "I see you've got a bodyguard. It was just an idea I had. Excuse it, please."

He went out, closed the door gently, and went back up the ramp to the lobby, out to the street. He walked through the rain around the corner of the building to a big graveled parking lot.

The lights of a car blinked at him and

his coupé slid along the wet gravel and pulled up. Tony Acosta was at the wheel.

Malvern got in at the right side and said: "Let's go out to *Cyrano's*, and have a drink, Tony."

"Jeeze, that's swell. Miss Adrian's in the floor show there. You know, the blonde I told you about."

Malvern said: "Yeah. I saw Targo. I kind of liked him—but I didn't like his clothes."

4



GUS NEISHACKER was a two hundred pound fashion plate with very red cheeks and thin, exquisitely penciled eyebrows—eyebrows from a Chi-

nese vase. There was a red carnation in the lapel of his wide-shouldered dinner jacket and he kept sniffing at it while he watched the headwaiter seat a party of guests. When Malvern and Tony Acosta came through the foyer arch he flashed a sudden smile and went to them with his hand out.

"How's a boy, Ted? Party?"

Malvern said: "Just the two of us. Meet Mister Acosta. Gus Neishacker, Cyrano's floor manager."

Gus Neishacker shook hands with Tony without looking at him. He said: "Let's see, the last time you dropped in—"

"She left town," Malvern said. "We'll sit near the ring but not too near. We don't dance together."

Gus Neishacker jerked a menu from under the headwaiter's arm and led the way down five crimson steps, along the tables that skirted the oval dance floor.

They sat down. Malvern ordered rye highballs and Denver sandwiches. Neishacker gave the order to a waiter, pulled a chair out and sat down at the table. He took a pencil out and made triangles on the inside of a match cover.

"See the fights?" he asked carelessly.

"Was that what they were?"

Gus Neishacker smiled indulgently. "Benny talked to the Duke. He says you're wise." He looked suddenly at Tony Acosta.

"Tony's all right," Malvern said.

"Yeah. Well do us a favor, will you? See it stops right here. Benny likes this boy. He wouldn't let him get hurt. He'd put protection all around him—*real* protection—if he thought that threat stuff was anything but some pool-hall bum's idea of a very funny joke. Benny never backs but one boxfighter at a time, and he picks them damn' careful."

Malvern lit a cigarette, blew smoke from a corner of his mouth, said quietly: "It's none of my business, but I'm telling you it's screwy. I have a nose for that sort of thing."

Gus Neishacker stared at him a minute, then shrugged. He said: "I hope you're right," stood up quickly and walked away among the tables. He bent to smile here and there, and speak to a customer.

Tony Acosta's velvet eyes shone. He said: "Jeeze, Mister Malvern, you think it's rough stuff?"

Malvern nodded, didn't say anything. The waiter put their drinks and sandwiches on the table, went away. The band on the stage at the end of the oval floor blared out a long chord and a slick, grinning M.C. slid out on the stage and put his lips to a small open mike.

The floor show began. A line of half naked girls ran out under a rain of colored lights. They coiled and uncoiled in a long sinuous line, their bare legs flashing, their navels little dimples of darkness in soft white, very nude flesh.

A hard-boiled red-head sang a hard-boiled song in a voice that could have been used to split firewood. The girls came back in black tights and silk hats, did the same dance with a slightly different exposure.

The music softened and a tall high yaller torch singer drooped under an amber light and sang of something very

far away and unhappy, in a voice like old ivory.

Malvern sipped his drink, poked at his sandwich in the dim light. Tony Acosta's hard young face was a small tense blur beside him.

The torch singer went away and there was a little pause and then suddenly all the lights in the place went out except the lights over the music racks of the band and little pale amber lights at the entrances to the radiating aisles of booths beyond the tables.

There were squeals in the thick darkness. A single white spot winked on, high up under the roof, settled on a runway beside the stage. Faces were chalk white in the reflected glare. There was the red glow of a cigarette tip here and there. Four tall black men moved in the light, carrying a white mummy case on their shoulders. They came slowly, in rhythm, down the runway. They wore white Egyptian headdresses and loincloths of white leather and white sandals laced to the knees. The black smoothness of their limbs was like black marble in the moonlight.

They reached the middle of the dance-floor and slowly upended the mummy case until the cover tipped forward and fell and was caught. Then slowly, very slowly, a swathed white figure tipped forward and fell—slowly, like the last leaf from a dead tree. It tipped in the air, seemed to hover, then plunged towards the floor under a shattering roll of drums.

The light went off, went on. The swathed figure was upright on the floor, spinning, and one of the blacks was spinning the opposite way, winding the white shroud around his body. Then the shroud fell away and a girl was all tinsel and smooth white limbs under the hard light and her body shot through the air glittering and was caught and passed around swiftly among the four black men, like a baseball handled by a fast infield.

Then the music changed to a waltz and she danced among the black men

slowly and gracefully, as though among four ebony pillars, very close to them but never touching them.

The act ended. The applause rose and fell in thick waves. The light went out and it was dark again, and then all the lights went up and the girl and the four black men were gone.

"Keeno," Tony Acosta breathed. "Oh, keeno. That was Miss Adrian, wasn't it?"

Malvern said slowly: "Yeah. A little daring." He lit another cigarette, looked around. "There's another black and white number, Tony. The Duke himself, in person.

Duke Targo stood applauding violently at the entrance to one of the radiating booth aisles. There was a loose grin on his face. He looked as if he might have had a few drinks.

An arm came down over Malvern's shoulder. A hand planted itself in the ashtray at his elbow. He smelled Scotch in heavy gusts. He turned his head slowly, looked up at the liquor-shiny face of Shenvair, Duke Targo's drunken bodyguard.

"Smokes and a white gal," Shenvair said thickly. "Lousy. Crummy. God-awful crummy."

Malvern smiled slowly, moved his chair a little. Tony Acosta stared at Shenvair round-eyed, his little mouth a thin line.

"Blackface, Mister Shenvair. Not real smokes. I liked it."

"And who the hell cares what you like?" Shenvair wanted to know.

Malvern smiled delicately, laid his cigarette down on the edge of a plate. He turned his chair a little more.

"Still think I want your job, Shenvair?"

"Yeah. I owe you a smack in the puss too." He took his hand out of the ashtray, wiped it off on the tablecloth. He doubled it into a fist. "Like it now?"

A waiter caught him by the arm, spun him around.

"You lost your table, sir? This way." Shenvair patted the waiter on the

shoulder, tried to put an arm around his neck. "Swell, let's go nibble a drink. I don't like these people."

They went away, disappeared among the tables.

Malvern said: "To hell with this place, Tony," and stared moodily towards the band stage. Then his eyes became intent.

A GIRL with corn-blond hair, in a white wrap with a white fur collar, appeared at the edge of the shell, went behind it, reappeared nearer. She came along the edge of the booths to the place where Targo had been standing. She slipped in between the booths there, disappeared.

Malvern said: "Yeah. To hell with this place. Let's go, Tony," in a low angry voice. Then very softly, in a tensed tone: "No—wait a minute. I see another guy I don't like."

The man was on the far side of the dance-floor, which was empty at the moment. He was following its curve around, past the tables that fringed it. He looked a little different without his hat. But he had the same flat white expressionless face, the same close-set eyes. He was youngish, not more than thirty, but already having trouble with his bald spot. The slight bulge of a gun under his left arm was barely noticeable. He was the man who had run away from Jean Adrian's apartment in the *Carondelet*.

He reached the aisle into which Targo had gone, into which a moment before Jean Adrian had gone. He went into it.

Malvern said sharply: "Wait here, Tony." He kicked his chair back and stood up.

Somebody rabbit-punched him from behind. He swiveled, close to Shenvair's grinning sweaty face.

"Back again, pal," the curly haired man chortled, and hit him on the jaw.

It was a short jab, well placed for a drunk. It caught Malvern off balance, staggered him. Tony Acosta came to

his feet snarling, catlike. Malvern was still rocking when Shenvair let go with the other fist. That was too slow, too wide. Malvern slid inside it, uppercut the curly haired man's nose savagely, got a handful of blood before he could get his hand away. He put most of it back on Shenvair's face.

Shenvair wobbled, staggered back a step and sat down on the floor, hard. He clapped a hand to his nose.

"Keep an eye on this bird, Tony," Malvern growled swiftly.

Shenvair took hold of the nearest tablecloth and yanked it. It came off the table. Silver and glasses and china followed it to the floor. A man swore and a woman squealed. A waiter ran towards them with a livid, furious face.

Malvern almost didn't hear the two shots.

They were small and flat, close together, a small caliber gun. The rushing waiter stopped dead, and a deeply etched white line appeared around his mouth as instantly as though the lash of a whip had cut it there.

A dark woman with a sharp nose opened her mouth to yell and no sound came from her. There was that instant when nobody makes a sound, when it almost seems as if there will never again be any sound—after the sound of a gun. Then Malvern was running.

He bumped into people who stood up and craned their necks. He reached the entrance to the aisle into which the white-faced man had gone. The booths had high walls and swing doors not so high. Heads stuck out over the doors, but no one was in the aisle yet. Malvern charged up a shallow carpeted slope, at the far end of which booth doors stood wide open.

Legs in dark cloth showed past the doors, slack on the floor, the knees sagged. The toes of black shoes were pointed into the booth.

Malvern shook an arm off, reached the place.

The man lay across the end of a table,

his stomach and one side of his face on the white cloth, his left hand dropped between the table and the padded seat. His right hand on top of the table didn't quite hold a big black gun, a .45 with a cut barrel. The bald spot on his head glistened under the light, and the oily metal of the gun glistened beside it.

Blood leaked from under his chest, vivid scarlet on the white cloth, seeping into it as into blotting paper.

Duke Targo was standing up, deep in the booth. His left arm in the white serge coat was braced on the end of the table. Jean Adrian was sitting down at his side. Targo looked at Malvern blankly, as if he had never seen him before. He pushed his big right hand forward.

A small white-handled automatic lay on his palm.

"I shot him," he said thickly. "He pulled a gun on us and I shot him."

Jean Adrian was scrubbing her hands together on a scrap of handkerchief. Her face was strained, cold, not scared. Her eyes were dark.

"I shot him," Targo said. He threw the small gun down on the cloth. It bounced, almost hit the fallen man's head. "Let's—let's get out of here."

Malvern put a hand against the side of the sprawled man's neck, held it there a second or two, took it away.

"He's dead," he said. "When a citizen drops a redhot—that's news."

Jean Adrian was staring at him stiff-eyed. He flashed a smile at her, put a hand against Targo's chest, pushed him back.

"Sit down, Targo. You're not going any place."

Targo said: "Well—okey. I shot him, see."

"That's all right," Malvern said. "Just relax."

People were close behind him now, crowding him. He leaned back against the press of bodies and kept on smiling at the girl's white face.

5



BENNY CYRANO was shaped like two eggs, a little one that was his head on top of a big one that was his body. His small dapper legs and feet

in patent leather shoes were pushed into the kneehole of a dark sheenless desk. He held a corner of a handkerchief tightly between his teeth and pulled against it with his left hand and held his right hand out pudgily in front of him, pushing against the air. He was saying in a voice muffled by the handkerchief:

"Now wait a minute, boys. Now wait a minute."

There was a striped built-in sofa in one corner of the office, and Duke Targo sat in the middle of it, between two Headquarters dicks. He had a dark bruise over cheekbone, his thick blond hair was tousled and his black satin shirt looked as if somebody had tried to swing him by it.

One of the dicks, the gray-haired one, had a split lip. The young one with hair as blond as Targo's had a black eye. They both looked mad, but the blond one looked madder.

Malvern straddled a chair against the wall and looked sleepily at Jean Adrian, near him in a leather rocker. She was twisting a handkerchief in her hands, rubbing her palms with it. She had been doing this for a long time, as if she had forgotten she was doing it. Her small firm mouth was angry.

Gus Neishacker leaned against the closed door smoking.

"Now wait a minute, boys," Cyrano said. "If you didn't get tough with him, he didn't fight back. He's a good boy—the best I ever had. Give him a break."

Blood dribbled from one corner of Targo's mouth, in a fine thread down to his jutting chin. It gathered there and glistened. His face was empty, expressionless.

Malvern said coldly: "You wouldn't want the boys to stop playing blackjack pinochle, would you, Benny?"

The blond dick snarled: "You still got that private dick license, Malvern?"

"It's lying around somewhere, I guess," Malvern said.

"Maybe we could take it away from you," the blond dick snarled.

"Maybe you could do a fan dance, copper. You might be all kinds of a smart guy for all I'd know."

The blond dick started to get up. The older one said: "Leave him be. Give him six feet. If he steps over that, we'll take the screws out of him."

Malvern and Gus Neishacker grinned at each other. Cyrano made helpless gestures in the air. The girl looked at Malvern under her lashes. Targo opened his mouth and spat blood straight before him on the blue carpet.

Something pushed against the door and Neishacker stepped to one side, opened it a crack, then opened it wide. McChesney came in.

McChesney was a lieutenant of detectives, tall, sandy haired, fortyish, with pale eyes and a narrow suspicious face. He shut the door and turned the key in it, went slowly over and stood in front of Targo.

"Plenty dead," he said. "One under the heart, one in it. Nice snap shooting. In any league."

"When you've got to deliver you've got to deliver," Targo said dully.

"Make him?" the gray-haired dick asked his partner, moving away along the sofa.

McChesney nodded. "Torchy Plant. A gun for hire. I haven't seen him round for all of two years. Tough as an ingrowing toenail with his right load. A bindle punk."

"He'd have to be that to throw his party in here," the gray-haired dick said.

McChesney's long face was serious, not hard. "Got a permit for the gun, Targo?"

Targo said: "Yes. Benny got me one

two weeks ago. I been getting a lot of threats."

"Listen, Lieutenant," Cyrano chirped, "some gamblers try to scare him into a dive, see? He wins nine straight fights by knockouts so they get a swell price. I told him he should take one at that maybe."

"I almost did," Targo said sullenly.

"So they sent the redhot to him," Cyrano said.

McChesney said: "I wouldn't say no. How'd you beat his draw, Targo? Where was your gun?"

"On my hip."

"Show me."

Targo put his hand back into his right hip pocket and jerked a handkerchief out quickly, stuck his finger through it like a gun barrel.

"That handkerchief in the pocket?" McChesney asked. "With the gun?"

Targo's big reddish face clouded a little. He nodded.

McChesney leaned forward casually and twitched the handkerchief from his hand. He sniffed at it, unwrapped it, sniffed at it again, folded it and put it away in his own pocket. His face said nothing.

"What did he say, Targo?"

"He said: 'I got a message for you, punk, and this is it.' Then he went for the gat and it stuck a little in the clip. I got mine out first."

McChesney smiled faintly and leaned far back, teetering on his heels. His faint smile seemed to slide off the end of his long nose. He looked Targo up and down.

"Yeah," he said softly. "I'd call it damn' nice shooting with a .22. But you're fast for a big guy. . . . Who got these threats?"

"I did," Targo said. "Over the phone."

"Know the voice?"

"It might have been this same guy. I'm not just positive."

McChesney walked stiff-legged to the other end of the office, stood a moment looking at a hand-tinted sporting print.

He came back slowly, drifted over to the door.

"A guy like that don't mean a lot," he said quietly, "but we got to do our job. The two of you will have to come downtown and make statements. Let's go."

He went out. The two dicks stood up, with Duke Targo between them. The gray-haired one snapped:

"You goin' to act nice, bo?"

Targo sneered: "If I get to wash my face."

They went out. The blond dick waited for Jean Adrian to pass in front of him. He swung the door, snarled back at Malvern:

"As for you—nuts!"

Malvern said softly: "I like them. It's the squirrel in me, copper."

Gus Neishacker laughed, then shut the door and went to the desk.

"I'm shaking like Benny's third chin," he said. "Let's all have a shot of cognac."

He poured three glasses a third full, took one over to the striped sofa and spread his long legs out on it, leaned his head back and sipped the brandy.

Malvern stood up and downed his drink. He got a cigarette out and rolled it around in his fingers, staring at Cyrano's smooth white face with an up-from-under look.

"How much would you say changed hands on that fight tonight?" he asked softly. "Bets."

Cyrano blinked, massaged his lips with a fat hand. "A few grand. It was just a regular weekly show. It don't listen, does it?"

Malvern put the cigarette in his mouth and leaned over the desk to strike a match. He said:

"If it does, murder's getting awfully cheap in this town."

Cyrano didn't say anything. Gus Neishacker sipped the last of his brandy and carefully put the empty glass down on a round cork table beside the sofa. He stared at the ceiling, silently.

After a moment Malvern nodded at the two men, crossed the room and went

out, closed the door behind him. He went along a corridor off which dressing-rooms opened, dark now. A curtained archway let him out at the back of the stage.

In the foyer the headwaiter was standing at the glass doors, looking out at the rain and the back of a uniformed policeman. Malvern went into the empty cloak room, found his hat and coat, put them on, came out to stand beside the headwaiter.

He said: "I guess you didn't notice what happened to the kid I was with?"

The headwaiter shook his head and reached forward to unlock the door.

"There was four hundred people here—and three hundred scrambled before the Law checked in. I'm sorry."

Malvern nodded and went out into the rain. The uniformed man glanced at him casually. He went along the street to where the car had been left. It wasn't there. He looked up and down the street, stood for a few moments in the rain, then walked towards Melrose.

After a little while he found a taxi.

6



HE ramp of the *Carondelet* garage curved down into semi-darkness and chilled air. The dark bulks of stalled cars looked ominous against the white washed walls, and the single droplight in the small office had the relentless glitter of the death house.

A big negro in stained coveralls came out rubbing his eyes, then his face split in an enormous grin.

"Hello, there, Mistuh Malvu'n. You kinda restless tonight?"

Malvern said: "I get a little wild when it rains. I bet my heap isn't here."

"No, it ain't, Mistuh Malvu'n. I been all around wipin' off and yours ain't here aytall."

Malvern said woodenly: "I lent it to a pal. He probably wrecked it. . . ."

He flicked a half-dollar through the air and went back up the ramp to the side street. He turned towards the back of the hotel, came to an alley-like street one side of which was the rear wall of the *Carondelet*. The other side had two frame houses and a four-story brick building. *Hotel Blaine* was lettered on a round milky globe over the door.

Malvern went up three cement steps and tried the door. It was locked. He looked through the glass panel into a small dim empty lobby. He got out two passkeys; the second one moved the lock a little. He pulled the door hard towards him, tried the first one again. That snicked the bolt back far enough for the loosely fitted door to open.

He went in and looked at an empty counter with a sign: "Manager" beside a plunger bell. There was an oblong of empty numbered pigeon holes on the wall. Malvern went around behind the counter and fished a leather register out of a space under the top. He read names back three pages, found the boyish scrawl: "Tony Acosta," and a room number in another writing.

He put the register away and went past the automatic elevator and upstairs to the fourth floor.

The hallway was very silent. There was weak light from a ceiling fixture. The last door but one on the left-hand side had a crack of light showing around its transom. That was the door—411. He put his hand out to knock, then withdrew it without touching the door.

The door-knob was heavily smeared with something that looked like blood.

Malvern's eyes looked down and saw what was almost a pool of blood on the stained wood before the door, beyond the edge of the runner.

His hand suddenly felt clammy inside his glove. He took the glove off, held his hand stiff, clawlike for a moment, then shook it slowly. His eyes had a sharp strained light in them.

He got a handkerchief out, grasped the door-knob inside it, turned it slowly. The door was unlocked. He went in.

He looked across the room and said very softly: "Tony . . . oh, Tony."

Then he shut the door behind him and turned a key in it, still with the handkerchief.

There was light from the bowl that hung on three brass chains from the middle of the ceiling. It shone on a made-up bed, some painted, light-colored furniture, a dull green carpet, a square writing desk of eucalyptus wood.

Tony Acosta sat at the desk. His head was slumped forward on his left arm. Under the chair on which he sat, between the legs of the chair and his feet, there was a glistening brownish pool.

Malvern walked across the room so rigidly that his ankles ached after the second step. He reached the desk, touched Tony Acosta's shoulder.

"Tony," he said thickly, in a low, meaningless voice. "My God, Tony!"

Tony didn't move. Malvern went around to his side. A blood-soaked bath towel glared against the boy's stomach, across his pressed-together thighs. His right hand was crouched against the front edge of the desk, as if he was trying to push himself up. Almost under his face there was a scrawled envelope.

Malvern pulled the envelope towards him slowly, lifted it like a thing of weight, read the wandering scrawl of words.

"Tailed him . . . woptown . . . 28 Court Street . . . over garage . . . shot me . . . think I got . . . him . . . your car . . ."

The line trailed over the edge of the paper, became a blot there. The pen was on the floor. There was a bloody thumb print on the envelope.

Malvern folded it meticulously to protect the print, put the envelope in his wallet. He lifted Tony's head, turned it a little towards him. The neck was still warm; it was beginning to stiffen. Tony's soft dark eyes were open and they held the quiet brightness of a cat's eyes. They had that effect

the eyes of the new dead have of almost, but not quite, looking at you.

Malvern lowered the head gently on the outstretched left arm. He stood laxly, his head on one side, his eyes almost sleepy. Then his head jerked straight and his eyes hardened.

He stripped off his raincoat and the suitcoat underneath, rolled his sleeves up, wet a face towel in the basin in the corner of the room and went to the door. He wiped the knobs off, bent down and wiped up the smeared blood from the floor outside.

He rinsed the towel and hung it up to dry, wiped his hands carefully, put his coats on again. He used his handkerchief to open the transom, to reverse the key and lock the door from the outside. He threw the key in over the top of the transom, heard it tinkle inside.

He went downstairs and out of the *Hotel Blaine*. It still rained. He walked to the corner, looked along a tree-shaded block. His car was a dozen yards from the intersection, parked carefully, the lights off, the keys in the ignition. He drew them out, felt the seat under the wheel. It was wet, sticky. Malvern wiped his hand off, ran the windows up and locked the car. He left it where it was.

Going back to the *Carondelet* he didn't meet anybody. The hard slanting rain still pounded down into the empty streets.

7



HERE was a thin thread of light under the door of 914. Malvern knocked lightly, looking up and down the hall, moved his gloved fingers softly on the panel while he waited. He waited a long time. Then a voice spoke wearily behind the wood of the door.

"Yes? What is it?"

"Ted Malvern, angel. I have to see you. It's strictly business."

The door clicked, opened. He looked at a tired white face, dark eyes that were slatelike, not violet-blue. There were smudges under them as though mascara had been rubbed into the skin. The girl's strong little hand twitched on the edge of the door.

"You," she said wearily. "It would be you. Yes. . . . Well, I've simply got to have a shower. I smell of policemen."

"Fifteen minutes?" Malvern asked casually, but his eyes were very sharp on her face.

She shrugged slowly, then nodded. The closing door seemed to jump at him. He went along to his own rooms, threw off his hat and coat, poured whiskey into a glass and went into the bathroom to get ice water from the small tap over the basin.

He drank slowly, looking out of the windows at the dark breadth of the boulevard. A car slid by now and then, two beams of white light attached to nothing, emanating from nowhere.

He finished the drink, stripped to the skin, went under a shower. He dressed in fresh clothes, refilled his big flask and put it in his inner pocket, took a snubnosed automatic out of a suit-case and held it in his hand for a minute staring at it. Then he put it back in the suit-case, lit a cigarette and smoked it through.

He got a dry hat and a tweed coat and went back to 914.

The door was almost insidiously ajar. He slipped in with a light knock, shut the door, went on into the living-room and looked at Jean Adrian.

She was sitting on the davenport, with a freshly scrubbed look, in loose plum-colored pajamas and a Chinese coat. A tendril of damp hair drooped over one temple. Her small even features had the cameo-like clearness that tiredness gives to the very young.

Malvern said: "Drink?"

She gestured emptily. "I suppose so."

He got glasses, mixed whiskey and ice water, went to the davenport with them.

"Are they keeping Targo on ice?"

She moved her chin an eighth of an inch, staring into her glass.

"He cut loose again, knocked two cops halfway through the wall. They love that boy."

Malvern said: "He has a lot to learn about cops. In the morning the cameras will be all set for him. I can think of some nice headlines, such as: 'Well-known Fighter too Fast for Gunman. Duke Targo Puts Crimp in Underworld Hot Rod.'"

The girl sipped her drink. "I'm tired," she said. "And my foot itches. Let's talk about what makes this your business."

"Sure." He flipped his cigarette case open, held it under her chin. Her hand fumbled at it and while it still fumbled he said: "When you light that tell me why you shot him."

Jean Adrian put the cigarette between her lips, bent her head to the match, inhaled and threw her head back. Color awakened slowly in her eyes and a small smile curved the line of her pressed lips. She didn't answer.

Malvern watched her for a minute, turning his glass in his hands. Then he stared at the floor, said:

"It was your gun—the gun I picked up here in the afternoon. Targo said he drew it from his hip pocket, the slowest draw in the world. Yet he's supposed to have shot twice, accurately enough to kill a man, while the man wasn't even getting his gun loose from a shoulder-holster. That's hooley. But you, with the gun in a bag in your lap, and knowing the hood, might just have managed it. He would have been watching Targo."

The girl said emptily: "You're a private dick, I hear. You're the son of a boss politician. They talked about you downtown. They act a little afraid of

you, of people you might know. Who sicked you on to me?"

Malvern said: "They're not afraid of me, angel. They just talked like that to see how you'd react, if I was involved, so on. They don't know what it's all about."

"They were told plainly enough what it was all about."

Malvern shook his head. "A cop never believes what he gets without a struggle. He's too used to cooked-up stories. I think McChesney's wise you did the shooting. He knows by now if that handkerchief of Targo's had been in a pocket with a gun."

Her limp fingers discarded her cigarette half-smoked. A curtain eddied at the window and loose flakes of ash crawled around in the ashtray. She said slowly:

"All right. I shot him. Do you think I'd hesitate after this afternoon?"

Malvern rubbed the lobe of his ear. "I'm playing this too light," he said softly. "You don't know what's in my heart. Something has happened, something nasty. Do you think the hood meant to kill Targo?"

"I thought so—or I wouldn't have shot a man."

"I think maybe it was just a scare, angel. Like the other one. After all a night-club is a poor place for a get-away."

She said sharply: "They don't do many low tackles on forty-fives. He'd have got away all right. Of course he meant to kill somebody. And of course I didn't mean Duke to front for me. He just grabbed the gun out of my hand and slammed into his act. What did it matter? I knew it would all come out in the end."

She poked absently at the still burning cigarette in the tray, kept her eyes down. After a moment she said, almost in a whisper: "Is that all you wanted to know?"

Malvern let his eyes crawl sidewise, without moving his head, until he could just see the firm curve of her cheek,

the strong line of her throat. He said thickly:

"Shenvair was in on it. The fellow I was with at *Cyrano's* followed Shenvair to a hideout. Shenvair shot him. He's dead. He's dead, angel—just a young kid that worked here in the hotel. Tony, the bell captain. The cops don't know that yet."

THE muffled clang of elevator doors was heavy through the silence. A horn tooted dismally out in the rain on the boulevard. The girl sagged forward suddenly, then sidewise, fell across Malvern's knees. Her body was half-turned and she lay almost on her back across his thighs, her eyelids flickering. The small blue veins in them stood out rigid in the soft skin.

He put his arms around her slowly, loosely, then they tightened, lifted her. He brought her face close to his own face. He kissed her on the side of the mouth.

Her eyes opened, stared blankly, unfocused. He kissed her again, tightly, then pushed her upright on the davenport.

He said quietly: "That wasn't just an act, was it?"

She leaped to her feet, spun around. Her voice was low and tense and angry.

"There's something horrible about you! Something—satanic. You come here and tell me another man has been killed—and then you kiss me. It isn't real."

Malvern said dully: "There's something horrible about any man that goes suddenly gaga over another man's woman."

"I'm not his woman!" she snapped. "I don't even like him—and I don't like you."

Malvern shrugged. They stared at each other with bleak hostile eyes. The girl clicked her teeth shut, then said almost violently:

"Get out! I can't talk to you any more. I can't stand you around. Will you get out?"

Malvern said: "Why not?" He stood up, went over and got his hat and coat.

The girl sobbed once sharply, then she went in light quick strides across the room to the windows, became motionless with her back to him.

Malvern looked at her back, went over near her and stood looking at the soft hair low down on her neck. He said:

"Why the hell don't you let me help? I know there's something wrong. I wouldn't hurt you."

The girl spoke to the curtain in front of her face, savagely.

"Get out! I don't want your help. Go away and stay away. I won't be seeing you—ever."

Malvern said slowly: "I think you've got to have help. Whether you like it or not. That man in the photo frame on the desk there—I think I know who he is. And I don't think he's dead."

The girl turned. Her face now was as white as paper. Her eyes strained at his eyes. She breathed thickly, harshly. After what seemed a long time she said:

"I'm caught. Caught. There's nothing you can do about it."

Malvern lifted a hand and drew his fingers slowly down her cheek, down the angle of her tight jaw. His eyes held a hard brown glitter, his lips a smile. It was cunning, almost a dishonest smile.

He said: "I'm wrong, angel. I don't know him at all. Good night."

He went back across the room, through the little hallway, opened the door. When the door opened the girl clutched at the curtain and rubbed her face against it slowly.

Malvern didn't shut the door. He stood quite still halfway through it, looking at two men who stood there with guns.

They stood close to the door, as if they had been about to knock. One was thick, dark, saturnine. The other one was an albino with sharp red eyes, a narrow head that showed shining snow-white hair under a rain-spattered dark

hat. He had the thin sharp teeth and the drawn-back grin of a rat.

Malvern started to close the door behind him. The albino said: "Hold it, rube. The door, I mean. We're goin' in."

The other man slid forward and pressed his left hand up and down Malvern's body carefully. He stepped away, said:

"No gat, but a swell flask under his arm."

The albino gestured with his gun. "Back up, rube. We want the broad, too."

Malvern said tonelessly: "It doesn't take a gun, Critz. I know you and I know your boss. If he wants to see me, I'll be glad to talk to him."

He turned and went back into the room with the two gunmen behind him.

Jean Adrian hadn't moved. She stood by the window still, the curtain against her cheek, her eyes closed, as if she hadn't heard the voices at the door at all.

Then she heard them come in and her eyes snapped open. She turned slowly, stared past Malvern at the two gunmen. The albino walked to the middle of the room, looked around it without speaking, went on into the bedroom and bathroom. Doors opened and shut. He came back on quiet catlike feet, pulled his overcoat open and pushed his hat back on his head.

"Get dressed, sister. We have to go for a ride in the rain. Okey?"

The girl stared at Malvern now. He shrugged, smiled a little, spread his hands.

"That's how it is, angel. Might as well fall in line."

The lines of her face got thin and contemptuous. She said slowly: "You—you—." Her voice trailed off into a sibilant, meaningless mutter. She went across the room stiffly and out of it into the bedroom.

The albino slipped a cigarette between his sharp lips, chuckled with a

wet, gurgling sound, as if his mouth was full of saliva.

"She don't seem to like you, rube."

Malvern frowned. He walked slowly to the writing desk, leaned his hips against it, stared at the floor.

"She thinks I sold her out," he said dully.

"Maybe you did, rube," the albino drawled.

Malvern said: "Better watch her. She's neat with a gun."

His hands, reaching casually behind him on the desk, tapped the top of it lightly, then without apparent change of movement folded the leather photo frame down on its side and edged it under the blotter.

8



HERE was a padded arm rest in the middle of the rear seat of the car, and Malvern leaned an elbow on it, cupped his chin in his hand, stared through the half-misted windows at the rain. It was thick white spray in the headlights, and the noise of it on the top of the car was like drum-fire very far off.

Jean Adrian sat on the other side of the arm rest, in the corner. She wore a black hat and a gray coat with tufts of silky hair on it, longer than caracul and not so curly. She didn't look at Malvern or speak to him.

The albino sat on the right of the thick dark man, who drove. They went through silent streets, past blurred houses, blurred trees, the blurred shine of street lights. There were Neon signs behind thick curtains of mist. There was no sky.

Then they climbed and a feeble arc light strung over an intersection threw light on a sign post, and Malvern read the name "Court Street."

He said softly: "This is woptown, Critz. The big guy can't be so dough-heavy as he used to be."

Light flickered from the albino's eyes as he glanced back. "You should know, rube."

The car slowed in front of a big frame house with a trellised porch, walls finished in round shingles, blind, lightless windows. Across the street a stencil sign on a brick building built sheer to the sidewalk said: Paolo Perrugini Funeral Parlors."

The car swung out to make a wide turned into a gravel driveway. Lights splashed into an open garage. They went in, slid to a stop beside a big shiny undertaker's ambulance.

The albino snapped: "All out!"

Malvern said: "I see our next trip is all arranged for."

"Funny guy," the albino snarled. "A wise monkey."

"Uh-huh, I just have nice scaffold manners," Malvern drawled.

The dark man cut the motor and snapped on a big flash, then cut the lights, got out of the car. He shot the beam of the flash up a narrow flight of wooden steps in the corner. The albino said:

"Up you go, rube. Push the girl ahead of you. I'm behind with my rod."

Jean Adrian got out of the car past Malvern, without looking at him. She went up the steps stiffly, and the three men made a procession behind her.

There was a door at the top. The girl opened it and hard white light came out at them. They went into a bare attic with exposed studding, a square window in front and rear, shut tight, the glass painted black. A bright bulb hung on a drop cord over a kitchen table and a big man sat at the table with a saucer of cigarette butts at his elbow. Two of them still smoked.

A thin loose-lipped man sat on a bed with a Luger beside his left hand. There was a worn carpet on the floor, a few sticks of furniture, a half-open clapboard door in the corner through which a toilet seat showed, and one end of a

big old-fashioned bathtub standing up from the floor on iron legs.

The man at the kitchen table was large but not handsome. He had curly hair and eyebrows a shade darker, a square aggressive face, a strong jaw. His thick lips held his cigarette brutally. His clothes looked as if they had cost a great deal of money and had been slept in.

He glanced carelessly at Jean Adrian, said around the cigarette:

"Park the body, sister. Hi, Malvern. Gimme that rod, Lefty, and you boys drop down below again."

The girl went quietly across the attic and sat down in a straight wooden chair. The man on the bed stood up, put the Luger at the big man's elbow on the kitchen table. The three gunmen went down the stairs, leaving the door open.

The big man touched the Luger, stared at Malvern, said sarcastically:

"I'm Doll Conant. Maybe you remember me."

Malvern stood loosely by the kitchen table, with his legs spread wide, his hands in his overcoat pockets, his head tilted back. His half-closed eyes were sleepy, very cold.

He said: "Yeah. I helped my dad hang the only rap on you that ever stuck."

"It didn't stick, mugg. Not with the Court of Appeals."

"Maybe this one will," Malvern said carelessly. "Kidnaping is apt to be a sticky rap in this State."

Conant grinned without opening his lips. His expression was grimly good-humored. He said:

"Let's not barber. We got business to do and you know better than that last crack. Sit down—or rather take a look at Exhibit One first. In the bathtub, behind you. Yeah, take a look at that. Then we can get down to tacks."

Malvern turned, went across to the clapboard door, pushed through it. There was a bulb sticking out of the wall, with a keyswitch. He snapped it on, bent over the tub.

For a moment his body was quite rigid and his breath was held rigidly. Then he let it out very slowly, and reached his left hand back and pushed the door almost shut. He bent farther over the big iron tub.

It was long enough for a man to stretch out in, and a man was stretched out in it, on his back. He was fully dressed even to a hat, although his hat didn't look as if he had put it on himself. He had thick gray-brown curly hair. There was blood on his face and there was a gouged, red-rimmed hole at the inner corner of his left eye.

He was Shenvair and he was long since dead.

Malvern sucked in his breath and straightened slowly, then suddenly bent forward still further until he could see into the space between the tub and the wall. Something blue and metallic glistened down there in the dust. A blue steel gun. A gun like Shenvair's gun.

Malvern glanced back quickly. The not quite shut door showed him a part of the attic, the top of the stairs, one of Doll Conant's feet square and placid on the carpet, under the kitchen table. He reached his arm out slowly down behind the tub, gathered the gun up. The four exposed chambers had steel-jacketed bullets in them.

Malvern opened his coat, slipped the gun down inside the waistband of his trousers, tightened his belt, and buttoned his coat again. He went out of the bathroom, shut the clapboard door carefully.

Doll Conant gestured at a chair across the table from him: "Sit down."

Malvern glanced at Jean Adrian. She was staring at him with a kind of rigid curiosity, her eyes dark and colorless in a stone white face under the black hat.

He gestured at her, smiled faintly. "It's Mister Shenvair, angel. He met with an accident. He's—dead."

The girl stared at him without any expression at all. Then she shuddered

once, violently. She stared at him again, made no sound of any kind.

Malvern sat down in the chair across the table from Conant.

Conant eyed him, added a smoking stub to the collection in the white saucer, lit a fresh cigarette, streaking the match the whole length of the kitchen table.

He puffed, said casually: "Yeah, he's dead. You shot him."

Malvern shook his head very slightly, smiled. "No."

"Skip the baby eyes, feller. You shot him. Perrugini, the wop undertaker across the street, owns this place, rents it out now and then to a right boy for a quick dust. Incidentally he's a friend of mine, does me a lot of good among the other wops. He rented it to Shenvair. Didn't know him, but Shenvair got a right ticket into him. He heard shooting over here tonight, took a look out of his window, saw a guy make it to a car. He saw the license number on the car. Your car."

Malvern shook his head again. "But I didn't shoot him, Conant."

"Try and prove it. . . . The wop ran over and found Shenvair halfway up the stairs, dead. He dragged him up and stuck him in the bathtub. Some crazy idea about the blood, I suppose. Then he went through him, found a police card, a private dick license, and that scared him. He got me on the phone and when I got the name I came steaming."

Conant stopped talking, eyed Malvern steadily. Malvern said very softly:

"You hear about the shooting at Cyrano's tonight?"

Conant nodded.

Malvern went on:

"I was there, with a kid friend of mine from the hotel. Just before the shooting this Shenvair threw a punch at me. The kid followed Shenvair here and they shot at each other. Shenvair was drunk and scared and I'll bet he shot first. I didn't even know the kid had a gun. Shenvair shot him through

the stomach. He got home, died there. He left me a note. I have the note."

After a moment Conant said:

"You killed Shenvair, or hired that boy to do it. Here's why. He tried to copper his bet on your blackmail racket. He sold out to Courtway."

Malvern looked startled. He snapped his head around to look at Jean Adrian. She was leaning forward, staring at him with color in her cheeks, a shine in her eyes. She said very softly:

"I'm sorry—angel. I had you wrong."

Malvern smiled a little, turned back to Conant. He said:

"She thought I was the one that sold out. Who's Courtway? Your bird dog, the State Senator?"

Conant's face turned a little white. He laid his cigarette down very carefully in the saucer, leaned across the table and hit Malvern in the mouth with his fist. Malvern went over backwards in the rickety chair. His head struck the floor.

Jean Adrian stood up quickly and her teeth made a sharp clicking sound. Then she didn't move.

Malvern rolled over on his side and got up and set the chair upright. He got a handkerchief out, patted his mouth, looked at the handkerchief.

Steps clattered on the stairs and the albino poked his narrow head into the room, poked a gun still farther in.

"Need any help, Boss?"

Without looking at him Conant said: "Get out—and shut that door—and stay out!"

THE door was shut. The albino's steps died down the stairs. Malvern put his left hand on the back of the chair and moved it slowly back and forth. His right hand still held the handkerchief. His lips were getting puffed and darkish. His eyes looked at the Luger by Conant's elbow.

Conant picked up his cigarette and put it in his mouth. He said:

"Maybe you think I'm going to neck

this blackmail racket. I'm not, brother. I'm going to kill it—so it'll stay killed. You're going to spill your guts. I have three boys downstairs who need exercise. Get busy and talk."

Malvern said: "Yeah—but your three boys are downstairs." He slipped the handkerchief inside his coat. His hand came out with the blue gun in it. He said: "Take that Luger by the barrel and push it across the table so I can reach it."

Conant didn't move. His eyes narrowed to slits. His hard mouth jerked the cigarette in it once. He didn't touch the Luger. After a moment he said:

"I guess you know what will happen to you now."

Malvern shook his head slightly. He said: "Maybe I'm not particular about that. If it does happen, I promise you you won't know anything about it."

Conant stared at him, didn't move. He stared at him for quite a long time, stared at the blue gun. "Where did you get it? Didn't the heels frisk you?"

Malvern said: "They did. This is Shenvair's gun. Your wop friend must have kicked it behind the bathtub. Careless."

Conant reached two thick fingers forward and turned the Luger around and pushed it to the far edge of the table. He nodded and said tonelessly:

"I lose this hand. I ought to have thought of that. That makes me do the talking."

Jean Adrian came quickly across the room and stood at the end of the table. Malvern reached forward across the chair and took the Luger in his left hand and slipped it down into his overcoat pocket, kept his hand on it. He rested the hand holding the blue gun on the top of the chair.

Jean Adrian said: "Who is this man?"

"Doll Conant, a local bigtimer. Senator John Myerson Courtway is his pipe line into the State Senate. And Senator Courtway, angel, is the man in your photo frame on your desk. The

man you said was your father, that you said was dead."

The girl said very quietly: "He is my father. I knew he wasn't dead. I'm blackmailing him—for a hundred grand. Shenvair and Targo and I. He never married my mother, so I'm illegitimate. But I'm still his child. I have rights and he won't recognize them. He treated my mother abominably, left her without a nickel. He had detectives watch me for years. Shenvair was one of them. He recognized my photos when I came here and met Targo. He remembered. He went up to San Francisco and got a copy of my birth certificate. I have it here."

She fumbled at her bag, felt around in it, opened a small zipper pocket in the lining. Her hand came on with a folded paper. She tossed it on the table.

Conant stared at her, reached a hand for the paper, spread it out and studied it. He said slowly:

"This doesn't prove anything."

Malvern took his left hand out of his pocket and reached for the paper. Conant pushed it towards him.

It was a certified copy of a birth certificate, dated originally in 1912. It recorded the birth of a girl child, Adriana Gianni Myerson, to John and Antonina Gianni Myerson. Malvern dropped the paper again.

He said: "Adriana Gianni—Jean Adrian. Was that the tip-off, Conant?"

Conant shook his head. "Shenvair got cold feet. He tipped Courtway. He was scared. That's why he had this hideout lined up. I thought that was why he got killed. Targo couldn't have done it, because Targo's still in the can. Maybe I had you wrong, Malvern."

Malvern stared at him woodenly, didn't say anything. Jean Adrian said:

"It's my fault. I'm the one that's to blame. It was pretty rotten. I see that now. I want to see him and tell him I'm sorry and that he'll never hear from me again. I want to make him promise he won't do anything to Duke Targo. May I?"

Malvern said: "You can do anything you want to, angel. I have two guns that say so. But why did you wait so long? And why didn't you go at him through the courts? You're in show business. The publicity would have made you—even if he beat you out."

The girl bit her lip, said in a low voice: "My mother never really knew who he was, never knew his last name even. He was John Myerson to her. I didn't know until I came here and happened to see a picture in the local paper. He had changed, but I knew the face. And of course the first part of his name—"

Conant said sneeringly: "You didn't go at him openly because you knew damn well you weren't his kid. That your mother just wished you on to him like any cheap broad who sees herself out of a swell meal ticket. Courtway says he can prove it, and that he's going to prove it and put you where you belong. And believe me, sister, he's just the stiff-necked kind of sap who would kill himself in public life raking up a twenty-year-old scandal to do that little thing."

The big man spit his cigarette stub out viciously, added: "It cost me money to put him where he is and I aim to keep him there. That's why I'm in it. No dice, sister. I'm putting the pressure on. You're going to take a lot of air and keep on taking it. As for your two-gun friend—maybe he didn't know, but he knows now and that ties him up in the same package."

Conant banged on the table top, leaned back, looking calmly at the blue gun in Malvern's hand.

Malvern stared into the big man's eyes, said very softly: "That hood at *Cyrano's* tonight—he wasn't your idea of putting on the pressure by any chance, Conant, was he?"

Conant grinned harshly, shook his head. The door at the top of the stairs opened a little, silently. Malvern didn't see it. He was staring at Conant. Jean Adrian saw it.

Her eyes widened and she stepped back with a startled exclamation that jerked Malvern's eyes to her.

The albino stepped softly through the door with a gun leveled.

His red eyes glistened, his mouth was drawn wide in a snarling grin. He said: "The door's kind of thin, Boss. I listened. Okey? . . . Shed the heater, rube, or I blow you both in half."

Malvern turned slightly and opened his right hand and let the blue gun bounce on the thin carpet. He shrugged, spread his hands out wide, didn't look at Jean Adrian.

The albino stepped clear of the door, came slowly forward and put his gun against Malvern's back.

Conant stood up, came around the table, took the Luger out of Malvern's coat pocket and hefted it. Without a word or a change of expression he slammed it against the side of Malvern's jaw.

Malvern sagged drunkenly, then went down on the floor on his side.

Jean Adrian screamed, clawed at Conant. He threw her off, changed the gun to his left hand and slapped the side of her face with a hard palm.

"Pipe down, sister. You've had all your fun."

The albino went to the head of the stairs and called down it. The two other gunmen came up into the room, stood grinning.

Malvern didn't move on the floor. After a little while Conant lit another cigarette and rattled a knuckle on the table top beside the birth certificate. He said gruffly:

"She wants to see the old man. Okey, she can see him. We'll all go see him. There's still something in this that stinks." He raised his eyes, looked at the stocky man. "You and Lefty go downtown and spring Targo, get him out to the Senator's place as soon as you can. Step on it."

The two hoods went back down the stairs.

Conant looked down at Malvern,

kicked him in the ribs lightly, kept on kicking them until Malvern opened his eyes and stirred.

9



THE car waited at the top of a hill, before a pair of tall wrought iron gates, inside which there was a lodge. A door of the lodge stood open and yellow light framed a big man in an overcoat and a pulled down hat. He came forward slowly into the rain, his hands down in his pockets.

The rain slithered about his feet and the albino leaned against the uprights of the gate, clicking his teeth. The big man said:

"What yuh want? I can see yuh."

"Shake it up, rube. Mister Conant wants to call on your boss."

The man inside spat into the wet darkness. "So what? Know what time it is?"

Conant opened the car door suddenly and went over to the gates. The rain made noise between the car and the voices.

Malvern turned his head slowly and patted Jean Adrian's hand. She pushed his hand away from her quickly.

Her voice said softly: "You fool—oh, you fool!"

Malvern sighed. "I'm having a swell time, angel. A swell time."

The man inside the gates took out keys on a long chain, unlocked the gates and pushed them back until they clicked on the chocks. Conant and the albino came back to the car.

Conant stood in the rain with a heel hooked on the running-board.

Malvern took his big flask out of his pocket, felt it over to see if it was dented, then unscrewed the top. He held it out towards the girl, said:

"Have a little bottle courage."

She didn't answer him, didn't move. He drank from the flask, put it away,

looked past Conant's broad back at acres of dripping trees, a cluster of lighted windows that seemed to hang in the sky.

A car came up the hill stabbing the wet dark with its headlights, pulled behind the sedan and stopped. Conant went over to it, put his head into it and said something. The car backed, turned into the driveway, and its lights splashed on retaining walls, disappeared, reappeared at the top of the drive as a hard white oval against a stone porte-cochère.

Conant got into the sedan and the albino swung it into the driveway after the other car. At the top, in a cement parking circle ringed with cypresses, they all got out.

At the top of steps a big door was open and a man in a bathrobe stood in it. Targo, between two men who leaned hard against him, was halfway up the steps. He was bareheaded and without an overcoat. His big body in the white coat looked enormous between the two gunmen.

The rest of the party went up the steps and into the house and followed the bathrobed butler down a hall lined with portraits of somebody's ancestors, through a stiff oval foyer to another hall and into a paneled study with soft lights and heavy drapes and deep leather chairs.

A man stood behind a big dark desk that was set in an alcove made by low, outjutting bookcases. He was enormously tall and thin. His white hair was so thick and fine that no single hair was visible in it. He had a small straight bitter mouth, black eyes without depth in a whitelined face. He stooped a little and a blue corduroy bathrobe faced with satin was wrapped around his almost freakish thinness.

The butler shut the door and Conant opened it again and jerked his chin at the two men who had come in with Targo. They went out. The albino stepped behind Targo and pushed him down into a chair. Targo looked dazed, stupid. There was a smear of dirt on

one side of his face and his eyes had a drugged look.

The girl went over to him quickly, said: "Oh, Duke—are you all right, Duke?"

Targo blinked at her, half-grinned. "So you had to rat, huh? Skip it. I'm fine." His voice had an unnatural sound.

Jean Adrian went away from him and sat down and hunched herself together as if she was cold.

The tall man stared coldly at everyone in the room in turn, then said lifelessly: "Are these the blackmailers—and was it necessary to bring them here in the middle of the night?"

Conant shook himself out of his coat, threw it on the floor behind a lamp. He lit a fresh cigarette and stood spread-legged in the middle of the room, a big, rough, rugged man very sure of himself. He said:

"The girl wanted to see you and tell you she was sorry and wants to play ball. The guy in the ice cream coat is Targo, the fighter. He got himself in a shooting scrape at a night spot and acted so wild downtown they fed him sleep tablets to quiet him. The other guy is Ted Malvern, old Marcus Malvern's boy. I don't figure him yet."

Malvern said dryly: "I'm a private detective, Senator. I'm here in the interests of my client, Miss Adrian." He laughed.

The girl looked at him suddenly, then looked at the floor.

Conant said gruffly: "Shenvair, the one you know about, got himself bumped off. Not by us. That's still to straighten out."

The tall man nodded coldly. He sat down at his desk and picked up a white quill pen, tickled one ear with it.

"And what is your idea of the way to handle this matter, Conant?" he asked thinly.

Conant shrugged. "I'm a rough boy, but I'd handle this one legal. Talk to the D. A., toss them in a coop on suspicion of extortion. Cook up a story

for the papers, then give it time to cool. Then dump these birds across the State line and tell them not to come back—or else."

Senator Courtway moved the quill around to his other ear. "They could attack me again, from a distance," he said icily. "I'm in favor of a showdown, put them where they belong."

"You can't try them, Courtway. It would kill you politically."

"I'm tired of public life, Conant. I'll be glad to retire." The tall thin man curved his mouth into a faint smile.

"The hell you are," Conant growled. He jerked his head around, snapped: "Come here, sister."

Jean Adrian stood up, came slowly across the room, stood in front of the desk.

"Make her?" Conant snarled.

Courtway stared at the girl's set face for a long time, without a trace of expression. He put his quill down on the desk, opened a drawer and took out a photograph. He looked from the photo to the girl, back to the photo, said tonelessly:

"This was taken a number of years ago, but there's a very strong resemblance. I don't think I'd hesitate to say it's the same face."

He put the photo down on the desk and with the same unhurried motion took an automatic out of the drawer and put it down on the desk beside the photo.

Conant stared at the gun. His mouth twisted. He said thickly: "You won't need that, Senator. Listen, your showdown idea is all wrong. I'll get detailed confessions from these people and we'll hold them. If they ever act up again, it'll be time enough then to crack down with the big one."

Malvern smiled a little and walked across the carpet until he was near the end of the desk. He said: "I'd like to see that photograph" and leaned over suddenly and took it.

Courtway's thin hand dropped to the

gun, then relaxed. He leaned back in his chair and stared at Malvern.

MALVERN stared at the photograph, lowered it, said softly to Jean Adrian: "Go sit down."

She turned and went back to her chair, dropped into it wearily.

Malvern said: "I'd like your show-down idea, Senator. It's clean and straightforward and a wholesome change in policy for Mister Conant. But it won't work." He snicked a fingernail at the photo. "This has a superficial resemblance, no more. I don't think it's the same girl at all myself. Her ears are differently shaped and lower on her head. Her eyes are closer together than Miss Adrian's eyes, the line of her jaw is longer. Those things don't change. So what have you got? An extortion letter? Maybe, but you can't tie it to anyone or you'd have done it already. The girl's name? Just coincidence. What else?"

Conant's face was granite hard, his mouth bitter. His voice shook a little saying: "And how about that certificate the gal took out of her purse, wise guy?"

Malvern smiled faintly, rubbed the side of his jaw with his fingertips. "I thought you got that from Shenvair?" he said slyly. "And Shenvair is dead."

Conant's face was a mask of fury. He balled his fist, took a jerky step forward. "Why you — damn' louse—"

Jean Adrian was leaning forward staring round-eyed at Malvern. Targo was staring at him, with a loose grin, pale hard eyes. Courtway was staring at him. There was no expression of any kind on Courtway's face. He sat cold, relaxed, distant.

Conant laughed suddenly, snapped his fingers. "Okey, toot your horn," he grunted.

Malvern said slowly: "I'll tell you another reason why there'll be no show-down. That shooting at *Cyrano's*. Those threats to make Targo drop an unimportant fight. That hood that went to

Miss Adrian's hotel room and sapped her, left her lying on her doorway. Can't you use your big noodle at all? Can't you tie all that in, Conant. I can."

Courtway leaned forward suddenly and placed his hand on his gun, folded it around the butt. His black eyes were holes in a white frozen face.

Conant didn't move, didn't speak.

Malvern went on: "Why did Targo get those threats, and after he didn't drop the fight, why did a gun go to see him at *Cyrano's*, a night-club, a very bad place for that kind of play? Because at *Cyrano's* he was with the girl, and Cyrano was his backer, and if anything happened at *Cyrano's* the law would get the threat story before they had time to think of anything else. That's why. The threats were a build up for a killing. When the shooting came off Targo was to be with the girl, so the hood could get the girl and it would look as if Targo was the one he was after.

"He would have tried for Targo too, of course, but above all he would have got the girl. Because she was the dynamite behind this shakedown, without her it meant nothing, and with her it could always be made over into a legitimate paternity suit, if it didn't work the other way. You know about her and about Targo, because Shenvair got cold feet and sold out. And Shenvair knew about the hood—because when the hood showed, and I saw him—and Shenvair knew I knew him, because he had heard me tell Targo about him—then Shenvair tried to pick a drunken fight with me and keep me from trying to interfere."

Malvern stopped, rubbed the side of his head again, very slowly, very gently. He watched Conant with an up from under look.

Conant said slowly, very harshly: "I don't play those games, buddy. Believe it or not—I don't."

Malvern said: "Listen. The hood could have killed the girl at the hotel with his sap. He didn't, because Targo

wasn't there and the fight hadn't been fought, and the build-up would have been all wasted. He went there to have a close look at her, without makeup. And she was scared about something, and had a gun with her. So he sapped her down and ran away. That visit was just a finger."

Conant said again: "I don't play those games, buddy." Then he took the Luger out of his pocket and held it down at his side.

Malvern shrugged, turned his head to stare at Senator Courtway.

"No, but *he* does," he said softly. "He had the motive, and the play wouldn't look like him. He cooked it up with Shenvair—and if it went wrong, as it did, Shenvair would have breezed and if the law got wise, big tough Doll Conant is the boy whose nose would be in the mud."

Courtway smiled a little and said in an utterly dead voice:

"The young man is very ingenious, but surely—"

Targo stood up. His face was a stiff mask. His lips moved slowly and he said:

"It sounds pretty good to me. I think I'll twist your—damn' neck, Mister Courtway."

The albino snarled, "Sit down, punk," and lifted his gun.

Targo turned slightly and slammed the albino on the jaw. He went over backwards, smashed his head against the wall. The gun sailed along the floor from his limp hand.

Targo started across the room.

Conant looked at him sidewise and didn't move. Targo went past him, almost touching him. Conant didn't move a muscle. His big face was blank, his eyes narrowed to a faint glitter between the heavy lids.

Nobody moved but Targo. Then Courtway lifted his gun and his finger whitened on the trigger and the gun roared.

Malvern moved across the room very swiftly and stood in front of Jean Ad-

rian, between her and the rest of the room.

Targo looked down at his hands. His face twisted into a silly smile. He sat down on the floor and pressed both his hands against his chest.

Courtway lifted his gun again and then Conant moved. The Luger jerked up, flamed twice. Blood flowed down Courtway's hand. His gun fell behind his desk. His long body seemed to swoop down after the gun. It



jackknifed until only his shoulders showed humped above the line of the desk.

Conant said: "Stand up and take it, you ——— double-crossing swine!"

There was a shot behind the desk. Courtway's shoulders went down out of sight.

After a moment Conant went around behind the desk, stooped, straightened.

"He ate one," he said very calmly. "Through the mouth. . . . And I lose me a nice clean senator."

Targo took his hands from his chest and fell over sidewise on the floor and lay still.

The door of the room slammed open.

The butler stood in it, tousle-headed, his mouth gaping. He tried to say something, saw the gun in Conant's hand, saw Targo slumped on the floor. He didn't say anything.

The albino was getting to his feet, rubbing his chin, feeling his teeth, shaking his head. He went slowly along the wall and gathered up his gun.

Conant snarled at him: "Swell gut you turned out to be. Get on the phone. Get Malloy, the night captain—and snap it up!"

Malvern turned, put his hand down and lifted Jean Adrian's cold chin.

"It's getting light, angel. And I think the rain has stopped," he said slowly. He pulled his inevitable flask out. "Let's take a drink—to Mister Targo."

The girl shook her head, covered her face with her hands.

After a long time there were sirens.

10



HE slim, tired-looking kid in the pale blue and silver of the *Carondelet* held his white glove in front of the closing doors and said:

"Corky's boils is better, but he didn't come to work, Mister Malvern. Tony the bell captain ain't showed this morning neither. Pretty soft for some guys."

Malvern stood close to Jean Adrian in the corner of the car. They were alone in it. He said:

"That's what you think."

The boy turned red. Malvern moved over and patted his shoulder, said: "Don't mind me, son. I've been up all night with a sick friend. Here, buy yourself a second breakfast."

"Jeeze, Mister Malvern, I didn't mean—"

The doors opened at nine and they went down the corridor to 914. Malvern took the key and opened the door, put the key on the inside, held the door, said:

"Get some sleep and wake up with your fist in your eye. Take my flask and get a mild toot on. Do you good."

The girl went in through the door, said over her shoulder: "I don't want liquor. Come in a minute. There's something I want to tell you."

He shut the door and followed her in. A bright bar of sunlight lay across the carpet all the way to the davenport. He lit a cigarette and stared at it.

Jean Adrian sat down and jerked her hat off and rumped her hair. She was silent a moment, then she said slowly, carefully:

"It was swell of you to go to all that trouble for me. I don't know why you should do it."

Malvern said: "I can think of a couple of reasons, but they didn't keep Targo from getting killed, and that was my fault in a way. Then in another way it wasn't. I didn't ask him to twist Senator Courtway's neck."

The girl said: "You think you're hard-boiled but you're just a big slob that argues himself into a jam for the first tramp he finds in trouble. Forget it. Forget Targo and forget me. Neither of us was worth any part of your time. I wanted to tell you that because I'll be going away as soon as they let me, and I won't be seeing you any more. This is good-by."

Malvern nodded, stared at the sun on the carpet. The girl went on:

"It's a little hard to tell. I'm not looking for sympathy when I say I'm a tramp. I've smothered in too many hall bedrooms, stripped in too many filthy dressing-rooms, missed too many meals, told too many lies to be anything else. That's why I wouldn't want to have anything to do with you, ever."

Malvern said: "I like the way you tell it. Go on."

She looked at him quickly, looked away again. "I'm not the Gianni girl. You guessed that. But I knew her. We did a cheap sister act together when they still did sister acts. Ada and

Jean Adrian. We made up our names from hers. That flopped, and we went in a road show and that flopped too. In New Orleans. The going was a little too rough for her. She swallowed bichloride. I kept her photos because I knew her story. And looking at that thin cold guy and thinking what he could have done for her I got to hate him. She was his kid all right. Don't ever think she wasn't. I even wrote letters to him, asking for help for her, just a little help, signing her name. But they didn't get any answer. I got to hate him so much I wanted to do something to him, after she took the bichloride. So I came out here when I got a stake."

She stopped talking and laced her fingers together tightly, then pulled them apart violently, as if she wanted to hurt herself. She went on:

"I met Targo through Cyrano and Shenvair through him. Shenvair knew the photos. He'd worked once for an agency in Frisco that was hired to watch Ada. You know all the rest of it."

Malvern said:

"It sounds pretty good. I wondered why the touch wasn't made sooner. Do you want me to think you didn't want his money?"

"No. I'd have taken his money all right. But that wasn't what I wanted most. I said I was a tramp."

Malvern smiled very faintly and said: "You don't know a lot about tramps, angel. You made an illegitimate pass and you got caught. That's that, but the

money wouldn't have done you any good. It would have been dirty money. I know."

She looked up at him, stared at him. He touched the side of his face and winced and said: "I know because that's the kind of money mine is. My dad made it out of crooked sewerage and paving contracts, out of gambling concessions, appointment pay-offs, even vice, I daresay. He made it every rotten way there is to make money in city politics. And when it was made and there was nothing left to do but sit and look at it, he died and left it to me. It hasn't brought me any fun either. I always hope it's going to, but it never does. Because I'm his pup, his blood, reared in the same gutter. I'm worse than a tramp, angel. I'm a guy that lives on crooked dough and doesn't even do his own stealing."

He stopped, flicked ash on the carpet, straightened his hat on his head.

"Think that over, and don't run too far, because I have all the time in the world and it wouldn't do you any good. It would be so much more fun to run away together."

He went a little way towards the door, stood looking down at the sunlight on the carpet, looked back at her quickly and then went on out.

When the door shut she stood up and went into the bedroom and lay down on the bed just as she was, with her coat on. She stared at the ceiling. After a long time she smiled. In the middle of the smile she fell asleep.

**Winners of Monthly Prizes in WARNER
BROS.-BLACK MASK Mystery Story
Contest No. 9 - ("The Affair at the
Swimming Pool") on page 123**

Fan Dance



Kennedy, like a stick of dynamite, is all right if left alone; but when they start throwing him around—bango!



THE *Summit Arms* stands on the northeast corner of Summit Avenue and Pencil Street, in the West End of Richmond City. This intersec-

tion is the highest point in the city and from the top, the tenth floor of the *Arms*, you can on clear nights see the harbor lights or the Night Express crossing the Eastmarsh Bridge.

It was a clear night and Osborne, gazing through the casement window on the tenth floor, saw the Night Express cross the bridge. He checked his watch with it. Ten-ten. Right. His butler, who had left him a moment before, returned now ushering in Kennedy of the *Free Press*, and then departed.

Osborne said, "Hello, Kennedy," without removing his eyes from the moving lights of the Night Express.

Kennedy, rubbing his chilled hands together, came over to stand beside Osborne. The reporter looked pale and faded in his rumpled suit. The Special Prosecutor was a big man, with amiable shaggy brows, hard padded cheeks, big hands with square-ended fingers. He was in slippers and velvet housecoat and pulled on a triangular cigar. He was fifty, but his eyes were youthful and blue and shrewd.

"Help yourself to a drink, Kennedy."

Kennedy watched the Night Express vanish back of the packing houses, then crossed to a table and poured out some rye. He said, "Flannery'd like a state-

By FREDERICK NEBEL

ment before he puts the edition to bed," and downed the drink.

"On what?" Osborne said casually, turning and going to a wing-chair, where he sat down and propped his heels on a footstool.

Kennedy shrugged. "You know as well as I do, Dan. The *Carioca Club*."

"H'm," mused Osborne.

"The bad news has reached a climax. We're running a statement by Howard Gilcrist, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. He wonders why you closed down sixteen night spots in the past two weeks and omitted to close down the *Carioca Club*. He doesn't think it's an oversight, because you've been prodded on this twice before. He found out that you and Marty Sullivan, the owner of the *Carioca*, went to school together out in Detroit. He claims you're not closing the *Carioca* because Marty Sullivan knows things about you that you wouldn't want publicly known. Would you like to read his statement?"

"Yeah."

Kennedy handed him a typewritten sheet of foolscap. Osborne read it from beginning to end in silence, without a move, without any change of expression. When he had finished he folded the sheet of paper neatly and returned it.

"Thanks," he said. He rose and went to the window and put one hand against the wall and leaned there straight-armed. He nibbled on his lip, his eyelids widening and narrowing. "You're going to print that, of course," he said.

"Have to," said Kennedy.

"Of course," nodded Osborne.

Kennedy said reasonably, "Gilcrist's right. And he's a damned sight more polite about it than a lot of other people. Down in Jockey Street they're saying it's just plain lack of insides—you're afraid of Marty Sullivan."



"Yeah?" said Osborne, squinting at the harbor lights. He turned to Kennedy and smiled and said again, "Yeah?" There was a certain glitter in his smile that was puzzling. "Let's see; tonight's Friday. Isn't it some kind of 'big night' there?"

Kennedy nodded. "Visiting Salesmen's Night. Every Friday night it's something else."

Osborne went to the phone, picked it up. "Yes, Kennedy; I went to school with Marty Sullivan, in a little town outside of Detroit. I used to be a kind of big brother to Marty. Used to fight his fights—well, he was a little guy. I used to lend him pennies, then nickels; and as I grew older, dollars. I saved his life twice as a boy. When I was admitted to the bar, I hung out my shingle in Detroit. He was my first case. I won it. He'd been driving a milk route then and had got tight and blown in all the money he collected on his route. I got him out of that. . . . Operator, give me Police Headquarters. . . . Yes, Kennedy, I've known Marty a long, long time. There was always something about the little runt you couldn't help liking. . . . Headquarters? This is Dan Osborne. Give me MacBride. . . . Steve, this is Dan Osborne. Run around and close up the *Carioca*. . . . Tonight. Make it at about eleven, when his show's on, just for fun."

He hung up, sighed bitterly. "There's your statement, Kennedy."

"Which picture would you like us to use?"

"Better use Marty's. He was always nuts about publicity." Osborne knocked the ash from his cigar. He looked morose, preoccupied. He kept flicking the cigar long after the ash had fallen.



THE police sedan was hiking down Center Avenue at a lively clip. It passed a trolley car on the wrong side, ran through a safety zone, jumped a red light, and cut the inside

of the corner going into North Jockey Street.

MacBride, sitting in the back with Moriarity and Cohen, said, "Gahagan, if you got to bust every traffic law that was ever made, why don't you at least use the siren? I haven't heard a peep out of it."

"Ah," yawned Cohen, "he don't like to wake people up."

Moriarity said, "No, Ike; he's just bashful. He don't want everybody to know it's a police car."

"Youse is all wrong," laughed Gahagan coarsely. "I ain't blowing the siren because there *ain't* no siren."

"There ain't no *siren*?" echoed MacBride.

Gahagan said, "Didn't Sergeant Bettdecken tell youse? Ha," chortled Gahagan, "somebody stole the siren this evening while the car was parked in front of Headquarters. Ha, ha!"

MacBride growled, "If you weren't at the wheel of this car, you jackass, I'd kick you in the ear. Last week no lights. The week before no spare tire. This week no siren—"

"Next week, maybe," said Cohen, "no Gahagan."

Gahagan sulked and gunned the car hard down Jockey Street. The animated lights of the *Carioca* bloomed at the bottom of the hill. Cars were parked for blocks around and there were a couple of cops on duty out front. The captain's sedan stopped. The skipper got out and watched the squad car draw up behind. Sergeant Holtzmann climbed out with a flock of uniformed policemen.

The big Negro doorman of the *Carioca* craned his neck and began to look worried. The taxicab drivers hanging around began talking among themselves.

The skipper said to Sergeant Holtzmann, "Okey, Rudy. Send a man up to Lark Street and another down to Vickers. Cut traffic out of Jockey between those streets, so we can clean these cars out in a hurry. Detail three men to move these cars quick. You run things outside, and don't let any-

body go in the *Carioca*." He looked up. "Here come the two wagons. If anybody gets nasty, pile 'em in and we'll dump 'em later."

"Right, Cap'n."

MacBride raised his voice: "Ike . . . Mory!"

"Yowssuh."

"Come with me," he said, and picked six more cops.

He picked up the two cops who were standing in front of the entrance. "We're clamping down, boys. You come in with us."

Plain-clothed Sergeant Doake, from the local precinct, touched MacBride on the arm and said, "What kind of a run-around is this?"

"What's eating you, Bennie?"

"Slamming down on Sullivan, I mean. What's the idea? I mean, on a Friday night. Marty'll be sore as a boil."

"I told that little Mick a week ago to go slow. I told him to yank off this fan dancer, or put some clothes on her. I warned him. I warned him that Dan Osborne might put the finger on him any minute."

"But, hell, Cap'n, why didn't you phone him?"

"Bennie, I warned him that when I came around it'd be with bells on."

The skipper opened his overcoat, looked at his watch. It was exactly eleven. "Let's go," he said. He was the first through the door.

The *Carioca* was jammed. There must have been five hundred persons there. The lights were dimmed in the vast room and there was a milky blue spotlight trained on the small, semi-circular stage. This fan dancer had taken the town by storm, not only because of her ability as a dancer and a shocker but also because she had succeeded in keeping her identity hidden. Her slender body was covered with a kind of platinum grease paint. Her face was like a Benda mask—unsmiling, immobile. The traps were rolling, the knocking sound of the gourds was electrifying. The dance was pagan, volup-

tuous. It was spellbinding. There was not a sound among the five hundred persons seated at the hundred-odd tables.

MacBride tapped the hat-check girl on the shoulder. She turned. He held up his hand and in its palm his badge shone.

"Where's the master switch?" he said.

She stared at him. He gripped her arm, shook her. Frightened, she led him to a door that opened on a small corridor. The switches were in the corridor.

"Bright lights," he said.

She hesitated, her hand resting on one of the levers. He reached up and pulled the lever and he could see a white glare spring into the lobby. He heard the music falter. He heard small, scattered sounds of astonishment. The music dribbled away. There were running footsteps and these culminated in the appearance of Jaeger, the head waiter—an angry, purpling man.

MacBride blocked him at the corridor entrance, pushed him back into the lobby. "Padlock, Jaeger. Go make your little speech. Tell 'em all to leave quietly."

Jaeger looked incredulous. He spouted, "What's the meaning of this? You can't do this!"

"I know, I know, Jaeger. You're surprised. I didn't warn Marty a week ago. I know, I know—"

"This—this is our biggest night!" choked Jaeger.

"Tough. Go make your speech."

Jaeger's fat jaw shook. "I've got to see Marty first."

MacBride gripped his arm. "Skip that. Do as I tell you, Jaeger, and don't be a dummy."

The sounds of confusion were growing. The waiters were skittering around. Some of the people had risen and were shouting questions. The fan dancer had vanished. There was an air of frustration, of anger. Some began to clap hands, to stamp feet. Chairs scraped.

Jaeger's jaw still shook. He refused to move.

Moriarity walked into the ornate bar

and, said to the head barman, "Close it up, pal. Lights out."

"Yeah?" said the head barman.

"Honest," said Moriarity.

"I take orders from Mr. Sullivan."

Ike Cohen came in and said, "What's the matter, Mory?"

"Big boy says he takes orders only from Mr. Sullivan."

Ike said, "One, two—"

"Three," said Moriarity, and they dragged the barman across the bar, slapped manacles on him.

"I'll turn the lights out," said the assistant barman.

"You catch on, brother," Cohen grinned.

The uniformed cops began to circulate in the main room. MacBride, his hands in his overcoat pockets, walked hard-heeled down the center of the room, crossed the dance-floor and climbed to the stage.

He said in a loud voice, "Everybody clear out. The place is closed by order of the police. Please go quietly."

"Nuts to the police!" somebody yelled.

Angry voices hummed, surged, broke in a wave. The uniformed cops stood motionless, scattered, saying, "Clear out, clear out."

Somebody threw a bottle. It bounced off the head of Patrolman Mariano, who promptly sat down on the floor. The other cops did not move; their hands tightened on their nightsticks but they did not move. Mariano got up slowly.

"Take it easy, Tony," another cop said.

The women were querulous, insulting. MacBride stood on the stage, his hands on his hips, his nose in the air, his eyes flicking the vast room. Bread, meat, potatoes were thrown at the policemen. Oaths rose. The cops remained motionless; they kept throwing glances at the skipper. He watched. He yelled:

"Come on, come on; clear out!"

Moriarity came up to him. "I can't find Sullivan."

"Look again."

Dan Osborne, in overcoat and derby, walked out on the stage, smiled. "Hello, Steve," he said to MacBride. "Having trouble?"

"Where'd you come from?"

"Oh, I came in the back way."

"Did you see Marty?"

Osborne was still smiling. "No," he said.

Somebody was squirting a siphon at Patrolman Shotz. Patrolman Shotz, cursing under his breath, took it, while his eyes strayed hopefully to MacBride.

A man yelled. "There he is! There's Osborne! Let him have it!"

"Duck, Dan!" MacBride rasped.

"Not me, skipper."

A flung bottle brought him down.

MacBride, who had seen the thrower, jumped from the stage, barked, "Okey, boys—the mop!" and made a bee-line for a tall, blond man who was crowing to his companions, "Did you see me crown him?"

MacBride kicked three chairs out of the way, said, "Yeah, we saw you, sweetie pie," and hit him a terrific blow on the chin. The man folded up like a folding chair and lay down. MacBride rapped out, "You other guys bail out! Beat it!"

The nightsticks were chopping. The women were yelping, screaming. One of the cops cut loose with the tear gas. Tables spun over, crockery crashed.

Kennedy was strolling about idly, wandering magically among blows and flung objects that never touched him. MacBride ran into him.

"How'd you get in?" the skipper barked.

"With Dan Osborne. Lively, isn't it?"

"Go up and see if Dan's hurt. He's on the stage." A glass crashed against his shoulder. He looked disgusted. He reached up and stopped in mid-career a water carafe that otherwise would have knocked Kennedy flat. "Go on, Kennedy; get out of this before you get killed."

Ike Cohen appeared saying, "I'm

damned if I can find Marty Sullivan."

The tear gas was a great persuader. The crowd began streaming towards the door, leaving behind it a wasteland of broken chairs, crockery, glass, food-stuff. The cops bunched together and herded the crowd out into the street and in a little while only MacBride, Moriarity and Cohen, Kennedy and Dan Osborne remained. Jaeger appeared in a moment, white with rage.

"Look what you done, look what you done!" he choked. "Just look at the place. A wreck!"

"Where's Marty?" the skipper asked.

"How do I know? He was here when the show started. Look, just look at the place! This is an outrage—"

"Yoo-hoo," called Kennedy from the opposite side of the room. "Come over and see what I found."

MacBride strode across the littered dance-floor to where Kennedy was standing. A man lay on the floor against the wall, his body twisted awkwardly, his hard white collar rumped. His face was discolored. Near him was a narrow doorway, open.

The skipper muttered, "Good cripes!" and dropped to his knees. When he rose he lifted his chin and called out, "Hey, Dan!"

Osborne came slowly across the floor, holding a handkerchief to a cut on his forehead.

MacBride was pointing. "Marty Sullivan."

"Passed out?" Osborne asked negligently.

"Passed out complete," the skipper said. "Dead."

Osborne stopped. He stared down at Sullivan with blue, expressionless eyes. He patted the cut on his forehead absent-mindedly.

"Choked to death," the skipper said.

"H'm," Osborne mused.

"He must have been choked before the fighting started," Cohen said. "Because I never saw him—not once."

"Me neither," Moriarity said.

MacBride stared towards the door.

"Something like this would have to happen," he growled. "And everybody that was sitting around here is now gone out—including the guy that choked him. As sure as we're standing here the opposition press will claim a cop did it. Mark me, fellas; mark me."

Jaeger was shaking all over. His fat hand rose to his lips, his eyes bulged as he stared down at Sullivan.

MacBride went backstage, where half a dozen girls and as many men were sitting around under the uncompromising eye of a policeman.

"Where's the fan dancer?" the skipper asked.

"She musta breezed," the policeman said. He pointed. "That there is her room. The door was locked and I busted it down but she wasn't in there."

MacBride entered the room. A rear window was open and he stuck his head out and saw an alleyway. He returned to the group outside the door.

"Who is this fan dancer?"

One of the girls said, "Ask Mr. Sullivan. He's the only one who knows."

MacBride chuckled ironically, bit the end off a three-cent cigar, lit up.

THE repercussion was greater than anyone expected. The opposition press, egged on by the Liberal League and insurgent political cliques, exploded; and the backwash was pretty devastating. The Mayor came in for a drubbing for having appointed Dan Osborne to the post of Special Prosecutor in the Chief Executive's vice drive. Osborne himself came in for a merciless hammering. The police were roundly criticized, from the Commissioner down. It came out in the newspapers that Marty Sullivan had been beaten and strangled to death by brutal policemen. . . .

MacBride himself issued a statement denying this charge. He stated that his men had endured all kinds of insults and been at the mercy of the mob for ten minutes before a nightstick was wielded or tear gas unleashed. The opposition press was full of statements of persons

who had been in the *Carioca* when the police raided it. Every statement was a hot indictment of the police and of the way the raid was handled. Some threatened court action. No one had actually seen a policeman choke Marty Sullivan to death but since all the statements enumerated acts of brutality on the part of the officers the opposition press felt free to assume that Sullivan had died as a result of an act of police brutality.

City Hall was in an uproar. Committee after committee called on the Mayor. Naturally there had to be lambs for the slaughter. The buck had to be passed. Some palliative had to be given to the outraged opposition press, to the Liberal League, to the political insurgents.

MacBride was suspended for thirty days without pay. The order stated that when he returned to duty it would be as acting captain in some outlying precinct. Moriarity and Cohen were removed from Headquarters to the Ninth Precinct. Every policeman who had taken part in the raid was farmed out to various precincts. The shake-up jarred the whole Department. Captain George Danno, formerly of the Alien Squad, moved into MacBride's office.

"I'm not going to like this job, Steve," he said.

MacBride was bitter, hard-jawed. "I've been taken for a ride, George! I'm the goat! There's an awful boner somewhere and Marty Sullivan was murdered and those crackpots are so anxious to fry me that they forget all about that—they forget that Marty Sullivan was murdered! Okey, I'm suspended. I've been a cop almost thirty years and I'm suspended. I ought to've been kicked in the head the first day I ever put on a uniform. I'm suspended. Okey, I'm suspended. Almost thirty years a cop and because a lot of lousy drunks in a honkytonk start throwing things so fast that a cop has to defend himself—" He threw up his arms and glared at George Danno. "What the hell are cops supposed to be anyhow—part of a daisy

chain? This city reeks to high heaven, George!"

Danno looked gloomy. "I know just how you feel, Steve. I only hope I can do half as well here as you've done."

MacBride punched him in the ribs. "Hell, George, you're the tops."



LANNERY of the *Free Press* said, "This is funny, it's really screwy. Here a guy is ostensibly murdered and all the yelling seems to be about something else. About City Hall and the Special Prosecutor and Steve MacBride, with a generous history, not complimentary, of City Hall and the Police Department thrown in. If it makes sense, if it even makes news—then I'm a punk editor."

"I would never argue with you," Kennedy said dreamily.

"I wasn't talking to you. I was thinking out loud. I told you years ago that one day MacBride would go a step too far and get himself a Bronx cheer, with trimmings."

Kennedy yawned. "The skipper is a big bull-headed mutt. He's got a one-track mind and he thinks that shield he wears is another kind of bible. It never occurs to him to walk around a tree, he's got to batter his head against it. To him the law, my friend, is the law: good, bad, or indifferent; it's the law. He carries it out as strictly on himself as on any heel that he picks up. Sometimes I think he's goofy. I don't approve of his outlook on life, his foolhardy honesty, his blind loyalty to his shield. But I like him. He's probably the best friend I've got. That being the case"—he rose wearily, a spare shadow of a man, frail, emaciated—"something's got to be done about conditions in Denmark. They seem to be particularly dirty. Would you have a drink in that desk of yours?"

"I would not."

"You would not, of course. If I ever

saw a bottle come out of that desk I'd swear it was a mirage. Toodle-oo."

"Where you going?"

"To investigate conditions in Denmark."

Flannery barked, "Be sure to keep your name and address on you, in case you pass out drunk somewhere, so they'll know where to take you."

Kennedy shivered as he stepped into the bitter wind that slammed down Hill Street. The threadbare light topcoat he wore was hardly adequate for mid-winter weather. His shoes were low, thin; his socks silk. His suit had been intended for spring. It wasn't that he didn't have the money; he just never got around to buying things for himself.

When he reached Dan Osborne's office, in the Municipal Building, he was jittery with the cold and his skinny hands were almost blue. The office was warm. Dan Osborne looked warm and comfortable in a gray herringbone suit. He was leaning on his elbows on the desk—a neat, well-groomed, healthy-looking man, amiable as always, even when he was worried. He puffed a triangular cigar.

Kennedy sat down on a radiator. Osborne had not spoken; he had evidently been following a line of thought, and though his eyes greeted Kennedy familiarly, he did not utter a word for several minutes. Finally he sat back, shrugged, smiled ruefully.

"I got Steve MacBride in a nice jam, didn't I, Kennedy?"

"I don't think he figures you did."

Osborne's large, well-packed face looked grave. He said, "I did all I could, Kennedy. I talked with the Mayor, with the Commissioner. I offered to resign if they'd keep the ax off Steve's head." He shook his head. "They wouldn't hear of it."

Kennedy smiled. "The Mayor couldn't afford to do that. He appointed you. He couldn't lose face by kicking you out. He didn't appoint MacBride. Hence . . . MacBride."

"I suppose so," Osborne sighed. "You don't think Sullivan was accidentally killed by a cop, do you?"

Kennedy said, "Sullivan wasn't accidentally killed and he wasn't killed by Steve's flying squad. I was there about a minute before the cops cut loose. I didn't see Marty anywhere. If Marty was alive then he'd have been on his feet. He wasn't alive. He was dead then. Up till then, up until the time Steve turned the bright lights on, the place was practically in darkness, except for the stage. Everybody's eyes were glued on the fan dancer."

"We know now that Marty Sullivan was alone at the table. The table was against the wall, the chair he was sitting on was next to that door that leads back to his office and the men's lavatory. Somebody could have stepped through the door. The drums and the gourds were pretty loud. Somebody could have stepped through that door and throttled him then, while the music was loud, while everybody was watching the fan dancer."

Osborne's blue eyes were fixed intently on Kennedy; they remained so fixed for a moment after Kennedy had finished talking.

Kennedy went on: "You and I went in the back way. We got in about five minutes before Steve turned the bright lights on. I left you and went up front to see the thing break. You said you wanted to stay back to get a close-up of the fan dancer when she came off the stage."

He said no more. He got off the radiator and rubbed his hands together and stared dreamily at the floor. Osborne never took his eyes off him. There was a peculiar quality to the silence that ensued for a long minute. Then Kennedy took a crumpled packet of cigarettes from his pocket and lit one.

He said, "Why, Dan, did you really hold off raiding the *Carioca* until you absolutely had to?"

Osborne sat back and seemed depressed. "Marty," he said. "I told him

several times to cut out the undressed shows and especially the fan dancer. He laughed at me. He never took me seriously. I was trying to give him a break. He thought it was fun to goad me, I guess. He was that kind of a guy."

"No other reason, huh?"

Osborne looked up, smiled blandly. "Of course not."

Kennedy inhaled. "This thing might break Steve's heart," he said. "As far as I know, he's never had a mark against him. He's a proud guy. So proud that sometimes he's funny. I don't approve of a guy being as proud as he is, but he's that way, and that's that. Sullivan was murdered. The fan dancer disappears. She doesn't show up. There's a connection. Got to be. Between her and the murder of Marty Sullivan. If the opposition press keeps hammering long enough, everybody'll believe that the cops actually killed Sullivan. They didn't. I know they didn't. I hate to have to prove it, it entails too much work, but I guess I'll have to. Not because I want any glory. Hell, I hate guys who want glory. I hate work. I hate to have to prove things. But I've got to. They've railroaded the skipper and—"

The door opened and Lakeman, one of Osborne's field men, appeared red-nosed from the cold outdoors, and excited.

"Later, Sam," Osborne clipped. "I'm in conference."

Lakeman was breathless: "But I—"

"Later, I said!"

Lakeman looked confused, injured. He shrugged and backed out, closing the door.

Osborne said, "Lakeman's enthusiasm sometimes runs away with him. I'm inclined to believe with you, Kennedy, that Marty was murdered. If you can prove it, they'll have to reinstate MacBride—because they suspended him on the premise that Marty was accidentally killed when MacBride let his men get out of hand. Good luck. And on your way out tell Lakeman to come in."

Kennedy took a cab to the South Side. He rode huddled in the back seat, half-asleep, his body jolting as the cab jolted. When he got out of the cab in Trumpet Street he fumbled sleepily in his pockets, brought a couple of bills out and gave one to the driver. He tipped a dime and, yawning and shivering, climbed the steps of the old brownstone and was let in by the superintendent.

"Where's Mr. Jaeger's apartment?"

"On the second floor. Number Six."

Kennedy climbed slowly, his head between his huddled shoulders, and knocked on the door of Number Six. It was opened after a couple of minutes by the head waiter of the *Carioca*. Jaeger was in a bathrobe. His eyes were bloodshot, his fat face pasty, his stringy hair uncombed.

"What do you want, what do you want?" he asked irritably.

"I'm Kennedy from the *Free Press*. I want to talk to you."

"Listen, I don't want to talk to anybody. I'm sick. I got a headache and a bellyache and I'm sick. Go 'way."

"What you need is a drink. I need one, too."

"What do you want?"

"Talk to you."

"Listen, I told you I don't want to talk to you. Why should I have to talk to people when I got a headache and a bellyache? Go 'way."

Kennedy stepped on his slippers and Jaeger yelped and teetered and Kennedy walked in saying, "And don't strike me, because I'm undernourished and you might kill me."

Jaeger, bulky and ungainly in his bathrobe, looked angry and vexed. Kennedy strolled past him into a large, clean, shabby living-room and saw a woman sitting on a straight-backed chair smoking a cigarette. She was stout, fifty-odd, with a swell head of red hair, painted lips, and she wore a mink coat, open and thrown back.

She said to Jaeger, "Who's the nasty man, Hermie?"

"He's one of those damned newspaper guys," Jaeger crabbed.

"The name, madam, is Kennedy. And yours?"

"Lady Godiva."

"I thought she was a blonde and rode a horse, or maybe the horse was blond."

"He's a wise guy, too," observed the woman, steely-eyed.

Kennedy said, "I'm just a poor scrivener."

"If scrivener means scarecrow, you're it, except that I've seen more attractive scarecrows in my time. So sorry to have you go. You must drop by again sometime when nobody's home, laddy."

Kennedy calmly turned his back on her and addressed Jaeger: "Where was the last place you saw Marty Sullivan before the cops arrived?"

Jaeger looked miserable. "Now listen, buddy. I got a headache, see? My head is near to bust, see? I got a belly-ache, too. I feel lousy."

"Where was Marty?"

Jaeger held his head between his hands and groaned. "Where he always was, I guess. At the table he was always at. How do I know? I was busy."

"The table where we found him dead?"

"Sure. Sure. Listen, buddy—"

"Then he always sat at the table, eh?"

Jaeger rocked his head in his hands. "Sure—sure he did, when he wasn't nowhere else. How do I know? Can I be ten places at the one time? Oh, my head—what a head I got—Ooo, what a head I got! Listen—please do me a favor—go somewheres else."

Kennedy sat down.

Jaeger shook a finger at him. "If you don't, I—I will! I can't stand to be annoyed this morning. Not with this head I got."

Kennedy said, "Calm yourself. I'm trying to find out who killed Marty Sullivan."

"Ah, you're trying to find out! Now ain't that something!"

"You," said the woman to Kennedy, "don't look as if you could find your way home, even with a map. Why don't you throw him out, Hermie?"

Jaeger sobbed, "Me—with my head—I should throw anybody out? No. No. No! It'd jar my head right off, Emmy." He groaned and fled into another room, slamming the door.

Emmy said, "See here, half-pint, why don't you take the air? They say fresh air is healthy and you don't look as if a little fresh air would hurt you. Hermie's got a hangover."

"And I've got a yen to ask him things," Kennedy said, rising and drifting towards the closed door.

Emmy jumped up and got in his way. She was a big woman. In her day, she must have been handsome, with that head of hair. But her eyes were too much like steel now, her mouth too hard.

"Get out," she said.

"Sit down and tend to your knitting."

"I never knit. Get out. Hermie's got a hangover."

"Please—"

"You don't have to be polite, laddy. Pick up your dogs and shuffle."

He started to brush her negligently aside. She doubled her fist and let him have it flush on the jaw. He reeled backward, tripped and fell flat on his back. She jumped after him, grabbed him by the back of the collar, dragged him across the floor, opened the corridor door and then dragged him to the head of the staircase. Saying, "This is called the shoot-the-chute," she started him headlong down the staircase, turned and went back into the apartment.

He lay for minutes in the hallway below, thinking things over. Then he got painfully to his feet, opened the hall door and went outside. He stood for a minute in the wind, shivering, his teeth knocking. A cab came along and he flagged it and said, "Go to the *Carioca Club*."



HEY had closed, padlocked the *Carioca*. By daylight its façade looked tarnished, drab, and the street itself was no beauty spot. The shutters had been closed, the canvas marquee removed.

Kennedy leaned against a pole across the street, eying the building as though he hoped to wring some secret from its yellow brick walls. There was no evidence of anyone being about. The building yawned with desertion. After a while he turned up his collar, crossed the street and followed the service alleyway to the rear of the building, to a square cindered yard. There were a dozen garbage drums lined up, waiting to be removed. He tried a couple of windows but they were locked. He tried a couple of doors. They were locked also. He blew his breath into his cold hands, drummed his cold feet. He tried a third door and almost fell down when it swung inward at his touch. Instead of entering immediately, he remained on the threshold, pondering. Then he stepped in, closed the door quietly.

He was in a small room and there were half a dozen battered easy chairs standing around. There was a phone on the wall and against the wall a table littered with magazines. A door leading from this room was ajar. He sauntered through it and into a narrower room fitted with rods and coat hangers and on some of these hangers there were ballet dresses. There was daylight, but it was dim, feeble.

Suddenly he found himself on the small stage, with the vast sweep of the main dining-room before him. A rectangular skylight admitted light but could not dispel the gloom of the place. Wreckage was still scattered all over the dance floor. Nothing apparently had been removed, or even straightened. The inside of the building was, without the aid of incandescents, more drab than the outside.

Taking his time, he crossed the dance-floor to the table at which Marty Sullivan had died. He stepped into the narrow doorway there, reached out to the point where the chair on which Sullivan had sat still stood. He nodded to himself, then entered the corridor which gave off the doorway. He followed this rearward to a point outside the dressing-room, where he remembered he had left Dan Osborne.

There was an L in the corridor and he took it, feeling his way now, for no daylight penetrated here. He stopped short when small sounds came to his ears. He did not move for a full two minutes. The sounds were nearby, small, unsteady, erratic. With his fingertips feeling along the wall, he proceeded. Suddenly he was in front of an open doorway and saw beyond, in a small room, a glowing flashlight aimed downward on a littered desk. A small hand, white-gloved, was scattering papers to left and right.

A woman's hand. He could tell that she was slender. Vagrant offshoots of the flashlight's glow showed him, intermittently, a young woman's face, lean, desperate-lipped. A cloth coat of some dark red material with a thick fur collar. On her head, cocked over one eye, a moderated shako. She was, he thought, very good-looking in a strange, black-eyed, desperate way.

He did not enter the room. He did not make his presence known. Slowly, step by step, he backed up, then turned and made his way cautiously back to the main corridor. He left by the door through which he had entered the building, walked to the street and entered a bar a few doors away. He ordered rye and stood at the front end of the bar, where he could see the alleyway of the *Carioca*.

"The cops sure mopped that place up across the street," the bartender said.

"Yeah," said Kennedy.

"The bums."

"Yeah."

"But I see they got theirs. That flat-foot MacBride, too."

"Yeah."

"Ever since I'm a kid I have got no use for cops. They're bums."

Kennedy threw a half-dollar on the bar, picked up the fifteen cents in change and watched the girl in the black shako walk past. She looked lean, lithe, muscular. He opened the door and drifted into the street and followed her, though you would never have guessed he was following anybody. Though she walked rapidly he could tell that she was watching for a cab. One came along, but he was nearer, so he grabbed it. There were not many cabs afield in this neighborhood.

Kennedy said to the driver, "I'm going to get off at the next block. Make a right turn and stop. The girl in the funny hat we just passed is looking for a cab. She'll see you parked there and probably want to get in. When she gives you the address, say you're hired."

"Nix. It ain't legal."

Kennedy showed him his press card. "How'd you like to get your picture in the paper and a notice saying you're the most polite driver in the city?"

"Was that the dame we just passed?"

There was a cigar store on the corner and Kennedy, leaving the cab, went in to get a deck of cigarettes. Through the glass door he saw the girl approach the cab, pull open the cab's door and say something to the driver. The driver shrugged. The girl made an impatient gesture and walked on. Kennedy went out.

The driver said, "Six-fourteen Westland."

"Let's go."

"Where?"

"Six-fourteen Westland."

The cab swung around in the middle of the street and headed westward through the city, skirting the untidy hem of Little Italy. Fifteen minutes later it wheeled into Westland, in the two-hundred block. As it pulled up, four blocks beyond, in front of the

Somerset House, Kennedy saw Dan Osborne come out of the doorway, cross the sidewalk and climb into a Ford coupé, which he drove off.

The *Somerset* was an old hotel that had been refurbished during the past year. It was second-rate, showy, with a popular coffee shop and a rowdy bar. A lot of traveling men stopped there. The rates were low, the hotel was convenient to the trolley lines, buses, and the shopping center, and it had a lot of sample rooms. It did a thriving business.

"Well, this must be six-fourteen," the driver said, squinting. "I wonder why the hell she didn't just say the *Somerset*."

"You sure you got the number right?"

"Sure I got the number. I pride myself on gettin' numbers right."

Kennedy climbed out, paid up and meandered into the garish lobby. He was still puzzled about Osborne. Not that Osborne didn't have a right to come in or go out of the *Somerset*; but under the circumstances . . .

Kennedy shrugged. He considered the possibility of snatching a drink, but the bar was downstairs, at the other end of the lobby, and he gave up the idea. He placed himself just inside the main entrance, and when, five minutes later, he saw the girl alight from a cab he crossed to the desk, showed his press card and said:

"Is Benedictine Krause, the actress, stopping here?"

"Benedictine Krause?" the clerk asked, puzzled.

"She's that new Alsatian actress. I heard she was in town. I'm trying to find out where she's staying."

"I never heard of Benedictine Krause."

"Sorry," said Kennedy, and turning leisurely, broke open a packet of cigarettes.

The girl in the black shako came up to the panel beside the desk and picked up one of three house phones. Kennedy heard her say:

"Mr. Webb, please." And in a moment: "Joel? . . . Inez. Listen, Joel," she said in a taut, fearful voice, "I didn't find it. . . . Yes, everywhere. . . . Everywhere, I tell you! . . . I'm down here in the lobby. . . . I just came from there. . . . No, no, Joel! I tell you I looked everywhere! There's no use talking over the phone this way. I'll come up. . . . But I must see you! . . . Well, all right. . . . All right. . . . But make sure you call me."

Kennedy walked out to the sidewalk, drew a cigarette out of the packet he had opened and stood on the curb lighting up in the wind. The girl almost brushed his shoulder.

"Go to nine-ten Waterford," she said to the driver of the cab parked there.

Kennedy tossed away the match and reentered the lobby and strolled up to the desk.

The clerk said, "I just asked one of the operators if she ever heard of Benedictine Krause and she said no."

"Well, look," said Kennedy. "You have a Joel Webb stopping here, haven't you?"

The clerk referred to his card index, said, "Yes."

"Ah," said Kennedy, rubbing his hands. "That's the man was supposed to have brought her to America. I knew him when I was covering the shows in New York. I'll surprise him. What room's he in?"

The clerk grinned. "Five-o-five."

Kennedy winked. "Mum's the word."

"Mum's the word," nodded the clerk, also winking.

MR. JOEL WEBB was a long-legged young man with crisp brown hair, impetuous blue eyes, and a small but determined mouth. He looked upset, harried, but by no means abject. His neck was lean, wiry, his chin aggressive.

"Well?" he demanded of Kennedy, who drowsed in the doorway.

"I've got something very important to tell you, Mr. Webb."

"Okey. Tell it."

"It will take time and I wouldn't want passersby to hear it."

"Well," snapped Webb, "come in then."

Kennedy sighed pleasantly and drifted into the small bedroom and Webb closed the door, barged across the room, found a pipe and piled tobacco into the bowl. He was still upset, still harassed, and apparently more preoccupied with his own thoughts than he was interested in the presence of Kennedy. But in a minute he seemed to remember that Kennedy was in the room. He snapped:

"Well, well, come on, come on. You've got something to tell me. Spill it, spill it."

Kennedy was half-reclining on the bed. "My name is Kennedy."

"All right, your name is Kennedy. So what?"

"So this, Mr. Webb. What was Inez looking for at the *Carioca* about half an hour ago?"

Webb, who had struck a match and was about to light his pipe, dropped the pipe and the match.

"Better step on the match," Kennedy recommended placidly.

Webb slapped his foot down on the burning match, put it out. His eyes bounced on Kennedy, his lips tightened, his lean jaw grew hard. He turned and strode to the window, rubbed the back of his neck. He swiveled. He leveled an arm at Kennedy and seemed all set to unleash a torrent of invective. But instantly he appeared to change his mind. He did change his mind. He came over and sat on the bed and said rapidly and in a low, earnest voice:

"Now be reasonable, Mr. Kennedy. Inez and I were at the *Carioca* the night the police raided it. We had to get out in a hurry. In the rush, Inez lost her handbag—a little bag—oh, you know, one of those small mesh bags." He eyed Kennedy steadily. "You're a broadminded man, aren't you?"

"Very."

"Well, look now," Webb went on confidentially. "Inez and I went to school together. We're old friends. I've been away, oh, for years, and when I came back, why, Inez was married. She's been married for three years. To a nice guy, but"—he wagged his finger—"a very jealous guy. He'll never let Inez see anybody, even her old friends. You understand, things between Inez and me are strictly on the level. But we went out that night."

"We went to the *Carioca*. She lost this handbag, with some of her cards in it. She was afraid it would be found and her husband would find out that she was there. She said she was going to try to get in the *Carioca* and see if she could find it. I told her not to. I told her that if the worse went to the worst, I'd explain everything to her husband. But she wouldn't listen. She went to the *Carioca* to see if she could find the bag. For God's sake, mister, don't tell her husband. He's a nice guy, a swell guy, only he's jealous—and if I thought I'd make trouble for Inez, why, I'd never forgive myself."

Kennedy sat up, scratched his ear, smiled dreamily. He rose from the bed, chuckled reflectively, and wandered to the door.

"Okey, Mr. Webb," he said. "I believe you implicitly."

"Gee, that's swell of you."

"Don't mention it. I was just keeping an eye out on the *Carioca* and I saw Inez come out. No harm done. If I run across the bag, I'll return it to you."

Webb actually beamed. "Will you! Say, you're a regular guy, Mr. Kennedy!"

Kennedy went down to the lobby, entered a phone booth and called Flannery at the office. "Listen," he said, "I've run into something that's worth fooling around with but I can't be sixty-eight places at one time, so I'll need some help. . . . Well, I want a guy to tail a guy. . . . Is Tucker around? . . . Well,

send him over to the *Somerset House*. Pronto, baby."

Tucker arrived ten minutes later. He was a small, slight, middle-aged man, who wore spectacles. A derby was perched high on the top of his head. He looked innocuous, simple-minded, but he was a good man on spot news and a good all-around newshawk. You would expect him to speak softly, precisely, apologetically.

He said, "Is this on the level, bozo, or is it just one of your practical jokes?"

Kennedy said, "Level as a mill pond, Tucks. I want you to tail a guy. Don't let him out of your sight. Check every place he visits. If he tries to take a train, a plane, a boat, or a bus—have him pinched."

"On what charge?"

"Any charge. Rough-house him, stick your watch in his pocket and then tell a cop he stole it. Anything to hold him. His name is Joel Webb. He's stopping here. In five-o-five. Go up to the fifth corridor and float up and down. If he leaves, tail him. If he comes down while you're on the way up, I'll tail him and send up a bell-hop to tell you. If a hop doesn't come in five minutes, you'll know Webb's still in his room. Got it?"

"Sure," said Tucker, and took an elevator up.

Kennedy waited five minutes, then left.

The cab he rode in had a broken window and before it had gone six blocks Kennedy was chilled to the bone. He called out:

"Stop at *Enrico's*." And when the cab stopped in front of *Enrico's*, in Flamingo Street: "Wait for me."

MacBride was sitting at the bar eating ham and baked beans and drinking beer. Paderofski, the barman, was paring his fingernails. His huge eyebrows shot halfway up his forehead and he grinned, greeted:

"Hah, Meester Kennedy, no seeing for a long time, mebbe t'ree days. Huss afry leetle t'ing?"

"Jake, Paderofski. You're looking tip-top."

"Shoo, I'm alwuz top-tip. M' wife she's say, 'Honey-bun, youzza top-tip, youzza da berries, youzza da coffee in m' crim.' Honey-bun she's call me."

MacBride looked sour. He muttered, "Honey-bun!"

"Shoo, Honey-bun. She's swal nack-neem, no?"

MacBride glared at him, swallowed, went on eating.

"Rye," said Kennedy. "And don't mind the skipper. Somebody hit him in the face with a bottle of sour cream. Well, well, Captain MacBride! Fancy meeting you here!"

"Nuts," said MacBride.

"How is everything at Headquarters, Stevie?"

"Nuts."

"Still working as hard as ever?"

"Nuts."

"Ha—nuts!" laughed Paderofski.

MacBride stabbed him with a violent stare, picked up his food and his drink and moved to the other end of the bar.

Paderofski scratched the top of his head with the middle finger of his left hand, and wondered what he had done.

Kennedy picked up his drink and made his way amiably to the end of the bar where the skipper had gone. The skipper pointed with his fork, growled:

"Lay off, Kennedy. I feel meaner than a mad dog. I feel so mean I can't even be civil to my wife. Now I don't have to be civil in a public bar and I don't intend to be. The reason why I came here was because I wouldn't have to be civil. And I don't want any suggestions, any sympathy, or any razzberry. In fact, I don't want anything—from you or anybody else. I want to be left alone. If people don't leave me alone I'm going to punch them in the nose."

Kennedy chuckled, downed his drink and skated the empty glass down the bar. From the doorway he saluted, saying gaily:

"Tally-ho, skipperry-wipperry."
MacBride glared at him.



NUMBER 910 Waterford was a greystone apartment house of six stories built around a small circular court which had a circular driveway. The lobby

was at the back of the circle. There was no desk but there was a rack for letters and a small switchboard and a mopey negro in plum-colored livery. His eyes were only one-third open and he sat on a high stool, droop-shoulder, with his lower lip hanging down to his chin.

"Hello, George," Kennedy said.

"Cunningham is m' name."

"I'm looking for an attractive young lady who wears a hat that looks something like a coal scuttle."

The negro suddenly burst into a guffaw and slapped himself on the knee. "Boss man, you took de words right outen ma mowf! It sho do look like unto a coal scuttle! Yassuh, boss man cap'n, it sho' do!" Then suddenly he was morose again and seemed on the point of falling asleep.

"Cunningham—"

"Folks don't call me Cunningham, boss. Dey call me Oscar."

"Well, Oscar, I'd like to see Miss Inez. She's in two-five, isn't she?"

"No, suh. She's in four-eight."

You operated the elevator yourself.

There was a white button alongside the door numbered 48 and Kennedy, looking tranquilly pleased with himself, pressed it. He heard prompt footsteps. The door opened and he was face to face with the girl. Even without the shako she looked striking. Her throat was slender but strong, her face was angular, handsome, with wide full lips. Her eyes were like two jets of black fire—full of passion and, he thought, touched with tragedy.

"I bring important news from Joel Webb," said Kennedy.

She started. Her eyes leaped, then

settled. "Come in," she said in a low, curious voice.

He entered blithely and strolled through a small foyer and into a living-room. As he tossed his hat on to the divan a shape bulked in the bedroom doorway. The woman Emmy, who had thrown him out of Jaeger's place. She scowled. Her eyes darkened and hardened and she snapped at the girl:

"Who let him in?"

"Why—I did. He said—"

"He said!" snarled Emmy, striding into the room. "You," she commanded the girl, "get in the bedroom. Get!"

The girl ran into the bedroom and Emmy closed the door after her, locked it.

Kennedy sighed, "Well, it's a small world after all."

The woman pivoted. "It's probably going to be smaller than you ever thought it was before, smart guy," she growled. "How did you find out she lived here?"

"I heard her give the address to a taxi driver."

"You stinking liar!"

He shrugged philosophically. "Okey, Emmy. No matter how I got here, I'm here. I don't want to talk to you, Godiva. I want to talk to the girl."

Emmy laughed harshly, dangerously. "And why, laddie?"

"I want to find out what she was looking for in the *Carioca* this morning."

Emmy put her hands on her hips. She grinned broadly, showing all her teeth; but there was no mirth in that grin. Her eyes shimmered. "Now ain't that just wonderful!" she mocked. "The little newspaperman wants to find out what she was looking for in the *Carioca*!"

"Emmy," said Kennedy, "let us have done with this repartee. It is written in the stars that I must meet the girl." His voice was tranquil, there was the barest shadow of a smile on his lips. He was genial and good-natured, but even so a man can be purposeful. Ken-

nedy was purposeful without being dramatically high-flown about it. He said in his gentle, almost coaxing voice:

"Open the door, Emmy."

He had never seen a woman tower the way Emmy towered. The rage which had started burning within her was whipped to white heat by his casual, easy-going manner; harsh words could not have enraged her more. Hatred and fury lashed out from her eyes. Her lips tightened and worked against each other and her jaw hardened and seemed to grow larger. She seemed to expand, to swell all over, and Kennedy expected to hear an unleashed torrent of abuse and invective.

But Emmy turned suddenly and walked hard-heeled into a small pantry, her elbows out from her side, her arms swinging. She reappeared instantly with a twelve-inch heavy carving knife gripped in her hand. Her voice was thick, rasping:

"So you'll shove your nose into my business, will you!"

She bore down on him and there was no doubt in his mind about what she intended doing. He scooped up a pillow and flung it and she was so primed to strike that instantly the blade wheeled. Its point pierced the pillow and when she saw this she cried out hoarsely, ripped the pillow free and hurled it away.

Kennedy was at the other end of the room. He said dryly, watchfully, "If you've got a head, Emmy, use it now. Put that cleaver away."

She made no reply. Her broad nostrils twitched. With her left hand she swept a chair out of the way. She headed across the room and on the way she used her left hand to pick up a vase. She hurled the vase at him and then charged with the knife. He was watching both, but the vase caught him; it shattered against his head, brought blood to his forehead. The pain was so sharp that he flung himself halfway across the room on the reflex. He would have gone farther, but the open pantry

door stopped him. It stopped him abruptly, jarred his whole body. In trying to steady himself, he reached out a hand blindly. It caught the top of a light chair and closed on it.

His eyes danced and he saw two or three Emmies coming at him, two or three knives sweeping towards him. Even in this split second he must have realized that it would be just as fatal to remain motionless as to take a swing. He gripped the chair with both hands, took a swing and connected and instead of feeling the swift incision of a knife he felt the hard bulk of the woman crash awkwardly against him, then fall away and crash to the floor. The knife was out of her hand. He did not see it anywhere. Then he saw it imbedded in the pantry door, its handle still quivering. Emmy lay in a heap, quite senseless.

Kennedy staggered to the bedroom door, unlocked it and tripped on his way into the bedroom. Rising, he looked around. Things still danced before his eyes and his head, having stopped the vase and been stopped by the pantry door, seemed to be jogging up and down on his shoulders. But he could see that the girl was not in the room. He looked under the twin beds. The bathroom was empty. So was a closet. Then he saw an open window and bowled across to it, thrust out his head. There was a fire-escape leading to a rear alleyway. The cold air felt good. He saw drops of blood falling on the windowsill and remembered his head. As he pulled his head in he heard a door slam.

Turning unsteadily, breathing heavily, he saw that the connecting door, through which he had entered, was closed. He fell on it, fought the knob. It was locked. Then he saw a door which he had overlooked before and stumbled towards it, yanked it open. But it was only another closet. He did not close it instantly, however. Reaching in, he withdrew an immense white fan. He made a small, rueful sound. Then he noticed that drops of blood were fall-

ing on the fan. His head felt like a huge red-hot clinker. He dropped the fan and went into the bathroom.

He washed the blood from his face and painted three cuts with iodine. His stomach felt a little shaky too by this time, so he took some bicarbonate of soda. Then he returned to the bedroom, picked up a chair and broke down the connecting door. The living-room was empty but on the floor next to the rim of the carpet the stub of a cigar smoldered. It was triangular in shape.



HE beating-up called for a drink. After a ten-minute talk with the plum-liveried negro, Kennedy hopped a cab and returned to *Enrico's*, hoping to catch MacBride. But MacBride had left.

"Did he say where?"

Paderoofski shook his head. "He's say he was take his car and go f'r a long ride, suzz he's not pastered by pipples. It's to me a great mysterium, the skipper he's so axcitement."

Kennedy sighed, "The lug would do something like that," and turned to go. But he saw Jaeger sitting at a corner table, obviously plastered to the eyebrows. Jaeger's eyes wore that dizzy expression of a drunk who sees nothing, hears nothing. Kennedy strolled over and sat down opposite him, saying, "Trying a bit of the hair of the dog, eh?"

Jaeger's fat brown eyes revolved, his big head wobbled. It took him a minute to place Kennedy. "Yeah," he said, "I'm having a li'l' pick-me-up."

"How long have you known Emmy Canfield?"

"Lishen. When I'm on the job, and I'm a damn' goodsh headwaisher, I"—he waved his index finger—"never tush drop likker. Never! Likker 'n' work don't mix, hah? Nope. But no job, no work—so drink likker. Hah? Sure."

"How long have you known Emmy Canfield?"

"Never, never mixsh work 'n' likker, my friend. Don't pay. Lookit me—besh headwaisher in business. Why? Never mixsh work 'n' likker."

"Does Emmy Canfield come from Detroit?"

"Emmy? Sure. Everybody cumsh from Detroit. Ever know that? Hah? Sure. Lots 'n' lots people cumsh from Detroit."

"When did Emmy come from Detroit?"

"Shanksgibbin Day."

"Thanksgiving Day?"

Jaeger banged the table petulantly. "Damn it, di'n't I shay Shanksgibbin Day!"

"Did she kill Marty Sullivan?"

Jaeger's eyes bounced. He stared stupidly at Kennedy for a full minute, then began to chuckle. His chuckle grew and grew until it became a laugh and then he was roaring, shaking with laughter, the tears streaming down his face. He put his head on the table and laughed and laughed and slapped the table uproariously with his hands. Then suddenly he sat up and looked grave in the manner that only drunks can look grave.

"Me," he said, touching his chest, "I killed Marty."

"Why?"

"Sh!" whispered Jaeger, leaning forward. "Becaush his left eyebrow wash yellor an' his right wash black. Time an' time again I ashked him, please, Marty, either bleach black one 'r dye yellor one. He laughs at me. Laughs at me! Sho I kill him. Ha, ha, ha! Pretty good, hah!" He hiccupped. "Well, think I'll git drunk. Ober! Rye!" He giggled and pawed his face and shook with silent mirth.

Kennedy gave it up. He rose, turned up the collar of his topcoat and went out. He took a cab to the *Free Press* and had a talk with Flannery and then he made a long distance call and spent twenty minutes on the wire.

IT was three o'clock when he drifted into Dan Osborne's office. Osborne, busy with a sheaf of papers, looked up, frowned, and sat back. He said with real concern:

"What the hell happened to your face?"

Kennedy was tranquil. "When are you going to put your cards on the table, Dan?"

"What are we playing," Osborne grinned, "poker?"

"I don't know what you're playing, Dan."

Osborne chuckled good-naturedly.

"What's troubling you, kid? Let's have it."

"What were you doing at the *Somerset* this morning?"

"Telling the manager that his cocktail-hour entertainment was not funny, it was smutty. He was reasonable. He said he'd cut it out. Why?"

Kennedy went over and stood by the window, his hands in his pockets. He gazed drowsily down at the street traffic for a minute, then turned and sat on the broad windowsill, his feet dangling.

He said, "I always thought you were a bachelor."

"I am."

"You weren't always."

Osborne sat back, clasped his hands behind his head and smiled jovially. "Been checking up?"

"Where's the wife?"

"Kennedy, I married twenty-four years ago. A girl named Sally McLean. She ran away from me three months after we were married. I never heard of her again."

"Ever hear of Emmy Canfield?"

"No."

"Inez Canfield?"

"No."

"Ever been in apartment forty-eight at nine-ten Waterford?"

"No." Osborne leaned forward. "Why?"

Kennedy crossed to the desk, opened the humidor and lifted out a triangular

cigar. "I found one of these in that apartment."

"I suppose other men smoke them, too."

"I suppose so." Kennedy dropped the cigar into the box. "It happens to be the place where I got beaten up. I found the fan dancer there."

Osborne's eyes were steady. "Where is she?"

"She skipped. Her name's Inez Canfield. Her mother's name is Emmy Canfield. Emmy's an Amazon. She came at me with a knife and while she was doing it Inez left by a fire-escape, from another room. I knocked Emmy out with a chair and went in the other room to get Inez. But she was gone and while I was looking out a window the connecting door slammed and I was locked in. When I broke it down, Emmy was gone, too. There was this triangular cigar, still burning, on the floor."

"You figure that somebody came in and took Emmy out, eh?"

Kennedy looked at him. "Yeah."

Osborne knit his brows thoughtfully. His eyes stared at the surface of the desk, glazed with thought, and his fingers drummed lightly on the square blotter. After a couple of minutes he shook his head, said, "I can't make it out, Kennedy."

"You wouldn't happen to know a young fellow named Joel Webb, would you?"

"No." He looked up. "Who is he?"

"He's in the puzzle, too. He's stopping at the *Somerset*."

Osborne sat back. "Oh, so that's who you thought I went to see. Did you grab him?"

"No. I put a tail on him. I didn't want to grab anybody until I had a talk with you."

Osborne eyed him speculatively. "I can't make you out, kid. But you needn't worry about me. Grab anybody you like."

Kennedy dropped his eyes, gazed curiously at the floor. Then he turned and

went out slowly, his head still lowered. He was still in a kind of day-dream when he reached the street, but the sharp wind roused him and he looked up as if surprised to find himself there. He walked around to the *Free Press* office and found Tucker sitting gloomily in the office.

Kennedy said, "Don't tell me you lost him."

"He checked out of the *Somerset* with a bag and took a cab and I took another cab. The cab I took got a flat and before I could get another your special oyster was among the missing. I shot right down to the railroad station, got in a booth where I could watch people come in and phoned Bob Angler at the airport. I told him to watch and see if Webb took a plane—gave him a description of the guy. Well, he didn't show up at the railroad station and according to Bob Angler he didn't show up at the airport."

"When did you lose him?"

"Two hours ago. What happened to your face?"

"It's a rash. I get it every winter."

Kennedy killed a couple of hours floating from bar to bar. He felt he was up against a stone wall for the time being and saw no sense in running his head against it. It was much pleasanter to browse over a drink, to idly chase thoughts here and there in the hope of running to ground one that was useful.

Soon it was dark, and time to eat, and he took a cab to *Enrico's*. He had paid the driver and was ambling to the door when he heard the driver scream:

"Look out!"

Kennedy threw himself flat on the sidewalk as three shots blasted the silence of the street and dug into *Enrico's* heavy door. The cab-driver blew his horn wildly. Kennedy lay tense, motionless, the sound of the horn braying in his ears. Then the horn stopped and he was being lifted to his feet by the driver, who gasped:

"You hurt? You hurt?"

"I—I d-don't think so," stammered Kennedy.

"I scared him wit' me horn. D'ja hear me scare him?"

Kennedy was trembling like a leaf. "Wuh-where is he?"

"He beat it. Up that way. Out o' sight now."

"What'd he look like?"

"Damned if I know. Only thing I seen, I seen this shape run out in the street and lift his arm out level and I yelled."

"Thanks, pal."

Enrico was standing in the doorway, his hands on his hips. "So what is this, so what?"

"I arrive," said Kennedy, "under a salute of guns." He tottered through the doorway. "A drink, before I pass out."

He took three in quick succession, under the concerned eye of Paderofski. All he could eat was a ham sandwich. His appetite had been blown away. An hour and a half later Paderofski said:

"Please to excuse you, Meester Kennedy. On de telephono is a poddy was wishing he should spik wit' you horry-op."

"Paderofski, your French gets better and better," Kennedy said and went to the phone; and on the phone, "Yes? . . . When? . . . Okay, Tucks, grab a car and pick me up here. In the lower left-hand drawer of my desk is a pair of manacles I stole from MacBride a year ago. Bring those, too. Can you get a gun? . . . Swell. Snap on it, Tucks."

He returned to the bar, said, "Paderofski, lend me Susie."

Paderofski took an automatic from beneath the bar and said, "Please, Meester Kennedy, being too careful," and handed across the gun. Kennedy shoved it into his pocket and, entering the restaurant, stood by the front window waiting. In a little while a black sedan yanked to a stop outside and Kennedy went out and found Tucker at the wheel.

Kennedy climbed in, slammed the door, said, "What's that in back?"

"A gun. You said bring a gun. The cuffs weren't there."

"I didn't tell you to bring a twelve-gauge shotgun. You can't go walking around the streets with that thing."

"It was the only one in the office. Flannery bought it once, about five years ago, when he thought he might go duck hunting. He never went. Well, don't worry; I don't think it works anyhow."

He slammed the car into gear and drove off and as they boomed up the street Kennedy heard his name being yelled. He looked around. Tucker put on the brakes.

"Keep going. It's only Paderofski. Probably Flannery phoning to give orders. Step on it. What time does the plane leave?"

"In half an hour."



TUCKER parked the car in the parking lot at the airport and climbed out, saying, "Well, the plane hasn't arrived yet." He pulled the shotgun out

of the back seat.

"Nix," said Kennedy.

"But you said bring a gun."

"Forget it, Tucks. This is no grandstand play. Just walk with me and act disinterested."

They went through the swing door into the waiting room and crossed to the desk behind which stood Bob Angler. Angler said, "Hello, gang. They're standing over in the corner."

"Thanks," said Tucker.

Neither Joel Webb nor Inez Canfield moved when they saw Kennedy coming towards them. Webb's eyes darkened and his lean jaw tightened up. The girl took hold of his arm. Kennedy and Tucker came up to them and Kennedy, taking his gun from his inside pocket and putting it into his overcoat pocket, said:

"Let's go."

Webb muttered angrily, "Now look here—"

"I'm looking, sweetheart—right at you. We've got a car outside. You and the girl get moving."

"Now listen—"

The schoolmasterly looking Tucker said from beneath his derby, "Can it, bozo. Ankle out. This is no celebrity interview."

The girl's eyes were wide with fright. There was something sinister about Kennedy's emaciated, lacerated face, and about his quiet, dreamy voice. She tugged at Webb's arm. Scowling, he started walking with her. Kennedy walked at his elbow. Tucker walked at the girl's elbow. Outside, Kennedy said to the girl:

"You ride in front." And to Webb: "You and me in back. Get in."

The sedan picked up speed on the cement highway. "Where are we going?" Tucker asked.

"Nine-ten Waterford," said Kennedy.

The girl looked around, startled.

Kennedy nodded. "Yes, Inez—back home. Gradually I'm going to get all you people in one spot. This has got so far that it's a circus, with me the head clown. Now somebody else is going to be the clown. Step on it, Tucks. The boy friend here is getting restless and if he doesn't sit still I'm going to shoot out a rib."

"Shoot between the ribs," Tucker recommended. "It goes farther. So I hear, anyhow."

Webb suddenly shouted, "You can't arrest us! You guys aren't cops!"

"He's just thought of something," Kennedy sighed; and then he snapped, "Sit still! Is a bullet in the gut worth arguing about whether we can arrest you or not?"

The girl said, "Don't, Joel. Don't."

Webb folded his arms and towered in savage silence, his teeth digging into his lower lip. The sedan rolled through the outskirts of the city, hit Southern Road and followed it to South Waterford.

Eleven blocks farther on it pulled up in front of 910 Waterford and Kennedy said:

"Now wait. There's not going to be any confusion here. Tucks, you go in with the girl first and go right up to four-eight. Wait outside four-eight. I'll be up in a minute with Webb."

Tucker got out, gripped the girl by the arm and entered the apartment house. A minute later Kennedy backed out, said, "Okey, brother," and Webb followed.

Webb sneered. "Pretty cagey, aren't you?"

"Just careful, for once in my life. If you try to make a break for it now, the girl won't be with you. Move along."

When they reached the lobby the elevator pointer was stopped at the fourth floor. Kennedy buttoned it down, told Webb to open it, and then stepped in close behind him. When they got off at the fourth floor Tucker and Inez were standing half-way down the hall.

"Open it," said Kennedy.

Her lips were shaking, there was terror in her eyes. With fumbling fingers she took a key from her purse, clattered it into the keyhole, turned it. Her face was dead-white. Tucker took hold of the knob and pushed the door open. Kennedy pulled his gun out of his pocket and said:

"In, Webby."

Tucker hustled the girl in and then Kennedy prodded Webb in with the gun. He saw the girl stop, put her hands to her cheeks, sway. She uttered not a sound but he could see her back grow rigid. It was Tucker who said:

"Blow me down! Will you look at this!"

Emmy lay on the floor, disheveled, part of her dress torn. Kennedy began to see that the room was in a greater state of chaos than when he had left it. Webb turned and looked at Kennedy furiously, as though Kennedy were the cause of it. The girl dropped to a chair and began shaking violently, though she made no sound. Regret seemed not a

part of her emotions: there was tragedy in her dark eyes, and fear, too.

Tucker's eyes grew round. He said, "They strangled the old dame and then breezed!"

"She's strangled, all right," mused Kennedy. "Just as Marty Sullivan was strangled." His voice dropped lower as he turned to the girl: "What were you looking for in the *Carioca*—back in Sullivan's office?"

Webb broke in— "She was—"

"Clam yourself," Kennedy told him dryly. "I'm talking to the girl. Come on, Inez, up and out with it."

Her fists were clenched, her lips pressed tightly together. She shook her head. Kennedy strolled over and stood back of her, his gun trained on Webb.

He was still tranquil: "Come on, Inez, spout."

"I'll tell you!" Webb rapped out.

Kennedy smiled. "Make it good this time."

Webb's jaw jutted. "I was in Sullivan's office the night of the raid. I was waiting there for him to come back to the office. I was sitting there smoking a cigarette when I saw a light on his desk blink. That meant trouble out front. The hat-check girl must have flashed it when you came in."

"How do you know the light meant trouble?"

"I'd been in the office before, once, when a fight started in the lobby and the light flashed. The night of the raid I was sitting there, smoking, as I said, when the light flashed. I got up and ran out of the office and when I saw what was going on I beat it out the back way. I left my cigarette case behind. When you saw Inez there, she was looking for it."

"Why didn't you go back after it?"

"She wouldn't let me. Besides, she had a key to the back door and wouldn't give it to me."

"And why were you worried about the cigarette case?"

Webb looked suddenly confused.

Kennedy said, "Now did you do this?"

When you saw the trouble light flash, did you leave the office, go down that narrow hallway to the little door that leads into the dining-room? Did you reach in through that door and choke Sullivan to death before the lights went on? Did you then run out back, go to the alley in the rear and catch the fan dancer—Inez here—as she came out of her dressing-room window?"

The girl cried out, "No, no!"

"Now I'm talking to Webby," Kennedy said.

Webb's voice sounded clotted: "Why should I kill Sullivan?"

"Why were you in his office? Why, why, why—there's a lot of whys floating around. Maybe this. Sullivan was the only one, so far as we knew then, that knew the identity of his fan dancer. You knew that if the cops nailed him ten to one her identity would come out. You didn't want that. Why? Well, you love her. You don't want her name dragged in the mud. You choke Sullivan to keep the secret. You skin out the back way, taking the girl with you. Then you remember that you left your cigarette case behind."

The girl got to her feet, her lips shaking, her fists clenched. "It's a lie—a lie—a lie!" she choked. "He was there—he did leave his cigarette case there—he did help me out the back window—but he didn't kill Sullivan!"

"How do you know? You were back-stage."

"I know! I know, I tell you!"

Kennedy smiled ruefully. "Then you know who did kill him?"

She choked, tightened her lips. Her eyes sprang wide open with shock and her hand flew to her face.

Kennedy said to Tucker, "Okey, Tucks. She knows. Phone Headquarters and tell them to send over somebody."

TUCKER walked across the room to the phone but he never reached it. The closet door opened and Jaeger stood there with a big gun in his hand.

His shirt was torn, there were scratches on his face, his hair was matted. He looked big and gross and pasty.

"Stay away from that phone," he muttered thickly. His eyes were haggard.

Kennedy aimed, pulled his trigger. Nothing happened. He tried twice more.

"Drop it," said Jaeger.

"I may as well."

Jaeger said to the girl and Webb, "You two go. Go on."

The girl stared at him as though he were a ghost.

Jaeger muttered bitterly, "Take her, Webb. Take her out."

Webb's face was lined, grim. He crossed the room, took Inez by the hand and went with her to the door. They left. Jaeger remained, leaning in the closet doorway, his breathing slow and thick. "Wait," he said. "Just wait." And when five minutes had passed, he moved from the closet, crossed the room to the corridor door and said, "If you come after me, it's the works." He opened the door, backed out, closed the door.

Kennedy pointed. "You stay here. Call the office about this dead one. Her name's Emmy Canfield. The other one's her daughter. Then call the police."

He scooped up the automatic he had dropped, yanked out the magazine. It was empty. "That tramp Paderoofski," he said, and ran into the bedroom. He went out by way of the window and down the fire-escape to the courtyard. When he reached the front, he saw Jaeger jogging along a block away. Kennedy looked at the car, wondering about the chances of driving it and trying to run Jaeger down. He jumped in—but of course Tucker had the key. He jumped out again, took the old shotgun with him and started off up the street.

Jaeger saw him and fired but the bullet passed somewhere overhead. Kennedy ran on, hugging the housewalls.

He could hear Jaeger's big feet clubbing the pavement, see his big ungainly body lunging on through the darkness. A second shot was closer: it scarred the sidewalk beneath Kennedy's feet. Kennedy jumped. He licked his lip and wondered whether he ought to stop but while he was wondering about it he kept on running.

He saw Jaeger turn again and plant himself in the middle of the sidewalk. Kennedy dropped behind an iron lamp standard as Jaeger cut loose. Four explosions banged in the street and lead whanged against the iron lamp standard. Kennedy was grateful for being skinny as a rail. He saw Jaeger reloading. Jumping up, he ran towards the man, hefting the shotgun as a club, hoping to reach Jaeger before he could reload. But the distance was too great to strike him with it. Kennedy saw him snap shut the gun.

Kennedy was fifteen feet from him in the open; there was nothing to hide behind. He waved his shotgun, yelled, "Stop or I'll shoot!" and made a pretense of aiming the gun. He even went so far as to press the trigger. The shotgun banged and the recoil knocked him to the sidewalk. As he scrambled to his feet, he saw Jaeger lying on the corner. Kennedy picked up the shotgun, went forward, aiming.

He said, "Don't move, Jaeger."

"You got me," Jaeger panted. "In the leg, high up. I can't move and I'm bleeding. Listen, leave Inez alone. She didn't have nothing to do with it. It was me killed Emmy. 'Cause why? Well, I'm a fine-looking guy to be nuts about Inez, but I am. She ain't that way about me, but you can't blame her for that. Her and Webb are nuts about each other. I knew I'd let Emmy have it some day.

"Look, Kennedy. She ain't that gal's mother. She never was. She's the one made Inez do that fan dance. When Inez'd fight against it, the old lady would threaten her with a knife. She had Inez scared to death. I seen she

was scared to death. You see, Marty wasn't the only one knew who the fan dancer was. I did, too. Inez thought she was her mother, but she wasn't. I found that out. I found out that her mother died twenty-one years ago, out in Tulsa, and left her with Emmy, who ran a boarding house. I just found it out the day the cops raided the *Carioca*.

"I'd been begging Marty to cut out the fan dance. He used to just laugh. And when I got this news, I went up to him and told him. He says, 'Sure, I know that. Do you know who her father is?' I said I didn't and he said, 'Dan Osborne. But Dan doesn't know. If he closes me up, I'll spring it on him then.' That kind of floored me. He laughed. He thought it'd be a great joke. Then when the raid came— Look, I knew Inez didn't care a rap for me, but— well, I didn't want to see her scandalized. When the raid came—I seen it through the door—I seen MacBride come in—why, I just went in that hallway, stepped through that little door and let Marty have it."

"Why'd you give it to Emmy?"

"She suspected I'd killed Marty. She came to my place and told me so—that was when you got there and she chucked you down the stairs. Well, I told her I knew Inez wasn't her kid. I told her if she'd squeal on me I'd tell what I knew. So that was a bargain. But I got drunk. I thought o' the times she'd threatened Inez and got sore enough to kill her then. I went up there first and seen her coming to on the floor—that was after she had the fight with you. I heard you in the other room and took her out, figuring to take her to my place and beat hell out of her.

"But downstairs, I saw Inez running away. I ran after her and she said she was going to meet Webb and they were going to run away and get married. That kind of socked me, though I half expected it. I let her go. Then I lost sight of Emmy. I came back later and found her. She said Inez had gone away and she was going to turn me up be-

cause I'd always taken Inez' side against her. Then I choked her to death."

He rolled over and a cigar fell out of his pocket. Kennedy picked it up. It was triangular in shape.

"You smoke these?"

"Dan Osborne gave me a couple. He was around asking me questions and he gave me a couple."

"Does he know about Inez?"

"No."

"I'll get an ambulance."

"No, no," begged Jaeger. "Let me pass out here. I tried to kill you in front of *Enrico's*, Kennedy. You knew too much. I tried it again here. I killed Marty. I killed Emmy. I don't want an ambulance."

Kennedy stared at him, said, "Well, it'll take a while for one to get here."



HE night wind was strong, it whistled past the high casement windows. Osborne watched the Night Express come up to the Eastmarsh Bridge, string across it. He pulled on his cigar.

"I never thought Marty was a rat like that," he said. "He always used to kid me, ride me, but I never thought he'd do a thing like that. When he kept telling me that if I closed him up I'd rue the day, I don't know, I just thought it was bluff. He was always full of bluff. But now I can remember his evil grin—I didn't think it was particularly evil then. But I know it was, now. He hated my guts. He hated me in his smiling, droll way when I went over on the side of the law. Kiddled me about it. Razzed me. But I always gave him a break. I should have killed him."

Kennedy said from the depths of the divan, "I sure had you picked as a major suspect for a long time. I guess I wasn't big-hearted enough to believe that you'd pull punches with Marty just for old times' sake. I really thought he had something on you."

"I know you did." Osborne's eyes dreamed. "You see, the child must have been born after my wife left me. I never knew about it. She ran away with some musician. I suppose I was to blame, a bit. I buried myself in work so."

Kennedy stood up, yawned. He said, "Well, MacBride goes back to work tomorrow. Same job. He doesn't know it yet, so I think I'll go find him and razz him a while, because tomorrow I won't be able to."

Osborne was wrapped in thought. "Did Inez say she would come here?" he asked.

"Yes. She and Webb never did leave the apartment house. They went down as far as the lobby and then Inez wouldn't go any further. I found them there when I ran back, after I shot Jaeger."

Osborne sat down, saying, "I won't know how to act. How do you act, Kennedy, when you meet a daughter you've never seen?"

Kennedy was on his way to the door. "I never was a father, Dan. I wouldn't know. So long. I'm going around to

Enrico's and take a punch at Paderoofski."

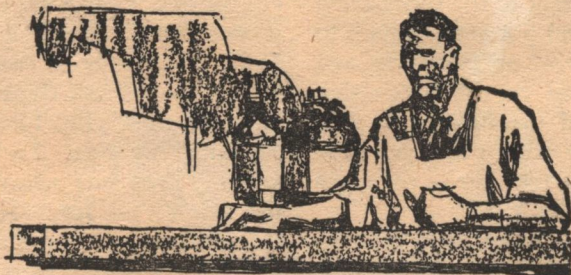
When he drifted into *Enrico's* fifteen minutes later Enrico himself was behind the bar. At sight of Kennedy he held his head in his hands.

Kennedy said, "Come on—tell Paderoofski to get out from under the bar."

Enrico threw his hands in the air. "But ain't you heard!" he exclaimed. He groaned, "Poor Paderoofski!"

Kennedy looked puzzled. "Huh?"

"Look, Kennedy, sir. After Paderoofski gives you the gun he remembers it ain't loaded with no bullets. He cries out. He runs to the street and yells, but you drive off. He yells some more. He pulls his hair. He jumps. He prays. Then—yes, then poor Paderoofski has nervous collapse. I send him to the husspital in an ambulance. In an ambulance to the husspital goes poor Paderoofski with big nervous collapse! Is that not sad, Kennedy, sir? . . . Please, quick, go to the husspital so Paderoofski shouldn't beat up no more doctors. Four already he's beat up, not counting three orderlies. Quick, before the husspital she's a wreck!"



Death Song

By PAUL CAIN



Pat Nolan puts on an act for murder



JACOBS, the assistant director, yelled "Hold your hammers!"

The pounding at the far end of the stage stopped.

Carl Dreier raised his head, said softly, wearily: "Turn 'em over."

I held on to the arms of my chair and waited for what I knew was going to happen.

The sound mixer called out the number, the assistant cameraman snapped his slap-stick under the microphone and moved swiftly out of the scene, Maya Sarin came through the right up-stage door in the narrow hallway set and walked a little unsteadily towards the camera. Creighton, the leading man, came through the door and ran after her. He came abreast of her about ten feet from the camera and they stopped and faced each other.

He put his hands gently on her shoulders, gazed deep into her dusky, violet-shadowed eyes.

"Darling!" he whispered, his voice quivering with emotion, "Darling! You can't leave me like this! . . ."

Then it happened.

She said: "Oh, yesh, I can." Her voice was thick with alcohol. She wasn't tight—she wasn't even drunk—she was cock-eyed.

Creighton started to say something like "But, darling . . ." and then he swallowed his words and his emotion and turned squarely towards Dreier, put his hands on his hips, snapped shrilly: "Mister Dreier—I refuse to try to work with a drunken woman any longer!"

Sarin turned wide glassy eyes to stare vacantly in the general direction of the camera.

"Why w'as matter?" she asked innocently, incredulously. "I don't know what Mist' Creighton's talking about. . . ."

Then her expression changed swiftly, her eyes narrowed to ominous black-fringed slits and she swung her open hand to the side of Creighton's jaw. If they didn't hear that smack up on Hollywood Boulevard they weren't listening—it was a pip.

I thought Creighton was going to go into his swoon for a minute, then he put one hand slowly up to his spanked face and turned and walked back up the hallway, out the door.

Sarin whirled towards the camera. ". . . 'S a frame-up!" she screamed. "Everybodeesh trying to ace me outa thish pischer! I won't stand—"

Dreier stood up. He was a tall heavy shouldered man with prematurely gray hair, a narrow sharply chiseled face softened by sympathetic eyes, a generous mouth. He looked very tired. He tapped one leg of the tripod with his walking-stick and the cameraman snapped off the camera-motor. It was silent except for the sound of Sarin's indignant panting.

Dreier said quietly: "In view of the

fact that we are five days behind schedule after eleven days on this picture, and that the company has been waiting for you, Miss Sarin, since eleven-thirty this morning"—he glanced at his watch—"and it is now ten minutes after five. . . . And in view of the fact that we have been trying to complete this one simple scene properly for two days and have been unable to because of your condition. . . ."

His accent was very precise. He turned and walked away.

She was after him like a spitting, snarling she-cat; she grabbed his shoulder, swung him around, screamed: "Oh, no, you don't!—you don't walk out on me! I'm perfec'ly cap'ble of doing thish shene! I—"

Dreier was standing still, looking down at her; I don't think I've ever seen such a startling change in a man's face. It was like white luminous metal; his light blue eyes had darkened and his soft mouth had straightened to a thin, savage line. His fury seemed all the more deadly because it was contained, all held inside of him.

His voice sliced the silence like an icy knife: "Take your hand off my shoulder."

Sarin dropped her hand and stepped back a pace or two, slowly. Dreier turned and walked swiftly away.

NEWs gallops in a studio. I didn't go to my office because I knew the phone would be burning up with calls from Bachmann. I wanted to figure out what I was going to say.

I was listed on the payroll as a gagman but that wasn't the half of it. Conciliator in Extraordinary would have been better. Bachmann was the boss of B. L. D. Pictures, and some time, way back in the sweet silent days when we turned them out in a week for eight grand, he'd conceived the fairly nutty idea that I was a natural-born peacemaker. He'd never got over it; when I'd returned to Hollywood after three or four years of trying to find out what

made China go, I'd found Bachmann with a studio slightly smaller than Texas and my old job waiting for me.

I'd worked on five pictures for B. L. D. and gradually, insidiously, almost without my knowing it, Maya Sarin had become my special charge. And what a charge!—it would have taken six men and a boy to keep up adequately with her and Bachmann knew it. His faith in me was touching, not to say sublime.

"Death Song" was her first picture with Dreier, and in addition to being Chinese technical expert, and a few other ill-assorted what-nots I was supposed to be Sarin's spiritual adviser and wet-nurse. And when I say wet-nurse I mean wet-nurse. She could suck up more whiskey in less time than any half-dozen longshoremen I'd known in a long experience of longshoremen. I'd done everything I could to avert the inevitable blow-off. So what!—so it'd happened.

I stalled in the Publicity Department a little while and had my shoes shined and got to Bachmann's office gradually. Sarin was coming out as I went in. I started to say something light and laugh-provoking, and she glared at me like a wounded lioness; I moved to one side and swayed in the wind as she went past.

There was a girl waiting to see Bachmann in the outer office. She had dark red hair and dark brown eyes and a skin like thick cream.

Bachmann's secretary got up and started for the door of his private office. She said: "Mister Bachmann wants to see you right away, Mister Nolan—"

Bachmann jerked the door open, blasted me with an icy stare, yelped: "Come in here!"

The secretary looked worried. She said in a small voice: "May I see you for just a moment first, Mister Bachmann?"

Bachmann snapped "No!" repeated: "Come in here, Nolan."

I bobbed my head at the creamy-

skinned angel, said: "This lady was here first. . . ."

She smiled at me and murmured: "Thank you—I'm in no hurry." The voice went with the rest of her.

Bachmann looked like he was about a half-jump ahead of apoplexy. That was all right with me because when he gets that way he becomes speechless. I gave the angel my best bow and marched past him into the office. He slammed the door and started walking up and down.

In about a minute he got his voice back, shouted: "Well—what are we going to do?"

I was looking out the window. I saw Sarin come out of the downstairs door of the Administration Building and start across the lawn towards the dressing-rooms. I said: "How about leaving the picture business flat and going back to cloaks and suits?"

Bachmann looked like a thug and was one of the swellest all-around men I've ever known. He couldn't help it about his pan. He wasn't paying any attention to what I said. He yelled: "You've got to talk to Dreier!"

I nodded.

"Dreier likes you," he went on. "You've got to make him understand that the release date of 'Death Song' is set. It's sold! It's got to be finished in three weeks at the outside!"

I nodded again. I was still looking out the window and I saw Sarin disappear into the Dressing-room Building. She looked like she was going somewhere. I said: "You can't make pictures with a sponge for a star. We're five days behind schedule. The call was for eleven-thirty this morning because we worked late last night with the mob. Sarin didn't even get to the lot till four and she was paralyzed. . . ."

I turned to Bachmann. "I think the best thing to do is scrap everything we've shot—it's lousy anyway—and start over with another girl."

Bachmann lifted his shoulders in such a high shrug that his head almost

disappeared like a scared turtle's.

"What other girl! You're talking like an idiot! You know as well as I do that Maya's name is sold with the picture. . . ."

I went over and looked up at a big photograph of her on the wall, grunted: "Uh-huh."

Bachmann's voice kept on popping behind me: "You've got to talk to Dreier. Maya says he doesn't like her—that he keeps on riding her and won't give her a chance to straighten out. She says—"

I heard the door open, Dreier's soft voice:

"What else does she say?"

I turned around. Dreier came in and closed the door, sank into a big chair.

Bachmann went behind his desk and sat down, too.

Dreier said: "Will you please replace me, Jack? I guess I can't take it."

He turned from Bachmann and smiled wearily at me.

Bachmann looked like he was about to do a back-flip. Then the old beaten-animal expression crept into his eyes. I knew that look; it'd take a giant of will-power to say no to him when he used it.

He said tremulously: "Carl. You wouldn't desert me, too!"

Dreier laughed. He was silent a moment and then he said: "No, Jack—I guess I wouldn't. Not if you're going to cry about it." He raised both hands resignedly and brought them down hard on his knees. "What do you want me to do?"

"Talk to Maya." Bachmann was leaning forward, smiling eagerly. "Reason with her—"

I grinned.

Bachmann glared at me, went on to Dreier: "Make her understand you don't dislike her—that it's for the good of the picture—that we've all got to co-operate—"

One of the phones on Bachmann's desk buzzed. He picked it up said: "Yes—what is it? . . . Please don't

bother me, Miss Chase—I'm busy!" He slammed up the receiver.

Dreier stood up. "All right, Jack," he said. "I'll try—again."

"Fine!" Bachmann turned to me. "You go with him, Pat."

I looked at my watch. It was fifty-four. I had to see a dog about a man at six-thirty; I said: "Maya's off me—I haven't been able to talk to her for three days. I think Carl can do better by himself."

Dreier was smiling. "Okey," he said. "I'm going to see the rushes first—last night's stuff. Then I'll see what I can do with her."

He went to the door, turned his tired smile to me. "Want to look at them with me?"

I shook my head. "I haven't got time—I'll look at 'em in the morning."

Dreier nodded and went out and closed the door.

Bachmann was leaning back in his chair glaring at me with elaborate disgust. "A fine smoother-over you're turning out to be!" he said.

"That smoother-over business is *your* idea," I reminded him, "not mine. Me—I like a good fight—I'm the kind of a guy that starts revolutions."

I gave him a trick grin and bowed out. The creamy angel was still sitting in the outer office. She smiled at me again and I took it and smiled back and almost smashed my knee-cap against the door because I wasn't looking where I was going.

I was still thinking about her when I got into my car, and figuring that maybe the deal with the man and the dog wasn't so important after all.



TRAFFIC was heavy on Melrose; I cut up Gower and got out of the worst of it but it took me nearly twenty minutes to get to the hotel.

I was getting into the bathtub when the phone rang. The switchboard-girl

said: "Theah's a Mistah Hammah callin', Mistah Nolan. . . ." She kind of crooned it, like: "Theah's a cotton field a callin', honey chile." You could slice that Deep South accent with a dull cleaver.

"On the phone, or is he downstairs?"

"On the wiah, Mistah Nolan. He's in the hotel but he wants to talk to you on the wiah. . . ."

Hammer played occasional bits in pictures and was a sort of all-around handy-man for Joe Ciretti. Ciretti was the Big Bad Wolf of the Coast underworld. He was also Maya Sarin's current suitor.

I told the girl to put him on and sat down and waited for the click, said "Hello" as disagreeably as I could.

His nasal, high-pitched voice quavered over the wire: "H'are ya, Old Timer? What's the good word? How's everything?"

"Everything's been swell—up to now. I'm in a hurry—what's on your mind?"

Hammer said: "Me and a friend of mine want to have a little talk with you."

I said: "Not a chance—I've got to be out of here in ten minutes and I'm just getting into the tub. Give me a ring later."

"Later won't do. We want to talk to you *now*!" The tone of his voice had changed; all the amusement had gone out of it and it was almost plaintively serious.

Another voice rasped over the wire suddenly. It was sharp, staccato, with a slight Latin accent:

"Listen, you! Look out the window—the one on your right. Look at the window across the court!"

I twisted around in the chair and looked through my wide open window at the one the voice was shouting about. It was about twenty-five or thirty feet away, open, dark.

I started to say, "So what," or something equally bright and then I stopped because there was a thin blue rifle-barrel sticking out a few inches over the lower

sill and it was pointing, as nearly as I could measure the angle at that distance, at my right eye. I could see a man's head and shoulders vaguely outlined against the darkness of the room.

The voice went on: "Now put the phone down on the table and put your hands up—high; then get up and unlock the door and go back and sit down. And don't forget—you're covered all the way to the door."

I did exactly that. I wanted to see what the play was about. I unlocked the door and opened it a couple of inches and went back and sat down. I kept my hands up and watched the rifle-barrel and waited.

In a couple of minutes Hammer and a thick-set, swarthy guy with bright beady eyes and blue-black hair came in and closed the door.

I looked back at the window and the rifle-barrel was gone. I said: "Do you gentlemen mind if I put on my pants?"

Hammer was a thin, medium-sized Swede with a thick butter-yellow mustache. He grinned a little, piped: "Never mind your pants—we like you this way." He waved his hand at blue-black hair. "This's Joe Ciretti—he wants to talk to you."

I got up and grabbed a bathrobe off the bed, slid into it. "First," I said, "you'd better let me in on what all this strong-arm stuff is about. I don't like it, and when I don't like something I get in a bad mood, and when I'm in a bad mood I'm a bad talker—or listener."

Ciretti's eyes widened innocently on Hammer; he lifted his hands in front of him as if he was holding a watermelon, said: "Strong-arm stuff! I don't know what Mister Nolan is talking about—do you, Gus?" His was the sharp, staccato voice of the telephone.

I went over to the door and opened it, said: "You boys have seen too many moving-pictures. It's a pleasure, Ciretti—sometime I'll play Indian and cowboy with you but right now I'm in a hurry. Give me a call at the studio—"

Ciretti waltzed over and very sud-

denly, magically, a big blue heater appeared in his hand; he jabbed it into my belly, rasped: "You go back and sit down—quick!"

Something in his tone made me realize that he *might* be on the level. I felt like a sap who'd been caught trying to make a four-card straight stand up, sat down.

Ciretti went on: "I've called you five, six times at the studio today."

"That's dandy," I said. "I didn't go near my office all day."

Ciretti sat down near me, leaned forward and let the big automatic dangle loosely between his legs. "Just one thing I want understood," he ground out. "Then you can go about your business and we'll go about ours."

"That'll be swell."

"You, nor this guy Dreier," he went on, "nor Bachmann, nor anybody else is going to freeze Maya out of this picture."

I opened my mouth like a black-bass and gave him a stunned gasp.

"Who," I asked gently, "ever gave you the screwy idea that anyone was trying to freeze her out of anything?"

"She told me." His voice was like a couple of billiard balls rubbed together. "She says you're all trying to railroad her out of pictures."

I said: "You know her better than I do. You know she's been stiff for weeks, and yet you fall for an insane angle like that. It doesn't make sense."

"She says she has to drink to keep going—with everybody against her."

Ciretti straightened up and eased the automatic back into its holster, slowly. He looked worried, as if he actually believed what he was saying and didn't know what to say next. The poor chump was evidently in love with little Maya.

Hammer was staring at the ceiling, whistling soundlessly, making a very bad job of trying to look unconcerned.

"If that's all you wanted to see me about," I said—"and why you picked on me instead of Dreier or Bachmann or someone who really cuts ice at B. L. D.

I can't imagine—you can tell Maya that if she'll pull herself together and lay off the jug everything'll be simply elegant."

I turned to Hammer. "I still don't savvy all this brandishing of guns and—"

Ciretti interrupted, said swiftly: "I thought you were trying to duck me—and I wanted you to know how I felt about it. You've got to give her a break."

My watch was on the table. I looked at it and it was sixteen minutes after six. I started to stand up and the phone rang; I sat down again and picked up the receiver.

The girl said: "Mistah Bachmann callin', Mistah Nolan."

I told her to put Bachmann on and said: "Hello, Jack," and listened. After about a minute I stuttered something like "Okey, I'll be right over," and hung up and looked at Ciretti.

I said: "Maya's out of the picture."

He stood up slowly. "What do you mean? They can't—"

I took a deep breath, went on: "She's been murdered. They just found her in her dressing-room. Dreier's been arrested."



THOUGHT Ciretti was going to explode or fall flat on his face or something. He looked like he couldn't breathe and his white face got a little purple and he tried to speak and couldn't. I felt sorry as hell for him.

He finally managed to gasp: "Where's Dreier? Where have they taken him?"

I said: "I don't know. Anyway, I'll lay six, two, and even he didn't do it. I don't know anything about it, yet but Dreier's not a murderer." And I was remembering his face when he'd turned on Sarin on the set.

Ciretti went unsteadily to the door and went out without looking back.

Hammer followed him and closed the door.

I took a two-minute shower and hustled into some clothes. Then I cantered to the door and opened it and started out and ran smack into the angel. Her creamy skin was about five shades lighter and her dark brown eyes were like saucers. Beautiful saucers.

"The girl said your line was busy," she stammered, "so I got the number of your room and came up. I—I had to see you right away. . . ."

I was steering her towards the elevator. I said: "Sure. What about?"

The elevator door slid open and we got in; she glanced at the elevator-boy and didn't answer. We were in the car, roaring down Vine Street by the time she managed to say: "Maya Sarin's been murdered!"

I looked at her sidewise and missed an oil-truck by inches, grunted: "Uh-huh. How did you know?"

"I saw her—I went to her dressing-room and found her lying there, dead." I felt the angel shudder beside me and heard her take in breath swiftly, sharply.

"What did you go to her dressing-room for?"

She said: "I guess I'd better begin at the beginning."

I nodded, swung into Sunset Boulevard. She began at the beginning and talked nearly all the way to the studio. In a large nutshell it went something like this:

She'd come to Hollywood from some place in Kansas to crash pictures, but pictures had crashed her. She'd worked extra a couple times at B. L. D. and Titanic and then there'd been a great open space without work and finally without coffee and doughnuts. She'd answered an ad that turned out to be the Nick Galbraith Detective Agency; they'd put her to work tailing some sucker for divorce evidence and then they'd sent her to Maya Sarin who it seems was one of their best undercover clients and Maya had given her a note to Bachmann asking him to give her

some kind, any kind, of a job on the lot.

The idea seemed to be that Maya's dipsomania was aggravated by a supercharged persecution complex and she wanted the angel to keep her eyes and ears open and find out who was conniving against her at B. L. D. She said Maya acted like she was scared to death of something and didn't seem to be quite sure of what it was.

From then on the plot thickened. She'd been waiting to present her note to Bachmann when Maya had stormed in after the blow-off on the set. A couple minutes after Maya went into the private office a woman whom she recognized as Mrs. Bachmann came in and sat down and talked about the weather with the secretary. And Maya was shouting her head off inside—they could hear practically every word she said.

By the time the angel had reached that point in her story I was standing on the brakes for the stop-light at Melrose. I leaned back and listened with both ears.

She was pretty excited. She said: "Finally Miss Sarin screamed: 'You straighten this thing out and see that I get a square deal around this dump or I'll tell that high and mighty wife of yours some things that'll make her hair curl!' Mrs. Bachmann got as white as a sheet and marched out of the office."

I said: "Is it possible that anybody in the western hemisphere doesn't know that Bachmann and Maya Sarin used to be—well—friendly?"

The stop-light snapped green; I shifted and let the clutch in and glanced swiftly at the angel. She was smiling a little. "Probably not anybody," she said—"except Mrs. Bachmann." She hesitated a moment, went on: "In a few minutes Miss Sarin came out and you came in. The secretary wanted to tell Bachmann about his wife being there but he was too excited to listen. I got up and looked out the window and saw Miss Sarin go across the lawn to the dressing-rooms and after a minute Mrs. Bachmann followed her."

"To the dressing-rooms! I saw Sarin, too, but I left the window as soon as she disappeared."

She nodded. "Then, after you and Mister Dreier left, the secretary went in and Bachmann came rushing out and apologized and said he'd be back in a few minutes. He looked terribly worried. I watched from the window and he went over to the dressing-rooms, too. I waited about a quarter of an hour and he didn't come back. The secretary went home and I thought maybe Bachmann had forgotten about me and wouldn't come back to the office so I went to Miss Sarin's room to ask her what I'd better do. I was curious about what'd happened, too. I knew where her room was from the time I'd worked there. She didn't answer when I knocked and I opened the door and she was lying on the floor, dead."

"What time was it?"

"It must have been about five minutes after six." The angel was almost whispering. "I didn't know what to do. I didn't have any business there, or at least it would take a lot of explaining and there didn't seem to be anyone around. Then I remembered that Miss Sarin had told me about you and that you were the only person on the lot she thought she could trust. I hurried back to Bachmann's office. He hadn't come back. I called the agency and told them what had happened and asked the boy at the information-desk where you lived and took a cab and came to your hotel. . . ."

I said: "What's your name?"

"Laird—Dolores Laird."

I thought it was a nice name.



THE rest of the night was an odds-on favorite nightmare that began with reporters ganging us when we got out of the car.

We finally made the Sarin dressing-room and it was so jammed with assorted Law that the

walls were bulging. Everyone had a different theory.

Nick Galbraith, the angel's boss, said it was a cinch for Sarin's maid. Sarin had sent her off the lot to get something—probably a bottle—as soon as she'd returned to the dressing-room and according to Galbraith the maid had sneaked back and beamed her with the "blunt instrument"; that was the only thing they all agreed on.

The blunt instrument was an over-size vibrator that was still lying on the floor near the chalked-off space where the body had been found.

A detective-lieutenant named Lawson insisted that Creighton was the murderer. Creighton's dressing-room was across the hall and when the maid had come back from her errand and found Dreier bending over the body she'd screamed and Creighton had dashed in and he and the maid had pointed the finger at Dreier. Dreier, it seemed, wouldn't talk and most of the coppers favored one or another variation of the Dreier theory. He was being held at the Hollywood Station.

Bachmann sat and groaned.

Then a radish-nosed captain from L. A. got a brilliant idea and asked Galbraith how come he knew about Sarin's chill so soon. Galbraith had to tell 'em about Miss Laird and they started working her over. Why hadn't she called for help?—why hadn't she called the police?—how long had she been in the dressing-room?—what was the reason for "personal enmity" towards Maya Sarin?

I said I'd vouch for Miss Laird and they all looked at me as if I was one of those arrangements with electric teeth that deep-sea nets bring up. Who was I? Where was I at the time of the crime?

I had a swell answer for that. I said: "What *was* the time of the crime?"

They all scratched their heads and asked a lot more questions and finally decided that the murder had occurred between five-thirty-five and five minutes

after six—if Miss Laird was telling the truth.

I called the projection-room and found out that Dreier hadn't left there till almost ten after. That gave Lawson a fresh start on his Creighton angle and they all started poking questions at Creighton who was sitting in a corner looking scared.

I winked one of my most reassuring winks at Miss Laird and jockeyed Bachmann out into the hall; we walked down to the far end. I told him in a few one and two syllable words that I knew about him and Mrs. Bachmann both going to the Dressing-room Building—and why.

He looked at me with his eyes hanging out on his cheeks and said: "Pat! I swear to you that neither of us had anything to do with it!"

"Nobody says you did. But if Miss Laird saw both of you go into the building it's probable that someone else saw you, too. I just want to be sure you're in the clear."

He put his hand against the wall to steady himself, whispered: "Mrs. Bachmann talked to Maya and Maya got mad and put her out of the room. She was coming down the hall from the room, crying, when I got here. I took her out to her car—it was parked in the alleyway out there—and we sat and talked for a long while and then we heard Maya's maid scream. . . . Carl was going into the projection-room when we came out of the building and he saw us—he saw that Ruth was crying. I guess when he found Maya dead he thought we had something to do with it and that's the reason he won't say anything."

I patted Bachmann's arm and steered him back towards the dressing-room and told him I had an idea I wanted to work out in detail, that I was going to run along and would call him later. As a matter of fact the only idea I had at that point was to talk to Mrs. Bachmann.

They were still working on Creighton.

Radish-nose was yelping about putting the pinch on everybody and a little guy from the D. A.'s office was running him a close second for noise by pointing out, with gestures, that there were four entrances to the Dressing-room Building and that anybody on the lot between five-thirty and six-fifteen was technically under suspicion.

They'd forgotten about Miss Laird for the moment; I officed her and we edged out.

Lieutenant Lawson was coming out of the phone-booth in the hallway downstairs. He said: "I just talked to the Doc. He says her nibs was killed sometime in the half-hour before he got to her—that'd make it sometime after ten minutes to six. An' he says she was loaded with heroin. . . . He says all the lick was for was to hold the H down an' keep her from blowin' her noodle entirely."

I said: "If she was that high maybe she sapped *herself* with the vibrator."

He looked at me as if he thought I was on the level about it and galloped back upstairs.

We ducked out the private entrance through the purchasing department to keep from being swamped by reporters and walked around the block to the car.

Dreier was out, as far as I was concerned. So was Creighton and the maid. That left Bachmann, who I was sure had told me the truth or what he believed to be the truth, and Mrs. Bachmann. I didn't know her very well; I was trying to think of five or six good reasons why she shouldn't have got mad, too, while they were going round and round, and picked up the vibrator and let Maya have it.

I didn't have to wait long for all six reasons. It was pretty dark by that time. We got into the car and somebody walked over from a car that was parked across the street and said: "Mister Nolan—you've got to do something!" It was Ruth Bachmann.

I said: "Sure—I'll do anything I can. Where do I begin?"

She glanced at Miss Laird, went on: "I think Mister Dreier is needlessly sacrificing himself because he saw Jack and me come out of the dressing-rooms—and I was crying. Miss Sarin put me out of her room"—her voice broke a little—"and I think I should tell the police I was there and what happened and then Mister Dreier will feel free to clear himself."

Something in the way she said it gave me all my reasons at once; either she was telling the truth or I was a Tasmanian watchmaker—which I wasn't.

I said: "You sit tight and let things go the way they are for a little while and everything'll be all right. I've got an idea."

She agreed after a minute and went back across the street; I started the car and swung into Melrose and wished I had an idea.

Back at the hotel I asked the clerk who the guy who lived across the court from me was.

He said: "Hotaling—Francis J. Hotaling." He'd lived there five days.

The name was familiar as hell. We went up to the room and fixed a drink and I beat my head against the wall a little bit trying to remember, and one of them worked. Hotaling was a fella who had been pointed out to me by some of the boys around the *Brown Derby* as a "Connection." That meant if you wanted anything on the mossy side of the Law—anything from square-cut emeralds to marihuana—he was the guy to see. He had a pan that looked like it had been through a wringer and worked in gangster pictures occasionally but his main racket was getting things for people who wanted them very badly—people who could pay—and he majored in dope.

So Mister Hotaling was pegged—and that wasn't all. I called up Jacobsen, the assistant director. Hotaling had worked the last three days on "Death Song." I told Jacobsen to meet me at the studio in an hour, hung up and said: "Dolores—you are about to see Pat

Nolan, the great detective, at work. Fix us a drink."

I jumped out to the elevator and sat on the button and had a long heart to heart talk with the elevator boy. He checked. When I went back to the room the phone was ringing. It was the Nick Galbraith Detective Agency. He wanted to know where he could find Miss Laird. I told him I'd just put her on a train for Kansas, and clicked the receiver and told Deep South to send up a waiter. The waiter showed up in a couple minutes and we ordered dinner.

Have you ever seen an angel eat oysters? It's marvelous.



ACHMANN said: "We can't do it—it's bad taste, with this terrible thing happening to Maya and all..."

He and Jacobsen and Dolores and I were sitting in his office.

I did a fair imitation of staring at him as if he'd lost his mind. "Bad taste! Is it bad taste to nail her murderer? Is it bad taste to—"

Jacobsen interrupted: "I think it's a swell idea."

I took a bow.

"Why not give this information to the police—let them handle it?" Bachmann was gazing vacantly out the window.

"Because they'll ruin it! Because our only hope is to force a quick confession before they know what's hit 'em." I stood up. "For God's sake, Jack.—where's your showmanship?"

He swung around wearily, said: "All right—go ahead. But I think—"

I'd grabbed Dolores' hand and we were on our way; we didn't hear what Bachmann thought. Jacobsen pattered along behind us, ducked into his office and grabbed the phone.

By a quarter of twelve we had a complete night-crew on Stage Six. I'd told the chief-carpenter what I wanted and prop-boys, grips, juicers, and what have

you were scampering around like ants at a picnic.

We worked all night. I talked Dolores into taking a nap, which she probably faked; by daylight we had the whole layout working like a piece of well-oiled machinery. Jacobsen had called Mary Fallon, Sarin's double and stand-in, and my other principals for six-thirty and when they got there we cleared the set and rehearsed for a couple hours and then knocked off for breakfast.

The general call was for nine-thirty. The idea that we circulated around was that we were going to start "Death Song" over as if nothing had happened, because we had to meet the release-date—the old "The show must go on" gag.

I was taking over as director until Dreier came back and we were starting with a corner of one of the big sets with about thirty extras and four-bit players. We were, according to the dope that I had everyone on the lot broadcasting, going to clean up all the big stuff first while we were trying to find a girl for the Sarin part.

AT a little before nine-thirty I left the restaurant and dashed over to Stage Six. Everything was ready; Jacobsen had draped a collection of the toughest mugs in Hollywood along a wall that was supposed to be one end of a prison-yard. They wore San Quentin rompers and they included Hammer and Francis J. Hotaling. Jacobsen had called both of them for bits, at seventy-five slugs a day.

I chinned with the cameraman a minute and sat down under the camera, nodded at Jacobsen; he and his kickers yelled: "Quiet—everybody!"

Bachmann was standing a little way back of me with a couple of other B. L. D. executives; Dolores was sitting on the arm of my chair with her elbow on my shoulder, which was exactly where her elbow should be.

I snapped into the loud-speaker: "Gen-

tlemen, as Mister Jacobsen has informed you, this is the scene where you look up and see the airplane that is signaling to someone in the prison. At first you are talking to each other, moving about, smoking. The sound of the airplane is your cue. When you hear it, look up—not all at once but a few at a time. Shall we rehearse it or do you all understand?"

They bobbed their heads in concert.

I put the loud-speaker down and said: "Turn 'em over."

The sound-man called the number and the assistant cameraman clicked his sticks, scuttled out of the scene. I lifted my right hand and the whole stage was plunged into pitch darkness.

It was entirely silent, entirely black; I felt Dolores' hand tighten on my shoulder.

There was thin slithering sound and, suddenly, a little light. The wall had split, slid back, and we were all looking into an exact replica of Maya Sarin's dressing-room. The light grew in it as it grows when an electric-dimmer is reversed, on a small stage. Everything else was in darkness.

Maya was sitting at her dressing-table staring drunkenly into the mirror. It was Mary Fallon, of course, but in those circumstances she looked more like Maya than Maya ever thought of. She was wearing the double of the costume Maya had been murdered in.

I expected a big triple-action gasp but I guess everyone who wasn't in on it was too surprised to gasp, or didn't have the wind for it. You could have heard a pin-feather fall.

There was a knock at the dressing-room door and Maya—I mean Mary—called "Come in," huskily—with Maya's voice. Hammer and Francis J. Hotaling came in. The make-up man had accomplished a miracle with those two; they were a couple old-timers that came nearer doubling Hammer and Hotaling than anyone else I could find in the files and they were dressed exactly as Hammer had been dressed when he and Cir-

etti crashed in on me, and as Hotaling had been dressed when he reached the studio.

Maya swung around and said: "Wha' d' yuh want?" and Hotaling put his hand in his pocket and answered: "We got that stuff for you." Maya stood up and Hammer edged around behind her and picked up the vibrator and slammed her over the head. Then they both scurried out of the room and the lights dimmed and it was pitch dark again. And still—so still I could hear Dolores' heart pounding beside me.

That went on for about a minute and then Hammer—the real Hammer—screamed. The lights came on and there was a lot of Law milling around and Hammer was still screaming.

WE all sat in Bachmann's office; Bachmann and Jacobsen and Dreier, who had been released, and the angel and I.

There was a knock at the door and Bachmann said: "Yes." The secretary opened the door and Lawson, the dick from the Hollywood Station, waltzed in.

He said: "Everything's under control. Hammer thought we were going to hang the rap on him and squealed. We caught Ciretti in the bathtub. He's been crazy mad at Maya four or five days—ever since he caught her playing post office with his chauffeur—and getting crazier all the time. And he's been scared, too. She's been so high with alky and heroin and what-not she's been shooting off her mouth about where she got it. . . ."

"Which was from Hotaling, huh?—and Hotaling was Ciretti's man?" I wanted to be sure about that.

Lawson nodded. "Uh-huh. Both of them, with Hammer, had decided what to do about it. Ciretti had Hotaling move

into the room across from yours because he figured he could jockey Maya into going to your room and bump her off there and make it look like you did it. But Maya was sore at you and wouldn't go for it."

I said: "Isn't that dandy."

Lawson went on: "Ciretti and Hammer were there last night when Hotaling came in from the studio and said Maya and Dreier had had a battle on the set. That looked like gravy to Ciretti—he hurried over to the studio and went in the extra gate with Hotaling's pass—they look a lot alike, anyway. He wanted to put the chill on her himself on account of the jealous angle. He smacked her down and then rushed back to the hotel. He could see you were in your room—across the court—and he suddenly had the bright idea of putting on that act for you—figuring it would double as an alibi and make it look like he was broken-hearted over her death."

And that was, in a manner of speaking, that.

Dreier and Dolores and I walked out towards the set together. Dreier kept looking at her in a very quaint way and finally he asked: "Have you ever worked in pictures, Miss Laird?"

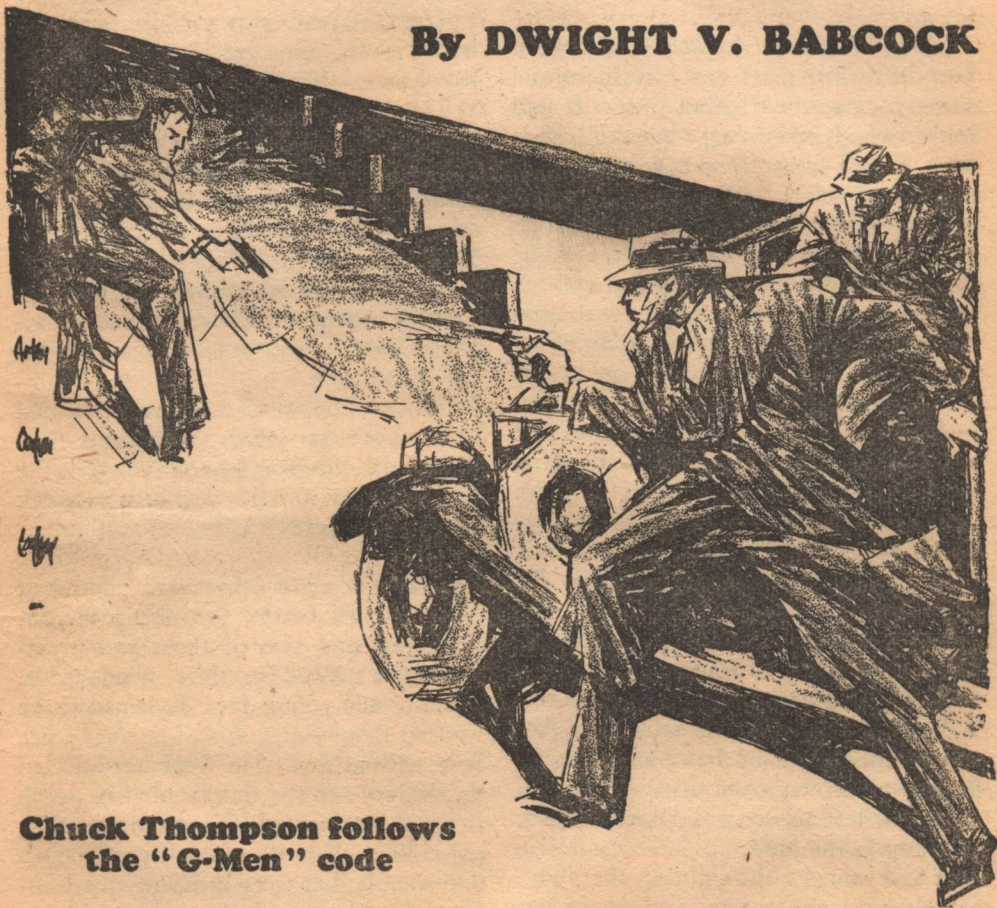
She smiled sidewise at me, said: "Yes—a little."

We all stopped and Dreier turned to me. "You know," he you-knowed in a far-away voice—"We've got to replace Maya very quickly. What do you think of Miss Laird for the part?"

I said I thought she'd be swell, but I knew a better part that she'd fit even more perfectly. She and I grinned at each other like a couple of kids and Dreier looked at us wide-eyed for a minute and then turned quietly and walked away.

"G-Man" Chuck Thompson

By DWIGHT V. BABCOCK



**Chuck Thompson follows
the "G-Men" code**



HEY found young Jerry Mulholland in a ditch with his face buried in the mud. He'd been dead for hours, but he'd been a long time dying. It takes a

long time when your guts are shot full of holes the way his were. And, while you slowly bleed to death, every second of remaining life is an agony of ex-

cruciating torment—pain clawing and ripping and burning inside of you.

They found him shortly after daylight, members of the county radio patrol did, alongside a lonely dirt road that rambled across the top of low hills. After a while, the divisional field office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation was notified—for young Jerry Mulholland had been a Department of Justice operative, working out of that office.

The news was a bitter blow to every man who happened to be at the office when it came in. Jerry Mulholland had been their friend and their brother agent. He had been young and enthusiastic and eager to learn. He had been a clear-eyed, intelligent, likable kid, irresistibly winning his way into their hearts.

They went to work swiftly, with grim purpose, while grief and bitterness and silent fury seethed within them. It was mid-morning when they started. In less than a half-hour they had established these facts—and these only:

Jerry Mulholland had not been on an assignment when he met his death. The day before, he had been doing routine work—checking used car lots with special agent Chuck Thompson in an effort to get on the track of a hot car syndicate that was rumored to be operating in the East, altering the appearance and numbers of stolen cars and shipping them to the Pacific Coast to be sold. Their work had met with no success that day and Mulholland had left Thompson at five-thirty, bound for home.

He had been shot elsewhere than the ditch where he was found, for the bullets had gone all the way through and none were in the earth around or beneath him. Trussed hand and foot he had been thrown from a car while still alive and left to die a thousand deaths, writhing in the mud.

It had rained a little during the night, before that had happened and there were tire tracks of a heavy car in the clay-like consistency of the road-bed along there—tire tracks that showed new Goodyears on all wheels except the right rear, that one leaving the tread of a worn General.

And Jerry Mulholland had tried to give them a lead. They'd found a filth-encrusted handkerchief wadded up in one of his hands. He had known what was coming, and somehow he'd been able to get that off his killer and hang on to it.

That was all. Not much to go on. No apparent motive for murder. But Jerry Mulholland's death could not go unattended. For, along with personal desires for vengeance, there was the tradition already established that no one could kill an F.B.I. man and get away with it.

The "G-Heat" was smoldering, ready to flare—the moment the killer's identity was established.

The handkerchief was sent to the police laboratory for a quick preliminary micro-analysis and report before being air-mailed East to the Department of Justice's own crime laboratory, the most complete in the world.

Michael—"Iron Mike"—Dougherty, Special Agent in Charge of the divisional field office, got Washington on the direct wire.

Chuck Thompson, because he had been closer to Jerry Mulholland than any of the others and because he felt the responsibility was his, was sent to break the news to Jerry's widowed mother.

THERE were other cars parked at the curb before the neatly modest bungalow and two of them had press-car signs pasted in their windshields. Thompson's young face darkened as he noticed these signs, and slow angry fire rose within him. He went hard-heeled up the walk to the tiny, roofed-in porch—a tall, hard-muscled figure in neat dark gabardine. The door stood partly open and sounds that were insistent, questioning voices drummed out to meet him.

He pushed inside without knocking and was in a small white and blue living-room. Two reporters had Mrs. Mulholland backed into a corner of the divan, taking turns asking her questions which she answered in a dazed mumble.

Thompson rapped, "Shut up!" as he crossed the room. He grabbed each one by a shoulder, jerked them up and around. "And get out!"

Two startled white faces gaped up at him. One hardened immediately to a

wise-eyed glare. The voice that went with it started to bluster. "Yeah? And who—"

The words died—killed by the deadly dancing glitter in this young giant's eyes. The other reporter was already edging meekly for the door. The blusterer swallowed, licked his lips, picked up his hat and followed swiftly. Thompson went to the door and closed it soundlessly behind them.

He drew a deep breath then removed his hat and swung around. He looked very young and ashamed, standing there like that with his head bent—like a small boy whose mother has caught him fighting. He said, with quiet sincerity: "I'm sorry, Mrs. Mulholland."

"It's all right, Chuck. Thanks for getting rid of them."

He lifted his head and his eyes were somberly troubled. His gaze found and clung to hers. "You know about—Jerry."

It was more a statement than a question.

"I know."

She was surprisingly young and daintily small, Mrs. Mulholland. Soft black hair framed patrician features that were as regular and clearly etched as a cameo. She sat on the divan, eyes misted, but with her head held high. Her lips quivered when she spoke, but she kept her voice level.

"My boy—he went like a man. He died for a great cause—for his country."

Hers was a proud sorrow.

"Yes," Thompson said. He moved impulsively forward a step, stopped, bit his lip. "I'd give anything if it could have been I instead of him, Mrs. Mulholland."

"You don't have to tell me, Chuck. I know." Her breath caught on a quick dry sob and she pressed one hand against her mouth, then quickly looked away.

Thompson felt big and awkward and angry at himself, at the world. His eyes were humid and breath flared his nos-

trils. He could not think of anything to say.

A moment and her chin lifted again, a proud light shining through the sheen of tears that filmed her eyes. "Jerry would want me to be brave. I—I can't believe it's happened—that he's gone. I won't be bitter about it. But he must not have died in vain."

"He won't have," Thompson's hands were clenched fists, crumpling his hat. "We'll get the one responsible for Jerry's death—I'll do it if it takes me the rest of my life."

She looked up, leaning suddenly forward, and her face was grimly eager, her voice strong with a new vibrancy. "I want to help, Chuck. I want to help find my boy's murderer. What can I do? There must be something."

Thompson crossed to the divan, seated himself beside her, this mother of one who had been his friend. "You can answer a question or two, if you feel up to it," he said gently. "But you must leave the active work to those in the division assigned to the case. They won't rest till the killer is brought to justice."

"I suppose you're right." She was leaning back in the divan now, staring out the window across the room, her voice tired, disappointed. "Only it will be hard—sitting at home, knowing Jerry's killer is out there somewhere. Free—and alive. If I were only a man!"

She breathed deeply and after a little while her eyes came away from the window, met his squarely. "What was it you wished to ask me?"

"Jerry—did he come home at all last night?"

"No. I thought maybe an emergency had arisen. That he had been sent out on a case. I didn't worry very much. He had told me that might happen any time."

"He didn't phone?"

"No."

Thompson lowered his eyes. "I guess—there's nothing else, right now. You know how I feel about—"

"I know." One small warm hand pressed with quick firmness over his big one. His glance was drawn up to hers and she looked deep into his eyes. "You're a fine boy, Chuck. Jerry loved you. I hope you will come to see me sometimes."

"I will—you know I will." He stood suddenly, abashed. "I have to go now, Mrs. Mulholland. Isn't there someone—a friend—I can call to come and stay with you?"

She shook her head quietly, hands folded in her lap. "No. There are neighbors if I want them. But I'd rather just be alone for a while now."

The anguish, the wordless suffering in her eyes bit deep into Thompson's soul, scarring it a little. He could sense the loss she had steeled herself to sustain, the great loneliness that was now hers. Yet she held her head up bravely, and he knew she would keep it that way despite the bitter sorrow in her heart.

He turned and went softly to the door, out on to the porch. With the door closed behind him, he took his time getting his hat on while he stared at nothing. Then he went slowly down the walk and got into the sedan he was driving.

"Hello."

The voice was friendly yet doubtfully timorous. It belonged to the meeker of the two reporters Thompson had ordered from the Mulholland cottage. He stood in the street at Thompson's left elbow now, appearing from nowhere, a nondescript gangling figure wearing owlsh Harold Lloyd glasses. He was using a hopeful, ingratiating smile.

Thompson was lighting a cigarette. He eyed the newshound quizzically, said, "Hello," without warmth, exhaling smoke with the word. He flicked away the match, started the motor.

"Wait a minute!" the reporter begged anxiously. Thompson waited and the gangling one's smile got sheepish. "I don't know for sure, o' course, but I got a hunch you're one of these G-men—like Jerry Mulholland was. Did you

know Mulholland was here, in town, last night?"

Quick glitter shot into Thompson's gray eyes and they tightened at the corners. His voice had an eager ring. "Where?"

"At—at McCulloch's Drug Store down on the Boulevard. He come in there about six o'clock for some cigarettes. They know him there."

"That's only four blocks from here," Thompson muttered thoughtfully. "And he never reached home." He shifted from neutral to low gear, looked up suddenly, jaw set. "Thanks—but if you know what's good for you, you won't bother Mrs. Mulholland any more."

The car started to move as he let the clutch in. Keeping pace with it, the newshound shook his head in a violent protestation of innocence, almost dislodging his glasses.

"Not me! I wouldn't do that. It wasn't my idea anyhow. That smart guy from —"

"Okey." Thompson flashed a brief, hard grin, gunned the motor.

The car jerked away from the curb, leaving the reporter behind. It was doing forty at the first cross street, the hood pointed for the boulevard.



FIFTEEN minutes later he had himself closeted in a phone booth in McCulloch's Drug Store. He'd called the office and caught Michael Dougherty in the office. He was speaking swiftly now, tersely, in a clipped emotionless tone.

"He was in here last night about six for some cigarettes. That was half an hour after he left me downtown. He must have been on his way home, but he didn't get there. No one recalls seeing him after he left here. I think Jerry saw something that aroused his suspicions between here and his home, or spotted someone on the fugitive list.

He tried a tail without getting a chance to phone, was suspected and trapped."

"Check," Dougherty agreed. "That's the theory we'll go on for the present at least. We've had the word out on the kid's car and I've just got a report that it's been found empty parked on a side street. Nothing suspicious about it—no blood stains—but Collins and Blake are on their way over to check up on fingerprints."

Thompson's face got thoughtful, but he didn't interrupt the flow of words coming from the receiver. Dougherty's voice clicked on crisply.

"Now, get this, lad. A report on the handkerchief has come in from the police lab. It shows the presence of grease and lubricating oil stains, gray automobile lacquer, and traces of heroin in the dried mucus. What do you make of that?"

Thompson's answer leaped into the phone. "It means our killer is a sniffer—on the junk. And he's been working or hiding out in a garage. The automobile lacquer points to a garage with a paint shop, and that seems to hook in with the hot car syndicate whose existence Jerry and I were checking on."

"Maybe. And I'd say look for a car with a new battle-ship gray paint job, with a worn General on the right rear wheel and new Goodyears on the others. The word's been flashed over the state teletype and to all field offices. We're going to start checking garages."

"Yes, sir," Thompson put in quickly. "And as long as I'm here, I'd like to work this area. I believe that Jerry was taken so far from here—southwest of the city—and his car in the other direction—in an effort to focus attention away from here. I've got a hunch the whole business centers here."

"All right, lad. But we've got to check on every other possible angle. I'm sending Enright and Smith over to work with you. They'll meet you in the lobby of the *Continental Hotel* inside half an hour. You know how to pro-

ceed. Check all garages, body works and large service stations in your area. Look for the car. When you spot it or a ringer, or find a plant that looks suspicious, report to me. We want plenty of man-power in on the final show-down."

Iron Mike Dougherty's voice took on an edge of steel. "We're going to get Jerry Mulholland's killer, and we're taking no chances of a slip-up. Be careful. This rat uses heroin and heroin's dynamite. He's bad. I've talked to the chief in Washington. He says: 'Get him alive if possible—but *get him!*'"

"We'll get him," Thompson gritted softly as Dougherty broke the connection.

He slid the receiver back on the prongs, stood for a moment staring with hard unseeing eyes at the mouthpiece. Then his lips tightened; he pulled the brim of his hat down over his left eye, went out of the booth. He strode long-legged across the store to the door, heels clicking sharply on the tile floor.

He went out into the noon-day sunshine of Glendale's main business artery—tall, broad-shouldered, trim-hipped—a young athlete in a hurry. He looked clean and hard and masculine, moving along like that, with purpose in his stride and serious purpose in eyes that usually sparkled with good-natured laughter—with a grim-set mouth that *could* wear a flashing spontaneous smile.



HE sign read:
AUTOMOBILE
Repairing—Painting
—Welding

It was faded, this sign, paint rotted and peeling. The once black letters, three feet high, were bannered across the top front of the building against a dirty brown background—barely discernible in the dusk.

The building was a single-storied square front that sagged with age. Rusted skeletons of cars cluttered a

weed-choked lot next to it. The wide double doors were closed. There was a window in the front—a big window made up of many small panes. And each pane was black with encrusted grime. The place seemed desolate, deserted, but a light burned inside somewhere, its rays feebly penetrating the grime-filmed window glass.

The new black sedan drifted slowly past, veered in to the curb as it slowed, came to a gentle stop near the corner half a block away. This was a dark side-street, a Mexican section, just north of the boulevard. No other cars were in sight.

Within the new black sedan, Thompson said: "It's getting dark. We'd better grab a bite to eat and phone in and report after this one."

McKenzie Smith drawled lazily: "Let's eat first; I'm too weak to move. This one'll just be another dud anyway."

He sat beside Thompson, slouched behind the wheel, hat on the back of his head. He was sandy-haired and lanky, McKenzie Smith, with freckled, pleasantly homely features. An ex-newspaperman, he affected a bored languor but was a whiz in any kind of action.

"You and your perpetual hunger!" Thompson rapped without rancor. He got the door open at his side, looked back at Bill Enright. "Okey, Mac. You be the one to stay with the car this time. This joint may be another dud, but there's a light inside. And you never can tell."

Smith closed his eyes, yawned. "That suits me. Just let me know when the shooting starts."

Thompson and Enright got out, walked back through the deepening dusk towards the ancient building with its grime-encrusted window. The older man did not speak. He had not spoken much all afternoon. He was a raw-boned grizzled man with iron in his spine. Lean and straight as a poker, he walked with his shoulders back, a sort of silent grimness about him. A vet-

eran man-hunter on the trail of implacable justice.

They came to the closed double-doors and found a smaller door piercing one of them. There was no outer knob or handle. Thompson leaned against this smaller door; it opened and they went inside.

Near the rear and hanging low over the dismantled motor of an old Ford, one light globe burned within that big ramshackle garage. It cast eerie shadows about the cluttered expanse of the interior. Black, grease-soaked filth was everywhere.

Two men stood not far from the light. Both had swung to face the door as it opened. Now one came forward hurriedly and the other turned and walked away. The one that came forward was a small man in a grease-stained mechanics' jumper, a greasy rag in his hands. He had grease on his narrow face and in his stringy hair. He headed off Thompson and Enright near the door, demanded surlily:

"Yeah? Whatcha want?"

"We stopped," Enright explained civilly, "because we saw the light. You paint cars here, don't you?"

Light glow reached his face and it was no longer hard and grim. It was relaxed in a pleasant, disarming smile that matched the easy tone of his voice.

Thompson managed to look bored, letting his eyes rove beneath sleepy lids. The left rear corner of the interior was walled off in the shape of a square, the size of a small room. But in the right rear corner a car stood, almost obscured in deep shadow. It was a heavy sedan, its hood pointed the other way. Gleaming highlights showed on the smooth dark green surface of a fresh paint job.

The other man had disappeared in the deep shadow alongside this car.

"Yeah—sure," the garage-man had said in answer to Enright's question. "You seen the sign, didn't you?" His voice was truculent, and his feet were

planted firmly. But his eyes held a darting, uneasy gleam.

Enright nodded. "That's why we stopped. Briefly, here's what we want. We represent the Crestview Mortuary. We have three hearses and two sedans to be refinished. We're getting estimates on the job. Would you like to bid on it?"

The garage-man tongued his lips uncertainly, but got more cordial. "Say, lissen—I can give you the best paint job in this part of the country. I know it's best because I do the work personal, see. And everything's guaranteed—ev—"

"Is that," Thompson interrupted, "a sample of your work?" He lifted his chin towards the sedan in the distant shadows. "I'd like to look it over."

He stepped forward as he said this, around the grease-stained one. But a hand jerked suddenly at his arm and a voice exploded in his ear. "No!"

One word. Sharply, and shrill with sudden panic. Thompson turned and looked down into eyes that were sick with fearful concern. And within him, Thompson's blood tingled crazily, but his voice stayed calm, slightly puzzled.

"Why? What's the matter?"

"Nothing." The garage-man swung around and took up a dogged stance between Thompson and the rear of the building. Between streaks of dark grease his face glistened whitely, damp with sweat. Desperate lights moved in his eyes, but his thin jaw was clamped stubbornly and his words were a surly snarl: "Nothing, see!"

Enright's mouth had tightened down to a thin line below the clipped edge of his mustache. He said, with haughty condescension: "I'm going to insist on having a look at that car. If it's a sample of your work, it seems only right that we should examine it as long as we're giving you a chance to bid on a big job."

He moved forward purposefully.

Beneath a cheerfully listless exterior,

Thompson was mentally on the alert. But he wasn't entirely prepared for what happened then.

A sudden sawing grind—an automobile starter—blasted into throbbing rhythm as a motor caught, roared. The green sedan!

The one in the greasy jumper jerked about as though yanked on a string. Thompson's knees bent a little and his hand streaked up and under his coat.

Motor noise filled the building in that moment, beat against the walls. Orange flame spurted in deep shadow where the car stood and the blasting report of a single shot echoed above all other sound.

Thompson had his gun out the same instant, fired, as a sledge-hammer seemed suddenly to smash into the garage-man, knocking him backwards to the floor, face twisted in agony.

The car had pitched forward, motor thundering, rubber screaming. It back-fired, lurched ahead. There was a splintering sound of impact; wood ripped and crackled as the sedan tore through closed double-doors, out into an alley.

Thompson squeezed the trigger twice more, felt recoil kick his palm as the Colt yammered. Enright was firing, too. But the sedan rocked around unaffected, sluing sidewise into the alley, out of sight, roaring away.

Enright shot one look down at the stricken one on the floor, sprinted towards the rear of the building, after the car. But Thompson spun, slammed to the front door, yanked it open, dived out to the street.

McKenzie Smith was coming on the run from the parked government car, gun steel glinting in his hand. Pounding to meet him, Thompson yelled: "Get back! The car—start it."

Shots rang sharply from the alley—Enright firing at the car which from here was only a diminishing roar in the night. Smith checked his long-legged lope, skidded as he snapped about, was sprinting back towards the corner.



HE reached the black sedan with Thompson fifty feet behind, threw himself behind the wheel, had the car driving into motion as Thompson jumped for the running-board.

"Which way?"

"Right," Thompson clipped. "Around the corner. A green sedan—it headed this way up the alley."

Smith cut the wheel hard over; the car slid into the turn, swooping forward in second, accelerating swiftly. Thompson got the right front door open far enough to squeeze inside. Up ahead two short blocks a dark sedan flashed through corner street light radiance. It had headlights but no tail-light; it was going away fast.

"That's it," Thompson rapped tersely, eyes glued on the windshield.

The speedometer needle was at forty-five; Smith shifted to high, gunned the throttle. They surged into hurtling speed. "Who is it?"

"I don't know. But it's the car we want, I think. It's got a new paint job—green instead of gray. They weren't taking any chances—had it done over in a hurry."

Smith's eyes never left the road. He was strained forward over the wheel, his homely freckled features tight and glowing with a sort of unholy joy. "How many of 'em are there?"

"One, that I know of."

They jolted over ruts and bumps, swerving crazily, plunging forward, but Smith held the car to the road, kept the accelerator against the floor-boards. The streets along here were dark, empty, but arc lamps shed pools of yellow glow at intersections. The sedan ahead shot through one of these lighted areas, whipped left, disappeared.

"Left," Thompson said. "The corner after this. They're heading for the boulevard."

Smith nodded. "Yeah. What happened to Bill?"

"He's all right."

They took the corner on two wheels, tires squalling, rear end rocking dangerously. Smith tramped on the throttle; the car leaped into new speed. Blocks ahead the street ended in white brightness—the moving lights of traffic on the boulevard. And between them and the brightness was the racing green sedan. They had gained a little on it.

Thompson's face was a taut, hard-set mask. "This is going to be fun," he breathed. "In that traffic."

Then, above the power-drone of their motor, rose a low moan that crescendoed immediately to a piercing shriek. Traffic slowed to a standstill at the opening to the boulevard and the tail-lightless sedan swirled out into it, heading northwest.

"A siren!" Smith blurted. "They've got a siren!"

Thompson's eyes thinned down, glinting. "Yeah. But maybe that makes it better for us. It's going to take all traffic out of the way."

They made the corner before cars on the boulevard got on the move again, dry-skidded out onto the wide concrete face of the State Highway. This was the main artery for cars northbound from the city and vicinity. They settled, flying along in the wake of the sedan whose screaming siren cleared a wide, empty swath before it.

Thompson leaned over the back of the seat cushion. There was a click of released spring clips and he came up with a heavy automatic rifle. A Colt Monitor, it was—the most deadly and most accurate weapon of its type ever devised. Shooting steel-nosed .30 caliber bullets, pumping them as rapidly as a sub-machine gun and with a range of over three miles.

He set the butt on the floor between his feet and reached out one hand, turned a small crank above the dashboard. The windshield lifted, leaving a horizontal three-inch slit at its base through which wind rushed whistling.

The car ahead sirened its way along

the boulevard, rocketing into the heart of a sizable town. And the government car hurtled in its wake, the tail of a screaming comet. Thompson's eyes flicked to the dash; the speedometer hovered above eighty-five and the motor thrummed full throttle, but they were slowly dropping behind. Still he did not lift the rifle.

And neither special agent spoke now. Each knew his job and was intent on doing it.

The lights of the town were a long bright blur on either side as they rushed past. There were many people on the streets here, parked cars. Thompson waited.

Then the lights dropped behind and they were charging through open country. Only a few houses, odd buildings, clustered lights, occasionally dotted the sides of the highway. Traffic was suddenly negligible. Thompson lifted the rifle.

He said, "Get set," through closed teeth, poked the barrel through the opening at the bottom of the windshield.

He got the butt against his shoulder, clamped his jaws, found the car ahead with the lights. He aimed low, braced himself against recoil, pulled down the trigger.

Blue flame leaped, darting; four reports crackled out.

A quarter of a mile ahead the green sedan seemed to twitch, bouncing, faltering in its projectile-like progress—a dark wavering bulk behind bright headlights.

"Got a tire!" Thompson clipped tightly.

He watched, squinting, while McKenzie Smith kept the throttle wide open. The bouncing sedan checked speed, swerved suddenly, careening towards the right side of the highway. It leaped a low curb, went into a skid, whirling completely around in a thick cloud of dust. Siren sound was a mournful lessening wail.

"We got 'em!" Grim exultance sang in Smith's voice. "Hang on!"

He braked expertly, letting compression do most of the work, pointed for the curbing and the stalled green sedan. Thompson had the window at his right open, his automatic out and up. The rifle lay against the cushion at his left knee, abandoned for the moment at least. Their headlights flashed over the dust-screened, stalled sedan as their front tires hit the curb, bucked wildly.

A figure was running crouched over, away from the settling dust and towards a low railroad embankment that paralleled the highway. Thompson kicked open the door at his right, left the car as it slued sidewise, wheels locked, stopped. Headlight beams caught the man against the embankment—caught and pinned him there in pitiless brilliance.

Scrambling up the bank, he whirled, gun glitter flashing in his right hand. The jolt when Thompson hit the ground jarred every bone in his body. He tripped, almost fell, caught and braced himself. In the same motion his gun steadied.

The roar of three shots blended; Thompson felt a quick hot sting against his left side. The one on the embankment straightened up as though smacked by a mighty hand. He poised there for a moment, rigid, unmoving, clutching the smoking gun. Then he spilled backwards in a limp heap, rolled loosely down to level ground.

Smith swore ruefully as he leaped from the government car. "He's the only one! Hell—why didn't you save him for me?"

Thompson straightened slowly, a stiffness around his jaw, eyes staring bitterly. Without answering, he trudged wearily forward. Loping swiftly ahead, Smith reached the side of the fallen one first, kneeled, turned him over.

"You got him dead center," he said after a moment. "Some shooting!"

The dead man was short and plump. His dark suit was streaked with dirt and dust from the embankment; his face was smudged with it. His hat had come off, showing glossy black hair that glis-

tened in the headlight glare. It was the man Thompson had glimpsed in the garage. There was blood on his chest.

Sirens were screaming not far away, getting closer. Cars were stopping on the highway, brakes and tires wailing. Standing above McKenzie Smith and looking down, Thompson got the hot Colt back in its clip.

"I had to let him have it," he muttered. "He fired first."

"Sure he did." Smith glanced up. "What's the matter with you? Snap out of it! This is one of the rats that got Jerry."

He got out a handkerchief, began wiping dirt from the plump dead face. Thompson turned away, but Smith's voice followed him almost at once. It was vibrant with a new excitement.

"And that ain't all, brother! This is Fatso Legri or I'm a pickled herring!"

Thompson swiveled, headlight glow catching the hard eager glint that flashed in his eyes. Pete "Fatso" Legri was on the wanted list. A small-timer, but a fugitive. He had crossed state lines in stolen cars. He was wanted on half a dozen charges ranging from the possession and sale of narcotics to murder. He'd killed a cop in Kansas City less than a month ago.

Shrieking siren noise was earsplitting in its nearness. It cut out suddenly and there was dying motorcycle thunder, crowd hubbub behind Thompson. He paused to crack a brief grin at Smith who was rising, pivoted and went back toward the paving with fresh spring in his stride.

A couple of state motorcycle cops rammed through the gathering throng to meet him. Thompson let light show on a gold shield in his cupped palm, said so that it only reached their ears: "F.B.I.—Department of Justice. We've run down a killer. Keep this crowd back and get traffic moving again, will you?"

They said they would. They swung around and started to work.

Thompson went over to the govern-

ment car and switched off the headlights. He got out a handkerchief and placed it under his clothes against the shallow bleeding ridge across his ribs. The wound was minor; it did not hurt a lot. It wouldn't have hurt at all if it had been three inches more to the right.

Smith's voice called: "The tires check. Goodyears all around except for the rear right and that's a worn General."

Thompson moved around to where the lanky ex-newsman was playing flashlight luminance over the back of the green sedan. The light lingered on two bullet holes on a height with the concealed gas tank, moved to another low on the streamlined left wheel-guard. The tire under it was flat, half off the rim. There was the smell of gasoline.

"Uh-huh," Smith grunted. "Some shooting!"

They went around to the driver's side of the car. It was a Hudson. Dust motes danced in the headlight beams, but the twin tail-lights were dark. Smith put the flashlight inside the driver's compartment, worked an odd switch on the dashboard, looked out and to the rear. Ruby glow fell from the left tail-light; white light brought the license plate out of darkness.

"A fixed getaway car. The license can't be spotted at night with the tail-light out. And that looks like extra heavy sheet steel in the back where the bullets went through."

Thompson nodded. 'He took the flashlight from Smith and sent its rays probing into the tonneau. Seat and rear cushion were missing. The rest of the compartment was blackened, charred, minus all upholstery.

"Torched out," Thompson breathed harshly. In the reflected glow of the flash, his face had a look of granite hardness, and gleaming points of steel danced in his eyes. "To remove blood-stains. They hadn't got around to refinishing the inside yet. This is the car all right."

He shifted the flash to his left hand,

pulled his gun, stepped to the front fender and made a short deep scratch in the finish with the sight. With the flash close to it, the scratch showed a layer of gray beneath the dark green of the new lacquer.

"Yes," Thompson said softly. "This is the car."

He thumbed away the flash beam, stared out at the highway. Cars were slowly crawling away and the two cops were using a lot of hard language, keeping them moving, waving faltering traffic on past. Smith shifted his feet, ran his hand over his homely face, said: "Well——"

Thompson turned towards him, his voice clipped, decisive. "You take charge here, Mac. I'm going back to Enright. Fatso put a bullet in the garage-man before he lit out, but he may be able to talk.

"Get this car under cover. The new paint job probably covered up any prints, but don't let anyone else lay hands on it till we get a chance to examine it. You know what to do. I'll phone the morgue for you."

"Okey," Smith agreed. "I'll handle this end." He gripped Thompson's shoulder hard, shook it a little as the latter bent to slide under the wheel of the government car. "Cheer up, pal. Jerry'd say we weren't doing so bad."

"It's only the beginning. We're nosing into something big, or I can't read the signs right." Thompson's eyes were hard and far away. "And one lousy small-fry rat like Legri doesn't begin to pay for the man Jerry was."

He started the motor, meshed gears. He waited till he had the car backed out onto the highway before switching on the headlights.



ARM morning sunlight poured through a sixth-floor Federal Building window, fell in a yellow slab across a desk. Papers crackled in Michael Dougherty's strong right-hand

fingers, were dropped into the slab of sunlight. Three typed pages they were—a sworn statement, signed by Bert Lynch. Bert Lynch was the wounded garage-man.

Dougherty said: "Legri tried to fix it so Lynch couldn't talk, but he's going to pull through and I'm satisfied he's telling the truth—except when he claims ignorance of their identity. He'll be held for harboring."

He was called "Old Iron Mike," but he wasn't old, despite his unruly shock of pure white hair. He was aggressively, dynamically young. He had the jutting, bulldog jaw of a fighter and was short and stocky and hard as tempered steel.

With his body planted before the desk, he faced the others in that plainly furnished, paneled office—Thompson, Enright and Smith. These three stood before him, at ease, waiting. Thompson said with a dreamy hardness: "Then, Moran—"

"Yes. Ed Moran—'Soap' Moran." Iron Mike Dougherty jiggled a rogues' gallery photograph between thumb and forefinger. His eyes were like twin flecks of blue ice. His voice was clipped, crisply earnest.

"He's the one we want now. Lynch has positively identified him from pictures as Legri's companion and his fingerprint classification matches with those we found in that room they used at the garage. You know his record; he's a life-taker and he's the heroin user. Neither Legri nor Lynch was on the junk.

"The kid spotted those two—Moran and Legri—after he left the drug-store and recognized at least one of them. He must have followed, not having a chance to use a phone, got caught by them. They found out who he was from his identification card, and let him have it. I'd say Moran was the killer. He got Jerry. It's up to us to get him!"

Dougherty paused, flexed his lips. He dug fingers back through the white shock of his hair, eyed each one with his keen penetrating stare. "You know

what we have to go on. Moran and Legri showed at Lynch's garage a little over a month ago. They picked that spot because of its isolation and appearance. They needed work done on their car. It had been driven hard and long; they'd taken it on the run from the Middle West. Lynch did the work and asked no questions.

"They wanted a place to stay and propositioned him, offering him big money. Lynch was broke and in debt. Business was bad. He needed money. He claims he didn't know who they were, but admits he thought they were in hiding. He let them use the back room in the garage. They stayed two weeks, not going out in the daytime.

"Then they left, warning him to keep his mouth shut. A week ago they come back and had their car painted gray and helped with the job. Their former Utah license plates had been changed for local numbers—registered to a fictitious name and address. Lynch noticed the siren under the hood; it hadn't been there before. Yesterday morning they came back again, wanted him to do a rush job, refinishing the car in another color. The back compartment had already been torched out, according to Lynch's statement.

"Legri had called for the car when you reached Lynch's place last night. Legri was naturally nervous over the—business of the night before, probably fearing you were just what you were—other Federal men who had picked up his trail. When you talked about examining the car he got panicky, tried to silence Lynch and make a getaway, outrunning you on the highway.

"Our examination of the back room of the garage and the rest of the building—and the car, has got us nothing that means anything so far, except the siren. It's our only lead and I don't believe it amounts to much."

He paused again, but the others did not speak. They waited, attentively silent, knowing he had not finished. Main Street traffic sounds drifted up

faintly to that quiet sixth-floor room.

Dougherty rubbed a hand across his mouth and jaw. "The siren was made here by the Peerless Siren Manufacturing Company. The serial numbers on it had been filed off, but Conroy brought them out with acid. According to the Peerless Company's sales records, the siren was originally sold a year ago to the Peace Haven Sanitarium for use on one of their ambulances. The Peace Haven is in Fairfield off Admiral Road. As an institution it has an admirable record, handling many charity cases, and the owner has a fine personal record. So that lead doesn't look very promising."

"But," Dougherty said, continuing, "it must be followed up. Moran and Legri must have made connections in this vicinity before they left the hide-out in Lynch's garage. And I believe Moran is still here, in hiding somewhere in our district."

His hand knotted into a fist, pressed down hard against the desk. His aggressive jaw jutted. "We've got to find him! To avenge the kid as well as to put Moran where he'll do no more killing. No detail must be left unchecked. I've got others doing the routine work. You three will be in charge of the outside investigation. Enright, you supervise the continued examination of the garage. Go through everything with a fine-tooth comb."

"Yes, sir."

"Smith, you will work on the car. As far as you have been able to determine, it is not stolen. Trace its origin. Take it apart piece by piece, and examine each piece for prints. Both of you save dust samples for microscopic examination."

McKenzie Smith nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Thompson, trace that siren. Start at the sanitarium and trace it from there. Report to me as soon as any of you get any kind of results. That's all. Any questions?"

The heads of Enright and Smith moved in quick negation. "No."

Thompson hesitated, but shook his head as Dougherty's level blue glance sought him.

"Okey, then." His grin was hard and confident. "Shove off. And good luck to you. Get Moran. I know you can do it."

The three special agents relaxed, turned and went from the room in thoughtful silence.



PEACE HAVEN SANITARIUM was situated on a knoll well back from the road. A wide graveled drive wound up through an incongruous wilderness of tall palms and shorter willows that screened the building from the road. The building itself was low and rambling, of gray stucco and with a green tile roof. It had many windows. It stood behind a neat shrubbery dotted lawn in the cool shade of overgrown pepper trees.

No human being was in sight when Thompson parked his car at one edge of the drive, slid out from behind the wheel. He went towards the entrance, past a fountain and a pool which held water lilies. A section of graveled drive branched off from the main one, disappeared around one corner of the building. The world seemed very far away, shut out from this spot.

As he got close to the entrance, the wide glass-panel door was opened by a big, thick-shouldered negro in a white jacket. He stretched thick lips in a broad, welcoming grin, held the door wide, said: "Yes, sah! Come right in, sah!"

Something soft brushed Thompson's left shoulder and the side of his face as he moved inside. Large leaves, shaped like pointed elephant ears, they were—wine-red in color and with a velvety surface. Giant potted begonias with superb pink blossoms, one plant on either side of the door.

He was in a broad cream-colored re-

ception hall which was bisected at right angles by another narrower hall. The reception hall ended in French doors and he could see through gauze-like curtain material out into a sun-splashed patio. He removed his hat.

It was cool in here and the sound the door made as it closed brought to him the realization that the building was very quiet. He turned and said to the smiling dorky:

"I want to see the person in charge here—the manager."

Behind him, someone spoke in a low, mellow voice. "Yes? I am the—uh one in charge here."

Thompson swung back. A right-hand hall door that had been closed was open now and a man stood there. Thompson was tall—well over six feet. But this man was taller. He towered over Thompson as he stepped forward, bending his fine silver-haired head as he came through the doorway, and Thompson had to look up to meet his eyes.

He was tall and straight and thin as a scarecrow, this man, yet he had about him an air of grave dignity, of distinction. He had a hawkish face with bushy brows and military mustache of silver gray. Dressed in sober black, he leaned on a tall curved-handled black cane. His eyes, too, were black—a deep lacquer black. Beneath the bushy brows they regarded Thompson inquiringly.

Thompson said: "I'm with the Department of Justice. I'd like to get some information."

"Yes?" Faint surprise showed in the black eyes and they wrinkled at the corners. "You mean you are er—a member of that fine group to which young Jerry Mulholland belonged? A government secret agent—a G-man?"

"Yes."

"Oh. . . ." The very tall man pursed his lips, let them come apart with a soft liquid sound of sucking. He shook his head sorrowfully, sighed. "Too bad—about young Mulholland. Too bad. I knew him slightly. He was a fine lad."

"He sure was," Thompson affirmed

quietly. He glanced sidewise at the negro who hovered respectfully in the background.

The tall man noted the direction of the glance. He coughed gently, said: "But what can I do for you? Er—my name is Findley—Joseph Conrad Findley. I own Peace Haven." He indicated the door through which he had appeared, stood aside. "Come in, come in here where we can sit down."

Thompson went through the doorway into a room that was half-office, half-study. There was a flat desk of carved walnut at one end, a rustic stone fireplace at the other. Booklined shelves reached halfway to the ceiling against the far wall. There were deep chairs with blue leather upholstery, and a divan before the fireplace. A thick, blue Chinese rug was underfoot.

Following Thompson, Findley explained: "I maintain living quarters in the building. I'm all alone in the world and the sanitarium is my—hobby, you might say—my greatest interest. I like to be near it."

"I see." Thompson turned, hesitated, frowning slightly.

"Is it something about young Mulholland?" Findley had closed the door and he looked very tall and very dignified, standing there before it. He spoke in a seriously thoughtful tone.

"I understand from the morning papers that you and your—er colleagues exacted quick vengeance for his death—wasting little time in running the killer to earth. You are to be congratulated."

"Perhaps," Thompson said softly. "But nothing we can do will bring back Jerry." Bitterness tightened in his eyes and he looked squarely across at the tall man. "The car Fatso Legri drove had a siren on it. That siren was sold to this sanitarium hardly more than a year ago."

Findley's bushy brows arched and his dark eyes looked startled, amazed. "You're sure?" He flexed his lips, making thoughtful sucking sound, eyes narrowed, and pointed a long left-hand

finger at Thompson. "That siren was stolen just about a week ago from our ambulance."

His dead-level stare bit deep into Thompson's for a long moment. Then he swung around, opened the door, called: "George!"

"Yes, sah?"

"Find Doctor Stitt and have him come here as soon as possible."

"Yes, sah."

Findley closed the door, waved a hand, explained: "Doctor Stitt is our resident physician. This is a lax season right now but he stays here the year round. He'll know more about it than I do."

Scowling, he went pacing unevenly across the room, leaning on his cane and rubbing the side of his neck with his left hand. His right leg did not bend at the knee and his right foot was singularly unwieldy. Before a window, he turned, jerked a glance at the chair nearest Thompson.

"Sit down! Sit down! He'll be here in a minute." His tone softened abruptly and he wagged his left hand before him. "Don't mind me, young man. This is—uh most embarrassing. Most embarrassing."

"I understand." Thompson remained standing quietly by the chair. "But don't let it bother you. We expected something like that had happened and my visit is more or less routine—just a check-up."

"Of course, of course." Findley was smiling again.

Knuckles tapped the door panel and the door swung inward. A clean-shaven blond man came in. Middle-aged, he was of medium height and looked clean and cool and healthy in a surgeon's white smock. Pince-nez spectacles jiggled on the bridge of his nose as he walked forward, smiling inquiringly.

Findley said: "Frank, this is Mr.—er—"

"Thompson," Chuck supplied.

Findley nodded. "—a Department of

Justice operative. Thompson; Doctor Francis Stitt."

The doctor blinked, looking at Thompson with sudden new interest. He shook hands, said: "This is a pleasure," heartily.

"Tell him—" Findley was stabbing out with his finger for emphasis. "Tell him about the siren disappearing from our ambulance."

Looking at him, Stitt nodded, swung his eyes back to Thompson. "That was the night of the *Cameron Hotel* fire in downtown Glendale. We were parked in an alley-mouth just outside the fire lines, doing first aid work. Luckily they got the fire under control before anyone suffered any really serious burns or injuries."

He let himself down on the arm of a chair, used a slow reminiscent smile, lifting one hand slightly. "But in the excitement someone managed to dismantle our siren and make away with it. We didn't see them, haven't any idea who it was."

"Your driver—" Thompson suggested.

Stitt shook his head, took off his glasses, polished them on one corner of his smock. He had round pink cheeks. "Didn't see a thing. You see, it was dark and the hood of the ambulance was headed into the alley and we were working at the back."

Thompson ran two right-hand fingers along the edge of his jaw. "I'd like to speak with your driver. You don't think he could have been in collusion with the thieves?"

"No," Findley exploded emphatically. "Impossible! Impossible, sir! Fred's as honest as the day is long. He's been with us for years. And he's not on duty this morning anyway."

"As a matter of form I must question him," Thompson insisted gently. "May I have his address?"

Findley stood very stiff, very straight. His voice was gruff with displeasure. He gave an address, added: "His name is Fred Morehouse."

"Thanks." Thompson's good-natured, boyish grin flashed. "I think that's all." He moved to the door, paused. "By the way, you reported the theft of the siren to the local police of course."

Findley had thawed some under Thompson's smile. He nodded, the sternness gone from his eyes and mouth. "Certainly, certainly."

Doctor Stitt had his glasses back on his nose, bobbed his head.

Thompson said: "Thanks again for your trouble," and went out into the hall and left them there. The negro in the white jacket opened the glass-paneled door for him. A begonia leaf touched his hat as he stepped outside.



It was close to noon when Thompson used a phone in the redecorated *Cameron Hotel* lobby and spoke with Dougherty. He said:

"The siren was stolen a week ago Friday night when the ambulance was doing first aid duty at a fire in the *Hotel Cameron*. That's all that anyone seems to know about it. I've checked with Findley—the owner of the sanitarium—the doctor on duty that night, and the ambulance driver. The hotel employees know nothing more than that. I've just come from the local police station; the theft was reported there the next morning.

"From what I've picked up, Joseph Conrad Findley—he's the one who owns Peace Haven—seems to be sort of a city godfather to the town. Everybody knows him and likes him. He gives a lot of money to charity every year."

"I know," Dougherty replied. "He's one of the town's civic leaders, a respected citizen, well known and admired for his philanthropies. That's the report I had on him, but I neglected to give it to you.

"But we expected to find that the

siren had been stolen in some way—" His voice had a vibrant crackling sound over the wire. "—so don't be disappointed. Moran can't get far; his picture and description are all over the country by now. Everyone is watching for him." A split-second pause, then: "How about that ambulance driver? It would be a job getting that siren loose. He could have—"

"He seems to tell a straight story. He's a world-war veteran and has a good local record; gave me several references. But I got his prints on a cigarette case for checking against the Washington file, just in case. His name is Fred Morehouse."

"Okey. Bring the prints in to be photographed this afternoon. I'll see you then."

Thompson said: "Yes, sir," and had started the receiver for the hook when the urgent impact of Dougherty's voice almost shattered the diaphragm. "Wait a minute!"

He got the receiver back near his ear. "Yes?"

"Mrs. Mulholland called this morning when I was out of the office for a few minutes. She wanted to get in touch with you—left word for you to phone or come to see her as soon as you could. Said it was urgent."

Sudden puzzled concern put a shadow about Thompson's eyes. He said slowly: "I'll do that right now."

Vague uneasiness gripped him as he pronged the receiver. He shifted the snap-brim of his hat, pushing it up off his forehead, got a new connection and gave the operator the Mulholland number. He listened to the steady spaced ringing of the phone bell at the other end of the wire for a full minute, and a growing premonition that something was very wrong increased with each unanswered ring.

He abruptly cracked the receiver into its prongs. There was a tight, stiff look about his mouth as he banged out of the booth, sailed across the hotel lobby, through the door to the street.

A PLUMP young woman was bent over a rose bush in the yard of the house next to the Mulholland cottage. She had on a fancy bright-colored sunbonnet and a pair of yellow linen overall slacks. She stopped clipping roses from the bush and watched curiously as Thompson brought his car to a screeching stop, kicked open the door and ran up to the Mulholland porch.

He planted his right thumb against the bell push, tried the latch with his other hand. Locked. He kept the bell going, hammered the door with his fist. A minute of this and he stopped, listened.

The plump young woman in the next yard said: "Mrs. Mulholland isn't home."

Thompson whirled, glared at her from the porch. "Where is she?"

The woman went wide-eyed, blinking, trilled a weak, flustered laugh. "I—I don't know. She went away early this morning and came back, and then later some people called for her and she went away with them." She turned towards the house, swung back and added brightly: "Maybe it was the undertakers. Her son's funeral is tomorrow."

"What did these people look like?" Thompson was coming down from the porch, across the lawn, his hat in his hands. He was sober-faced, serious, and the fierceness had faded from his eyes. "I'm a friend of Jerry Mulholland's. It's important that I locate Mrs. Mulholland at once."

"Oh." She nodded, smiling uncertainly up at him, grew thoughtful. "Why, I was in the house and I didn't get a look at them except when they came out to get in the car. There was a woman and a man and Mrs. Mulholland walked between them. She seemed kind of weak and all broken up, poor soul, and they had to help her out and into the car. But then you can't blame her, with her only—"

"What kind of a car was it?" Thompson cut in. And his voice was gently

firm, but his eyes held a sort of bitter desperation.

"A sedan, I think. Some dark color. I didn't pay much attention. I'm not one to pry into others' affairs, or spy on them. But poor Mrs. Mul—"

"What time did they leave here?"

The whiplike intensity of his tone startled her, left her wordless for a moment. "About—about an hour ago or more."

"You couldn't describe this man and woman?"

"Why, no. I didn't pay any attention—they were just average looking. In—in dark clothes I think. Yes—in dark clothes!"

"Thanks," Thompson said.

He turned away, deep brackets etched about the corners of his mouth. He went around to the back of the house. The back door was unlocked and he went inside. The neat little kitchen was spic and span, white porcelain and checkered linoleum. He moved slowly through the rest of the rooms and his eyes were searching slits of live steel.

There was nothing out of place anywhere—except in the living-room. And that was nothing tangible. Only a faint sweetish smell that lingered on the air. Thompson stood in the middle of the room, chin lifted slightly, inhaling deeply through his nose. His breath expelled harshly and he swore in a low, terrible voice.

Chloroform! That smell was chloroform.

He stood there a moment in that small cheerfully blue-and-white room, with a strange numbness growing inside him. And his knuckles were white, every muscle in his body rigidly taut. Only a moment he stood like that, and then he came briskly alive, went to work with a swift, deft speed, starting with the divan and examining every square inch of that room.

Near the door, caught on the back of an upholstered chair, he found several strands of hair. Hairs that were too

long to belong to a man, and which could have been pulled from someone's head in a scuffle. He placed them on a clean sheet of white paper from the desk, moved to the window, holding them in the better light. They were a light brown in shade; Mrs. Mulholland had coal black hair. And clinging to these light brown hairs was a short stiff white thread.

Thompson did not stop for more.

Once in his roadster, he burned the highways on the shortest cut to the Federal Building and its laboratory. Chuck knew that in the fragmentary evidence he had lay the key to the whole mystery, a key that would open the secret door behind which was hidden the unknown power directing the operations which had relentlessly wiped young Jerry Mulholland from their evil path and pointed a half dozen other murders.

"Iron Mike" Dougherty and Bill Enright were with Chuck when the analyses finally came through, and all three were like bloodhounds on a warm trail. To be sure, the results were indicative rather than conclusive, but they were convincing nevertheless to these keen manhunters, incredible as the lead might be.

"What now, Chuck?" "Iron Mike" asked gruffly.

"The chauffeur first," Chuck answered promptly. "Then the showdown; and I want you to let me handle that."

Dougherty closed his desk drawer with a bang.

"All right; let's go," was all he said.



IGH wattage globes flared at each corner of the low stucco building that housed Peace Haven Sanitarium, sent bright fingers of light reaching through the surrounding trees for Thompson's car as it crawled up the graveled drive. It was dusk. Stars shone palely in a rapidly darkening sky;

the moon was hiding somewhere below the horizon.

Thompson stopped the car near the pool of water lilies, got out and let himself show plainly in the light that flooded over him, walked towards the entrance.

The wide door opened, was held that way by the same hulking, thick-shouldered negro in the same neat white jacket. Teeth sparkled in the light glare; his grin was as broad as it had been that morning. But it didn't get into his eyes; they were searching, doubtfully wary. And his voice lacked its former deep rich timber when he said:

"Yes, sah. Come right in, sah."

Thompson smiled back at him—a happy-go-lucky carefree smile—reckless laughter in his eyes. He walked straight towards the colored one, and when he was across the threshold and close enough, his hand moved very smoothly and very swiftly up and under his coat and out again. He poked the automatic that was in it hard against the lowest button of the other's white coat.

"Be a good darcy, George," he said softly. "Take me to Big Joe. Quick!"

He hadn't stopped smiling, but there was steel under the softness of his voice, in the compelling flash of his eyes. George's smile had gone with breath expelled harshly. He had stiffened, heavy shoulder muscles cording, straining outward against coat cloth. He looked down slowly at the gun snout that was pressing into his hard belly, looked up, brown-flecked whites of his eyes showing.

Soft light glowed in the reception hall. The negro nodded mutely, stepped back, his eyes still on Thompson. And Thompson moved aside to let the door close, brushing against one of the potted begonias. He followed closely as George backed to the nearest right-hand door.

"Turn around," Thompson breathed swiftly. "And open it—and walk straight through to the center of the room."

The negro was breathing heavily.

There was no fear, only a sort of hypnotic wonder, in his eyes. He pulled them away from Thompson's, swiveled, got the door open and walked forward into the room. Thompson followed, heeling the door shut and setting his shoulders against it.

Shaded lights glowed in corners; window shades were drawn. Joseph Conrad Findley sat behind his carved walnut desk and looked at Thompson. He sat leaning forward a little, both hands pressed down against the desk top, a long thin lighted cigar jutting from the left side of his mouth.

Doctor Francis Stitt stood beside the desk, poised on the balls of his feet as though he had started to run and changed his mind. Glitter on his eyeglasses hid his eyes, and his red lips were parted slightly, showing his even white teeth.

An air of tense expectancy held them like that for a moment.

Then Thompson lifted the Colt a little, said: "Don't move. Keep your hands on the desk, Findley, and let's talk things over. I've come for Mrs. Mulholland."

Stitt settled down on his heels, glasses jiggling on his nose. His mouth closed tightly. The surgeon's smock was gone and he wore a dark suit coat, matching his trousers. Findley sat back calmly, lamp glow gleaming on his silvery hair. Beneath bushy brows, his dark lacquer-surfaced eyes seemed inquiringly puzzled. He took his left hand slowly from the desk, got the cigar away from his mouth, said, "Mrs. Mulholland—what do you mean?" in his mellow voice.

Keenly alert, Thompson let go of a quiet chuckle of appreciation. "She's here. I know she's here." Blood sang swiftly in his veins. "Listen—"

Findley's hawkish face was peacefully, attentively, composed. He lidded his deep black eyes. Smoke rose tranquilly from the tip of his cigar. Stitt had not moved. The negro stood in the center of the blue Chinese rug, facing Thompson, his massive shoulders

hunched forward. Breath, pumping slowly through his flat nostrils, made harsh whistling sound in the room.

"Listen," Thompson repeated. "She wasn't the kind that could rest and leave the hunt for her boy's murderers to others. She had to do something to help avenge his death. Somehow, some way, she found out something. She tried to reach me this morning to tell me about it, but someone suspected that she had learned something and got to her before I did.

"There were two of them. They used chloroform and took her away only half conscious. But she put up a fight. There were pulled-out hairs on a chair near the door—and they weren't from Mrs. Mulholland's head. A starched white thread was caught in the hairs—the kind that might come from a nurse's cap. And, besides incidental dust on that hair, the microscope showed presence of pollen dust. *Begonia* pollen dust.

"It's hard to go in or out the front door of your Peace Haven without running into one of your potted begonia plants. The chloroform and thread pointed to a hospital; the begonia pollen to *this* so-called hospital. Those hairs came from someone who was sent from here."

Findley shook his head slowly, firm lips curved in a patient smile. "Preposterous, sir! Amazing! A figment of wild imagination. If you think Mrs. Mulholland is here, you are welcome to search the premises."

"Maybe you don't understand." Thompson's eyes kept on the move, flashing from one to the other of these three still figures in the room. The gun was very steady in his low right hand.

"This is the showdown, Findley—the end. The end of Peace Haven Sanitarium and the front you've spent years in building. The end of Joseph Conrad Findley—public benefactor, philanthropist, citizen and political power. And the end of Big Joe—right guy in certain criminal circles.

"You played Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, built up an elaborate double life—a front to hide your real business. A dirty business, Findley. Dope. We know now that your Peace Haven is the main distribution point in the Southwest for smuggled drugs coming in over the Border and through coast ports. We know now that you used ambulances in transporting much of it.

"You see," Thompson went on, "Fred Morehouse, your chauffeur, talked. Maybe you weren't expecting that—after you got his first report on the questions I asked him. He saw the light of reason. It was easy money, working for you, but he's an ex-soldier and he really thinks a lot of the country he fought for. He saw that this was war too—a war against crime and criminal makers such as you—and that he was on the wrong side. He changed over.

"We've got you, Findley, and men like you are hard to get. Men who work in the dark, behind a shield of respectability and political influence. You're harder to reach, but you're worse and more dangerous than a dozen killers of the Dillinger-Nelson type. You're the ones who breed those killers."

Findley's lips moved. His voice was old and dead. "Why do you bother to tell me this? Why do you stop to explain?"

"Because the hairs I found at Mrs. Mulholland's had no roots on them—no trace of dandruff or dried scalp tissue. But there was powdered glue on the ends. The hairs were from a wig, Findley. A man disguised as a woman wore it. Unless I'm very wrong, that man was Soap Moran. He's hiding here, masquerading as a woman since his picture has been decorating page one of all newspapers. Legri had been here with him; they took the siren from your ambulance with your knowledge. The report to the police was just to cover yourself in case there was ever a kick-back.

"Moran is a heroin sniffer and a

killer. He'll probably try to resist arrest. The knoll this place is on is completely surrounded by Federal Narcotics Agents, F. B. I. men, and deputy sheriffs. No one can get out. Most of the supposed patients here are really your own men, but there are a few legitimate ones. We don't want them to get hurt or killed. I came in alone to talk it over, to make you see that resistance is useless. You have a system of alarms strung around the grounds and if we'd rushed the place, someone would have got panicky and there'd have been fireworks. But you can order your men to lay down their guns. That way we will only have Moran to deal with."

Thompson stopped speaking, got his breath, asked slowly: "How about it, Findley? You know the game's up. Are you going to let us take over peacefully?"

Stitt lifted a drawn face from his hands, hung haggard eyes on Findley. Staring into distance, the tall silver-haired commanding figure behind the desk nodded dumbly. "It's the end," he whispered almost inaudibly.

"You're wise," Thompson said. "Your decision won't hurt you any when you get in court." His voice took on clipped urgency. "You can reach your men with the house phone on your desk. Order them one by one to come in here. And where in the building is Moran? And Mrs. Mulholland? She's here and alive I know. If you'd wanted her dead, the chloroform could have fixed that in her own home."

Findley's hawkish face tightened bitterly. His gaze came back from infinity and his eyes, finding Thompson's, burned with an intense dark fire. "She's here, but not on my orders. I didn't want to touch her. Moran planned—"



HE broke off as his eyes jerked upwards and a voice above and behind Thompson snarled sharply: "Selling me out, huh? Drop it, dick!"

Thompson didn't look up. He stiffened tensely, then relaxed, letting right-hand fingers loosen from the grip of the Colt, staring across at Findley. The gun made a thudding sound as it hit the rug. Findley was half out of his chair, glaring at the spot above Thompson's head. Stitt's white face and the negro's shiny dark one were turned that way.

"Sit down, Big Joe! Get that heater, George."

Thompson stood still. He knew that voice belonged to Moran, and from the sound of it Moran was keyed up to killer tension.

Hate burned in Findley's eyes; hate almost throttled his voice. "Put down that gun, Moran! You're only going to get yourself and a lot of others killed."

"I'm doing this! Sit down and shut your face. Get the heater, George, and hold it on this smart dick."

Findley sat down, his hawkish face dark with suppressed fury. Stitt stared in fearful fascination, breathing through his open mouth, his eyes looking very large and black with a dumb terror. Muscles twitched in the negro's sweaty face. His eyeballs bulged. He hunched reluctantly forward, got the gun, backed away with it without once taking his gaze from the one above Thompson.

"Get away from the door, dick. I'm coming in."

Thompson took three steps forward, turned, looked up. A transom above the door was open. Head and shoulders of a man showed there. Soap Moran. And a blued-steel automatic was trained on the room. He was sleek and black-haired, Moran, with a thin white hatchet face and a twisted lipless mouth.

He warned tautly: "Don't nobody move. You watch that dick, George, and if he tries anything funny, let him have it. If you don't—if you make one slip, you're through. I'll croak you deader'n hell."

The negro swallowed, nodded jerkily, pointed the gun at its former owner. Thompson stood six feet away and to

one side, paid no attention. He watched Moran's head suddenly duck from sight. The door instantly jumped open and Moran was in the room, crouching, coming from a chair that stood in the hall just below the transom.

He made an incongruous figure, crouching there in a white starched nurse's dress. The uniform was complete to white shoes and stockings; only the wig and cap were missing. He was small and thin and cruel-looking, this outlaw. His slitted eyes glittered dangerously and the gun looked like a cannon in his hand. He had killed seven men and two women—not counting Jerry Mulholland.

That thought seared into Thompson's brain, started hot blood pounding at his temples. He forced his voice level as Moran closed the door behind him, said evenly: "You can't get away, Moran. This place is covered on all sides. Those on the outside gave me fifteen minutes before coming in after me. The fifteen minutes are nearly up and they'll come in shooting. You haven't a chance."

"Haven't I?" Moran's lipless mouth sneered. "Listen, dick! I'm going out of here and they're not gonna touch me. I've got a car at the side door. And you're gonna tell them to let me through—because I'm gonna take the old Mulholland dame with me!"

Tight muscle suddenly ridged the clean edge of Thompson's jaw.

Moran's slitted eyes whipped to the negro. "And you're coming with me, George. I'll need your help. Let these other yellow bellies stay and take the rap. But one funny move out of you and it's your last, see!"

The negro's thick slobbery lips opened and closed and he finally croaked: "Ye—yes, sah!"

"All right then, we'll go down and get the dame and the dick can do his stuff." He swung his pin-pointed eyes to the desk at the end of the room. "And don't you two do anything but sit there. The first one that gets in front of me gets a slug in the belly. *You* can sit

and wait for a pinch, but nobody takes Ed Moran!"

Findley's cigar had gone out; it was crumpled in his fist. His black eyes burned with a fierce fire and his face was a craggy mask of gray. His voice shook with a terrible fury. "Damn you, Moran! If it hadn't been for you and Legri, none of this would have happened."

Thompson looked sleepy about the eyes. But, without moving, he was set on the balls of his feet.

"Yeah!" Moran chopped off a harsh taunting chuckle. "So Big Joseph is mad! If you'da let me finish the dame when I wanted—"

Thompson leaped. The negro was standing with the gun pointed before him, but his dazed, fear-filled stare had wavered. Thompson moved like a shot and his low-driven shoulder rammed the colored one's chest. The impact carried them off balance, stumbling across the room. But Thompson's right hand caught the Colt, twisted it viciously, and the hard edge of his left palm cracked down on the black wrist. The gun came free in his hand as they hit a chair and fell.

The room roared with gun sound—one hammering report on top of the other. Thompson had fallen underneath George. He felt the slugs smash into the negro. Struggling frantically aside, that one was slammed back on top of Thompson, pinning him down.

"Ahh . . . ahh . . ." A tortured sob rattled from the black's throat as life went out of him.

And over the negro's thick shuddering shoulder, Thompson got a flash of Moran's twisted white face; the smoking automatic in his hand was steadying for a third shot, tense knuckles contracting. The Colt was pinned against Thompson's chest by the dead weight of George. Thompson gathered himself, heaved with arms and legs.

The negro's heavy body catapulted up into the air as Moran's gun crashed again. Thompson rolled, snapped to his

knees, squeezed trigger three times. Thundering concussion slammed about the room. Moran's bullet thudded into the negro's body.

But Moran's gun didn't sound again. He crashed back against the door panel and the automatic was knocked from his fingers. He went to his knees, choking on blood and clawing at the holes in his chest. A crimson flood spilled out over his fingers and dyed the white nurse's uniform. He fell forward on his face.

Feet pounded in halls; voices shouted in and around the building; window glass shattered. A forceful, authoritative voice—"Iron Mike" Dougherty's voice—rang out suddenly, beating down all other sound:

"Don't be fools! You're trapped. No one can get out of the building."

Two shots cracked out. Pandemonium died swiftly. There was comparative silence and men with guns were in the room.

Thompson got to his feet and faced Dougherty and Enright as they came through the door. There were no words; but eyes moved quickly about the room, lifted to Thompson's, asked questions. He looked toward the desk.

Stitt was on his feet, shoulders crowding the wall, spread-fingers pushing against the plaster. His face was white as death. Findley stood slowly to his erect magnificent height. His face was peacefully composed and there was an air of grave dignity about him as he faced these men who would take him away to prison.

He bowed a little—a mocking bow. And suddenly he had his black cane in his hands. And just as suddenly the lower part of the cane had fallen away, and a long, slender blade glittered in the lamplight.

The gun in Thompson's hand moved forward.

He said swiftly: "Drop it, Findley. You can't do anything with that now.

It's all over. This is the end."

Findley looked at Thompson and his eyes got distant. He sighed, nodded absently. "The end. Yes—this is the end. It couldn't last."

He let his gaunt shoulders slump, looked down. The sword blade slid slowly between his fingers, hilt towards the floor. And everyone else in that room remained strangely silent, held as though by a spell, while he said: "I knew it was only a matter of time—after *they* moved in on me. But it was no use to run away; I'm too old for running, and for prisons. This is the best way."

His body stiffened; he turned away from the desk and fell rigidly forward. His hands held the sword point against his chest as he went down. There was a jarring thud. He lay on the floor with two feet of blood-stained blade showing above his back.

Doctor Francis Stitt made a sudden whimpering sound that was like someone far away screaming horribly. He put clawed hands over his face as though to shut out the sight. Thompson slowly lowered the Colt. Released breath made sound in the room.

THEY found Mrs. Mulholland locked in a cement-lined room in the basement, tired but unharmed.

"Are you all right, Mrs. Mulholland?" Thompson asked.

"Yes, Chuck."

"We've got them," Chuck told her, "the ones we wanted. And we've cleaned out a sore spot that has been bothering the Narcotics Bureau for a long time. But we wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for you and the leads we got through you. There has been a lot of talk about G-men, but it's time they recognized some G-women. You carried on where Jerry stopped and——"

"And that is what he would have wished," Mrs. Mulholland finished softly.

Numbers With Lead

By W. T. BALLARD



Bill Lennox, studio trouble-shooter, meets the numbers racket head on



CROSSING the lot, Bill Lennox, liaison man for the studio, paused as he saw a uniformed studio-policeman come from stage three, dragging a small, sandy-haired youth. Lennox stared for a moment, then crossed towards them. "What's wrong, Collins?"

The special cop looked around, a scowl twisting his heavy features. "I just caught this guy selling numbers to an extra."

"Numbers? So that's it." Lennox eyed the small man. "Who are you?"

"He's one of the grips," Collins said. "Spurck ordered anyone caught selling numbers thrown off the lot."

The small man tried to wrench free. The big cop said, "Tough guy," and hit the smaller man. "Come on, you." His other hand caught the grip's collar as the man swung at him. He twisted him about, almost lifted him from his feet, and pushed him towards the police office.

For a moment Lennox stood watch-

ing them. Then he shrugged, turned, and went into the administration building.

Sol Spurck, vice-president in charge of production at General Consolidated's West Coast studio, was dictating as Lennox pushed open the door and walked into the cathedral-like office. He waved towards a chair.

"Honest, Bill, I'm glad you are back. A madhouse we have here, I'm telling you."

Lennox grinned sourly.

"Say, Sol, I just saw something funny. One of the cops was throwing a grip off the lot for selling numbers."

Spurck's face set. "And you call it funny. Listen once while I tell you. They're buying numbers like nobody's business. It's worse than the dime letter even." He rose and thumped the desk, the big diamond on his ring finger making dents in the mahogany. "Honest, Bill, this numbers thing is lousy. It takes the nickels from widows and orphans. Them extras make maybe enough to eat, and what is it they do with their money? They buy numbers."

Lennox' eyes were narrow. "I didn't know it was as bad as that. Remember, I've been gone six weeks. I've heard about numbers, but I thought most of them were sold in Harlem."

"Harlem, is it?" Spurck came around the desk. "It ain't that bad. It's worse, and it's got to stop, y' understand."

Spurck emitted a lungful of smoke. "From what I hear, they got this thing organized. A regular business it is, and they're plenty tough. But positively, I'm telling you, Bill, either we run them out of Hollywood or they run us out. Figure the money they got to work with, and you know what money will do. Look at Prohibition and I'm telling you, the money which was made with bootleg ain't nothing but pennies compared to this number thing. We got to do something and do it quick. I've just been waiting for you to get back."

Lennox nodded and walked towards the phone. He called the chief of the

studio police and said: "Turner, Bill Lennox. Listen. Collins just picked up a grip on stage three for selling numbers. I want to talk to him, the grip, I mean."

Turner's voice came over the wire. He said: "Hold it. I'll see."

Lennox held it. Then Turner's voice reached him. "That grip's gone, Mr. Lennox. Collins threw him out the main gate."

Bill asked: "What was his name?"

The police chief spoke to someone, then said, "It's May, Tom May."

"Okey," Bill told him. "Look up his address and bring him down here. I'll be in my office all afternoon." He hung up and turned around, said to Spurck, "That grip is gone. I want to talk to him. It isn't much of a lead, but he might be scared into telling something. I'll get on this at once."

Spurck nodded. "I got to go, Bill. Monty Hamilton is giving a party at Malibu and Rose is down there already." He rose, got his hat and started for the door. "Remember, Bill. Them numbers has got to go."

Lennox grinned at the closed door, then turned and went through into the cubby-hole which served as his office.



HE worked steadily for almost an hour, the building about him strangely silent with the quiet of Saturday afternoon. Finally the phone rang and Turner said: "We can't locate that grip, Mr. Lennox. We called the place listed as his address, but he's moved, and they don't know where he went. Don't know or won't tell."

Bill swore and hung up. At five-thirty he left, took a cab to *Levy's* and bought a cocktail at the bar, carried it to one of the small tables and sat down. Mike Payman of the *Tribune* came through the mirrored door and helped himself to the other chair. "How's the boy?"

Lennox finished his drink and motioned to the waiter. "I'm lousy, thank you, and how are all your troubles?"

Payman grinned. "Mine sit at a city desk, and curse poor legmen."

The drinks came and Bill tasted his. "Listen, Mike, you get around a lot. What do you hear on this numbers racket?"

Payman fished an onion from his drink and ate it thoughtfully. "There's always some new racket in this land of broken promises. Why worry about numbers?"

"They're getting into Spurck's hair," Bill explained. "I thought maybe you would know who the big shot is."

Payman moved his shoulders, finished his drink and said, "As long as you're buying, I'll have another, thank you."

Lennox looked at him. "That's the trouble with this town. It makes chisellers out of all of us. You weren't a bad squirt when you were on that San Diego sheet, but now you're nothing but a bum. You could have ten grand in your pocket and still cadge a drink."

Payman's eyes got narrow, suddenly, then he laughed. "Okey, I'll buy this one."

Lennox rose, "I hate not chiseling a drink out of you, but I've got to run, late now." He did not wait for Payman's reply, but went through the door, crossed the street, and walked into the *Derby*.

Nancy Hobbs said: "I've only waited twenty minutes. You would be late on a night like this."

He slid into the seat. "And what's so special about tonight?"

She said: "Behold an editor. You're in distinguished company, my boy, and we've got to celebrate."

He said: "I'm sorry, kid, I can't tonight. I promised Ben Houser that I'd drop over to the studio. He's got a little girl appearing tonight that he thinks really has talent. They rehearse these programs, you know."

"Just a talent scout," she mocked. "And you haven't even looked at my

dress. What's the matter, William? Haven't I box-office appeal?"

He looked at her. She was pretty, more than pretty, with her little nose and its three tiny freckles across the bridge. He grinned. "I still don't see how you ever escaped pictures, honey. You're very swell, but if I keep telling you, you might go Hollywood on me, and I can't have that. You're the only reason I'm glad to be back in the cock-eyed town."

She raised her eyebrows. "I really can't stand it when you get complimentary, but something's on your mind, William. What is it?"

He said: "It's numbers. Spurck's hot and bothered, and I have to stop them, somehow. The trouble is I don't know where to begin."

She said: "I hate to show my girlish ignorance, but what the hell are numbers?"

"It's a new racket," he told her. "New out here, that is. It's a type of lottery. You pick a certain number. If it wins, you get six hundred for one."

"Sounds interesting." She stopped eating to stare at him.

Lennox said: "That's what a lot of people think. It's rotten because the money isn't made that's too small for these wolves to grab, and your chances can hardly be figured. Why, even in a town as big as New York there are days when there aren't any winners."

She asked: "Why is Spurck worked up?"

Lennox shrugged. "You can't stop people gambling, but it's bad for them to do it in working hours."

She said: "Police."

He shook his head. "What can they do? Arrest a few sellers? That won't stop it. What I have to find is the brains, the big shot back of it."

Her frown grew. "I don't like it, Bill. These boys will be tough. Why is it that every time trouble starts you have to mix in?"

He grinned. "Worrying about me, babe?"

Her voice was fierce. "And don't I have the right, or do I?"

He looked at her and for just a moment the shell of cynicism which five years on newspapers and three in Hollywood had built about him, almost cracked. His voice was softer and he patted her hand. "You're a pal."

Her tone was bitter. "Sure, I'm a pal. I always am. I suppose I'll go up and listen to those amateurs who should be home washing dishes or fixing the car."

He said: "You don't have to go."

She stared at him. "Sure I do. Why? Because, you big ape, I'd rather go to amateur night with you than to the *Ambassador* with anyone else. Now forget it and eat before I make a public fool of myself."



EN HOUSER said: "It's swell of you to come, Bill. Hello, Miss Hobbs!"

Nancy said: "Hello!" without much enthusiasm, and they followed Houser into the big studio. The room was already full and they had trouble finding seats. Houser said, under his breath:

"Watch this girl, Bill. I'll raise my hand when she comes up."

Lennox nodded. Nancy yawned behind her hand and Houser went towards the mike. The signal glowed and he swung into his sales talk.

Lennox sat listening. Then he watched while two girls played a duet on pianos, while a colored boy played the mouth organ, while four college boys sang Sweet Adeline. Then he saw Houser raise his hand.

"And now, folks, we have Miss Maria Mussaco, who has brought her own accompanist. What are you going to sing, Maria?" The girl, small, dark, with flashing eyes and red lips, said:

"*Smoke Gets In Your Eyes.*"

"All right. Let's have it."

The pianist struck a few chords, then

the girl was singing. The voice rose, gained volume, assurance. She needed training, but the studio with the crowd of people was fading from Lennox' eyes. He saw instead, Irene Dunne, singing to a group of extras, representing exiled Russian nobility on the "Roberta" set. When the girl finished the applause was thunderous.

Nancy Hobbs leaned close. "Houser's right, Bill. That girl has something."

He nodded, his eyes fixed on the platform. Suddenly he stiffened.

Nancy said, sharply: "What's the matter? What's happened?"

He was still staring. "See the accompanist, the man standing by the piano? That's Tom May."

"And who's Tom May?"

"A grip. We had him thrown off the lot for selling numbers. I want to talk to him."

He saw May leave the platform, lost sight of him, but the program was continuing and he could not move. As soon as Houser signed off, Bill rose and pushed his way forward.

Houser said: "What did you think of her, Bill?"

"Not bad," Lennox told him. "She needs training, but, well . . ."

"Think she'd go in pictures?"

"Maybe," Lennox was cautious. "She won tonight, didn't she? Doesn't that mean that she gets two weeks work at some night-club?"

"The *Corn Club*," Houser told him. "It's a hot spot and I hate to see her work there. She's a nice kid, too nice to work in Phil Zimm's place. But . . . well, that's why I was hoping you'd get her a test."

"Where is she now?"

"You mean you'll talk to her?" Houser was eager. "She's already gone to the *Corn Club*, but I'll run you over. Our winners always go over there after the broadcast. She'll sing later on."

Lennox looked towards Nancy. He did not care to see the girl but he did want to talk to May, and there was a

good chance that the accompanist would have gone to the club. At least the girl could tell him where he could find the former grip.

Nancy shrugged and said, in a resigned voice, "We might as well celebrate at the *Corn Club* as anywhere else."

"Fine," Houser was already moving towards his office. "I'll ring up for a table, then drive you over." He was gone almost five minutes, then came back, and led them through the waiting-room and out to the parking lot. As he started the car he said: "This girl really has something, Bill."

Lennox grunted. His mind was on May, on the numbers racket. He said: "If you're in love with her, you're just spoiling your chances, helping her crash pictures."

Houser's face showed red in the light from the dash lamp. "Who said I was in love with her?"

Nancy Hobbs smoothed things by saying: "She certainly is attractive."

Houser's voice was grateful. "See, Bill, and that comes from a fan writer." He swung the car through traffic and into the jammed parking place beside the club. "Zimm certainly gets a play. It's the wheel that draws them. Since Caliente closed, the picture people are gambling in town. That last night at Caliente was sure wild. Everyone was trying to get even." He laughed, climbed from the car, and they went towards the stucco building.

The headwaiter nodded to Houser and said to Bill: "We haven't seen you in some time, Mr. Lennox." He led them to a ring-side table. As Nancy sat down Houser looked at his watch. "It's forty minutes before Maria goes on. Do you want to dance, or would you rather try the wheel?"

Bill shrugged, but Nancy said: "We'll dance," and led Lennox towards the crowded floor.

He skilfully avoided a swaying couple, and said against her hair: "Why anyone sees any fun in a dog-fight like

this, I never . . ." He stiffened, staring across her head.

Her voice was sharp, concerned. "What's it now?"

"Nothing, I just spotted May. I want to talk to him." Without another word he led her back to the table, then skirted the floor and paused before the former grip. There was a tall glass close to May's hand, almost empty.

May looked up, his pale eyes flickering as he saw Lennox. "What do you want?" The voice was sullen.

Bill dropped into the other chair. "To talk to you. Collins put you off the lot for selling numbers. . . . How would you like to come back?"

May twisted the glass slowly. "I don't know whether I want to or not."

Lennox hid his surprise. "Not anxious, huh?"

"I wasn't getting rich," May growled. "What the hell did it hurt Spurck if I made a few dollars on the side? It didn't come out of his pocket."

Lennox' voice got sharp. "You're heading for trouble, kid. You've got the wrong slant. You'd better change it, quick."

"Nuts to you." May's sullen dark eyes looked at Lennox steadily and defiantly.

Bill leaned forward and his fingers closed on the bony wrist. "Get this, fella. I can get nasty. I can turn you over to the cops. I'd rather give you a chance."

"A chance to rat. 'Is that it?' May shook Lennox' hand away. "Go ahead, big boy. Turn me over to the cops and see what it buys you. You can't stop them selling numbers. I'd be sprung in ten minutes. This numbers thing is bigger than you are, Lennox, bigger than Spurck, bigger than your whole — damn' studio. Laugh that off, smart guy, but leave me alone."

For a minute Bill was angry. Someone had been feeding May a line about the importance of the big shot behind the numbers racket. That was evident. Bill started to say something, changed

his mind and rose. May was laughing at him as he walked away.



NANCY looked at his face as he came back to their table. "Any luck?"

Lennox shook his head. "The kid's gone screwy. Someone's showed him some easy money and he's got ideas. I'm wasting time, fooling with him. . ." He broke off as Houser came up to the table with Maria.

Nancy whispered, "Give the kid a break, Bill. She's nice."

Bill rose and Houser said: "Miss Mussaco, I want you to meet Miss Hobbs and Bill Lennox."

The girl took Bill's hand. "This seems almost like a dream, Mr. Lennox. I've read your name in the gossip columns a hundred times, but I never expected to meet you."

He stared at her, thinking that she was kidding, but there was no sign of it in the large dark eyes. There was something eager about her. She was excited, excited as a child is excited. He guessed that she was eighteen, nineteen, perhaps, yet she lacked the sophistication of the average high school girl. He smiled: "Don't get your hopes too high. A lot of girls have tests and then don't make the grade."

"Then you will give me a test?"

Lennox nodded as Houser asked Nancy Hobbs for a dance. He said: "Shall we dance, Maria?"

She looked about doubtfully. "If you think it would be all right. You see, I'm to work here for two weeks."

Lennox' smile widened. "I don't think they'd fire you for dancing with me. Shall we try?" He led her towards the crowded floor. She danced well, but he had expected that. Her body was built for dancing. He said, still amused. "This is your first time at a night-club, isn't it?"

She looked up at him, her dark eyes very wide. "How'd you guess?"

"I've got second sight," he said. "Which do you want to be, Maria, a singer in pictures or on the radio?"

The arched brows knotted. "I think pictures." She said it doubtfully. "Mr. Lennox, I want to ask you a favor."

"A favor?" He stared. "What is it, Maria?"

She said, hurriedly: "It's not for myself. It's for a friend. He used to work at General. He was fired this afternoon. . . . He . . ."

Lennox' voice hardened. "You're going to ask me to get Tom May his job back?"

Surprise held her for a moment. "Why, how did you know?"

He said, grimly: "I've an idea that your friend doesn't want his job back. I just had a little talk with him, and he didn't seem enthusiastic."

Her hand on his arm tightened. "He'll take the job, and he won't sell any more of those numbers. I promise."

Lennox stared at her. "Are you sure you know what you're promising, Maria?"

She said: "He's got to have that job, Mr. Lennox. He's in bad company. I don't want him in the rackets. He's just a wild kid that's sore because he hasn't got a lot of money, but if he really gets mixed up with this bunch he'll never get out. I know what will happen if he keeps on. I've seen it, seen death. . . ." Her lips closed sharply and her face was dead white beneath the makeup, making her lips look almost black by comparison.

She faltered suddenly and Bill steadied her. "What's wrong, kid?"

She was staring towards the door. "Who are those men?"

Lennox turned his head. He said: "The one on the right is Phil Zimm, who owns this spot. The man with him is Al Switzer, his bodyguard. Why?"

She had recovered herself somewhat. "Nothing."

Lennox started to say, "Don't lie"—and someone grabbed his shoulder and pulled him around. He found himself

staring into the pale eyes of Tom May. The man was drunker than he had been at the table. He started forward, but the girl shoved in between them. "Tom, Tom."

May pushed her to one side, not gently. "You keep the hell out of this. I'm going to tell this stuffed shirt where he gets off. Asking you questions about me, huh? What'd he tell you, and what the devil have you been telling him?"

She pushed forward again. "I was asking for your job back, you drunken fool. Do you understand? Your job that you lost. . . ." May's hand came up and he slapped her across the cheek.

Lennox brushed her to one side and faced May. He saw the man's hand streak towards the back of his neck, saw it start forward, the thin knife gleaming. Then his fist crashed against May's jaw and the ex-grip went down, the knife clattering to the floor with sudden sound in the now quiet room.

The music had ceased. Somewhere in the crowd a woman squealed. Then Zimm and Switzer pushed forward. Switzer dragged May to his feet, cuffed him again and again, and then, grabbing the collar of his coat, almost carried him from the floor.

Zimm turned to Bill. "I'm sorry, Mr. Lennox. The punk was drunk, see? He won't cause any more trouble, I promise you."

Bill nodded. "All right. Forget it." He took the girl back to the table. Her face was still white, and she was shaking.

Houser said, sharply: "What happened."

Lennox shrugged. "Nothing. A drunk."

The radio man nodded. "This is a tough spot." He turned to Maria. "I'm sorry I steered you up against it."

She said, very low: "It isn't your fault. You've been swell, but I have to go now. My number is coming up."

Houser said: "Want me to go back with you?"

She shook her head. "I'd rather you didn't." She was gone, leaving the ra-

dio man staring curiously after her.

Houser said: "She's a game kid. I wish I hadn't brought her into this."

Lennox looked at him. "What are you worrying for? You didn't have anything to do with it. Don't all your winners play this spot for two weeks?"

The radio man said: "Yes, but you don't understand." He brooded over his cigarette, and Lennox waited, half expecting him to continue, but Houser remained silent.

THE floor show began. Lennox hardly bothered to watch the dancers, paid no attention until Maria appeared. She sang "*Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*," again. She was noticeably nervous, much more so than she had been at the radio station, but the applause was good. She bobbed her head and disappeared.

Houser rose. "I'll just go back and get her. Meet you out front." He was gone and Nancy yawned. "Now can we celebrate?"

Bill grinned. "You're like a spoiled kid with a stick of candy." He helped her rise and they moved towards the foyer.

Nancy said: "Wait while I spoil some powder with my nose," and disappeared towards the woman's room. Lennox lit a cigarette and lounged against the wall, close to the entrance of the bar. The wall was thin and a voice he recognized reached him distinctly.

"You damn' fool. What did you mean starting something on the dance-floor?"

May said: "I tell you, Mr. Zimm, that girl knows something, you know, about that business at . . ."

Zimm's voice got harsh. "Shut up, fool. How the hell could she know? We checked and . . ."

May's answer wasn't clear and Switzer, the bodyguard, cut in. "What the devil is Lennox hanging around for, anyway? I had a tip tonight that he was after this numbers thing, that Spurck is after it. . . ."

Zimm's voice was still harsh. "Okey, if that's the way it is, we can't take chances. I'll take care of this dame, but I'll do the talking. You birds gum things up."

Lennox' mouth was thin as he moved forward to meet Nancy Hobbs. Suddenly he stopped. The passage from the dressing-rooms ran along the side of the bar and opened into the foyer. He saw Houser appear, hold the door for Maria, saw them come towards him. Then he saw Zimm step out of the bar and block their passage.

For seconds Bill hesitated, then moved towards them, heard Zimm say: "Never mind, Houser. I'll see that she gets home."

"But listen . . ." Houser was hesitating as if not willing to leave the girl with Zimm, yet for some reason trying to avoid a direct issue. "Bill Lennox of General is here, wants to talk to her."

Bill knew that the radio man had said the worst thing possible. He knew that Zimm did not want him to talk to the girl, was afraid of something which she might tell. The night-club man's voice was harsh, had lost all pretense of friendliness. "I said I'd take her." There was a command in the tone which no one who heard it could miss.

Houser's face reddened and his fists at his side clenched. Bill expected to hear him tell Zimm to go to hell, but after a moment his shoulders moved in a hopeless gesture. "Well . . ." He stopped as he saw Bill, and hope leaped into his harried eyes.

Lennox said, coolly: "You've got the wrong night, Phil. Miss Mussaco has a date with me. Come on, Maria."

His eyes never left Zimm's face from the time that the man swung about. For an instant it seemed that Zimm's hand would streak for the shoulder-clip. Then with an effort he controlled himself; but his black eyes, usually devoid of expression, blazed with an indescribable fury as if passion was gripping, riding him, blinding him to reason. His voice, when he spoke, was hardly recognizable.

"Make it some other night, Lennox. This is very important."

Bill shot a look at the girl, jerking his eyes away from Zimm's face for an instant only. She was chalk-white, her skin almost translucent, wax-like. Fear gripped her so that speech was out of the question. His eyes switched back to Zimm. He knew how dangerous the man was, how bad to cross, but he would hardly start anything here with three hundred people only a few feet away.

Bill said, and his tone was almost mocking, "She goes with us. . . ."

He left the end of the sentence hang in the air between them like some suspended thing, a challenge which Zimm must face or back down. The night-club man chose to back down, but Lennox knew that his danger was increased by the man's power to control his anger, to grip himself. For seconds Zimm stood like a hawk poised to strike. Then the tension went out of him . . . he even managed to call up a smile, a grimace which twisted his thick lips into something that was more chilling than a scowl.

"Sorry," Zimm said. He swung on his heel and was gone, striding down the passage.

Houser's held breath made whistling sound as it escaped his tightly held lips, and Lennox looked at him sharply. The radio man was wiping his beaded forehead with a handkerchief. His laugh sounded shaky, unreal, and his voice had gained a high, thin note when he said: "That's that."

Bill wanted to ask him what he meant, how much he knew, but there wasn't time. Zimm might change his mind, might come back. He said, sharply, "Get Miss Hobbs and take her home. Tell her I'll be there later, and don't let her argue. Come on, Maria."

He had the girl's arm even as he pushed Houser towards the foyer. Nancy tried to speak to him as he passed, but he shook his head and motioned towards Houser. She stared.

Then, with a shrug, followed the radio man across the lot towards his parked car.

Bill motioned a cab forward, pulled the door open, and helped the girl in. "What's your address?"

She gave it to him and he relayed it to the driver, then got in and slammed the door. "Step on it."

THE cab shot away, its rear wheels spraying loose gravel across the entry. Lennox twisted and looked back. He was unarmed. His gun was in his desk at the apartment. His mouth set grimly as he watched the street for signs of pursuit. He had sent Nancy with Houser because he had feared trouble, half expected Zimm to follow. He said to the girl. "What's it all about, Maria?"

"I don't know." Her voice barely reached him.

Impatience, almost anger, made his voice edged. "Why lie? You were scared to death back there, and yet earlier you didn't know who Zimm was, didn't know until I told you. Listen, Maria, I'm up against this numbers thing, and from something I overheard I've a hunch that Zimm has his fat finger in it. Come on. Talk! What do you know that Zimm thought you might tell me?"

She shook her head and her voice sounded strained as she said: "I don't know anything, honest. Nothing I can tell. I thank you, but you shouldn't have taken me away. I should have stayed. It was silly for me to be afraid, I'd have been all right."

He said: "One of us must be screwy," as the cab pulled up before a two-story brick building. "Is this the place?"

She nodded. "It's my father's restaurant. We live upstairs." She got out of the cab, opening the door herself. "Don't bother to get out. I'll be all right. Please, please, get away from here."

He stared at her in the gloom, glanced right and left up and down the

dark street. It was empty, deserted. The cabman already had the car in gear. The girl turned and started towards the door. Lennox said: "Wait. Where can I find May?"

She said: "I'll call you. Really, I will." Her voice sounded desperate. Please go."

Bill shrugged, slammed the door. He leaned forward, told the driver, "Wait around the corner," opened the door on the far side, and was standing in the street as the cab pulled away.

The girl had reached the door, was pushing it open. She gave a little startled cry, half fear, half surprise. Lennox sensed rather than saw the man in the dark doorway, heard Switzer's voice: "Take it easy, kid. Zimm wants to talk to you."

She was crying, and trying to wrench free. "Please let me go, I haven't talked. Honest, I haven't."

The bodyguard growled: "Shut up. Do you want to raise the neighborhood?" and slapped her, his hand making a smacking sound against her full cheek.

Lennox ran forward. Neither saw him until he struck. As his right fist crashed against Switzer's jaw he caught the girl with his left hand and pulled her back, out of the way, but the body-guard was through. He collapsed with a startled grunt, his legs folding under him. Lennox dived in, wrenched the gun from the man's shoulder-clip, and straightened as a car swung into the end of the block. Zimm had moved fast to get Switzer to the girl's place before they arrived. Bill hadn't expected that. His slitted eyes watched the car as it slowed. Then he shoved the girl behind him. "Get up the stairs, out of the way," he whispered. He had no time to see that she obeyed, no time for anything.

A voice from the car called. "Al! Al! Did you get her?"

Lennox snapped a shot high, heard a muffled curse. Then a gun flashed in return, the bullet chipping the brick

above his head, showering his face with stinging particles.

He pressed tightly against the wall, using the jamb for cover. He'd hoped that they would run at the shot, but they weren't running, and his skin felt tight about his jaws as his lips pressed into a grim line. This might be nasty. Switzer stirred and Lennox poked him with the toe of his shoe. "Easy, punk."

The man lay still. A voice called: "You haven't got a chance, Lennox. Come out."

Bill grinned sourly. A hand torch flashed towards him and he snapped another shot. The torch went out. Then a shotgun belched from the car, twin barrels with deafening roar, the slugs chipping at the brick, searching the dark corners.

Switzer cursed. One of the slugs tugged at the shoulder of Lennox' coat, but did not break the skin.

He reserved his fire. He had no idea whether the gun he had contained a full clip. There was silence for a moment. Then something moved at the rear of the car. They were getting set to rush the door. He brought the gun up, waited until he caught a movement of shadow and fired, just as a second car swung into the block, its horn blowing, shrilly, steadily.

The engine of the car at the curb raced. Men swung aboard and it started with a jerk, the rubber making screeching noise as it gripped the surface of the street. The car went around the corner fast just as the second car spun to the curb, stopping dead with four brakes set. Lennox expected cops to boil out, but the door came open and Nancy Hobbs was on the pavement.

"Bill! Bill! Are you all right?"

He said: "Sure, honey. Maria, Maria, come down, quick." He could hear her feet. Then Switzer stirred, and Lennox warned him hoarsely. The next moment he was pushing the little singer into the coupé, telling Houser to pull up to the corner and stop.

Maria protested, "But I live here."

Lennox' voice was tense. "Listen, kid. That crowd isn't fooling. The further away from them you stay, the better." The coupé leaped forward, Lennox riding the running-board. It jerked to a stop beside the cab. Bill flung the driver a bill, had a glimpse of the man's white face. Then they were gone, Lennox squeezing inside.

Houser said, excitedly: "Where to?"

"Anywhere," Bill told him. "How did you muggs happen to show up?"

Nancy laughed softly. "We didn't happen to. Ben knew where Maria lived. I know you and thought there might be trouble."

Bill didn't answer at once. When he did, he said: "We've got to find a safe place to park this kid tonight, somewhere where Zimm can't find her."

Nancy nodded. "What about that cabin of mine in Topanga?"

Lennox said: "Swell. We'll run you two kids up there, then come after you tomorrow."

"Why not let me get my coupé and drive up?" Nancy suggested. "What's the need of your going?"

"None, I guess." He gave Houser her address and was silent as the coupé went across town. Finally he said: "Listen, Maria. Won't you tell me what this is all about?"

The girl started to speak, stopped, and was suddenly crying against Nancy's shoulder. Nancy glared at Bill in the light from the passing street lamps. "You big lug," she said, "let her alone."

When the car pulled up to the apartment Lennox said: "Drive into the alley and stop this side of the garage entrance." He waited until the car stopped, then opened the door and, climbing out, helped the girls. "I'll get the coupé if you'll gimme your keys."

Nancy handed them over. "I'll go with you." They went down the concrete ramp together. At the bottom Lennox said: "Sorry to spoil your evening, kid, but thanks."

She said: "If you think I'm going to

the mountains for you, you're screwy. She's sweet, Bill, and scared plenty, but she's game. You lay off. What difference does this numbers business make? I'm going upstairs and get some clothes. If you question her while I'm gone, I'll brain you." She turned and went towards the elevator.

Lennox drove the coupé up the ramp and found Houser standing beside his car. "Where's Maria?"

"She'll be back in a minute." Houser fumbled with a match as if he were trying to say something and couldn't get it out. Maria came through the door of the garage office and walked towards them. "I can't thank either of you enough for helping me tonight. I hope—" Her voice broke. "I hope that you don't get into trouble." Her eyes were puffy, swollen.

Houser's voice sounded sharp in Lennox' ears. "Don't thank me, kid. Please, will you let me send you out of town? I've an announcer friend in . . ."

She said: "No, no, I can't. I've got to stay here. Something terrible might happen if I went . . . I . . ." She broke off as Nancy came out, carrying an overnight case. She handed the bag to Bill and slid in under the wheel. He put the case at the back of the seat, helped Maria in and said to Nancy, "Call me from the store in the morning." Then he stepped back and watched the car pull out of the driveway.

Houser took a deep breath. "I'll run you home, Bill. Get in."

Lennox said, "Thanks," and climbed in. As he put the car into gear, Houser swore. "If anything happens to that girl I'll never forgive myself. I could have stopped this."

Bill stared at him. "What do you mean?"

Houser took time to answer. "I knew that there was something screwy. Zimm arranged it all, her appearing on my program, her winning. I thought at first he was in love with her. I don't know now. I don't know what to think."

Lennox was still staring. "How do you mean, Zimm arranged it? What the hell does he have to do with your radio program?"

Houser's smile was twisted. "He has plenty, he owns the sponsor company. That bird owns a lot around this town that people don't know about. He's plenty powerful. Switzer called me last week. He said some dame named Mus-saco was sending in an application, that I was to put her on. I tried to argue and he got tough. He said that if I wouldn't play they'd get an announcer that would."

"It was my first big chance and I didn't want to muff it. I told her to come to rehearsals and I found she had real talent, I also found that she didn't know Zimm, I mean the name. I got interested then. I had a hunch that he wanted a chance to get to know her, or something. That's one of the reasons I wanted you to hear the broadcast. I figured that if she got a break in pictures she wouldn't work in his lousy club."

"But what is Zimm's idea?"

Houser shrugged. "You got me, pal, but I'll kill the greasy swine if he makes a pass at her. That kid is right, Bill. Take my word. She's on the level." The car drew up in front of Bill's apartment and he climbed out. Houser said: "Gimme a ring after you hear from Miss Hobbs in the morning, will you?"

Lennox nodded. "Sure." He turned and went thoughtfully towards the door.



LENNOX was up when the phone rang. He picked up the instrument and heard Nancy Hobbs say with relief. "So you're all right?"

Lennox said: "Sure. Why wouldn't I be all right?"

"I never know," the girl told him, "and Zimm is tough. What had I better do with the little girl?"

He said: "Keep her out there and talk

to her. Maybe she'll tell you things when she won't me. That kid's in a spot of some kind. How is she?"

"Nervous. I'll try, Bill, but I feel so darn sorry for her that I'm afraid I won't get far. I'll call you back."

She hung up and Lennox tried to read the paper. He was half through the sport page when the phone rang again.

Nancy said, excitedly: "She's gone."

"Gone? What do you mean, gone?" His voice rasped.

The girl said: "I mean gone. Old man Stewart, who has the cabin below mine, says that a car went up the road while I was at the store and stopped at my place."

"But who . . . how could Zimm know where she was?"

The girl said: "I don't know. It's my fault. I should have brought her down to the store with me, but I thought she'd be safer up there. I'm coming in. We've got to do something." The phone clicked before he could answer. He had hardly hung up when it rang for the third time.

It was Houser. The radio man asked, "Heard from Miss Hobbs?"

Bill told him and there was silence for a moment at the other end of the line. Then Houser almost shouted, "Zimm's got her."

"Maybe." Lennox agreed, "but how the devil could he know where she was?"

"It's my fault." Houser's voice sounded broken. "I shouldn't have let her telephone her mother."

"What? When? Where'd she call from?"

The radio man said: "Remember last night when you were down in Miss Hobb's garage? Maria went into the office and called her mother. I didn't have the heart to stop her."

Lennox swore, and Houser asked: "What do we do now? Call the police?"

"We can't yet," Bill told him. "We're not even sure that anyone took her. Certainly we can't prove that Zimm did. I'll have to see. You sit on your hands for a while and don't do anything

screwy." He hung up, sat thinking for several minutes, then started towards the door. He had almost reached it when the phone rang again.

He swore, recrossed the room, and answered it. Spurck's voice was labored. "Bill! Bill! A man just called me and said we should lay off the numbers or something I shouldn't like would happen by my family."

"What?"

"Positively, I'm telling you. He said I was to call you and that you should keep your nose clean. Honest. Those were his words, or anyhow they would do something to Rose. Bill, you would think he was the President or anyhow the Governor of California the way he gave orders. *Gott soll hutten* that them tough loafers should do things to Rose."

Lennox said: "So we let numbers alone?"

Spurck's voice sputtered. "You should say such a thing! Is it that you think I am yellow? Honest, Bill, you hurt me."

Lennox said: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it that way, Sol. These boys are tough. I think I know who's behind the number racket, and he won't stop at anything. I'm warning you. We can't let anything happen to Rose."

"You're telling me. But right away I send her to New York by plane, y'understand. If them bad boys think they can run things they should think some more. I already called the authorities."

"You called the cops?" There was alarm in Lennox' voice.

"Did I say cops? Phooey! I called those G-men. Positively, I'm telling you, them G-men really do things like in that picture we just made. What a picture! And if it don't break box-office records without one star in it even I'll . . ."

Lennox cut in. "Who was it you called?"

"I called Harker and told him that you would come right over by his apartment. He lives at number—Normandie. You go there and tell him what

you know. We'll show these hard boys they can't run things like their name was Hitler."

"All right, I'll go down there, but for — sake, get Rose out of town. Get her on the noon plane, and tell her to take care of herself." He hung up and went for his hat. He was boiling inside, but his face showed nothing. That Zimm should threaten Rose Spurck struck Lennox directly where he lived. Out of his hundreds of friends in Hollywood, Rose meant more to him than almost anyone else. In her whole life she had never done a small or mean thing. She was big, good, and very kind.

He slammed on his hat and went to the door, jerked it open and stared. Mike Payman was in the hall outside, his hand raised to knock. The reporter grinned. "This is service."

Lennox' eyes narrowed. "What the hell do you want?"

Payman moved his shoulders. "Is that the way to greet a pal on Sunday morning?"

"I'm in a hurry, Mike," Bill told him, and tried to step past.

The reporter said: "I'll keep you only a couple of minutes. You know that numbers racket you were talking about last night? Well, I got to thinking. It might be smart if my sheet hopped on the thing, make a good page-one story, and help you."

Lennox hesitated. "Is this your own idea?"

Payman said: "Well, I thought it up, yes, but I also talked it over with Rube Bailey, the assistant city editor. He went for it. He said that if you'd give me the dope you've got, we'd print just what you want printed and hold the rest until you give us the word."

Lennox shrugged. "The trouble is, Mike, I don't know a thing."

Payman's eyes were on Lennox' face. "Yeah? Come on, Bill. Play ball. The *Tribune* can help and you know it. Tell me what you know."

For a moment Lennox hesitated, suddenly coming to a decision. "All right,

Mike. I'll play ball, but you can't print it. Spurck got a phone call this morning, warning him to lay off or his family would get hurt. He just called me. As far as I'm concerned, there isn't any numbers racket."

Payman's eyes glinted. "Don't kid me, I know you, Bill. You don't scare."

Lennox' voice was deliberate. "I'm working for Spurck. Wouldn't you lay off if you were in his shoes? After all, it isn't his job to police this burg."

Payman hesitated; his eyes on Lennox' face were speculative. Bill's eyes told nothing. Finally the reporter laughed. "I guess at that Spurck's right. It's no skin off his nose."

Lennox said: "That's what I've been trying to tell you. Now I've got to run. I've a very swell date." They rode down in the elevator together.

Payman said: "I've got a cab. Can I drop you somewhere?"

Bill thanked him. "I'm walking. Be seeing you." He watched the reporter's taxi pull away, then turned and walked up the street.



LLLEN HARKER was young, twenty-eight or nine, with black hair and a thin, firm mouth. He looked like a profes-

sional man, a doctor or lawyer. He was a lawyer, one of the first of Hoover's schoolboys, as gangland had derisively called them when the department was first formed.

He worked quietly, without publicity. In the year that he had headed the local bureau his name had been in the papers but once. He ducked publicity, but he got things done. Lennox had met him twice, liked his quiet efficiency. He said: "Spurck called you and told you I was coming."

Harker nodded. "I've been expecting you." He closed the door and led the way to the living-room. "Now tell me about it."

Lennox told him everything that he

knew. "The girl's missing," he ended. "I have reason to believe that Zimm has her, but I can't prove it. I can't prove much that I've told you."

Harker nodded. "Frankly, I wish that Spurck had kept out of this. I admire his stand, but we're working on the same thing from a different angle, and I'm not sure but that this will complicate our plans."

Lennox watched the Federal man through the smoke which curled up between them. "Are you after Zimm?"

Harker took time to answer. "The number or policy racket is one of the strongest and most vicious in existence. It's not as strong here as it is in the East, but it's growing. We've been watching Zimm for some time. One of my men, Dan Lawton, was killed about six weeks ago."

"By Zimm?"

Harker shrugged. "If we could prove that, then we'd be getting somewhere. Thank you for coming over. That's all I can say now. If you were anyone else I wouldn't have said as much, but you've made a nice record out here, Lennox. I wish I had you in the bureau. Do you think this little singer was kidnapped?"

Lennox shook his head. "Not in the usual sense of the word. I mean that if Zimm did get her it was to keep her from talking, not to hold her for ransom. She knows something, but some of the gang have a hold on her and she won't talk. You can always reach me through the studio if I'm not at my apartment." He rose. "I won't take up your time. I'd like to see Mrs. Spurck before she starts East."

He shook hands, went through the door, and down in the elevator. As he reached the street he thought he saw a man disappear around the corner of the building. He raced towards it and stared up the empty concrete drive. There was no one there, and he went back to his cab, told the man to take him to Spurck's Beverly Hills address, and climbed in. He was almost certain

that he had not been followed to Harker's, but he couldn't be sure. As they went out Wilshire he lit a cigarette and thought things over. Harker had not told him much, but the Federal man was certainly interested in Zimm.

Spurck's sedan was in the drive when Lennox paid his cab and went up the walk. He saw that the front door was open, saw Rose Spurck in the big two-storied hall, her hat on, her bags piled inside the door. She turned and gave a little cry of gladness as she saw Bill. Her short arms extended as she came forward. "Bill, *mein knabe*." Her arms were around him, gripping him tight.

"Is this the way for a respectable lady to act, even in Hollywood?" Bill's tone was chiding, but there was a lump in his throat.

She said: "I knew you'd come, Bill. Please, for me, make Sol see he should go too."

Spurck was behind her, patting one plump shoulder with a short-fingered hand. "Nonsense, Mama. Positively, I'm telling you that there ain't no danger. Is it that you would have me run from a lot of loafers, yet? I'm surprised at you. If it weren't that your own sister Irma is sick with gall trouble and she can't get well in the best hospitals even, I wouldn't want you should go." He looked at his extremely thin watch. "Come. Planes don't wait for no one, not even when they are important."

Rose managed a smile, but her brown eyes were moist as Bill helped her into the car, nodded to the chauffeur, and followed Spurck in. Sol said: "Remember this car, Bill? We bought it for that Arkin picture where Bob was a gangster. Remember? The car it has bullet-proof glass, all of it, even the windshield. Frankie Cane owned it before he was shot in St. Louis."

Rose shuddered and snuggled closer against Bill's shoulder. The car moved down the drive and swung into the street. Lennox was talking to Spurck.

He did not see the cheap sedan which swung in from one of the side streets until it was almost abreast of them. Then he cried a sudden warning and threw his body forward to protect Rose, tugging at his gun. But there was no shot. Instead, a package was tossed from the other car as it pulled ahead, a square package which landed on the running-board of the Spurck car.

Lennox shouted a warning to the driver, tried to get the door open, but he was too late. There was a blinding flash. The car rocked, seemed to be coming to pieces. Then something struck Lennox, and everything was black.

WHEN consciousness came back he was lying on the grassed parking, an ambulance surgeon bending over him. He tried to sit up, saw the crowd of people held back by the uniformed police. There was a buzzing in his ears, but he muttered, "How's Mrs. Spurck, and Sol?"

The interne said: "They're suffering from shock, but they're all right otherwise. The chauffeur is dead."

Lennox sat for a moment feeling his head, then climbed unsteadily to his feet. Spurck was standing beside Rose, his face, white, set, his arm strapped to his side. "Bill's all right, Mama. Look. He's all right."

Rose was rocking back and forth. "Poor Eddie, *olav hasholom*." . . . Lennox guessed that she was hysterical. Eddie was the chauffeur. He stepped out of the way while they helped the Spurcks into an ambulance, answered the questions of the uniformed policeman, refused to go to the hospital, recognized an electrician from the studio, and had the man drive him to his own apartment.

The electrician said: "I was ten blocks down and saw the explosion. When I found it was you and Mr. Spurck it was terrible."

When the car pulled up before his apartment Lennox got out.

The man said: "Anything I can do? Can you get upstairs okey?"

Lennox nodded. "I'm all right. See you tomorrow." He turned and went into the building. The clerk's eyebrows rose when he saw Bill's torn clothes, his bloody head. "Miss Hobbs is in your apartment, Mr. Lennox. What happened?"

Bill said: "Little accident," and went on to the elevator.

Nancy was standing in the middle of the room when he pushed open the door. At sight of him she caught her breath sharply, and the color drained from her face.

"Bill?"

He said: "I'm okey, kid. Nothing to worry about. They tried to blow up Spurck's car. Killed the chauffeur. Sol and Rose are all right."

"Zimm?"

He shrugged, and took a look at himself in the mirror. He wasn't nice looking. "Must be Zimm. Who else?"

She was helping him out of his torn coat. "You should be in the hospital."

He grinned. "That's what the doc thought, but you're both wrong. I've got things to do."

Her eyes widened, then narrowed. "Bill, you're going to quit this right now. Think I want you in little pieces?"

He said: "Haven't forgotten Maria, have you? Listen, Nance. We can't take this lying down. If we do, we're licked. We might as well get out of town. This burg is the most beautiful spot for chiseling games that ever was invented. The only reason there aren't more is because we fight them all the time. We've got to fight this, and we've got to find that girl. If she hadn't talked to me last night, she wouldn't be in a spot now. They weren't afraid of her until I jumped into the picture, and I would be a swell heel if I ducked out and left her sawed off, wouldn't I?"

She said, stubbornly, "At least lie down a little while. You're still shaking from the shock."

He said: "All right. I'll lie down if you promise to call me in an hour."

She hesitated, then nodded. "All right, I promise."

The sharp sound of the ringing phone roused him. He was off the couch before the girl could answer it, saying into the instrument. "This is Lennox. What do you want?"

A man's voice said, "What you and Spurck got was just a sample. Keep out of things or you'll get really hurt. We know you went to that damn' Fed. Don't make that mistake a second time." There was a click, and Lennox hung up slowly.

The girl said, sharply: "What is it? Who was it, Bill?"

His thin lips curved. "That was our friend, the one that sent that Xmas package, just tipping me off that it was only the beginning unless I keep clear." He picked up the phone, called the hospital, and got Spurck's secretary. "How's Sol?"

The secretary said: "They're just leaving now. He's chartered a plane and sending Mrs. Spurck East. I tried to get him to go also, but he won't. He's going to stay here and fight. There are two men from the D. A.'s office with him, so I guess he's safe for the time, but I wish he'd go."

"So do I," Lennox agreed, and hung up.

Nancy said: "You'd better lie down."

He shook his head. "I'm going over to that restaurant and see what Maria told her mother when she telephoned last night."

Nancy rose. "All right, then, I'm going with you."

Lennox shook his head. "You're not, and we're not going to argue about it. You'll stay here. I'll take your car to make sure you do. Where are the keys?"

Their eyes locked. She opened her mouth to argue, closed it and tossed him the leather book of keys. He said: "Thanks, Nance. You're swell," and went out the door.



HE restaurant was long, narrow, with three rows of tables running back towards the kitchen at the rear. Lennox went in, looked around and said to the

waiter who came forward, "Where's Mussaco?"

The waiter hesitated. "He's not here at present."

"Where is he?" There was a curt note in Bill's voice which brought sharp color to the man's cheeks. His dark eyes were stubborn, but they dropped before Lennox' stare.

"He's upstairs."

Without a word Bill turned, left the restaurant, and went through the door he had defended the night before. The bricks showed fresh scars where the shotgun slugs had marred them. He went up the steps two at a time and pounded on the door at the top. A small man with curly hair and dark eyes opened the door, stared at him, then asked:

"What is it?"

"I want to see Mrs. Mussaco."

The man did not move. "My wife? She is very sick."

Lennox' voice was crisp. "It's about her daughter, Maria. She'd better see me."

Fear leaped into the man's eyes. "Maria! Maria! Where is she? What have you done with her?"

"That's what I want to talk to your wife about, Mussaco. Come on. We're wasting time."

For an instant longer the Italian hesitated, then turned and led the way along a dark hall to a cluttered bedroom.

Mrs. Mussaco was in a chair beside the window, large, shapeless. Her reddened lids bore mute witness that she had been crying. "My baby! Where is she?"

Lennox said: "That's what I'm trying to find out." His voice had gained kindness. "She called you last night, told you she was going up to Topanga can-

yon. Who'd you tell? Who knew where she was?"

The woman said: "I tell no one, no one." She started to cry. "Such a good girl, Maria. Please, you no hurt her, Mister."

Lennox said: "I'm trying to help. You must have told someone. Did you tell May, Tom May?"

The woman nodded. "Sure, I tell Tom. He was here, Tom. He like one of my own. I said, Maria, she go with nice lady to Topanga."

Lennox swore under his breath. "Where can I reach May?"

The father made warning sound in his throat, but the woman paid no attention. "You wrong, Mister, Tom no hurt Maria. Tom like my own *bambino*."

Lennox masked his impatience. "I know, but where is he? Where does he live?"

She told him the address without hesitation. "You see Maria, you tell her come home."

He nodded and went hurriedly to the door, conscious that Mussaco was following. The restaurant-man said: "Please, Mister, we good people. We no want trouble."

Lennox said, "Sure," and went down the stairs, his brows twisting. Fear hung above that apartment like a cloud; fear of something. He wondered what. He came through the door and ran directly into Mike Payman.

The reporter stared at him with surprise. "As I live and exhale carbon dioxide, Bill Lennox."

Lennox said: "Sure. How'd you happen to be in this part of town?"

Payman grinned. "Food. This little joint puts out the best spaghetti in town. Come and have some."

Bill lied. "I've eaten. Be seeing you."

He moved towards Nancy's car, conscious that the reporter's eyes followed him. He watched his rear-view mirror to see if he was followed, but saw no sign. The coupé went across town fast, dodging Sunday traffic, until he parked it before May's apartment and went in.

He climbed to the third floor, knocked on the door, and waited. It came open after a moment, exposing the ex-grip. The man's hair was mussed, his collar open, and his face flushed with liquor. He tried to shut the door, but Bill's foot was in the way.

"What the hell do you want?" His words sounded thick.

Bill pushed the door wide, went in, one hand sunk in his coat pocket, gripping the gun. May backed away, his eyes burning. He tried to bluster. "Who the devil do you think you are, crashing in here?"

Lennox snapped. "Save it. You act like a five-year-old with a cap-pistol. Come on. Where's Maria?"

"How should I know? She went with you last night."

Lennox' left hand snaked out and grabbed the man's shoulder. He shook him, hoping to sober him. "I'm through fooling, May. You told Zimm that she was at Miss Hobb's mountain cabin. They took her from there. Where is she?"

May wrenched himself free. "Go to hell." He picked up the bottle from the table and started to raise it to his lips. Lennox grabbed it, tossed it through the half-open door of the bathroom, and heard it smash against the tiles. "Get smart, you fool! Someone tossed a bomb at Spurck's car. Someone grabbed the girl. Do you know what kidnaping means in this State? You think your big shot has this town by the tail. You'll find out different before you're through, and you'll be the first to get it in the neck unless you play smart."

May jeered. "I'm crying for Spurck."

Lennox' anger almost choked him. "Forget Spurck. He's okey. You'd better start whining for yourself. You're going to answer questions for me or talk to the Federals. Maybe you know how they work. Don't think your big shot can spring you there. They'll sweat you and sweat you plenty. Make no mistake about that."

May stared at him, licking dry lips.

His bluster was gone, and the liquor was wearing off. He said, suddenly: "Okey, I'll show you." He turned, walked towards the desk against the wall, pulled open the drawer, and snatched up a gun. He pivoted, but Lennox had moved up behind him. As he turned, Bill's fist crashed against his jaw, sending him down, the gun sliding from his fingers to land with a dull sound on the thin rug. Bill stooped, caught it up, and rubbed his bruised knuckles.

"Get up."

Slowly, May climbed to his feet, all the fight gone out of him.

"Ready to talk?" Lennox still held the gun.

The man whined, "They'll kill me if I do."

"You can get out of town."

May's laugh wasn't pleasant. "What with? I haven't a thin dime." He was arguing with himself. "I'd be crazy to leave. I've got a good thing here and you can't touch me. Bring on your damn Feds." His courage was returning.

Lennox' eyes narrowed. Time was essential. Every hour that passed added to Spurck's danger, to everyone's danger. He knew that if May talked to Zimm, the racketeer might move again. He said: "How much do you want?"

May's eyes lighted. "Now you're talking. Ten grand."

"You're screwy. I'll give you five hundred."

May said: "I'm laughing, and it hurts. I know plenty, Lennox, even something which your damned Feds could use."

Lennox shook his head. "There isn't five thousand dollars' worth of information in the world, let alone ten. I'll give you a thousand and that's tops."

May licked his lips. Lennox weighed the gun in his hand. "Come on. We'll go down and talk to them."

May backed away. "Try to take me. Two grand. I know where the girl is."

Bill hesitated. "Fifteen hundred," he

said, finally, "or not a dime. Take it quick, before I change my mind."

May was studying his face. "Okey, chiseler. You win."

With his free hand Bill pulled out his check book. The man said: "Ixnay, Cash on the line or the deal is off."

"You're nuts," Lennox told him. "Where would I get fifteen hundred on Sunday?"

"That's your grief. Take it or leave it."

Bill's voice snapped. "I'll take it. You wait for me here and lay off the liquor. I want you sober enough to talk when I get back."

The man said: "What the hell would I drink? You broke the bottle, and I told you I haven't a dime. Snap it up. I want to get the night plane."

Lennox was backing towards the door. "I'll be back in half an hour." He raced down the stairs and to the coupé. At the first drug-store he called Nancy Hobbs. "Listen, bum. I've got to raise fifteen hundred in twenty minutes. Call up everyone you can think of. I'll be over there in about fifteen minutes. I'm buying May off."

"You're what?"

He said: "I know. I don't like it either. But I haven't a thing on him except numbers selling. I tried to run a bluff and it didn't stand up. Get going."

He replaced the receiver and returned to the car. He was in Hollywood in seven minutes, making the rounds of every restaurant where he could cash a check. In twenty-three minutes he brought the car to a stop before his apartment. Nancy was waiting at the curb. "I've got seven hundred. I had them send it around by messenger."

He took the money from her hand. "Swell work, kid. Be seeing you."

She was already crawling into the car. "No you don't. This is one time that I go along."

He did not stop to argue, but shot the coupé away from the curb. She said: "Think May will play it square with you?"

Lennox' voice was grim. "He'd better. He made the mistake of telling me he was taking a plane out. If his story doesn't check, he'll find coppers waiting when his plane lands."

He was silent, pushing the coupé fast. At the apartment he did not stop to park but slid out, leaving Nancy to find a parking space. She called, "Be careful," but he did not hear her. He was already through the door and racing up the stairs. No one answered when he knocked at May's door. He swore, knocked again, then tried the knob. It turned under his hand and he went in.

May lay in the middle of the rug, lay on his back, his eyes staring. Someone had cracked the side of his head and struck too hard, or had they? Perhaps they had meant the blow to kill. Lennox bent above the man, listening for heart action which wasn't there. Then he saw a piece of white paper, stuffed into May's stiffening fingers. He pulled it out, saw it was printed crudely in pencil, read: "*Get smart, Lennox. You can be next.*"

He swore again, turned and went to the door. May had been dead minutes only. The assailant must have come in almost immediately after Bill had left. There could be only one answer to that. He'd been followed.

Bill went slowly down the stairs and along the sidewalk to where the girl had parked the coupé, half a block away. She said, her eyes widening, "So soon? Did he talk?"

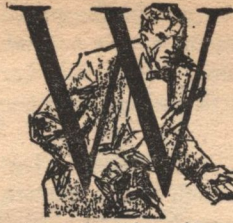
Lennox told her soberly: "Dead men never talk."

"You mean . . ."

For answer he passed her the penciled note. "This was in May's hand. You can figure it for yourself. They're so damn' sure of themselves, Nance. This scares me. It beats anything I've been up against. There's more money in it, a hell of a lot more, and money means power. We've got to crush it or it will crush us."

"So where do we go now?"

"Back to the apartment, I guess."



WITHOUT a word she kicked the motor into life and turned the car north. Neither spoke until they reached the apartment hotel. As they walked into the lobby Ben Houser rose from one of the leather seats and came forward. His face was drawn and white. "I tried to call you. Didn't get an answer, so I came over. Any news?"

Lennox shook his head. "Sorry, but there isn't."

Houser said: "This is all my fault. I should have warned her against Zimm. I shouldn't have let her make that phone call. I'm going to have a talk with Zimm."

Lennox said, sharply, "You're not. You keep out of this. It's gummed up enough the way it is."

"But . . ."

"Do as I tell you, and don't argue. Keep away from Zimm."

Houser still hesitated. "I read about Spurck's car being bombed in the paper."

"What paper?"

For answer Houser pulled a folded *Tribune* from his pocket. "They got their bulldog out early, an extra." He handed it over.

Lennox took the paper. "Thanks, and Ben, do me a favor, will you? Go on home and sit on your hands. I've got plenty on my mind now."

Houser hesitated, then turned towards the door. "All right. But if you hear anything, let me know."

Bill said: "Sure," and opened the paper.

Nancy said: "You're a little rough on Ben, aren't you? He's pretty well gone on that girl, Bill."

Lennox looked up at her. "He'd better get over it, then. She was in love with May."

"I don't believe it."

He shrugged. "You women! Wasn't she worrying about May, about his los-

ing his job? Just because he happened to be a heel is no reason why a woman wouldn't fall for him. They fall for birds who aren't worth kicking into the gutter."

She stared at him. "All right. But you don't know as much about women as you think, Bill Lennox."

He snorted and looked back at the paper. Banners screamed. "*Producer's Car Bombed. Spurck Escapes Death. Chauffeur Killed.*" Almost the whole of page one was devoted to the bombing. There was a three-column picture of the wrecked Rolls, a paragraph telling that the car had been the property of a former St. Louis gambling czar. . . . Lennox read the whole thing, his brows drawing across his eyes in a puzzled frown. "I don't get it."

She asked: "You don't get what?"

He said: "The *Tribune* is Mike Payman's sheet. Say what you will about the bum, he's a good reporter. It says here that the police are at a loss to account for the bombing. There's not a word about the numbers racket, not a line."

She said: "Which means, what?"

"I'm trying to dope it out," he told her. "Payman knew that Spurck had been threatened. I told him not to print it and he promised, but after this the bridle would be off, and yet there isn't a mention. I'm going to get hold of him and find out why."

Her eyes were very wide. "You mean . . ."

He said: "I don't know what I mean," and went towards the phone, called the *Tribune* and asked for Bailey. When the assistant city editor answered, he said: "Did Payman talk to you about this numbers thing? This is Bill Lennox, of General."

Bailey said: "What numbers thing? I haven't seen Payman for a week."

"A week? Doesn't he still work for the sheet?"

"As far as I know. What's this numbers thing you're talking about?"

"Skip it," Bill told him. "How does

Colonel Clark stand for legmen who don't show up for a week?"

There was marked hesitation in Bailey's voice. "The Colonel is out, Lennox. He's lost control."

"Lost control, and Payman stands in with the new owner. Is that it? By the way, who does own the *Tribune*?" Lennox' voice had sharpened.

"It's not generally known." Bailey was stalling.

Bill had a sudden hunch. "It wouldn't be Zimm, would it?"

"Er . . . I'm not saying a thing."

Lennox' mouth twisted. Bailey's voice told him that his guess had clicked. He said, "One thing more. What's Mike's address?"

Bailey gave it without hesitation and Bill hung up and went back to the waiting girl.

She said: "What did you find out?"

He gave her a twisted look. "Plenty. Zimm now owns the *Tribune*."

"No. . . ."

"Right, and Mr. Payman is going to talk and like it." He went out the door with her at his heels. He said: "You stay here. You can't go."

She didn't bother to answer. Instead, she beat him to the car and slid in. "What's the address?"

He swore at her as he climbed in. "You might get killed."

She said: "You're still alive. What's the address?" He gave it to her and was silent as the coupé turned east.

The building was old, of yellow brick, with long bay windows jutting out on either side of the entrance. Bill left the girl to park the car, went in, found Payman's name on the mail box and climbed the stairs. He stopped before a door on the third floor, knocked, and waited. There was sound within. Someone fumbled with a night chain. Then the door opened and a man's face showed. It wasn't a nice face; the eyes were small, piggyish, and there was a stubble of reddish beard.

"What do you want?"

Lennox said: "Payman."

The eyes got smaller. "He ain't here. Scram, fella." The door started to shut. Lennox' foot was in the way. The man kicked at Bill's sport shoe, his face getting redder. Lennox grinned, gave the door a sudden shove. The big man was off balance, and almost fell as the door crashed back. He took backward steps, trying to get his balance, clawing at his shoulder-clip. Bill was after him like a cat, giving him no chance to get the gun. He drove his fist against the man's jaw, saw him fall and jumped on to him, digging his knees into the man's ribs while he got the gun. Then he rose.

"Get up."


Slowly the big man crawled to his feet. "You'll get yours when the big shot hears. You don't know who you're monkeying with."

Bill said: "I'm beginning to have a faint idea. Where's Payman?"

"Never heard of him."

"So that's the way it is. Want some more?" He swung the gun suggestively. "Get over against that wall, quick."

The man moved. Lennox kept one eye on him as he circled the room and peered through the bedroom door. Then he swore his surprise. Maria Mussaco was tied to the chair beside the window.

ILL said to his prisoner: "Come in here where I can watch you. Don't get any screwy ideas, either. Get your nose into that wall." He watched while the man obeyed. Then he untied the girl. "What happened?" he asked, when he removed the gag.

She shook her head. "Nothing happened. I came with friends."

Lennox swore. "And they tied you up, just to be sure that you wouldn't walk out on them? Stop lying, kid. I'm trying to help."

The big man laughed. Lennox whirled. "Another sound out of you, and I'll poke your tongue down your

throat." He said to the girl, "I've spent the day hunting you and you hand me a runaround. What's the idea? Have they bought you off?"

Her eyes were on his face, wide, dark pools which mirrored fear. He couldn't stay mad. She was scared, shivering with fear. A sudden noise from the hall made him move towards the connecting door. The hall door was opening slowly. He held his gun, waiting. Then he relaxed as Nancy appeared. "You should whistle, kid. I might have shot you."

There was a small pearl-handled gun in her hand. "You were so long, I got nervous." Then she saw Maria and her eyes widened, went back to Lennox. "I couldn't whistle. I wasn't sure who might be here."

He said: "You're swell, honey. Come here and watch this punk while I find some tape." He found some in the bathroom, forced the man to lie face down on the bed, and fastened his ankles and wrists. "Let's get the hell out of here."

Maria said: "I'm not going. I can't. I don't dare."

"You're not go— The hell you're not." He swung her up lightly into his arms. "You keep still, kid, or I'll get tough."

Nancy said: "Bill!" sharply, but he paid no attention, was already in the hall.

"You don't get the angle, Maria. People who mean plenty to me are on the spot unless I get Zimm, and I haven't got a thing on him. You know something. What's the matter? What are you afraid of? What hold has he on you? Tell me and let me help."

She was crying as he carried her down the stairs and put her in the coupé, but she did not answer. He hated bullying women, but he knew that at any moment Zimm might strike again at Spurck. He had to stop the man and he was beginning to get an idea. He said to Nancy, who was back at the wheel: "My apartment as quick as you

can. Where does Payman come into this, Maria?"

Still she did not answer and he said, suddenly: "If it's Tom May you're protecting, stop it. He's dead." It was brutal, but he had to snap her out of it, had to make her talk. If she were in love with May . . .

She said: "Tom . . . dead. . . . Does my mother know?"

He stared at her. She wasn't taking it the way he had expected. Maybe he'd been wrong. Maybe she hadn't been in love with the grip. "I don't think so. I haven't told her. Why?"

The girl was speaking to herself. "Tom was no good, but mother didn't know that. She loved him." Then she said to Lennox: "Tom's father used to be a waiter in the restaurant. He died, and mother raised Tom."

Lennox stared. "How long has he lived with you?"

"About seven years."

"You were born in this country, weren't you, Maria?"

Her eyes widened. "Yes." There was a funny note in her voice. "What made you ask that?"

He was thinking about something else and did not answer. At the apartment he helped her out and hurried her through the lobby to the elevator. Once in his own rooms he called Nancy into the kitchenette. "So you were right. She wasn't in love with May."

The girl did not smile. "Looks like it."

He said: "You don't rub it in; you're swell. But how did you know?"

Nancy's lips twitched. "She's in love with Ben Houser."

"With Houser? You're nuts. What makes you think that?"

Nancy shrugged. "No man would understand, but I'll tell you one thing. If anyone can get her to talk, Houser can, but it's a dirty trick."

He said: "We won't worry about that part. It isn't nice to go throwing bombs around, either. You take her over to Ben's place and see what he can

chisel out of her. I hope you're right. I hate to do it this way, Nance, but I've got to think of Spurck."

Her eyes were suddenly soft. "You don't have to tell me, Bill. I understand. But why not bring Ben here?"

Lennox said: "Because I don't want Maria here. It might be dangerous for her after what I'm going to do."

Her eyes got suspicious. "What are you up to?"

He said: "I'm just going to try a bluff. I haven't time to explain. Take her over to Ben's. Tip him off that she has to talk, and if you learn anything, phone me at once. If she won't talk to him I'll have to turn her over to Harker, the Federal man. I hate to, but it's the only other out. Now scram, and don't argue." He watched Nancy speak to the girl, watched them disappear through the door, heard Maria say: "You mean that Ben Houser was worried about *me*?" and grinned sourly. From the sound of the girl's voice he judged that Nancy had guessed right again. He shut the door, went to the phone and called the *Corn Club*, asked to speak to Zimm, Phil Zimm.

The man who answered said: "He's busy."

Lennox snapped, "He'll be busier if he doesn't talk to me. Tell him that and that it's Bill Lennox." He waited almost five minutes before Zimm answered.

Bill said grimly: "That was a swell present you tossed at us this morning, but your aim was poor. Don't try a repeat."

Zimm said, sharply, "What are you getting at?"

Lennox said: "Only this, Zimm I've found the girl, found her at Mike Payman's apartment. She talked, and that tells you where you stand."

Zimm swore. "I don't believe it."

Lennox laughed. "Send a man over to Payman's joint. I left a big heel tied up on the bed. He'll tell you I'm not lying, and don't bother to look for her. When I hold an ace, I protect it. . . ."

He wondered whether his bluff would stick. All he was playing for was time. If Houser got the girl to talk it would be okay. What puzzled Lennox was why she was still alive. That her knowledge was a threat to Zimm he knew, and it wasn't like the man to let a threat live.

Zimm was saying, "Well . . ."

Lennox told him, "Go ahead. Check up on Payman's place, then call me back." He hung up without giving the man a chance to answer, lit a cigarette and waited. It was ten minutes before the phone rang. When he answered it was Nancy Hobbs, not Zimm.

She said excitedly, "He's not here, Bill. He's gone. Houser's gone to see Zimm."

Bill swore. "How do you know?"

"The clerk here at the apartment heard him threatening Zimm over the phone, heard him say 'I'm coming over for a showdown, you cheap grafter.' Then he slammed the receiver and dashed out."

Lennox swore under his breath. "The crazy fool! Did Maria hear?"

"She was standing right beside me," Nancy told him. "What shall I do with her?"

He thought a moment. "Take her to your place, and don't open the door for anyone." He slammed the receiver, and sat waiting for Zimm to call. The phone rang and he caught it up, but it wasn't Zimm. It was Nancy.

"Maria's gone."

"Gone? Where?"

"After Houser, I guess. She took my car while I was calling. Drove away just as I reached the door. You should have seen her face. What will the crazy kid do?"

Lennox spent no time wondering. He did not even answer. He was on his feet, already diving for the door. A car was pulling up before the apartment as he dashed out. He jumped to the running-board and yelled, "Take me to the nearest cab-stand. It's life and death."

The driver slashed in the gears and

the Packard jumped ahead, made the turn with rubber screaming. At the intersection a red light stopped them. Lennox hit the pavement running. He dived across against traffic, jerked a cab door open, panted, "*Corn Club*," and fell in. His apartment was much nearer to the *Corn Club* than Houser's place was. There was just a chance that he might head the little singer off.



HE cab slid to a stop before the club entrance, its wheels throwing loose gravel over the doorman. Lennox was out of the cab in a moment,

said to the doorman: "Has a little girl come in alone in the last few minutes?"

The man looked uncertain. "I don't know. We've got quite a crowd."

Lennox swung back to the taxi-driver. "Park your hack and stand here. If a girl about so tall," he held up his hand, "comes along, keep her out of the joint."

"What if she yells copper?"

"She won't. Lennox thrust him a bill. "There's another ten in it when I come out." He wheeled and was gone, pushing his way through the crowded foyer towards the office. It was dark, deserted. He swung about and went down the steps and along the tunnel which led to the gambling rooms. A big man with a thick jaw and reddish hair got in his way.

"Where's your card?"

Lennox reached inside his coat and brought his gun out. He let the guard take a look at it, then shoved it against the man's ribs and got the gun from his shoulder-clip. The guard said, hoarsely, "What is this? A hold-up?"

"Wrong guess. Where's Zimm?"

"Go to hell!"

Lennox said, "You're very dumb. You don't get paid for getting roughed." His gun tapped the man's head smartly. "Move," he said, and jammed the muzzle against the guard's back.

The guard was through arguing. He

led the way to a door in the side of the tunnel, pushed it open, and went down the cross tunnel to the door at the end. Lennox said: "Careful," as the man knocked.

A voice called, "Who's there?" and the guard answered, "Varco."

"What the hell do you want?" The bolt was shot and the door started to open. Lennox gave the guard a sudden shove and he fell headlong into the room, taking running steps, trying for his balance. There were three men in the room, Zimm, Switzer, and Houser. The radio man sat in a chair beyond the desk, one eye discolored, his lips bloody.

Lennox was inside the door, his gun swinging slowly. Zimm stared. "What the hell do you want?"

Bill made himself grin. "I figured you'd have had time to check up. I wanted to talk, and I don't like phones. Get their guns, Ben."

Houser recovered from his surprise and moved from one man to the other.

Lennox said: "You know I've got the dead wood on you, Zimm, but for a reason of my own, I'm giving you one chance. You can get out now, get out of town and stay out. If you ever show up in this country you know what will happen."

Houser said: "Why let them go? Why not turn them over to the cops? They've got Maria."

Lennox said, "They haven't got Maria. I have." He was praying that the girl had not yet arrived, that he could get Zimm away before she did.

Zimm said, slowly, "How'd you like to have a million dollars, Lennox?"

Bill laughed. "Not a chance, Zimm. You're going to leave here with me, and head for the airport, you and Switzer, or you're going down and talk to the Feds. Think it over."

Switzer stiffened, said under his breath, "What's the big shot going to say?"

Lennox hid his surprise. "The big shot?" He'd figured Zimm for the big shot. He said: "You're wasting time.

I'll take care of him. Do you want the chance, or don't you?"

A voice apparently from the ceiling said: "You and who else? Drop that gun, Lennox."

Bill pivoted and a bullet tugged at his shoulder. "Drop it!" He let the gun slide from his fingers and stared upwards. An elevator was descending into the corner of the room, Mike Payman standing in the car, a gun clenched in his small hand. "What's going on here?" The car reached floor level, stopped, and Payman stepped out.

Zimm said, hoarsely, "He's got the girl."

"The hell. . . . I don't believe it."

"It's the truth," Zimm insisted. "I sent a man over to your place. Harry was taped up. She's talked."

"Yeah, talked." Switzer had been grabbing the guns from Houser. He turned, handed one to Varco, and another to Zimm. He faced Payman now. "It's your fault. You could control her, keep her from talking. You fell for her and wouldn't let me rub her out. . . ."

"Shut up." Payman's voice was icy.

Switzer sneered. "I won't. You don't have to take the rap. It's me, me and Zimm. If the Feds get me I'll spill. . . ." He never finished. The gun in Payman's hand flashed up and down. A red spot appeared on Switzer's forehead. The bodyguard swayed for an instant and went over on to his face.

Payman swung to face Zimm. "What about it, Phil?"

The night-club man said, hurriedly: "I'm with you, Mike, all the way, but if that girl talks . . ."

"Lennox is lying," Payman said. "I know her. She won't talk. She doesn't dare. Have you ever known me to be wrong, Phil? That girl hasn't talked. I heard what Lennox said as I came down. Do you think that if she had, he would let you leave? He's trying to bluff, trying to get you away for some reason." His eyes switched to Bill, whom Varco was covering. "Where is she, Lennox?"

Bill said, "Find her." He was cursing the luck, cursing the chances which had brought Payman. If that girl arrived now. . . .

The reporter said: "I understand you're a tough guy. Well, I like making tough guys talk." His eyes were glistening as if the thought of the torture gave him immense pleasure. Lennox knew suddenly that he was seeing the real Payman for the first time. He decided to play for time.

He said: "If I tell you where Maria is, do Houser and I go free?"

"Sure." Payman said it too quickly. Lennox knew he was lying, that he dared not free them. Payman was grinning. "So the great Lennox can't take it? He's yellow. I always thought so, but I never had a chance to find out."

Houser had started forward, said through clenched teeth: "You yellow —" and Zimm hit him, knocking the radio man to the floor.

Payman paid no attention. His eyes were burning on Lennox' face. "Where is she?"

"Back in Miss Hobbs' cabin at To-panga."

The reporter said to Varco: "Get a couple of men and get out there fast. You know where it is. You were there this morning."

The man nodded, went to the elevator, pressed a button in the wall, and the car moved upwards until its base formed a section of the ceiling.

There were two buttons in the wall. Lennox said: "Mind if I look?" He crossed without permission. Varco had pressed the right one to make the car rise. Bill judged that the left one brought it down. He said: "It's cracked the wall, here by the floor." Bill spoke as if quite at his ease, as if he expected they would free him shortly and was now merely curious over a clever device.

Payman came towards him. "Where?"

Lennox pushed the left button as he bent down. "No, I guess I'm wrong."

He straightened, noted that Payman now stood beneath the descending car. He swung about slowly, moving just out from under the car. He saw Houser climbing slowly to his feet, said sharply, "Don't try anything, Ben."

Both Zimm and Payman looked towards the radio man, who was on his hands and knees, glaring at them. He had seen what Bill had done, had caught the cue and now began to talk volubly, desperately, doing nothing to invite another attack but straining to hold their attention.

The car was coming down slowly, too slowly. If Payman would not move, would not notice. . . .



LENNOX almost held his breath. Then the bottom of the car touched Payman's head. The reporter ducked, jumped sideways with an oath.

Lennox caught him as he jumped, with his left hand wrenched at the man's gun while he drove his right against the reporter's jaw.

Payman swayed, grabbed Lennox, and carried him to the floor. They rolled over, fighting for the gun. Payman's strength was surprising. His slender arms were like bands of iron. One hand came up, the fingers outspread, searching for Lennox' eyes. Bill ducked under and drove his fist against the man's mouth.

The reporter's lips were bruised, bloody, but he still fought on. He tried to lock his legs around Bill's body. Lennox broke the grip, rolled free, saw Zimm kick Houser in the side, saw the radio man writhing on the floor. The night-club man swung about. He had a gun, reversed. He circled Payman and Lennox as they closed again, trying for a chance to strike. He struck once. Bill saw the gun coming, got his head out of the way, and the butt crashed down on Payman's shoulder.

His grip relaxed, and Lennox rolled

over, grabbed Zimm's legs, and dragged the night-club man down. He got his fingers into Zimm's throat, clung. He saw Payman on his knees, one arm useless, the other reaching for a gun. Lennox let go his grip, struggled upward, swung a haymaker from the floor which crashed against the side of Payman's head.

The reporter went down and Bill dived forward, scooped up the gun and came to his knees. Both Payman and Zimm were trying to rise. He rasped, "Stay down, or get it." They stared at him, their eyes bloodshot, their breath coming in gasps, as he struggled to his feet.

"Hurt, Ben?" He dared not look towards Houser.

The radio man moaned. "Never mind me. Save yourself. Get to Maria."

Lennox laughed as the phone rang. "She's all right. She isn't in the mountains." He picked up the receiver, tried to make his voice sound like Zimm's. "Yeah?"

Lennox grinned suddenly. "Send them down. . . .

"You heard me." He hung up, stood waiting, steadying himself against the desk.

Payman was glaring at Lennox, Houser's breathing was labored, and Bill guessed that he was hurt badly. He wished the men would hurry. Then there was noise from the tunnel and Harker swung the door open, his gun raking the room. "Lennox!"

Nancy Hobbs pushed past him. "Bill! Bill! Are you all right?" She was at his side, steadying him. Maria rushed in, knelt at Houser's side, and cradled his head in her arms.

Lennox said: "I'm swell. How'd all this happen?"

Nancy said: "I came over here, right after I called. I knew you'd come, but a fool cabman stopped me at the door, wouldn't let me in. Then Maria came with these men. They arrested the taxi-man. He must be crazy."

Lennox laughed. "He was earning ten bucks. How'd Maria get with the Feds?"

"She brought us," Harker explained, coming over. "She came rushing into the office like a crazy woman; said she knew who killed Dan Lawton. Lawton was that man of mine who got killed, checking on Zimm. She saw him killed in the basement of her father's restaurant. Payman knew that she saw the killing, but he was in love with her. He arranged for her to win the radio contest so he could get her to Zimm's place and she could be watched.

"He wasn't afraid that she'd talk, because her parents are in this country illegally. They were here before the war. Maria was born here. Then they went back to Italy and returned without a quota number. Payman was in the gang in San Diego that helped them enter. He's blackmailed them ever since. She kept quiet until she learned that Zimm had Houser. Then nothing else mattered. She was afraid of the police. She knew that Lawton had been a Fed, so she came to me."

He crossed to where his men were examining Houser and asked, "How is he?"

One of the men straightened. "He might have a smashed rib. Nothing more, I guess."

Nancy was watching the girl. She said: "It looks like a wedding. Weddings always make me sad."

Bill grinned at her. "That's why I've never married you, kid. I hate it when you're sad."

WINNERS IN THE WARNER BROS.-BLACK MASK CLUE CLUB MYSTERY STORY CONTEST NO. 9—"THE AFFAIR AT THE SWIMMING POOL"

While many Contestants arrived at the correct solution, in the opinion of the judges—confirmed by a representative of Warner Bros.—the following gave the most complete and comprehensive analysis of the case:

- 1st Prize, \$25.00 cash:** Horace M. Byrnes, Harrisburg, Penna.
2nd Prize, 10.00 cash: Ballington Duncan Boss, Paterson, N. J.
3rd Prize, 5.00 cash: J. M. Brumager, Memphis, Tenn.
4th Prize, 5.00 cash: Louis Guimond, New York City.
5th Prize, 5.00 cash: Bartley P. Toner, Philadelphia, Penna.

PRIZES 6 to 25: One year's free subscription for **BLACK MASK** to each:

E. A. Adriaenssens, Arthur K. Barnes, Lloyd C. Bennett, LeRoy L. Blair, Charles Bruce, Sam Burton, Melvin W. Casey, G. Clarke, Mrs. Royal S. Copeland, Jr., C. B. Dobbs, William Dougherty, Minna W. Glidden, Russell C. Johnson, J. Matthews, B. D. McBride, John McGinness, R. C. Morey, John K. Scott, James A. Wallace, Paul G. Whitmore.

IN ADDITION, THE JUDGES RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING FOR HONORABLE MENTION:

Karl Anderssen, William C. Avery, Oliver R. Bechtold, P. R. Buckley, Cecele Campbell, Lawrence Cope, H. M. Darkey, Kenneth M. Day, Leo J. Diehl, L. Ervin, Jack Fallon, Verne Feigert, Francis Z. Francis, W. Jos. Gelhaus, H. K. Gerwig, I. Arthur Henderson, A. J. Hiatt, Ruby Hintgen.

Thos. F. Hone, C. A. MacDonald, C. C. Magruder, Ralph M. Manley, W. Mathieson, Alpheus T. de la Mare, Jr., A. R. Maxey, Miss Gloria Miller, Frank Milleson, Robert M. Mullin, Wm. F. Morrison, John B. Newlin, Mrs. C. P. Pardee, John Q. Public.

Thomas Gerald Reeves, Charles Saylor, Ann Senyk, H. Darrell Smith, Kent Snare, A. B. Starr, Jr., Theodor H. Unterman, Mrs. J. S. de Vore, Dr. D. E. Winstead, James L. Webb, John C. Wynne.

CONCLUDING THE GREAT WARNER BROS.-BLACK MASK CLUE CLUB MYSTERY STORY CONTEST.

WARNER BROS., world famous as producers of the best detective-mystery pictures, and **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE** have been presenting, exclusively in this magazine, one of the most interesting and worth-while contests ever held. It began in the February issue; has run for one year; has been open to every **BLACK MASK** reader without charge; and there have been valuable monthly prizes, and still more valuable grand prizes to be won.

WARNER BROS. have been producing a series of twelve detective-mystery pictures. They are by the outstanding detective story writers of the present day, and are being elaborately produced as feature pictures with famous Star casts and without regard for expense. Each picture has its own name, but the group is known as "**Clue Club Mystery Masterpieces**." The purpose of the Clue Club is to insure movie-goers that when they see the Clue Club sign displayed at a theater and in its advertisements, they are assured of the best in detective-mystery screen entertainment.

These pictures will be shown by at least one of the theaters in your city or town. On page 127 you will find listed the 427 "first run" theaters, which probably have shown or will show these pictures and which are local headquarters for Clue Club members (see paragraph 3 of the rules). Of course, these productions will also be on view at neighborhood theaters everywhere.

On page 126 you will find a short mystery story in which the film's leading characters appear. The contest, conducted as one of the Clue Club's interesting activities, is to state who is the guilty person. If you will see the picture first, before you send in your answer, it may help you solve the mystery by making you familiar with the characters. But this isn't necessary, as the story necessarily differs from the screen version and the solution is just a question of logic and clear thinking.

This month **BLACK MASK** publishes the last of these short mystery stories constituting a new mystery contest. This month **BLACK MASK** will again award to the 25 winners the prizes named on the next page.

In addition to these prizes awarded by **BLACK MASK, WARNER BROS. PICTURES, INC.**, will award 4 complete vacation trips as Grand Prizes (2 Bermuda-Nassau cruises and 2 Bermuda trips on the famous Furness Bermuda Liners) to the 4 contestants who have most nearly correctly solved the greatest number of the twelve monthly contests and whose letters are the best letters received. These prizes are certainly some of the most attractive that have ever been offered in any contest.

If you did not get a copy of either the February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November or December **BLACK MASK** drop us a postcard and we'll send you a copy of the contest stories in those issues—"THE WHITE COCKATOO," "WHILE THE PATIENT SLEPT," "THE FLORENTINE DAGGER," "THE CASE OF THE CURIOUS BRIDE," "THE CASE OF THE VELVET CLAWS," "THE CASE OF THE LUCKY LEGS," "THE CLUB CAR MURDER," "THE SLAIN GUEST," "THE AFFAIR AT THE SWIMMING POOL," "THE AFFAIR OF THE JEALOUS GROOM," "THE MURDER OF LADY WENTWORTH." Send us your solution of those problems along with the one in the present issue and you'll be recognized as a contestant for a grand prize.

See next page for the rules and conditions: read them all very carefully. They're easy, but **THEY MUST BE FOLLOWED.**

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1st Prize and 2nd Prize each A 7-day vacation trip with all expenses paid from New York to Bermuda, Bermuda to Nassau, and Nassau to New York, on the finest of the Furness Bermuda Line ships.

3rd Prize and 4th Prize each A 4-day vacation trip with all expenses paid from New York to Bermuda and return on the finest of the Furness Bermuda ships. Four glorious days at sea, with the privilege of stopping on the Islands, at your own expense, for as long as you desire.

MONTHLY PRIZES

AWARDED BY BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

1st Prize: \$25.00 in cash **2nd Prize:** \$10.00 in cash
3rd to 5th Prizes: \$5.00 in cash each
6th to 25th Prizes: A year's subscription for Black Mask each

RULES AND CONDITIONS

- 1 The Black Mask Monthly Prize Contest begins each month on the 7th day of that month and ends on the 17th day of the following month. The twelfth and last monthly contest is now open.
- 2 Warner Bros. Grand Prize Contest, consisting of the twelve Black Mask monthly contests, began January 7, 1935, and ends January 17, 1936.
- 3 To be eligible to compete for these final monthly prizes and the Grand Prizes, you must be a member of your local CLUE CLUB. To become a member you merely obtain a membership card, either by applying to your local theater showing the CLUE CLUB MYSTERY MASTERPIECES, or by writing to Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., 321 West 44th St., New York, N. Y. Either way, the card is free and imposes no obligation of any kind.
- 4 To compete for this month's prizes you must send us either the coupon at the bottom of this page, or an exact copy of it which you can make yourself, filled in with your solution of the mystery in that issue. Attached to this coupon, or copy of it, you must send us a letter stating in not more than 200 words why you think your solution is the correct one. The prizes named on this page will be given by Black Mask to the 25 contestants whose solutions are nearest correct and whose letters are, in the opinion of the judges, the best letters received. The winners' names, but not the correct solution, will be published in a subsequent issue.
- 5 To compete for Warner Bros. Vacation Cruises Grand Prizes you must take your membership card to your theater each time you go to see one of these CLUE CLUB MYSTERY MASTERPIECES and on your way out have the girl in the ticket office initial it after the name of the picture you have just seen. (The names of the pictures are printed on the card, with space for initial after each.) When you send in your twelfth solution, this month, you must attach to it your membership card. As soon as possible after January 17, 1936, the Grand Prizes will be awarded to the 4 contestants who have most nearly correctly solved the greatest number of the twelve monthly contests, and whose letters are, in the opinion of the judges, the best of the letters received. You do not have to be a monthly prize winner to be eligible to win a Grand Prize. You can enter this Grand Prize Contest at any time: if you have missed some of them you can get the missing ones by writing to Black Mask for them. And you can get your membership card at any time. If you have missed seeing some of the pictures it will not keep you from winning a prize, if your answers and letters are considered among the best.
- 6 The Judges of both the Monthly Prize Contests and the Grand Prize Contest will be the editor of Black Mask and an official of the Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc.; and there can be no appeal from their decisions.
- 7 Employees of Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., and of Black Mask Magazine, are excluded from this contest.

BLACK MASK: 578 Madison Ave., New York

The chief arrested as the murderer of Dr. Harrigan.

For the reasons stated in attached letter.

Name

Address

WATCH FOR THESE CLUE CLUB MYSTERY MASTERPIECES

THE FLORENTINE DAGGER	WHILE THE PATIENT SLEPT
THE CASE OF THE CURIOUS BRIDE	THE GREEN CAT
THE CASE OF THE LUCKY LEGS	INVITATION TO A MURDER
THE CASE OF THE VELVET CLAWS	MURDER BY AN ARISTOCRAT
PATIENT IN ROOM 18	THE MURDER OF DR. HARRIGAN

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Field & Stream is a magazine that you will find immensely enjoyable and informative. Order a copy today through your magazine dealer.

WARNER BROS.-BLACK MASK CLUE CLUB MYSTERY CONTEST STORY No. 12

THE MURDER OF DR. HARRIGAN

[With plot changed expressly for this contest but using the same characters as appear in Warner Bros. Clue Club Mystery Masterpiece of the same name, featuring Kay Linaker, Ricardo Cortez, Mary Astor, John Eldredge, Joseph Crehan, etc.]

A PATROLMAN was passing the private sanitarium of Dr. Harrigan when the door burst open, a watchman appeared and, perceiving the officer, hastily summoned him inside. Informed that the doctor had just been found murdered in his laboratory on the third floor, the officer rushed up the two flights of stairs to the laboratory and immediately took charge, holding every person in the building. He then telephoned to the chief who arrived in a few moments, bringing with him Detective Lieutenant Lamb who made his own investigation and proceeded to give his findings to the chief.

"This sanitarium," Lamb began, "was devoted to the treatment of victims of nervous disorders and of drug and liquor habits. It is, as you have observed, Chief, a narrow building of three floors and a basement. The upper floors are reached by an elevator, now out of order, and by front and rear stairways which are directly connected with one another only by the long hallway on the ground floor. On the second floor, to pass from one stairway landing to that of the other, one has to go through the two rooms of the women's ward; on the third, through the laboratory. The elevator opens on the rear stairway landings, which are at the north end of the building.

"The personnel consisted of Dr. Harrigan, Dr. Coate, Miss Sally Keating, nurse, and three orderlies. An orderly is on duty at all times on each of the floors, with a station on the front landings. This is an established rule owing to the danger of an outbreak by any one of the patients. Lambert has the upper floor, for duty in connection with the laboratory, Jackson the second, while Thomas Ash, in addition to his duty as orderly on the ground floor, also ran the elevator and acted as doorman and watchman. All three are stronger than the average, and with the exception of Ash, are surly, sullen fellows of the type which one associates with guards of this sort, which was what they amounted to. It seems, too, that, while they had nothing against Dr. Coate, they cordially disliked Dr. Harrigan, bitterly resenting his overbearing manner toward them and the fact that their wages for the past two months had not been paid.

"At this time there are but six patients; four in the men's psychopathic ward on the ground floor, two in the women's on the second floor. Two of the men patients appear quiet enough; of the other two, Shotwell has been in a strait-jacket for the past two days, which was taken off him only this morning, while Melady is suffering from delirium tremens.

"To reconstruct the discovery of the crime: Dr. Harrigan was working on a drug curative compound in the north end of the laboratory where the patrolman found his body. Dr. Coate was assisting him. Jackson and Lambert, as Dr. Coate saw them on his way up, were seated in

their respective places, reading. Ash was working on the elevator on the ground floor.

"Dr. Coate states that Dr. Harrigan ordered him to go to the basement for a supply of a needed drug, that he left by the south door, closing it behind him, and went down one flight where he encountered Miss Keating. He says that he engaged her in conversation perhaps two minutes when the laboratory door was opened and Dr. Harrigan called down sharply to him, demanding that he stop "that talking" and hurry. He states that the door closed with a bang and he at once continued his way to the basement.

"Miss Keating states that after Dr. Harrigan called and the door was closed, she turned and entered the first room of the women's ward, passed through it slowly, while saying a few words to the patient there, and went on to the north room, but had barely begun to speak with the patient in that room when she heard a heavy thump directly over her head. At all times worried over the men patients, Miss Keating says she ran to the south landing and asked Jackson if he had heard anything unusual, and that Jackson grunted a negative in his surly way. Not satisfied, she went to the head of the stairs and called down to Dr. Coate. She says he answered as she repeated the call and came hurrying up. They both ascended to the third floor and asked Lambert if he had heard anything in the laboratory, and he growled that he thought there was some sort of a noise but that he hadn't wanted to take a chance of being bawled out if he opened the door.

"Dr. Coate and Miss Keating went into the laboratory, followed by Lambert, and discovered Dr. Harrigan's body. Dr. Coate, knowing that Ash was working on the elevator, and wanting him to get a policeman, turned to the nearer door and found it locked. Turning the key, he opened the door and shouted to Ash. Ash answered, rushed to the street and fortunately intercepted the patrolman.

"Now the two quiet patients in the psychopathic ward both state that Shotwell had left the room a short while, perhaps two minutes, before they heard Dr. Coate's voice and that he returned immediately after they heard Ash answer the doctor. Both say that he appeared in some excitement.

"Ash says that, tinkering on the elevator, he was not aware that Shotwell had left his room, but when he turned to answer Dr. Coate he saw Shotwell coming down the last steps of the stair beside him. Both Jackson and Lambert say that no one passed them except Miss Keating and Dr. Coate.

"The weapon used in the murder, as of course you saw, was that now broken carboy in its burlap wrapping.

"Do you need anything more, Chief?" Lieutenant Lamb asked.

"No, that's plenty," the chief answered.

WHO KILLED DR. HARRIGAN?

THEATERS THAT WILL FIRST SHOW "CLUE CLUB MYSTERY MASTERPIECES"

ALABAMA: Birmingham, Empire; Montgomery, Empire; Mobile, Crown.

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E. St. Louis, Avenue; Springfield, Lincoln or Tivoli; W. Frankfort, Strand; Cairo, Jackson; Chicago, Oriental or Garrick; Peoria, Palace or Rialto; Rockford, Palace or Coronado; Decatur, Empress or Lincoln; Aurora, Tivoli or Paramount; Joliet, Princess or Rialto; Quincy, Orpheum or Washington; Danville, Palace or Fisher; Elgin, Rialto or Crocker; Bloomington, Castle or Irwin; Galesburg, Orpheum; Waukegan, Genesee or Academy; Evanson, Varsity; Moline, LeClaire or Paradise; Rock Island, Fort or Spencer.

INDIANA:

Gary, Grand; Hammond, Parthenon; South Bend, Grenada; Indianapolis, Lyric; Ft. Wayne, Palace or Embury; Evansville, Majestic; Terre Haute, Grand or American; Muncie, W. Grand or Strand; Anderson, Paramount or Starland; Kokomo, Indiana or Isis; Richmond, Tivoli or Ritz; Lafayette, Luna.

IOWA:

Council Bluffs, Strand; Sioux City, Capitol or Orpheum; Des Moines, Paramount or Orpheum; Davenport, Capitol or Orpheum; Cedar Rapids, Paramount or Iowa; Waterloo, Strand, Paramount or Iowa; Dubuque, Orpheum or Avon; Ottumwa, Ottumwa; Burlington, Iowa; Clinton, Rialto; Mason City, Palace; Ft. Dodge, Strand; Marshalltown, Capitol; Iowa City, Varsity; Newton, Capitol; Muscatine, Palace or Uptown.

KANSAS:

Kansas City, Electric or Granada; Wichita, Orpheum; Topeka, Jayhawk or Orpheum; Hutchinson, Fox or Strand; Pittsburg, Midland or Colonial; Leavenworth, Lyceum; Parsons, Uptown; Lawrence, Granada or Patie; Manhattan, Wareham or Dickinson.

KENTUCKY:

Paducah, Arcade; Lexington, Ben All or Strand; Louisville, Mary Anderson.

LOUISIANA: New Orleans, Orpheum or Tudor; Shreveport, Strand; Baton Rouge, Paramount or Louisiana; Alexandria, Paramount or Saenger.

MAINE: Portland, State or Strand; Bangor, Bijou or Park.

MARYLAND:

Baltimore, Stanley; Cumberland, Liberty; Hagerstown, Academy or Colonial; Frederick, O. House or Tivoli; Salisbury, Arcade.

MASSACHUSETTS:

Boston, Paramount and Fenway; Quincy, Strand; Waltham, Embassy or Central; Malden, Mystic; Everett, Capitol; Newton, Paramount; Brockton, Colonial; Chelsea, Olympic; Cambridge, University; Lynn, Warner; Somerville, Capitol and Ball; Salem, Paramount or Federal; Worcester, Warner; Springfield, Capitol; Holyoke, Strand or Victory; Lowell, Strand or Merrimac Square; Lawrence, Palace; Manchester, Palace or Crown; New Bedford, Empire; Fall River, Empire; Haverhill, Paramount; Fitchburg, Fitchburg; Pittsfield, Palace.

MICHIGAN:

Marquette, Delft; Escanaba, Delft; Ironwood, Ironwood; Menominee, Lloyd; Detroit, State; Pontiac Strand; Port Huron, Family, Ann Arbor, Majestic or Worth; Grand Rapids, Keltus or Kent; Flint, Garden; Saginaw, Mecca or Franklin; Lansing, Lansing or Strand; Kalamazoo, Fuller; Jackson, Capitol or Michigan; Bay City, Washington or Bay; Battle Creek, Bijou or Post; Muskegon, Michigan State or Regent.

MINNESOTA:

Minneapolis, Lyric or Orpheum; St. Paul, Riviera or Tower or Orpheum; Duluth, Lyric; St. Cloud, Grand or Paramount; Winona, Winona; Rochester, Lawler; Hibbing, State or Garden; Mankato, Grand; Faribault, Paradise; Virginia, State.

MISSISSIPPI:

Jackson, Majestic or Istrone; Meridian, Strand or Temple; Vicksburg, Saenger or Alamo; Hattiesburg, Saenger or Lomo; Natchez, Baker Grand.

MISSOURI:

St. Louis, Rialto, Hannibal, Star or Orpheum; Kansas City, Newman or Main Street; St. Joseph, Orpheum or Electric; Springfield, Gillon or Plaza; Joplin, Fox or Hippodrome; Sedalia, Liberty.

MONTANA: Butte, American; Great Falls, Rainbow; Billings, Babcock; Missoula, Wilma.

NEBRASKA:

Omaha, World Orpheum or Brander; Fremont, Fremont or Empress; Lincoln, Lincoln or Colonial; Grand Island, Majestic, Grand or Capitol; Hastings, Strand; Norfolk, Rialto or Granada; Beatrice, Fox or Rialto; Columbus, Swan or Columbus; No. Platte, State, Fox or Paramount.

NEVADA:

Reno, Granada.

NEW HAMPSHIRE: Nashua, Colonial or Tremont.

NEW JERSEY:

Newark, Capitol or Branford; Elizabeth, Ritz; Montclair, Bellevue or Willmont; Orange, Embassy or Hollywood; Plainfield, Oxford; Jersey City, Stanley; Bayonne, De Witt; Hoboken, Fabian; Union City, Lincoln; Paterson, Rival; Passaic, Capitol; Hackensack, Orlani; Englewood, Plaza; Perth Amboy, Crescent; New Brunswick, O. House, State or Rival; Trenton, Stacey, Lincoln or Capitol; Camden, Grand; Atlantic City, Virginian.

NEW MEXICO:

Albuquerque, Chief or Kimo.

NEW YORK:

Albany, Ritz; Utica, Avon; Schenectady, State; Binghamton, Capitol, Strand, Riviera or State; Troy, Troy; Amsterdam, Strand; Rome, Capitol; Watertown, Olympic; Kingston, Kingston; Buffalo, Gt. Lakes or Century; Rochester, Regent or Palace; Syracuse, Paramount or Strand; Niagara Falls, Bellevue; Elmira, Keneys; Jamestown, W. Garden or Palace; Auburn, Palace; New York City, Strand; Yonkers, Strand; Poughkeepsie, State; Newburgh, Ritz; Brooklyn, Strand.

NORTH CAROLINA:

Charlotte, Broadway; Winston Salem, State; Greensboro, National; Durham, Paramount; Asheville, Plaza; Raleigh, Palace; Wilmington, Bijou or Royal.

NORTH DAKOTA:

Fargo, Fargo or State; Grand Forks, Paramount; Minot, Strand or State; Bismarck, Capitol.

OHIO:

Cincinnati, Keltus; Hamilton, Palace; Columbus, Broad or Majestic; Dayton, Victory; Springfield, Regent or State; Portsmouth, La Roy; Lima, Sigma; Middletown, Gordon; Chillicothe, Sherman; Cleveland, Allen; Lorain, Palace; Elyria, Capitol; Toledo, Princess; Akron, Strand; Youngstown, Warner or Park; Warren, Ohio; Canton, Alhambra; Massillon, Lincoln; Zanesville, Weller or Liberty; Mansfield, Ohio or Madison; Steubenville, Capital; Marion, Ohio; Newark, Auditorium; Sandusky, Plaza.

OKLAHOMA:

Oklahoma City, Midwest or Liberty; Tulsa, Majestic or Rialto; Enid, Aztec or Criterion; Shawnee, Criterion; Okmulgee, Yale or Orpheum; Bartlesville, Lyric or Odion; Seminole, State or Rex; Muskogee, Broadway or Ritz.

OREGON:

Portland, Music Box or Orpheum; Salem, Elsinore or Capitol; Eugene, McDonald; Medford, Rialto or Criterion; Astoria, Liberty or Riviera; La Grande, Liberty; Baker, Clarick; Corvallis, Whiteside.

PENNSYLVANIA:

Philadelphia, Stanley; Reading, Astor; Allentown, Rialto or Colonial; Harrisburg, Majestic or Colonial; Lancaster, Capitol or Hamilton; Chester, Washington; Bethlehem, Palace; York, Rialto; Hazleton, Feeley; Norristown, Grand; Easton, State or Embassy; Lebanon, Capitol or Colony; Shenandoah, Lyric or Strand; Pottsville, Hollywood; Scranton, Family or Capitol; Wilkes-Barre, Orpheum or Peru; Williamsport, Keystone or Rialto; Shamokin, Majestic or Capitol; Pittsburgh, Warner; McKeesport, Memorial; Erie, Strand; Altoona, Olympic, State or Mishler; Johnstown, Cambria; New Castle, Victor; Sharon, Columbia; Washington, State or Washington; Bradford, Grand; Greensburg, Grand.

RHODE ISLAND: Providence, Majestic or Fays; Pawtucket, Leroy; Woonsocket, Stadium; Newport, Opera House.

SOUTH CAROLINA: Charleston, Garden; Columbia, Imperial, Greenville, Rival or Bijou; Spartanburg, Carolina or State.

SOUTH DAKOTA: Sioux Falls, Egyptian; Aberdeen, Lyric; Huron, State; Rapid City, Elks.

TENNESSEE: Nashville, 5th Ave.; Chattanooga, State; Knoxville, Riviera; Memphis, Warner; Jackson, Paramount.

TEXAS:

Dallas, Capitol or Melba; Houston, Kirby; San Antonio, Texas; Fort Worth, Palace; El Paso, Wigwag; Beaumont, Liberty; Austin, Queen; Galveston, Tremont or Martini; Waco, Orpheum; Ft. Arthur, Peoples; Wichita Falls, State; Amarillo, Mission; Laredo, Rialto; Corpus Christi, Palace or Ritz; San Angelo, Texas; Texarkana, Paramount.

UTAH: Salt Lake City, Victory; Ogden, Paramount; Provo, Crest.

VIRGINIA:

Richmond, National; Petersburg, Bluebird; Norfolk, Norva; Strandon, Newport; Portsmouth, Colony or Gates; Newport News, Palace or Paramount; Roanoke, Roanoke or American; Lynchburg, Trenton; Alexandria, Ingomar or Richmond; Danville, Rialto; Winchester, Capitol.

WASHINGTON:

Vancouver, Castle; Longview, Columbia; Seattle, Music Box or Orpheum; Spokane, State or Orpheum or Fox; Tacoma, Blue Mouse or Music Box; Bellingham, Avon, Mt. Baker or Grand; Everett, Everett or Granada; Yakima, Yakima; Aberdeen, Warner; Walla Walla, Roxey; Olympia, Liberty; Wanchette, Vitaphone; Port Angeles, Olympian; Bremerton, Rialto or Rex.

WEST VIRGINIA:

Huntington, Orpheum; Charleston, Virginian or Rialto; Parkersburg, Strand; Wheeling, Capitol; Clarksburg, Ritz; Fairmont, Virginia; Martinsburg, Apollo.

WISCONSIN:

Milwaukee, Warner or Strand; Waukesha, Avon or Park; Racine, State or Venetian; Madison, Capitol; Kenosha, Kenosha; Oshkosh, Strand; Sheboygan, Sheboygan; Green Bay, Bay; Fond Du Lac, Garrick or Keltus; Appleton, Appleton; Beloit, Majestic or Rex; Wausau, Grand or Wausau; Manitowish, Mikado or Capitol; Janesville, Jetties or Myers; Superior, Peoples; La Crosse, Rival or Majestic; Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

WYOMING: Casper, America or Rialto; Cheyenne, Paramount.

IN FEBRUARY

RIGHT off the bat we mark the February makeup a one-two knockout.

We realize that tastes differ; some like chutney with their curry; others prefer their meat straight and unseasoned. To prepare just one dish to tickle everyone's palate is being just a bit overconfident.

So, first, listen, you **Kennedy-MacBride** fans.

Frederick Nebel has just cooked up a new one of this combination, built on enthusiasm and inspiration—a great story by a great writer. And of the various stories of this really human pair, by **Mr. Nebel**, we peg this one right at the top and no fooling. It is so happily in character—**MacBride** is **MacBride**; **Kennedy** is **Kennedy**, exactly as they should be. “**NO HARD FEELINGS**” is the title and believe you me, you'll have no hard feelings against **Frederick Nebel** when you read this one.

All right; now you **Flashgun Casey** followers, tune in. We have just as hot a message for “**PORTRAIT OF MURDER**,” by **George Harmon Coxe**. You may not have heard it yet, but a certain book publisher—yes, the same one who brought out “**Maltese Falcon**” and the other **Dashiell Hammett BLACK MASK** stories—is out with the statement that **Mr. Coxe** is the greatest since Hammett.

Well, judging from recent readers' vote and the letters that come in currently, **Mr. Coxe** is already rated pretty high in our own fold, and “**PORTRAIT OF MURDER**” will even boost that reputation. It is a fast, hard story with no formula about it.

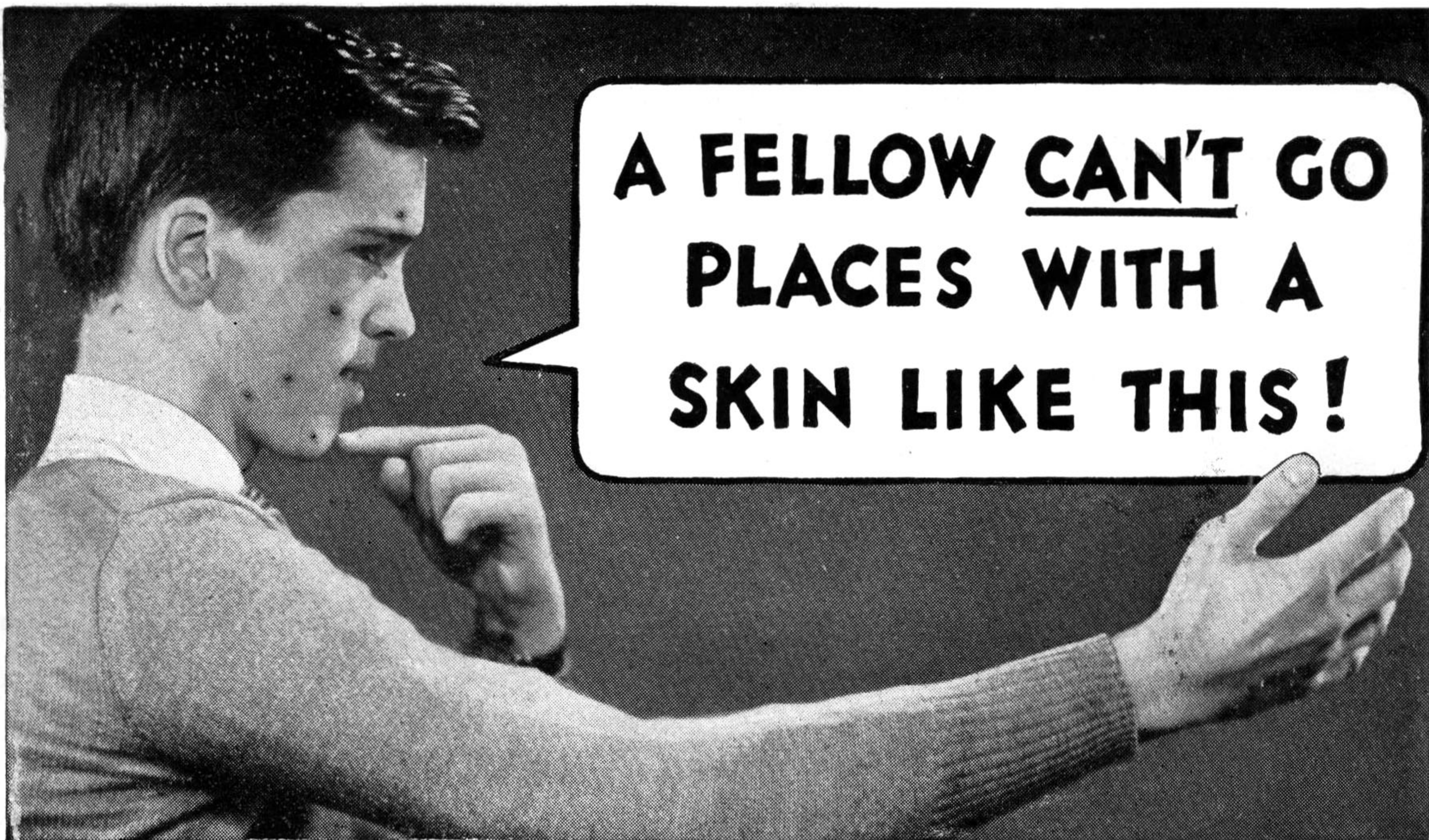
And now to the **Jerry Tracy** addicts. **Jerry** is in action again. “**BODY SNATCHER**,” by **Theodore A. Tinsley**, will bring out the gooseflesh, bead the brow with cold perspiration, cause a laugh when least expected and a long-drawn sigh at the end. We are beginning to believe that **Jerry** likes these jams. He gets so darned excited.

Space is limited, so we'll only add that there is a rattling good story of **Black Burton**, by **Nels Leroy Jorgensen**, and, in addition, another stand-out.

FEBRUARY BLACK MASK

On **ALL** Newsstands January 7th

The magazine with no duds in any issue



**But Pete
is soon
pimple-
free and
“out
stepping”**



**Don't let adolescent
pimples make a hermit
out of YOU!**

Between the ages of 13 and 25, important glands develop. This causes disturbances throughout the body. Waste poisons get into the blood and irritate the skin, making it break out in pimples.

But you can clear skin irritants out of your blood—with Fleischmann's Yeast. Then the pimples disappear! Eat 3 cakes of Fleischmann's Yeast a day, before meals, until skin clears.

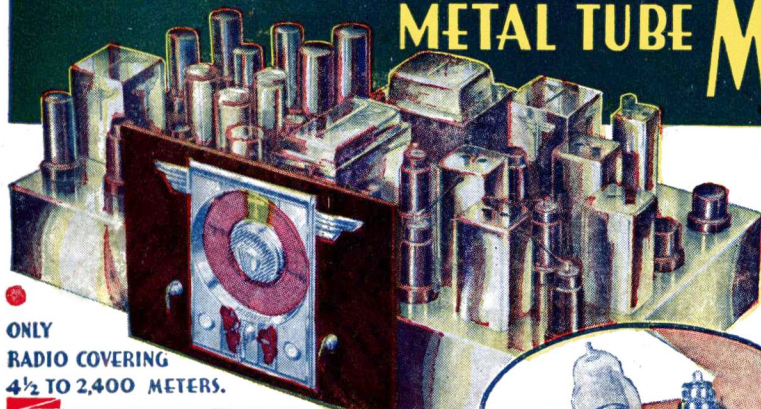


—clears the skin
by clearing skin irritants
out of the blood

SAVE UP TO 50% by BUYING YOUR RADIO *Direct from* MIDWEST LABORATORIES

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with New 1936 SUPER *Deluxe*

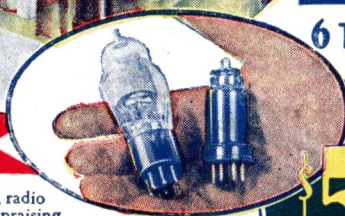
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GIANT
THEATRE-
SONIC
(LESS TUBES) **SPEAKER**

TERMS AS LOW AS \$5.00 DOWN



PUSH-BUTTON TUNING
(Noises Suppressed)

Now, Push-Button Silent Tuning is offered for first time! Simply pushing Silencer Button hushes set between stations... suppresses noises. Pressing Station Finder Button automatically indicates proper dial position for bringing in extremely weak stations.

Acousti-Tone V-Spread Design
(Patent Pending)

...Establishes new radio style overnight! The V-Front Dispersing Vanes were developed by Midwest engineers as a result of a study of directional effect of the Midwest Full Scope High Fidelity Speaker. These Vanes spread the beautiful lacework of the "highs" throughout the entire room in a scientific manner... directing the High Fidelity waves uniformly to the ear. Send for new FREE 40-page catalog. It pictures the complete line of beautiful 1936 Acousti-Tone V-Spread consoles... and chassis... in four colors.

FULL SCOPE HIGH FIDELITY

Brilliant

Concert Tone

Now, get complete range of audible frequencies from 30 to 16,000 cycles, being transmitted by four new High Fidelity Broadcasting stations—WIXBS, W9XBY, W2XR and W6XAL. Glorious new Acousti-Tone is achieved... assuring life-like, crystal-clear "concert" realism.

V-FRONT



EVERYWHERE, radio enthusiasts are praising this amazingly beautiful, bigger, better, more powerful, super selective, 18-tube 6-tuning range radio. They say it is a tremendous improvement over Midwest's 16-tube set, so popular last season. It is sold direct to you from Midwest Laboratories at a positive saving of 30% to 50%. (This statement has been verified by a Certified Public Accountant who conducted an impartial survey among representative Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana radio retailers.) Before you buy any radio, write for FREE 40-page 1936 catalog. Never before so much radio for so little money. Why pay more? You are triple-protected with: One Year Guarantee, Foreign Reception Guarantee and Money-Back Guarantee! This super Midwest will out-perform \$200 to \$300 sets on a point-for-point comparison. That is why nationally known orchestra leaders like Fred Waring, George Olsen, Jack Denny, Tito Ritto, and others use Midwest sets to study types of harmony and rhythmic beats followed by leading American and Foreign orchestras.

80 ADVANCED 1936 FEATURES

Scores of marvelous features, many exclusive, explain Midwest super performance and thrilling world-wide all-wave reception... enable Midwest to bring in weak distant foreign stations, with full loud speaker volume, on channels adjacent to locals. Only Midwest offers so many features... only Midwest tunes as low as 4½ meters... only Midwest gives the sensational new Push-Button Tuning feature, etc. See pages 12 to 21 in FREE catalog for description of the 80 features. Read about advantages of 6 Tuning ranges... offered for first time: E, A, L, M, H and U. They make this Super De Luxe 18-tube set the equivalent of six different radios... offer tuning ranges not obtainable in other radios at any price!

DEAL DIRECT WITH LABORATORIES

No middlemen's profits to pay—you buy at wholesale price direct from laboratories

...saving 30% to 50%. Increasing costs are sure to result in higher radio prices soon. Buy before the big advance... NOW

You can take advantage of Midwest's sensational values. You can order your Midwest 1936 Full Scope High Fidelity Acousti-Tone radio from the 40-page catalog with as much certainty of satisfaction as if you were to come yourself to our great radio laboratories. You save 30% to 50%... you get 30 days FREE trial... as little as \$1.00 puts a Midwest radio in your home... Satisfaction guaranteed or money back. Write today, for FREE catalog.

SAVE UP TO 50%



Thrill to new explorations in sections of radio spectrum that are strangers to you. Every type of broadcast from North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia is now yours. Send today for money-saving facts.

GEORGE OLSEN PRAISES LIFE-LIKE TONE REALISM

Long Island, N. Y.—After comparing many different makes, I finally decided upon Midwest. It out-performs other radios costing almost twice as much. The crystal-clear tone is so life-like that it sounds as though I am in the studios, actually hearing artists performing.



TODAY'S FINEST RADIO SAYS TED FIO RITO

My new Midwest is finest radio I have had pleasure of hearing. Bass-Treble control is marvelous... enables one to hear every instrument in orchestra.



METAL TUBES

This Midwest is engineered from the ground up to use either the new METAL tubes or glass-metal counterpart tubes. Octal sockets and newest circuits permit use of either type... just as you desire.

MAIL COUPON TODAY! FOR FREE 30-DAY TRIAL OFFER and 40-PAGE FOUR-COLOR FREE CATALOG

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Make Easy
Extra Money

Without obligation on my part, send me your new FREE catalog, complete details of your liberal 30-day FREE trial offer, and FREE Miniature Rotating 18-tube Dial. This is NOT an order.

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