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**MURDER—
FOR NO REASON**

*A COMPLETE NOVELETTE
by* **ROGER TORREY**

**TEN CARATS
OF LEAD**

*A "SPECIAL SQUAD" STORY
by* **STEWART STERLING**

**G.T. FLEMING-ROBERTS
AND OTHERS**

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Washington, D. C.

Top Picture
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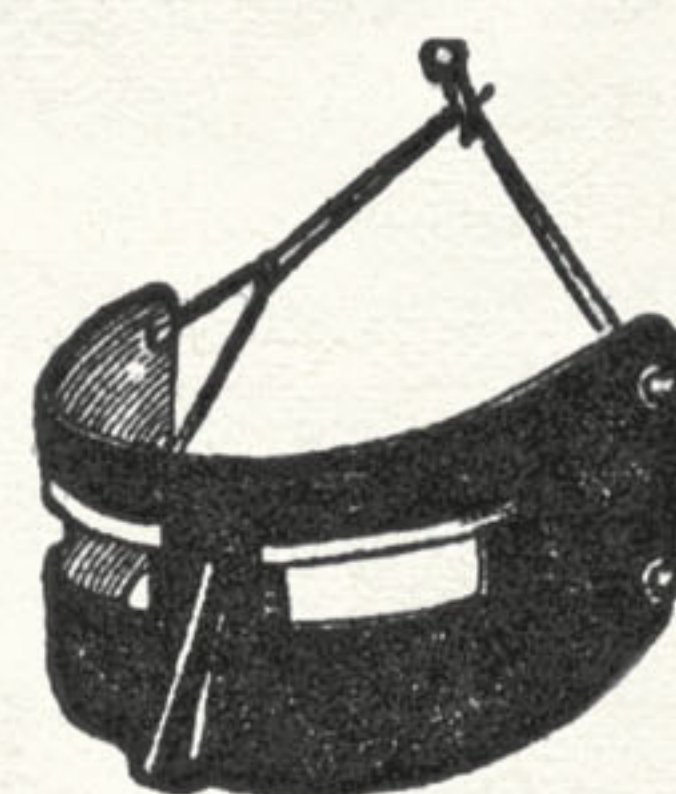
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SEPTEMBER ISSUE ON SALE JULY 19TH



BLACK MASK



K. S. White, *Editor*

VOL. XXIII No. 4

August, 1940

Contents

- MURDER—FOR NO REASON** Roger Torrey 6
A complete novelette
Introducing Bryant—one-man crime-prevention bureau in a cow-country C.C.C. camp.
- TEN CARATS OF LEAD** Stewart Sterling 26
A complete novelette
It was a case for Homicide, according to all the rules, but Hansard knew it had germinated under the three gold balls of his own special detail—the headquarters hockshop squad.
- WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS FAMOUS CRIME?** . . . I. B. Hazelton 50
A pictorial contest feature
Spot the flaws in this presentation of a notable murder case and win a cash prize or a subscription to Black Mask. Announcement on Page 49.
- CASEY AND THE BLOND WREN** George Harmon Coxe 52
A short story
There were two kinds of people that got Flashgun's goat—the camera-crazy and the camera-shy. The blond little British wren was the latter—lens-leery though lovely—but she had a reason.
- TOO TOUGH** John Graham 67
A short story
The trouble with some guys is they don't know the difference between tough and too tough—too smart and just smart enough.
- THE FRAME THAT DIDN'T FIT** Eaton K. Goldthwaite . 82
A short story
Meet Duke Brian and Franny Steinmetz, a pair of ex-felons from Philly, and the amazing Mr. Green who always got airsick before he took a plane trip.
- BEHIND THE BLACK MASK** 94
A page of informal talk about the magazine—and things in general.
- RATS BREED RATS** G. T. Fleming-Roberts 95
A short story
In which a tough cop and a sentimental newshound gamble against death with the soul of a killer's kid for table-stakes.
- 10,001 MOTIVES FOR MURDER** Wyatt Blassingame . . 104
A complete "Bishop" novelette
Everyone in South City knew about the first ten thousand reasons why Ralph McDonald might have been bumped off. It was the ten-thousand-and-first that packed the surprise.
- JIM GREGG** Charles E. Jestings . . . 128
A prison poem
- LIFTING THE SEPTEMBER BLACK MASK** 4
A partial preview of our plans for the next issue of this magazine.

Cover painted for Black Mask by Rafael DeSoto

Black-and-white illustrations by Peter Kuhlhoff

Every story in Black Mask is new and, to the best of our knowledge, has never before been printed in any publication.

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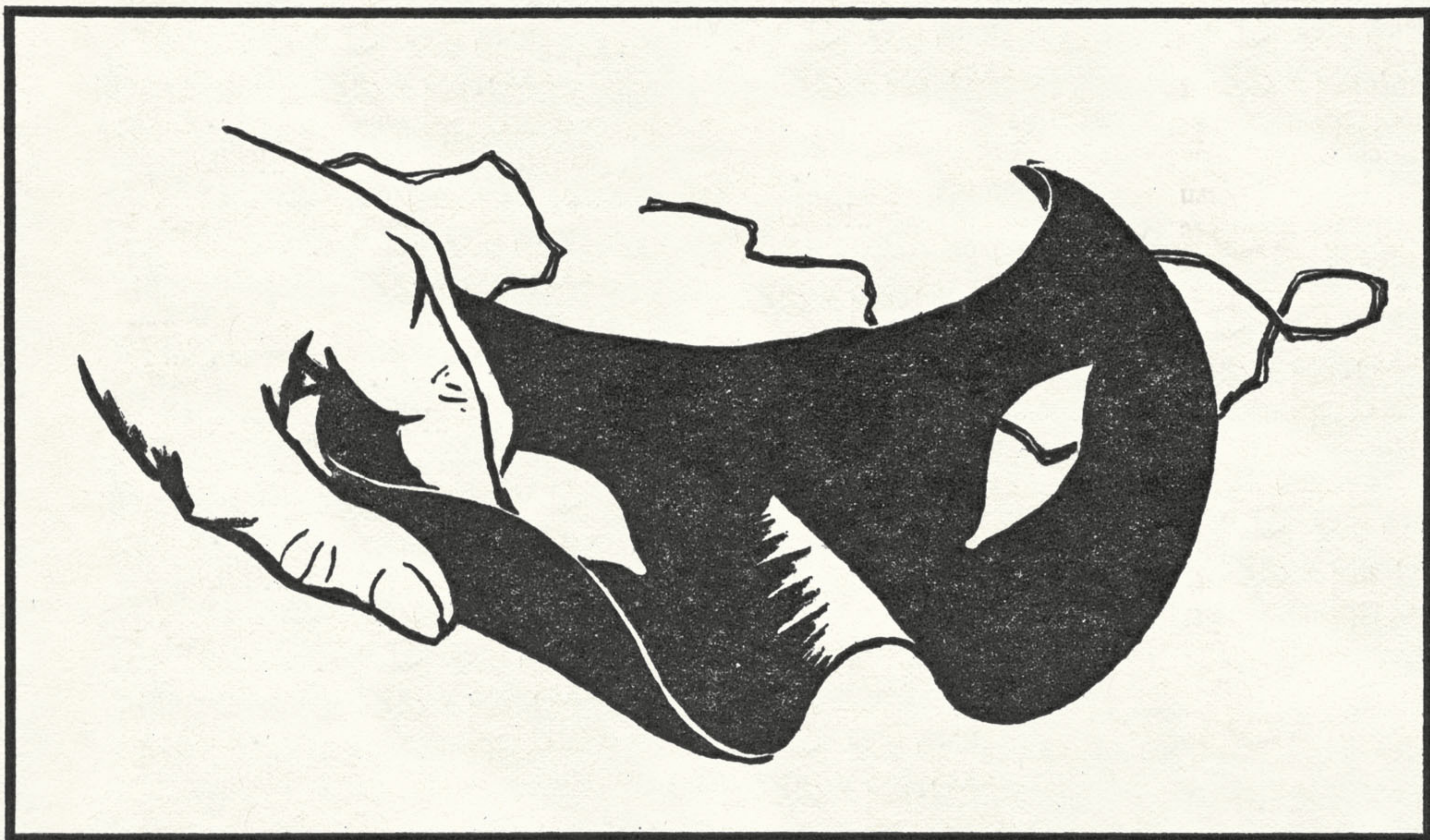
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LIFTING THE SEPTEMBER



BLACK MASK

BILL LENNOX, trouble shooter for General Consolidated Studios, returns in the next issue to take *Pictures for Murder*, in W. T. BALLARD'S newest smashing complete novelette. Fish Harbor, home port of Southern California's fishing fleet is the setting for this gripping yarn and the super-stench of tons of tuna and sardines blend with the blood-smell of murder to permeate the shadows Lennox has to penetrate before Wharf Street can be cleared and the cameras begin to grind out another of Sol Spurck's "epics of the silver-screen."

Remember O'Hanna, house-dick at San Alpa, in DALE CLARK'S *Rhymes With Crimes* back in the July issue? He's back again next month to crack down on the neatest murder set-up we've run across in a long time. The irrepressible author wanted to call the yarn *Con-*

fucius Say It's Murder but we cracked down on that like a Nazi *blitzkrieg* having taken a solemn vow to do nothing to perpetuate and everything to discourage the march of the C.S.I. gags. The title is now *Killer in the Wind* and we're betting you're going to like it too.

Then there's another Broadway Squad story by JOHN LAWRENCE, *Death in the Pluperfect*, shorts by WILLIAM BRANDON, CLEVE F. ADAMS and JIM KJELGAARD—we're going to learn the correct pronunciation of that guy's name somehow, yet—and *Dog Eat Dog*, one of the greatest detective yarns of the year, by ROBERT REEVES. It introduces Cellini Smith, who in our candid opinion is the most original detective-fiction character S.S. (Since Spade)—for anyone who happens to remember a little piece called *The Maltese Falcon* that once ran in these pages.

This grand issue of BLACK MASK will be on sale JULY 19th.



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LET ME START SHOWING RESULTS FOR YOU

5 inches of new Muscle

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What a difference!

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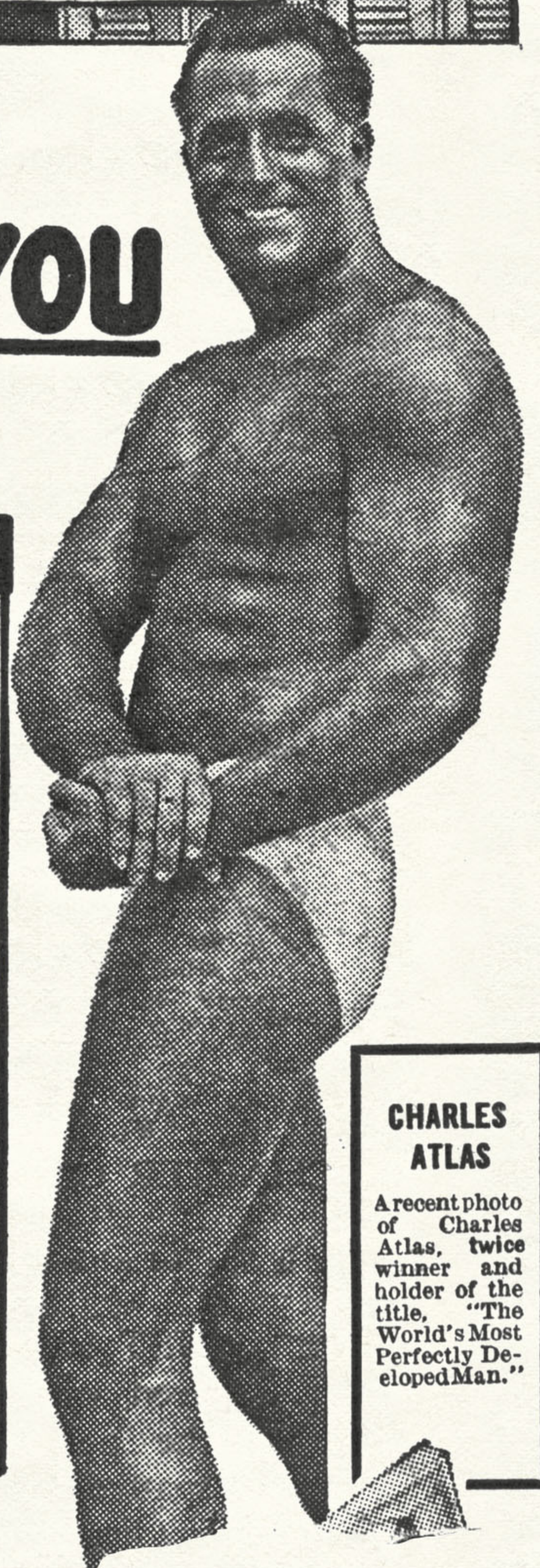
John Jacobs **BEFORE** John Jacobs **AFTER**

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A recent photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

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I could fill this whole magazine with enthusiastic reports from OTHERS. But what you want to know is—"What can Atlas do for ME?"

Find out—at my risk! Just give me a 7-day trial. Just one week!

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FOR NO REASON

CHAPTER ONE

Trouble is Spelled with Three C's

by **ROGER
TORREY**



JUST as I swam out even with the tip of the point something spatted the water by my head, then I heard like the crack-
The

clothes and said: "Hey! The looie says you used to play football."

"Three years for State," I said. "And then three years pro. We'll have a football team, too."

"Why'd you quit? There's dough in it, ain't there?"

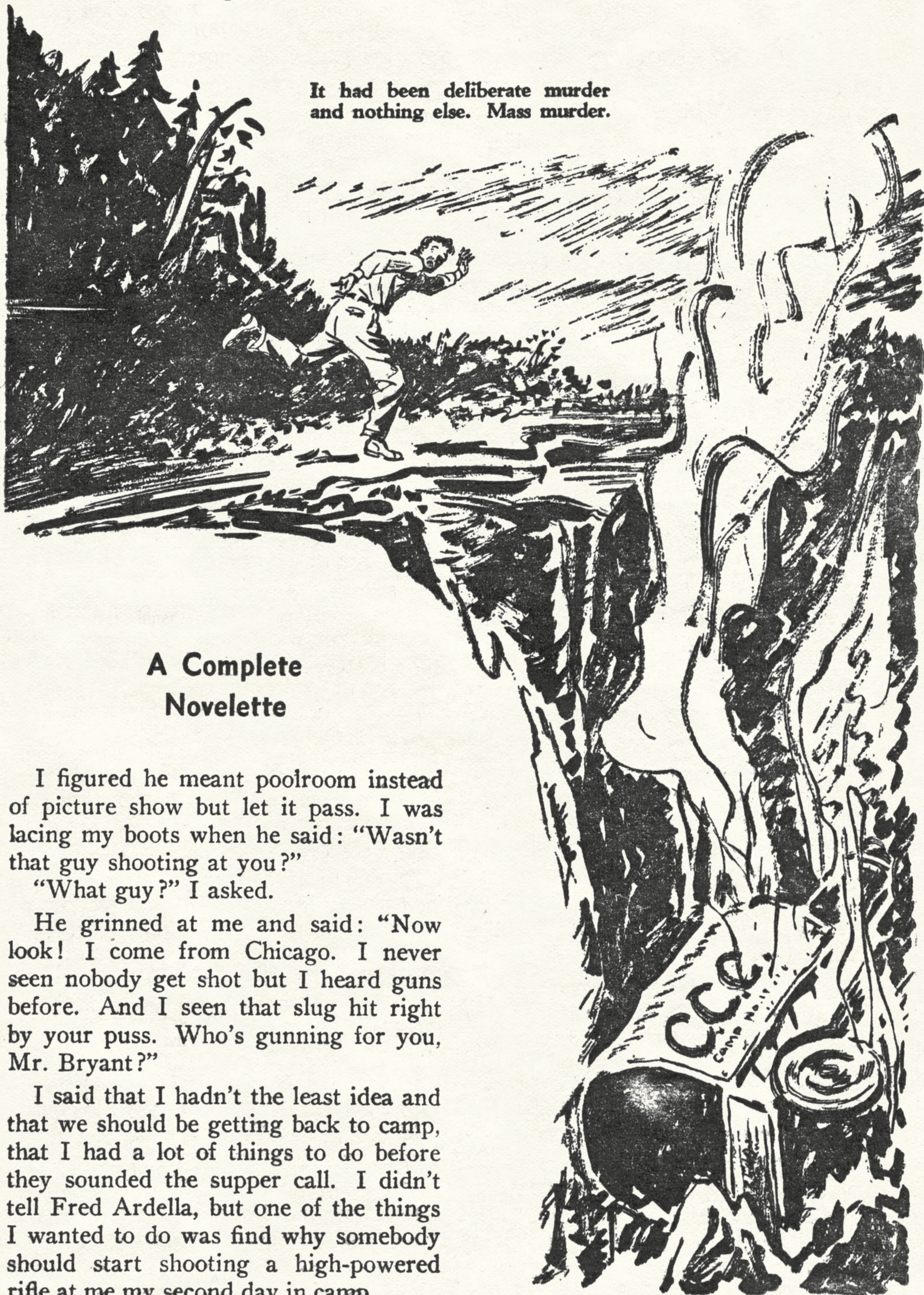
said. "Sure. I got a bad leg two s ago, though, and it goes back on when I twist suddenly."

Huh! That why you took this job?"

I said it was. He asked me if it paid much money and I said nobody ever got out of being a director of physical tion at a C.C.C. camp, but that it ' turn out to be a lot of fun. Freddy and said his idea of fun wasn't tuck up in the middle of the woods fty miles from a picture show.

"Director of Physical Education"—that was what the C.C.C. authorities had hired Bryant to be for the summer session of that cow-country camp. But "One-Man Crime Prevention Bureau" would have been a more accurate title. That was what he had to turn himself into when someone began potting at him with a high-powered rifle and slaughtering wholesale the boys under his charge.

**It had been deliberate murder
and nothing else. Mass murder.**



A Complete Novelette

I figured he meant poolroom instead of picture show but let it pass. I was lacing my boots when he said: "Wasn't that guy shooting at you?"

"What guy?" I asked.

He grinned at me and said: "Now look! I come from Chicago. I never seen nobody get shot but I heard guns before. And I seen that slug hit right by your puss. Who's gunning for you, Mr. Bryant?"

I said that I hadn't the least idea and that we should be getting back to camp, that I had a lot of things to do before they sounded the supper call. I didn't tell Fred Ardella, but one of the things I wanted to do was find why somebody should start shooting a high-powered rifle at me my second day in camp.

It just didn't seem the way to start out a happy summer that I'd figured would be a sort of vacation.



CAPTAIN RAWLINS was in his office. He tipped his head so he could look at me over the top of the rimless glasses he wore, and I said: "Somebody shot at me, Captain Rawlins. I went swimming—and somebody potted at me while I was in the water."

He took off the glasses and started polishing them. "You sure of that, Mr. Bryant?"

I said I was certain—that there could be no mistake. He said: "Possibly one of the boys has smuggled a twenty-two rifle into camp. We'll have to investigate."

With that, he looked at me to see how I was taking it.

"It was no twenty-two," I said. "It was a big gun. I've shot enough of them to know that."

"Almost hit you?"

"Pretty close."

He had almost white hair but his close-cropped mustache was gray. He started to gnaw at it and said, "This is awkward!" as though he was thinking aloud.

I stood there, waiting, and he went on with, "The camp has been threatened, Mr. Bryant. Frankly, that's why I approved your application, rather than asking for someone with more experience. I understand you originally came from this country."

I said: "My dad's old place is about twenty miles west of here. Dad sold it, years ago, but I grew up there."

"Then you'd know just about everybody in the country?"

"All the old-timers."

He put the glasses back on and said: "I was hoping there was nothing to the threat. Yet, I felt I shouldn't take an unnecessary risk if it could be avoided. I was told this was not a very healthy place for a camp. In a very nice way,

you understand. Of course we both know I have nothing to do or say about where the camp is located. I am sent here on orders only. But the people around here apparently do not realize that."

"It's an isolated spot, Captain Rawlins. If it's like it used to be, a lot of these old-timers don't even leave their ranches except for supplies. Not over twice a year sometimes. They're behind the times."

"Ah yes," he said, chewing at his mustache. "I understand that, but I don't understand the people. I can't take a risk with these boys, you know, Mr. Bryant."

Now we had two hundred and forty boys in camp, mostly from Chicago, or from Gary, right near there. A good part of them were lads with foreign-born parents—more than half, probably. Some of them were homesick and a lot more of them were half sore about being taken clear across the continent and put under the kind of supervision they were getting. There was enough opportunity for trouble right in the camp without more being added to it from outside sources.

I said all this, and Rawlins sighed and said: "I'm a regular army man, Mr. Bryant. I think these camps are a good thing—in fact, I think they are a fine thing—but I find dealing with the boys isn't like dealing with an enlisted group. Discipline and order are harder to maintain. I want no other trouble."

When I asked him who'd made the threats he said: "The man who made the threat is named Withers. He and some friends of his rode up for what they were pleased to term a friendly visit. Naturally I took them around and tried to explain the work we are doing. I explained the boys were building roads, clearing fire-trails, making drainage ditches, similar things. I explained to them our plan of making this a more or less permanent station and how we planned to make this a model camp. Why we were attempting a modified landscaping in the territory surrounding

the actual camp. They listened to me very intently and then told me this was no place for the camp to be.

"I demanded to know what they meant by that statement and they said, vaguely, that the people around here didn't approve of such foolishness. That the ranchers who specialized in raising cattle and sheep looked upon this section of country as summer range and would resent our boys being here. I imagine they are afraid of the boys scaring the stock, or some such foolishness as that. They mentioned the ever present danger of forest fire, claiming our boys would add to this. I told them that invariably someone was in charge of the boys when they were working outside of the camp proper, and that the boys would act as fire-fighters in case of need—that this was part of their duty. That, as a matter of fact, the danger of fire causing serious damage was lessened by their presence."

"I don't know, or remember, anyone named Withers," I said. "Did he say where he lived?"

"Well, no. I didn't ask—I took it for granted he lived fairly near. I didn't take the man seriously then. But three days later, when a shot was fired at me, I decided the man was actually liable to be a menace."

"They shot at you, too?"

"Yes. And at Lieutenant Ward. Neither bullet came close to either of us—we took them as a warning. That's why I approved of your application."

"Did you tell the state police?"

He took off the glasses again and looked at me severely. He said: "Mr. Bryant! I look on this as an army post. Technically, I suppose we are under the jurisdiction of the state police, but I hope I will not live to see the day when I am forced to call in police to protect men I am commanding. I rather think, that with your knowledge of the country and the people, we can work this out between us."

I said: "Well, I'll take time off and do a little scouting around. I'll meet some

old friends, surely, and I'll ask a few questions. And it might have been one of the boys with a smuggled rifle, as you suggested, Captain Rawlins. I'll see what I can find."

"Please do, Mr. Bryant, immediately," he said.

I looked back at him, just as I was going out the door, and he wasn't expecting it. He didn't look cold and brisk then. Just worried. He hadn't sounded as though he'd expected me to find any smuggled guns, either—and that meant quite a lot. This Rawlins had been taken from the regular army and put in charge of a bunch of city kids—and he didn't like one bit of it. He didn't know anything about his new job—but he was no fool.

There was trouble in the air and he'd caught the feeling.



RED ARDELLA was waiting for me outside the office building. He said: "Hey, Mr. Bryant! I just seen somebody sneaking around the cookhouse."

"Probably somebody trying to snag a little something extra from the cook," I said. "This air and exercise will pick up you fellows' city appetites in a hurry."

"It wasn't any of the guys, Mr. Bryant. It was somebody in hick clothes. I seen him plain."

I said, "It's saw, Fred, not seen," headed for the cookhouse, and walked fairly into the mess—with Fred behind me, which wasn't so good.

The cook was on the floor, half under a table. He was on his side and there was blood on his forehead and on the floor by it. The second cook and the four boys who were on cookhouse duty were standing by the big range, with their hands raised. The cook and three of the boys looked scared, but the other boy was grinning as if he enjoyed the show. There was a husky, stockily built man standing in front of them and holding a

gun on them, and when I went in the door he swung the gun my way and said: "Get over in line."

I got over in line. I didn't even own a gun, much less have one with me. Fred tried to duck back out of sight, but the man saw him and Fred joined us.

The boy that wasn't scared looked at me and kept his grin and said: "Big-city stuff, hey, mister?"

I didn't know his name but I grinned back at him and said it was. The cook started to stir around, where he was under the table, and the man with the gun turned that way a little—and I went for his knees with all the speed I could put in it.

My game knee went back on me, which was a usual thing, and I fell five feet short and flat on my face. Then the lights went out for me.



I CAME back with Captain Rawlins squatting on the floor by me and giving me part of a haircut. He was just taking off a bit on one side, so he could tape a bandage down over the cut on my head, but I didn't know that and rolled away from him and his scissors.

He said, in his clipped way: "Please lie quiet, Mr. Bryant! That thug struck you on the head with a gun barrel. Fortunately, he didn't fracture your skull."

The moment I moved I wished I hadn't. It felt as though the top of my head was going to lift off.

I said: "Where'd he go? My leg went bad or I'd have got him."

Rawlins said reprovingly: "Mr. Bryant! Don't ever do such a foolish thing again. The man would undoubtedly have shot you had you succeeded in reaching him. Such heroics are suicidal. Nothing less."

He sounded as though he didn't like my going for the hold-up man, but his eyes didn't look the way his voice sounded. They were friendly.

I looked around and saw the cook sit-

ting on the floor but leaning back against the cookhouse wall, and he said: "I got the same thing you got, Mr. Bryant. I thought it was a joke, at first."

All the boys were standing around, and the one that hadn't been scared was still wearing his grin. He said: "Aw, it was nothing! The guy just lowered the boom, is all. He wasn't doing any shooting—I could see he didn't want no part of any shooting, right when he come in."

"What's that?" said Rawlins, looking over that way.

"Hagh! He come in and I seen right off he wasn't wanting to shoot nobody. He kept close, so he could club with the gun in case one of us made a break. If he'd wanted to shoot, he'd have stayed back a ways. 'At's easy to figure out, mister."

"Call me Captain Rawlins," said Rawlins, automatically. And then to me, "Would you know the man again, Mr. Bryant?"

"Yes, sir. A man about thirty. He was dressed in rough clothes, but he's not from this country. He's not a native, I'm sure."

"Why?"

I'd been trying to think just what had struck me wrong about the hold-up man and I finally got what had puzzled me. I said: "His clothes were all right, sir, but his face wasn't tanned the way it should have been. He was sun-burned instead of tanned. And he was carrying an automatic—pretty near all the people around here favor a revolver. Though most of them don't own one. A rifle and a shotgun can be used in this country—a revolver is almost useless."

The boy who'd spoken before said: "A hell of a lot of guys have been bumped off with 'em, mister."

Rawlins said: "I'll have no profanity in my presence, young man. What's your name?"

The boy said: "Richard Deiss."

"Add the word 'sir' to that, if you please."

"Wellsir."

Rawlins said to me: "Suppose you go to your quarters, sir, and rest until you feel more fit. I'd like to speak with you then, if I may. Are you feeling better, cook?"

The cook said he was feeling much better, and Rawlins walked out.

The boy named Deiss said: "The dirty ——! Telling me to call him 'sir'."

Then Fred Ardella said, "You're in the army now." and all the others laughed.

Fred walked back with me to my cabin because I was still shaky. He said, just as we got there: "This guy Deiss is all right. His brother's in the can for manslaughter and his old lady's dead. His old man won't work and Blacky—we call him Blacky—sort of run around by himself, if you know what I mean."

I said, "Oh, he'll get used to it here and like it," and hoped I was speaking the truth.

CHAPTER TWO

Mass Murder



HIS time Lieutenant Ward was with the captain when I went in. Ward, who was young and almost fat, grinned at me and said: "Ah-ha! The hero himself. All I've been hearing from the kids is how you tackled the hold-up man with your bare hands. They think you're hot stuff, Bryant."

I said: "It's probably a good thing for me I didn't make my tackle. The guy would probably have done me in right there."

Rawlins frowned and said: "There's something odd about this. The man asked for nothing, I understand. He just stood the boys up against the wall and kept them there. It's a mystery. After he knocked you out, Mr. Bryant, he ran out of the cookhouse and that was the last seen of him. He wasn't alone.

I understand some of the boys scouted around and found where three horses had been tied to trees, on the far side of the camp but out of sight. Do you understand it?"

I said: "Indeed I don't. I'm afraid one of the boys might meet the man and do something foolish. There's a possibility of the man leaving the country now, of course."

Ward said: "Let some of these tough Chicago babies of mine get their hands on him and he'll wish he'd left. I've got a dozen little hoodlums in that crowd that will end up on the gallows."

"Now, Lieutenant," said Rawlins. "You shouldn't speak of the boys like that, even in sport. A lot of these boys have never been out like this before."

"None of them have."

I said: "I've got one of them following me around like he was a pet poodle. The Ardella boy. I can't turn around without bumping into him."

Ward said: "A good kid."

Captain Rawlins said: "If you feel up to it, Mr. Bryant, I'd like to have you drop your regular work and look into this for us. This has me worried. I fear the boys aren't safe with things as they are."

"It might be better if I worked at it slow and easy," I said. "Apparently we're watched here. If I go about things as though nothing out of the way has happened, I think I may have better luck."

He thought that over and admitted I might be right and told me to work it out any way I wanted. Ward and I left together—our cabins were side by side, with Lieutenant Comiskey's cabin just on the other side of his—and when we got to his door he stopped and said: "Got a gun, Bryant?"

I said I hadn't.

He told me to wait a second and went in the cabin, then came back with a Colt .45 automatic, that looked as big as a house. He handed me this and a box of shells and said: "I'd carry it for a while. That bird that smacked you might come

back. You know enough not to start anything if he's got the drop on you, don't you?"

"You forget I was brought up in this country," I said. "They still settle things with guns around here—that is, the old-timers do. I won't take any chances."

"I wouldn't," he said, scratching one of his heavy jowls. "I've had a funny hunch about this place ever since we brought the boys in here. There's something wrong here."

I asked: "Where's Comiskey tonight?"

"He went into town after the mail and some supplies with one of the trucks and half a dozen of the boys. He'll be back any time, now."

It was just then that we heard the boys shouting from down the road and both Ward and I turned and ran for the sound. From their voices they sounded as though they needed help.



WARD'S flash picked them out when we were still a hundred yards away. There were three of them. Two of them were running and the other was just picking himself up after a fall. Just as we saw this a shot banged out in the wood, right above them, and the boy who'd just got to his feet spun and went down again.

I said to Ward: "Get that light off them, Lieutenant! Fast! That kid took a slug."

We got to the two boys who were still on their feet and I said: "Keep going, guys. Don't stop until you get to camp."

The one in front stopped and panted: "The truck! The truck! It's off the road a couple of miles down. They're hurt—all of them."

"What about Lieutenant Comiskey?" snapped Ward.

"He—he's dead," the boy managed to say.

I said: "When you get to camp find

Captain Rawlins. Tell him about this. Tell him to get a truck and get it down there and get them back to camp. Ward, take care of the kid down here, will you?"

I started up through the brush and heard him say: "Hey wait, Bryant! Not in the dark!"

I didn't like the idea myself because I didn't know just what I might run into, but I figured I'd have as good a chance that way as the other fellow would.

It was easy enough to see just what was happening—the truck had been run off the road—and somebody on a horse had followed the three kids up the road, keeping above them, and had cut loose with his gun at the boy our light had spotted for him. Ward and the two boys and I had been making a lot of noise talking and the gunman might have ridden away. I didn't know, but I thought I could go through that underbrush as quietly as a horse could—and I might get lucky.

I did just that. I wasn't over a hundred feet away from the road when I heard a snorting sound just ahead and to the right. I latched the safety off the automatic and went that way, trying to keep from making a sound—and then the horse snorted again. After that I heard somebody mutter angrily: "Hold still!"

It didn't sound as though it came from more than twenty feet ahead, but I was wrong on that. All of a sudden the brush started to crack and I heard a horse going away from there in a hurry.

I ran just as fast as I could in the direction of the sound. The trees thinned out a little and I got a hazy glimpse of a man on a horse and I emptied my gun that way. It was too dark to see anything but the line of the barrel and I didn't think there was any chance of hitting anything but it seemed to be worth a try.

I heard Ward shout, from the road, and I called back: "I'll be right there. He ran away."



WARD had the boy's belt off and was using it for a tourniquet. The boy had taken the slug through the fleshy part of his leg and it hadn't touched the bone but had cut the big artery there. The kid was perfectly conscious and was leaning up on his elbows and watching Ward work.

I said: "He got away. I just got a look at a man on a horse."

"You hit him?" asked the boy.

I said I didn't think so but that I certainly hoped I had. And then the boy told us just how much he hoped so too—and he used more language than I ever heard in all my life, even after three years on a professional football team.

He said, when he got that out of his system: "They worked it dirty on us. Jonesy was driving and the looie and a guy named Morri were on the front seat with him. Me and Harper and Cort were in the back. We was looking over Jonesy's shoulder—you know—just standing up and hanging onto the seat back and looking at the road. We was hungry, see, and wanted to get back before the chef closed up the cookhouse. The looie said he'd see we all fed. So we see where a piece of the road has come down, on the upper side, and Jonesy pulls as far over to the lower side as he can and starts to go by in low. There was room. Then the bank just caves and down we go. I'll bet that truck tipped over sideways twenty times or more before we hit bottom."

I looked at Ward and he looked at me. The boy knew what we were thinking, because he added: "Yeah! That's where it was. Right at that place where the road runs up and is shelved into the side of the hill. Where it's steep going down to the creek."

That made it deliberate murder and nothing else. And mass murder. The road was a hundred feet or more above the creek at the place the boy was speaking of, and it was almost straight down. If the road had been undermined

there the truck was sure to go down—and with it the men who were riding it. And with a heavy truck, going over and over like that, it was more than likely that everybody in the truck would be killed.

The boy got the idea all right, because he said: "Me and Harper and Cort got jarred loose on the first roll and sort of thrown to the back. Then we got pitched out. We went down and looked and Lieutenant Comiskey was dead. We got Jonesy out and put him by the truck but the steering wheel had shoved his chest in bad. He couldn't talk."

Ward asked: "What about the other boy? Morri?"

The boy looked sick and it wasn't alone from the bullet through his leg. He said: "He—the truck's on him yet. We tried to pry it off, but it just sort of kept settling more. So we went to get help."

Then we heard another truck come pounding down the road and it pulled up with the lights on us. Captain Rawlins came piling out and ran to us and said: "How bad is he hit?"

"Through the leg," Ward said.

Rawlins was right in action. He snapped: "All right! Two of you men get that stretcher out of the back of the truck. Carry him to the cook shack—the cook knows some first aid."

"Maybe he should be taken to town, sir," Ward suggested.

The captain said: "Nonsense! The doctor will come here. Move now, you men!"

Two of the lads from the truck brought a stretcher and we loaded the boy on it. About that time the rest of the boys started streaming down the road to us, so I knew the two that had gone on ahead and told the captain, had also told their friends.

The captain took the first five he saw and got them in the back of the truck and said: "This will be enough. Lieutenant Ward, you and Mr. Bryant will come with me."

He went down that rough mountain road at forty miles an hour.

CHAPTER THREE

With a .45



WE HADN'T needed to hurry but we didn't know that until we'd climbed down to the wreck. It wasn't hard to find—a section of the road was entirely missing, and the truck was at least a hundred feet below. Comiskey had been killed instantly, his head crushed in like an eggshell. The cab seat on the truck had buckled and had caught him like a vise, when some roll of the truck had pitched him up against the roof. The boy that had been driving the car was still alive but unconscious. We got there just in time to watch him die. The one that had been pinned under the car was also dead—and I pitied him the most. He'd known what was coming and he'd just had to stay there and wait for death.

Rawlins spread blankets he'd brought over the bodies and said: "We'll leave them here tonight. I'll stay and watch, gentlemen. It will be better to move them in the morning."

I said: "This is murder, Captain Rawlins. I'm almost certain we should leave them as they are until the county authorities are notified and examine the scene."

Rawlins said, in a voice that didn't sound like his own: "They'd better get here early then. I'll not leave these boys out here like this. It isn't decent." Then he added: "Call the coroner, Lieutenant Ward, immediately upon your return to camp. Tell him I'd appreciate it if he'd start for here at once. You had also better notify the sheriff as well as the state police. This is out of our hands."

The boys that had ridden down with us, in case we needed help in lifting the truck, were standing by. Two of them were crying and trying to act as though they weren't.

One of the others said: "If we catch

the guy that did this we'll hang him."

I looked a little closer when I heard him speak and saw it was the same boy that had been at the hold-up in the cook-house—Richard Deiss—the one who hadn't been frightened.

Rawlins also recognized him because he said: "That will do, Deiss. The law will handle this matter."

Deiss muttered something and I said: "I'll stay with you, Captain."

"You are in no condition to stay, Mr. Bryant," he said. "Please go back with Lieutenant Ward."

He was only about five feet away from me and I thought the boys couldn't hear me from where I stood. I said, very softly: "Captain! Give me a break! I've got a notion the man that did this will come back to see how it worked out. I missed him once tonight—maybe I won't again."

"Are you armed?"

"Yes, sir."

He raised his voice and said: "Lieutenant, Mr. Bryant wishes to stay with me here by the wreck. Please return to camp and notify the authorities, as I have requested."

Ward gave me a hard look and started the boys up the bank toward the truck. I knew he'd had the same thought I'd had and was wishing I hadn't spoken about it first.

We could hear the truck back and fill as they turned it toward the camp, and then the captain said: "Mr. Bryant, I am at a loss about this. It seems so senseless. There's no reason why a thing like this should happen. Deliberate murder, for no reason. I can't believe these lives were taken just because some of the natives objected to our presence here. That isn't reasonable."

I agreed with him.

He said, as though thinking aloud: "There was no trouble last year, or I'd have been told about it. You know this camp was established last year, Mr. Bryant."

I'd taken that for granted because of the obviously weathered condition of

some of the buildings. I said: "Well, of course I've only been here a couple of days. I haven't had much of a chance to find out about things like that."

"The camp was built early last year and about one hundred and fifty men were stationed here. It was decided to abandon this site, however, and the camp was vacated last fall, with the exception of the usual caretaker left under those conditions. A change of plans occurred during the winter and the camp was again to be put in use, though what caused the change I don't know, naturally. All I know is that I was given this assignment and brought the men here."

"How long ago?"

"Possibly a month—time goes rapidly on a job of this kind. The camp had to be put in shape for more men—more cabins had to be constructed and the older ones repaired. And I admit it's the first time I was ever detailed on such duty, and so I was working under a handicap. I feel responsible for what's happened. I thought it just some malcontent, objecting to our presence here because of some silly personal reason. I can't understand this, Mr. Byrant. Murder—for no reason."

"There's a reason," I said. "There has to be a reason for murder."

I got a flashlight from the wrecked truck and dug out the box of shells Ward had given me at the same time he'd handed me the pistol. I filled the clip and jacked a shell into the chamber, and said: "I'm going up and take a look at what was done to the road. And find a hide-out that I can sneak back to in the dark between here and the road. It would be a good plan if you built a little fire, over at the side, and maybe put some blankets in the shadow so it would look as though you were asleep. Have you got a gun, sir?"

He said: "I didn't take time to pick it up. I thought it just an accident at the time, though the boy that brought the message from you assured me his friend had been shot. It was unbelievable—or so I thought then. I know better now."



MAKING quite a lot of noise and flashing the light back and forth, I started up toward the road. I'll admit I was hoping the killer hadn't had time to get back to the scene of the wreck. With nothing but a flashlight and an unfamiliar gun between me and a man, or men, who'd already killed three people that same evening, I had a funny creepy feeling running up and down my back that I couldn't manage to control.

I made it up to where the road was cut out, dreading every step. The road had been built just by cutting into the side of the hill, and all the wrecker had done was cut under the lower side of it. I don't think he'd taken out more than three dozen shovelfuls of dirt in all. But he'd taken 'em out in such a way that the right front wheel of the truck just sank and down the gully it went.

Above the road he'd just started a little landslide—enough to block the inner edge of the road. Altogether, it hadn't taken much work to wreck that truck and kill three men for no reason that either the captain or I could figure out. I spotted a little clump of firs, just above the wrecked truck and maybe fifty feet from it, and I made plenty noise going back to the fire Captain Rawlins had built.

He came out of the darkness back of it and said, very softly: "I made what looked like two people sleeping and put them in the shadows. If a man got close he'd know they're dummies—but from a few feet away he couldn't tell."

I said, "Swell" and we pretended to go over that way, just in case anyone was watching.

And then I ducked back and went up to my fir thicket, doing it as quietly as I could—and expecting to see a gun flash out fire at me every step I took. I really had the jitters. Woods at night like that have a funny kind of quiet—the trees creak and groan and there's a

steady rustling, whishing sound from the wind through the pine needles—and though I'd been brought up in that country and knew what to expect, even familiar noises can sound ominously different when you're keeping watch over three dead men. Men killed for no apparent reason.

I found my thicket and burrowed into it until I was almost out of sight. It wasn't cold at all—the breeze didn't get that close to the ground. I laid there, trying to listen to everything and pick out a man's footsteps through the natural sounds—and I'll be darned if I didn't fall asleep.



TWO MEN woke me and they weren't over fifteen feet from me. I could see one of them outlined against a slightly lighter patch of brush, but the other one was in shadow. They were talking in whispers but I could hear one say: "My foot's damn near killing me."

The other one said: "A blister! And you're crying about it like it was a broken leg. Shut up and listen!"

They kept quiet a moment and I shoved the safety down on the automatic.

In a minute the one that had been complaining about his foot said: "I still think we should have stopped at the camp. We could have asked questions. I don't like this."

"It was your idea in coming back here to see what happened," the other one said. "It's like I said. Somebody's keeping watch down there. There's still a few coals where he built a fire and I can see where he's rolled up in a blanket on the other side of it. Look there."

He pointed and again they kept silent. Then the first one said: "Might as well go first-class. I'll knock him out and we'll look the truck over. I know I hit that kid, up in the road, but I want to see what happened down here."

I kept flat on my stomach, just like I was. But I stuck the automatic out and

said, "Don't move!" from that position.

They moved fast and in two different directions. I shot once at the man who'd said he'd done the shooting up in the road—and I knew I'd missed as soon as I pulled the trigger. One of the men shouted—I couldn't tell which because my ears were ringing from the noise of the gun—and then one of them shot back at me. I held the gun on the flash of his, as near as I could, and tried again. I couldn't see him at all, but I knew it was the one who hadn't done the shooting—the one who wasn't complaining about his foot.

From farther down the hill, three more shots came my way—just as fast as they could be fired—and I heard Rawlins shout: "Hold 'em, Bryant!"

With that, the man who'd done the last shooting started running. I could hear him going through the brush, crashing through it with as much noise as a horse would make. I didn't hear anything of the other man, so I called to Rawlins: "One of them's still here. Keep back."

He said, "Keep back hell!" and came panting up to where I was. He was holding a big club, and his hair was all tousled from where he'd been lying down. He didn't have his glasses on and his uniform coat was unbuttoned with the collar loosened and he didn't look at all like the strict careful officer he usually did. He said: "You hit anybody?"

I whispered, "Here, take the gun!" and passed it over. "You stay here—you're a better shot than I am. I'll get a bit away and turn the flash on. He'll shoot at it and then you can nail him."

"He may hit you. There's been enough murder here tonight."

"I'll get behind a tree," I said.

I did—twenty feet away—and stuck the flash out and turned it on and waited for the shooting to begin but nothing happened. I kept moving the flash back and forth, but not seeing where it was pointing, and all of a sudden Rawlins said, in a funny voice: "It's all right. Come on, Bryant."

I stepped out from behind the tree and he said: "Right ahead of you. You caught him with the light once. Our side's getting in, now."

And then I saw the man, lying face down and all spread out. He wasn't moving and I held the light on him while Rawlins went up, covering him with the gun. He bent down and took a gun from the ground by the man's hand and then I went up.

We turned him over and Rawlins said: "That's marvelous, Mr. Bryant, marvelous! Between the eyes, shooting in darkness. I congratulate you, sir."

I didn't say anything because I couldn't. When I'd shot at the flash of the dead man's gun I'd gotten lucky for once. I'd hit him right between the eyes and what that heavy .45 bullet did to him was something not to see.

I said finally: "It wasn't the right one. It wasn't the one that shot the boy up in the road. He ran the other way, when I told them to not move."

Rawlins said grimly: "This is a start. We can find who this man is, and from that we can locate his friend."

CHAPTER FOUR

Rawlins Gets His Gun



WE WERE still looking at the dead man when the boys from the camp got there. There were about a dozen of them—Ward had sent that many, both for safety and because he knew that none of the boys would have gone along that road at night alone after what had happened. They stopped above us, flashing lights all around, and called: "Captain Rawlins! Mr. Bryant!"

We went up to the road. The spokesman was a tow-headed kid, not over eighteen if that, and he was so excited he could hardly talk.

He said: "L-l-l-lieutenant W-ward sent us. There's more trouble at the

camp, sir, and Lieutenant Ward t-thinks you should go back there. H-he sent us after you."

"What's happened," asked Rawlins.

Somebody was sneaking around again, sir," he said more calmly. "The cook was working late, getting ready for breakfast, and he heard 'em. He ran out and held one of them and then Lieutenant Ward came. There was some shooting and one of our guys got shot. He shot three times at the lieutenant though, sir, and the lieutenant didn't know it was one of our guys when he shot back."

"One of our boys! Is he hurt?"

"He's dead. And the lieutenant said to tell you the telephone line is down. He said he'd have sent a truck out tonight but that it couldn't get past this bad place in the road."

I said: "What about the man the cook was holding? The one he grabbed when he ran outside, after hearing the noise? What about him?"

"That's the guy that got shot, Mr. Bryant. He had a gun and he shot at the lieutenant, after he'd pulled away from the cook. His name was Joe Biggers, Mr. Bryant. He was in that bunch that runs around with Blacky Deiss."

"That would be Richard Deiss?" the captain asked.

"Yes, sir. He's from Gary, he and the guys that hang around with him."

Young Deiss had been puzzling me for some time, but I didn't think this was any time to go into further conversation about him. I hadn't liked the boy, but put that feeling down to just not caring for his flip manner and talk.

The captain said heavily, to me: "This caps it. This puts the lid on it. I'll be up before the board on this. I'll face charges. Poor Ward—I'll bet he's in agony."

"There's an answer to it, sir. I've got a hunch Ward will come out all right."

"Oh, they'll call it an accident, no doubt. Will that make Ward feel any better? Will I feel any better—know-

ing one of the boys in my charge was shot by one of my officers? Knowing another officer lies dead here for God knows what reason?"

I said: "I'm willing to bet the telephone line was cut—and that the road will be wrecked, down at the pass where we go through that rock fill. I'll bet that's another place we'll find the road tampered with."

Rawlins said, "Nothing would surprise me now," and started down the road toward camp.

I stayed where I was. I thought that, after all, somebody responsible should stay with our three dead and the other dead man who'd been in the plot to kill them.

Though I'd have kept no death watch for him alone. If he'd been buried at that time I'd have danced on his grave.

THE rest of the night passed quietly. It got cold along toward morning but I was wrapped in some extra blankets and didn't mind. And Rawlins and Lieutenant Ward came with a truck and a dozen of the boys, just after breakfast time. They both looked as though they hadn't slept a wink.

Rawlins said: "Mr. Bryant, please take the truck and a driver and go back to the camp. Send the truck back for us at once. Lieutenant Ward and I'll straighten up things here. We can't leave these bodies here until the coroner arrives, regardless of what the law is in the matter. I will take full responsibility for their removal."

I said: "I could stay and help you."

He said: "You will be in charge of the camp in my absence. Lieutenant Ward is now under technical arrest, though the three of us understand this is a formality. I've sent a crew of boys out to try and find where the telephone line is broken. They will report to you if they return before I get back. Use your own judgement if anything comes up."

I said, "Yes, sir!" and went up the road to the truck.

The driver was a boy I'd not noticed before, and he said: "You're Bryant, eh—the guy that tackled the hold-up man in the cook shanty?"

I said he'd guessed right, but that the less I heard about the hold-up in the cookhouse, the better I'd like it.

He grinned and said: "Sure! You only been here a couple of days but the guys think you're O.K. Because of you going for that guy like that, I guess. They think the captain's a big heel. It's do this and do that and say 'sir' to him and all that. Like in the army. They like Ward though, and Comiskey was a good guy."

I said: "Captain Rawlins is an old army man who's never worked with raw recruits like you fellows. That's all. You'll find he'll fight for you, if you're in the right, just as fast as he'll raise hell with you if you're in the wrong."

"Maybe so," said the driver. He didn't sound as though he believed me. "The guys say you killed a man down there last night. That right?"

I thought about how I'd shot the man who hadn't done the shooting in the road—how the one I'd really wanted to kill had gotten away the night before. Twice.

I said: "Yeah! That's right! The wrong man!"

"That's what the looie did," he said. "This guy Joe Biggers. Biggers had a pistol in his hand though, and he'd shot it three times at the looie. Or at least the looie thought Biggers was shooting at him, or he wouldn't have shot back. It's a hell of a note. What'll they do to him?"

I said I didn't know and we wheeled into the camp.



GOT cleaned up and bummed a late breakfast from the cook, and then went over to the office just in case something came up where the boys would have to see whoever was in

charge. None of the working parties had been sent out and the whole camp was standing around in little groups, talking. The flag was at half-mast, and that made the whole affair a little unreal to me. It didn't seem possible that a thing like murder could happen like it had.

It was all crazy—none of it made sense. People aren't killed for no reason at all—and I couldn't think of any sensible reason.

And then Richard Deiss came in the office and said: "Can I talk to you a minute, mister?"

I said he could and he stood in front of the desk, as though he was on parade.

I said: "Sit down and be comfortable. I'm not an officer, Deiss. I don't think you understand—they're bound by rules and regulations. They can't act as they'd often like to—they have to behave according to what's in the book. It finally gets to be a habit with them."

He growled, "They put on a show, is all," but he sat down. He was a big kid, about twenty I thought, and he had a suspicious way of tilting his head and looking at you from the side.

I said: "What's the matter? I'm supposed to be looking after things until the captain gets back, so you can talk to me, if you want. Or if you'd rather wait for the captain it's all right with me."

He said: "That heel! It's you I wanted to see. Maybe you can make the guy see sense. I told the guys there was no use in talking to him."

"Talking to him about what?"

"They going to move the camp now?"

"I wouldn't know. I doubt it. I doubt if any man in the world could move Captain Rawlins away from here until the government told him to go."

Deiss nodded, as though he'd expected to hear that. He said: "Well, I'm telling you. You won't have no camp. It'll just be you and the cook and the looie that's still alive. And the captain. Maybe even the cook will go, too."

"I don't understand that, Deiss."

He gave me a mean look and said: "There's a hell of a lot going on here you don't understand, mister. And us guys don't either. All we know is there's been three guys killed in a truck, and the truck was made to go over that bank on purpose. The road was fixed so the truck couldn't miss. A pal of mine gets killed because the looie don't know which way to shoot. Another guy gets shot in the ham, coming back from the truck. There's a stick-up in the kitchen and you and the cook get bopped on the head. The telephone line is cut and it can't get fixed because whoever cut it took a big chunk of wire along with him. Somebody's trying to hole us up in here and kill us off. The next thing, they'll dynamite the bunkhouses when we're asleep. We're going to get out, whether Rawlins likes it or not."

I said: "It doesn't do any good to tell me about it, Deiss. I just work here. I understand Joe Biggers, the boy Lieutenant Ward shot last night, was a pal of yours. That right?"



"Yeah! We run around together back East. He come along because I joined up. And then he gets killed because Ward don't know nothing about a gun. Ward ought to get life for that play."

I'd found out what I wanted to know—and what I'd been afraid of. I said: "How was it that you happened to tell me about this?"

"The guys picked me out."

"It wouldn't be because you're back of all this talk about getting out, would it?"

"Hell, no!"

"Any idea of why anybody should be around that cookhouse last night? What was Biggers doing there?"

"Maybe he was planning on cracking a window and getting a little something extra to eat."

"Listen, Deiss," I said. "I know you think you're a smart guy that knows all the answers. Now I'm going to do a little talking. In the first place, Biggers wasn't trying to break into the cookhouse. The cook heard him fooling around there and caught him at it. He had a gun and he shot three times at Lieutenant Ward, before Lieutenant Ward shot and killed him." And then I took a chance and added: "And you were seen there with Biggers, just before the trouble started. One of the other boys saw you and Biggers together."

"Who seen us? Tell me that."

I laughed and said: "That will all come out later, Deiss. You're skating on thin ice, fellow. I'd stop this talk about leaving the camp if I were you. In other words, Deiss, I'd watch my step. Right now is no time for trouble-making."

He said, "You go to hell!" and got up and sauntered out.

I WANTED to lay Deiss across my lap and paddle him—which might have been a job because he was almost as big as I was—but I'd have welcomed the work right at that time. Then I remembered what he'd said about the telephone line and went out and over to

the bunkhouse. The boy with the corporal's stripes on his sleeve, who'd been in charge of the detail, was there, and he was talking to Deiss who hadn't wasted a second in getting hold of him.

I said: "What about that line? Can't it be fixed?"

He said: "I was just going over to tell you, Mr. Bryant. Part of it was cut away and we haven't anything around here we can use for a splice. I dropped down by the creek and told Captain Rawlins, and he's got the road almost fixed by now. He's going to send a truck into town right away."

I said that was fine and turned around and almost ran into Fred Ardella. He started to walk back to the office with me and said, as we went along: "I saw Deiss talking to you, Mr. Bryant. Hey! Did he tell you his brother was here last year? Did he tell you about his brother-being a caretaker here, over the winter?"

I said that was the first I'd heard of it.

He said: "Yeah! I guess he had a pretty good time, from what Deiss says, too. Some of his friends came up and stayed damn near all winter with him. They brought a lot of liquor and they had their wives, or girls, with 'em, and they must've just raised hell. I know Deiss got canned over it, and then went back and got in jail. For manslaughter. It was a stick-up or something, I guess."

All of a sudden things started to make sense. I said: "Fred, I want you to do me a favor. I want you to hang around with Deiss and never leave him alone for a minute. Will you do that?"

Fred said: "If he don't want me around he'll tell me to get the hell away. He's bigger than I am."

"Just watch him then."

"You afraid he's going to run away? He's been talking about it—he's got about half the camp in the notion."

I said: "It's just that. I'll depend on you, Fred."

He said my trust was well placed and swaggered away. I think it was one of

the few times anybody had ever told him they had any faith in him and I think he liked the idea a lot.

And then Captain Rawlins came up the road in the truck—with the bodies.

I said: "I think I've got it figured, Captain, but I'll have to have help. As soon as the state police get here, I'll start out. But I'd like Lieutenant Ward to get me a copy of the brand-register for this county. It will be at the courthouse."

"He can get it," said Rawlins. "And we won't wait for the state police, either. You and I will go. We'll try and get this settled before the police get here. Now what's this about this young fellow? What's his name? Deiss?"

I said: "I don't want him left alone for a second. He's too smart. He's known what this was all about right along, I think."

Rawlins said: "If he knows anything, I'll find it out if I have to skin the young devil alive. There's been murder done over this, Mr. Bryant. I mean to know what it's all about."

I said: "O.K. Put on your gun and I'll show you. It might even be a good plan to take along a rifle."

"Like that, eh?" he said. He looked a lot happier than he had a moment before. "If I can just get my hands on the devil that cut out that road and shot that boy last night I won't need a rifle. I'll do what's proper with my bare hands."

But he belted on his gun and took one of the regulation army Springfields from the gun rack.

And then we started.

I should have thought of it before. I had the answer in my hands during the night, when I'd heard the man who'd come down by the truck, talking with his partner. I should have known what had happened when he complained about his feet being sore—but the remark hadn't tied in with anything at that time. The news about the caretaker and his friends was the answer—the thing that made everything else fall into line. We went

down the road to where I'd gone up above it and shot at the man on the horse and then played Indian later. We followed broken brush and horse tracks for about a mile and then I pointed at a rock setting fairly in the little path we were following and said: "I'm right! Isn't that blood?"

Rawlins said: "By the Lord Harry! It is. You're right."

I warned: "We might have a long way to go. I don't know just how far the man had to walk."

"I'll walk my feet down to the ankles," Rawlins said grimly. "Just for one crack, and I'm going to make it a good one."

A couple of miles farther on we found the horse. Shot through the left hind leg, high up in the muscle—and again through the body.

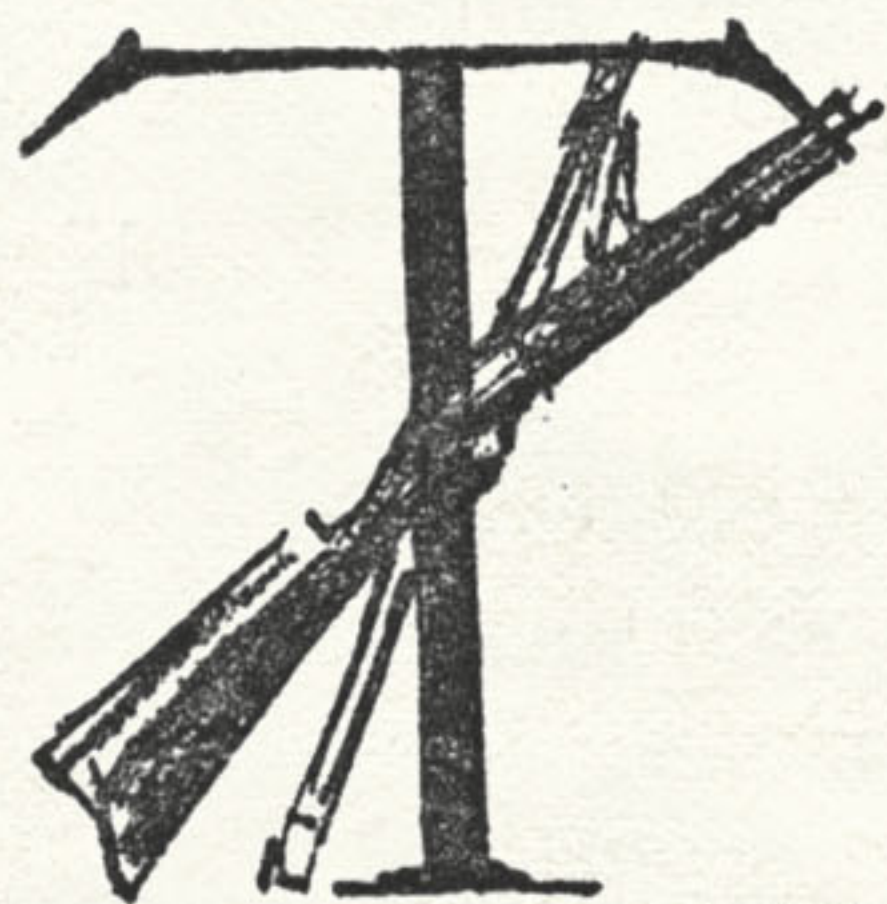
I looked it over and saw it was branded 7Y, and said: "O.K! I'm right. But I think we'd better go back and wait for the state police. This is all the evidence they're going to need in order to make an arrest."

Rawlins said: "I'm an officer, and I have the same right to arrest, Mr. Bryant. We'll follow along as we've been doing."

That seemed to be that.

CHAPTER FIVE

There Was a Reason



HE RANCH was a dirty little place and we'd taken two hours to get there, from the spot we'd found the dead horse. The house itself was out in a stumpy field, with no shelter near except the barn—and that was so flimsy it offered no protection.

We looked it over, and Rawlins said: "Well, here it is. And we know what we're after. Let's get going at it, Mr. Bryant."

I'd been thinking, all the time since

we'd found the horse. I said: "Now wait a minute. These people, if they're the right ones, are facing murder charges already. If the two of us start walking across the clearing, and they start shooting, they'll nail us both. We'd be in the open and they'd be shooting from the cover of the house."

He said that was true—and what of it?

I said: "Look! You're a crack shot with a rifle and I'm just fair. You stay here in the edge of the clearing and keep ready. I'll go up to the house and see what it looks like. That way, if anything should happen, you can hold them and I can get away."

He said: "I'll go up to the house. They might possibly start shooting before they even talk with you."

"You're in uniform—I'm not. They'll be curious about me—and they'd know what you were after. My way's best."

He argued, but he knew I was right. And he so wanted to get the man, or men, back of the murders that he gave in.

He grumbled: "All right, go ahead. Keep that gun handy though. Keep it in the waistband of your trousers but keep your coat over it. Maybe they'll think you're unarmed."

I said I'd do that and started toward the house. I tried to walk as though I was just stopping in for a casual how-d'ya-do, but my knees were shaking so hard I could hardly get over the ground. I felt a little bit sick at my stomach and dizzy as well, because, if I was right, I was going to meet a cold-blooded deliberate murderer—and there was nothing but Rawlins and that army rifle to back me up if it came to trouble.

I had a feeling it would, too.

THE man who opened the door was chewing tobacco. He looked me over, not saying anything, and then spat tobacco juice so it landed right by my shoe. He had about a month's beard on his face and looked as though he hadn't had a bath in six.

He finally said: "Well, mister! What might you be after? Hey? What you doing here?"

I said: "I was just out walking around and looking over the country. I'm a stranger here."

"You're a ——— liar," he said. "You're John Bryant's boy and you come up to work at that damn camp the government's got up on the mountain. What you snooping around here for, hey?"

I didn't have to answer. A short, heavy man came to the door and stood there alongside the man who'd opened it. He looked me over without saying a word to me, then said to the first man: "We'd better gather him in. It'll just be one less. My way's best—we'll just take over the camp tonight. Hold the head guys and to hell with the kids."

The minute I'd heard him talk I'd known he was the man I was looking for. The same one who'd gotten away the night before. The same one who'd fixed the trap for the truck and killed Comiskey and the two boys. The same one who'd shot the other boy in the road. His voice was a give-away. He had a city twang in it you couldn't mistake.

He said to me: "O.K., wise guy! You asked for it and you're going to get it. You should keep your nose out of what don't concern it. You're learning too late."

I heard somebody inside the house say, "Who is it Mickey?" and knew there were at least three of them. And I knew that if they ever got me inside the house Rawlins wouldn't be able to use that rifle.

I said: "I'll stay out here."

He said: "Why you big clown, I'll take you apart and see what makes you tick." And then he took a step away from the door toward me. And I took a step back away from him and yanked at the gun in my waistband.

He turned then and jumped for the house door, and he ran into the other man, who was standing there and staring. I got the gun cleared from my coat

and started to turn it toward them, but I was far too slow. They were both out of sight by the time I got ready to shoot. A gun banged in the house and a bunch of splinters showed on the warped boards not a foot from my head, and I dropped to the ground, where I could watch the front door.



AFTER a while I could hear talking—and then by and by a hat came poking out alongside of the door-casing. I didn't shoot.

I could hear somebody inside say, "I'm going out!" and hear somebody else say, "That ain't the way to do it, I'm telling you. He can't get away."

Then there wasn't any more talking for a little while. And then the rifle at the edge of the clearing went off, sounding as loud as any cannon, and I heard somebody shout, around the corner of

the house in back of me. The shout sounded odd, muffled.

Rawlins called out: "One down, Bryant! Keep low."

I shouted back: "I'm going to set fire to the shack. That'll bring 'em out—we've got 'em for sure!"

The same man who'd opened the door called: "Hey, young Bryant! Don't burn the place. I ain't got nothing to do with this. I'll have a warrant out for you if you touch a match to it."

That was funny but I didn't have time to laugh. Somebody inside the house started shooting through the wall at me, and I had to get as close to the house as I could to keep from getting hit. One of the slugs didn't miss me by more than an inch.

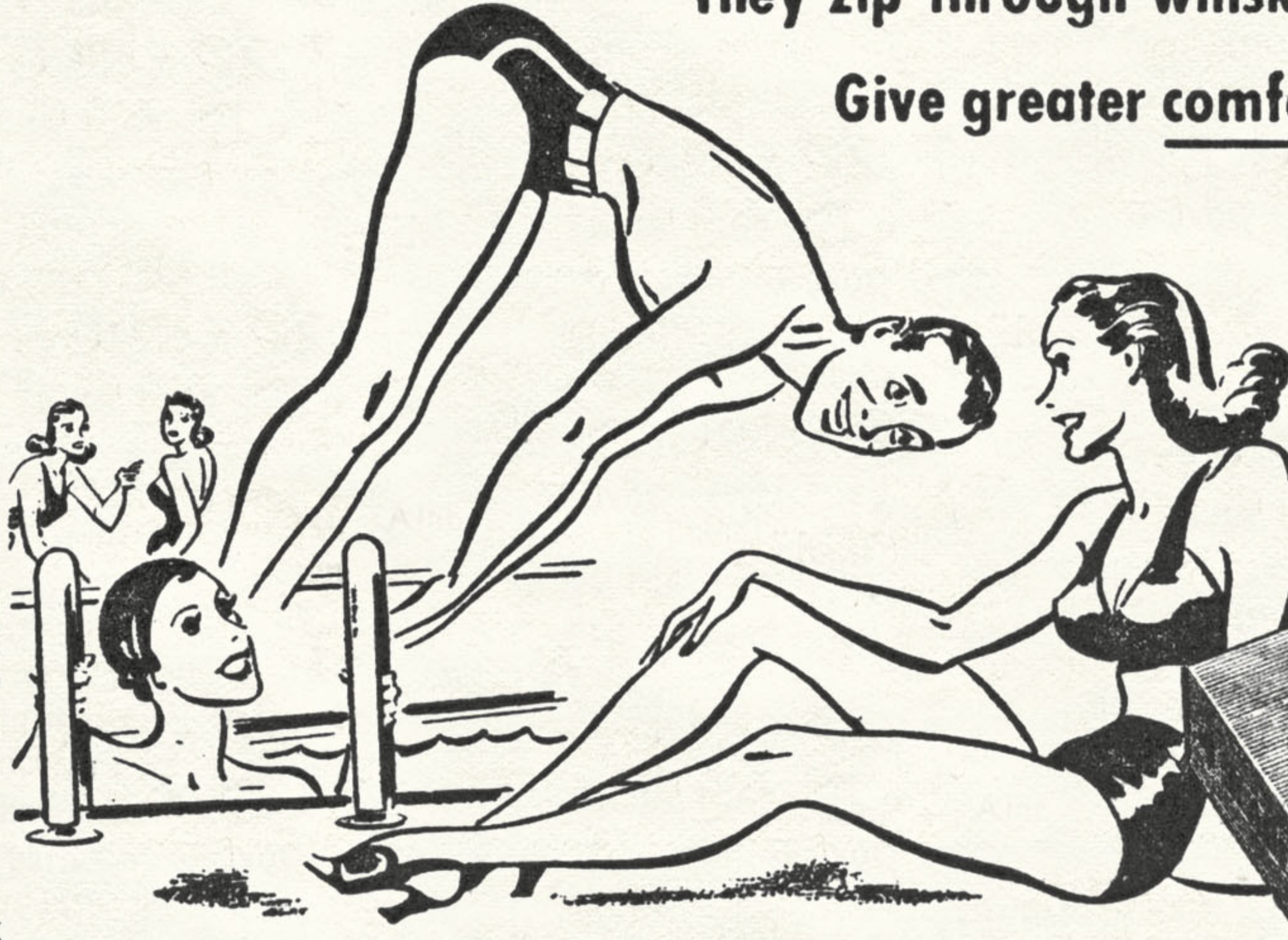
Rawlins let go a couple of shots from the rifle, apparently just trying to scare them, and then he shouted: "You there in the house! You can't get away! We've got you trapped! Come out with your hands in the air!"

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They didn't answer him but I could hear them talking among themselves. And then one of them shouted: "All right! Here we come!"

Two of them, the same two I'd seen, came out the door in front of me, telling me they were going to do it and for me not to shoot. They had their hands up above their shoulders.

I called to Rawlins: "There's still another one."

The man I knew was a murderer snarled: "Get smart, wise guy! He ran for it and that guy shot him down like a rabbit. He's out in back, deader than a herring."

They stood there about ten feet from the house and with their hands like that—and Rawlins came walking across the clearing toward us. He was holding the rifle down now, with the muzzle slanting across his body and tipped a little in the air, but I had my gun pointed at the prisoners. Rawlins was walking along without looking toward his feet, and he was stepping as though he were walking on eggs—just balanced, taking little dainty steps.

And then he just dropped as though he'd been shot, shoving the rifle out ahead of him—and just when a gun roared inside the house he shot back. And a man pitched out of the door, not over five feet in front of my face.

Rawlins called: "That'll be all of them, Mr. Bryant, but you'd better make sure. Go in and look. I'll cover these men."

I went in and looked. We had a dead man in the back yard as well as the one I'd just seen shot, but that was all except our two prisoners.

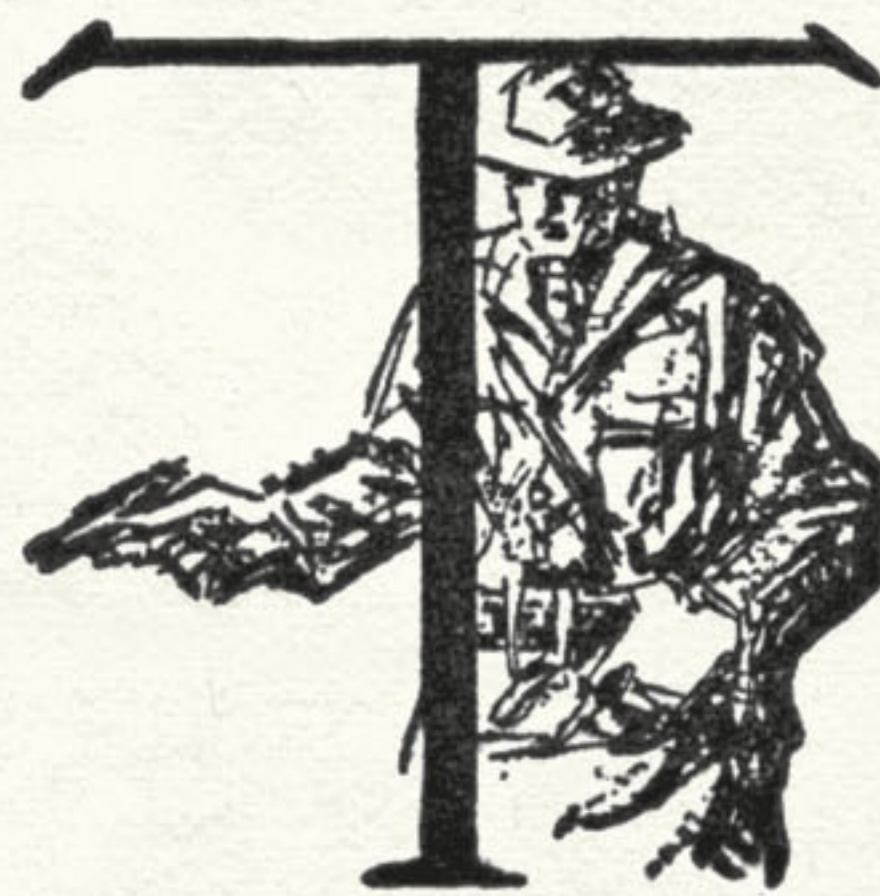
When I got through with my looking around, Rawlins was standing in front of them and saying: "And if either of you open your mouth except to answer questions, I'll turn you over to my boys. They'll hang you higher than Haman. I'll get the straight of this if I have to stand back and see you lynched to get it."

I said: "The house is empty, Captain. Both the other two men are dead."

He said: "I'm a fair shot if I do say it myself. These men came out too readily—I knew there was a trap. So I thought I'd spring it. Mr. Withers, here, admits owning the 7Y brand, Mr. Bryant. There's nothing else to do. We'll march them back and turn them over to the police. The county coroner can pick up the bodies. I won't bother with such trash."

I said: "The dead man in back is the one that held us up in the cookhouse."

"I'd figured that," he said.



THAT was all there was to the thing. We walked them back to camp and we got the story on the way. Young Deiss' brother had robbed a bank, along with four other men. He'd joined the C. C. C.'s to keep out of sight for a while—and he'd taken the caretaker job, over the winter, for the same reason. He'd figured it would be a good place for both himself and his pals. They joined him and spent part of the winter with him, all of them expecting the camp not to open again. And then, when the government unexpectedly decided to open, they had to get out in a hurry. They'd had their bank loot buried under the cookhouse floor—they got to it by taking a board from the base of the building—and they didn't have time to get it out.

All of a sudden, trucks loaded with C.C.C. boys had started pulling into camp, and they'd left right then because they couldn't explain being there. If there'd been any question about it and if the law had grabbed them for trespass, their bank robbery would have come to light.

Young Deiss' brother had gone back to Gary, to wait until things had quieted down, and got arrested for another crime. The others just moved in with Jed Withers, who was a no-good loafer they'd met during the winter. They'd tried to get at the money several times

—but each time something had happened and they'd failed. They'd finally decided to scare the camp away—and they hadn't missed it by much at that.

Rawlins admitted to the state trooper we were talking with: "I'd made up my mind that if anything else happened I'd apply for a camp transfer. I was willing to admit the place was too much for me."

The trooper said: "This is all well and good. It explains the shooting of the boy, in the road, as well as the accident to the truck. The man you captured admits both the shooting and wrecking the truck, though I'd like to know how you made that tough egg sign a confession."

Rawlins said: "The boys were talking about a lynching. That was all. I let him hear the talk."

"That's well and good, like I said," said the trooper, looking now at Lieutenant Ward. "But there's this other boy getting shot. The one called Biggers. I realize the lieutenant can claim self-defense—there's no doubt about it being that—but I'll have to take him in I'm afraid."

I said: "I can give you the guilty one on that, too, Sergeant. One of the bank robbers was named Deiss—he's now in jail in the East for manslaughter. His brother is with us, and he and this Joe Biggers, who was shot, were pals. I think it was like this, but you can readily find out. Young Deiss knew his brother had robbed a bank and then ducked out here to keep out of sight. He undoubtedly recognized the man who held us up in the cookhouse as one of his brother's confederates in the bank robbery, though the man wouldn't recognize young Deiss."

"He'd hardly expect to see him here," said Rawlins.

"That's it. Well, the boy put two and two together and he got five for the answer. He thought out the reason for the hold-up—for the attempt at scaring Captain Rawlins into vacating the camp. As everything that happened seemed centered around the cookhouse, and as he knew that's where that gang spent most

of their time during the winter, from what his brother had told him, he naturally assumed that was where the loot was buried."

Rawlins said: "And that's where we found it."

"I get it," the trooper said. "He and his pal tried to hi-jack the stuff and the cook caught this young Biggers. Biggers then shot it out with Lieutenant Ward and got the worst of it. Of course I'll have to check with this young Deiss. I can break him down on it."

"I'll send for him," Rawlins offered. He went out, did so, and after while when we were just sitting there talking about what had happened, I heard a voice say: "Yes, sir. You sent for me?"

We all looked up, and for a moment I didn't recognize Deiss. Both his eyes were black. His mouth was so swollen that either it, or the two front teeth he'd lost, kept him from speaking plainly. His face was all marred and bruised.

Rawlins stared at him and said: "The officer wants you to answer some questions, Deiss, and I want you to answer them truthfully. My Lord! What happened to you?"

Deiss said: "Fred Ardello and I got in a scrap, sir."

"Who started it?"

"Well, he kept following me around and I told him to go away. It just sort of started then. I guess maybe I started it, sir."

"He hurt any?" I asked.

Young Deiss looked even more pained than his bruises allowed for. He said: "Mister, not one bit. I didn't know it, but the kid used to fight in them Golden Glove things. He whipped me on a dime and had nine cents change coming. I never laid a hand on him from start to finish."

We all laughed and I left, to tell Fred Ardello he'd done just fine.

And when I did, young Deiss was starting to tell the state trooper his story—and it sounded just the way I'd figured it would. I went away thinking I might have a good summer after all.

TEN CARATS OF

By
**STEWART
STERLING**



It was a case for the Homicide men according to all the rules, but Mike Hansard of the headquarters hockshop squad knew it had germinated under the three gold balls of his own special province, and that it could only end when he pulled the correct "blue card" from his "suspected" file.

CHAPTER ONE

Death on the Diamond Exchange

MIKE HANSARD stood just outside the door as two white-clad internes wheeled the operating carriage into the ward-room. They left the room silently without bothering to transfer the man in the short-sleeved hospital shirt, to the cot.

A grave-eyed nurse touched Hansard on the sleeve. "He won't be out of it for half an hour. You might have a little while with him, then."

The plainclothesman eyed the strained, weather-beaten face on the pillow. "No chance to pull through?"

She shook her head. "An ordinary man would've died on the table. He..."

"Yeah." Mike's jaw was rocky. "Guy gets toughened up after twenty years on a beat. Makes it that much harder to check out."

The nurse moved quietly down the

LEAD

A "Special Squad"
Story



The staccato bark of an automatic rifle echoed hollowly in the empty street.

long corridor. Mike sat down on the cot.

The dying man groaned, stirred a bandaged arm uneasily. Mike had a similar bandage on his own arm, where they'd made the transfusion. But he didn't have three bullet holes in his guts, the way Tom MacReady did. Mike would have given a lot more than a pint of blood to help Tom, if he'd had the chance.

MacReady had gone to bat for him plenty of times. There was that night when Mike was new to harness, and the

Cassati crowd had cornered him in a blind alley and put the lead to him. Tom hadn't even been on duty, but he'd heard the gunfire and come in blasting, just as Joe Cassati was about to dot Mike's eye. There would be a three-inch scar, somewhere on MacReady's chest, under those bandages, that the older man had carried ever since as a memento of Cassati.

Mike had been close to Tom in those rookie days. They both reported to the reserve-room in the same precinct house.

Both had similar ambitions. But Mike had passed his qualifying examinations and gone on up. Tom just couldn't seem to make the grade, but that was just because some of the gold-braid boys couldn't get it through their thick skulls that MacReady had what it takes to be a first-class detective and then some.

They knew now—too late. And they'd be out in force at the funeral, to give honor to a cop who'd faced a murderous pistol fire in performance of his duty. Hansard ground out his cigarette and cursed helplessly. A hell of a lot of good official honors would do Tom's widow and ten-year old kid!



HE man on the pillow muttered incoherently and rolled his head from side to side. He opened his eyes, stared vacantly up at the detective.

It was another five minutes before there was a light of recognition in his gaze, then he reached out feebly for Hansard's hand.

"Hello, Mike," he whispered hoarsely.

"How you feel, Tom?"

MacReady grimaced. "Not so bad. I guess they . . . fixed me up O.K."

"Sure." Mike grinned cheerfully. What they had fixed Tom up with had been a load of morphine. That was all they could do. "Feel like telling me what happened?"

The wounded man closed his eyes. "Ain't much I can tell, Mike. I'm coming along Hester Street. To see if old lady Kruger got her coal from the relief. When I get to the corner opposite Dumont's jewelry store—" He groaned, tried to put a hand to his belly, fumbled at the bandages for a little, then stiffened and lay still.

Hansard lit a cigarette, held it to MacReady's lips. "Take a drag, Tom."

The patrolman inhaled greedily, let the smoke dribble slowly from his nostrils. "I see these two punks and a dame huddled in front of Dumont's window.

When they spot me, they move on kind of sudden. So I go over to give a peek." His voice was weaker, his lips looked like blue steel. "When I get up close, I see this Red Cross poster stuck on the outside of the window. . . . Ah! It does hurt!"

"Take it easy, old-timer."

"The old gray mare, Mike, ain't what she used to be." Sweat glistened on MacReady's face. He went on, slowly. "Knew that poster was screwy. Stuck over hole in the glass. They'd used a glass-cutter and a suction cup. Half the junk was gone out of the window. So I . . . went after 'em."

"You get a look at them, Tom?"

MacReady licked his lips. "Couldn't see 'em clear. Light was bad. They went . . . up the Bowery. Turned in that alley. Middle of the block." A trickle of pink saliva ran out of the corner of his mouth. "When I hit the corner . . . they jumped me. Didn't get a chance. . . ." His voice trailed off into nothing, but his lips continued to work.

Hansard put his ear close to MacReady's mouth.

"Be a while," the patrolman was gasping, "before I . . . get back . . . to roll call."

"A little while, Tom. Yeah."

"You'll have to . . . look after it, Mike." MacReady's eyes opened suddenly, very wide. He hoisted himself up convulsively, on one elbow. "They assigned you . . . to the case . . . didn't they, Mike? It's a hockshop case . . . ain't it?"

"Sure it is. Inspector put me on it personal."

"That's O.K. . . . then." The patrolman fell back limply. "Long as . . . you're on it, Mike." His eyes glazed. He fought to focus them on the man bending over him. "When'll . . . Mary and Steve . . . be over . . . to see me?"

"Ought to be here any minute, Tom. Any minute, now."

There wasn't any answer. The faded blue eyes stared fixedly up at the ceiling.

Hansard took out his watch, rubbed the back to mirror brightness on his vest, held it to MacReady's lips. After a minute he put the watch back in his pocket.

"You sure got lousy breaks, pal. You sure did. I don't know if anything can be done to balance the books for you, but I'll give it a try, Tom."

He rang the bell on the wall.



N THE shadow of the El, the street was dark and gloomy, but the opposite side of the Bowery was a blaze of naked electric bulbs over dazzling displays of silver-

plate and glittering rows of gaudy gems. One jewelry store crowded against another, elbowing for space in this brilliant white light of Little Maiden Lane.

As Mike stalked toward the sign—*D U M O N T ' S — D I A - M O N D S*—he saw a bulky-shouldered man lounging in the doorway. When Hansard angled toward the Red Cross poster on Dumont's window, the man stepped out into the light. His eyes were narrow slits in a brick-red face. He had his right hand in his coat pocket and his voice was brusque.

"Keep movin', mister . . . right along, now. Right along."

Hansard didn't even bother to show his badge. "Crysaake, don't you Ames dummies know a cop when you see one?"

The representative of the Ames Patrol took his hand out of his coat pocket. "I ain't takin' no chances. Buddy of mine had the switch snapped on him a little while ago, right up there on the corner."

"Yeah. An' he might be alive now if you stuck to your post, way you're supposed to, shamus," Mike said curtly. "What's your name?"

"Brundage." The Ames man was surly. "Don't be telling me my business. I know what I'm supposed to do and what I ain't. I been assigned to this corner for two years. Me an' Tom MacReady always got along jake. He

never made no complaint. An' none of our subscribers got any squawk—"

"MacReady ain't exactly in a position to complain. Far as your customers are concerned, why should they holler? They're covered by insurance, aren't they?" Hansard went over to the window, ripped off the poster, looked at the six-inch hole the glass-cutter had made. "But that isn't saying there aren't going to be plenty of beefs about this. There've been too many of these glass-cutter jobs in the last two-three weeks. It'll be the same mob back of all of 'em. Now they've gone up against a chair-job, everybody'll get put on the 'pan about it. Where was you when the fireworks went off?"

Brundage jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Down on Hester. Kid came up and told me somebody'd heaved a brick at Thomasini's window. That *We Buy Old Gold* joint. So I beat it down there. It was a false alarm. So then I hear the shooting and hike back." He shifted uneasily under Hansard's cold stare. "I called an ambulance for MacReady."

"Yeah?" Hansard morosely studied the vacant spaces in Dumont's display. The robbers had been smart. They hadn't taken any watches or any of the cheap "slum" that's used to catch the eye of the passerby. The stuff that was missing was mostly rings, he decided.

"Got a key, Brundage?"

The Ames man produced a ring attached to his belt with a steel chain. "I ain't s'posed—"

"Suppose my eye!" growled the plainclothesman. "Open up!"

Brundage used a key. Hansard went in first, inspected the alarm box on the wall, saw it hadn't been tampered with. Then he found a phone, got through to headquarters.

"Extension four-o-two . . . Ed Schmidt . . . Ed? I'm down at Dumont's. Put through a thirty-one, will you? All cars. Rush. Have 'em contact every hockshop in the city. Notify us of anyone trying to pawn any soli-

taires worth over—say fifty bucks. Or any unset stones more than a quarter-carat. They'll probably pry the stones out of the settings. . . . I know, I know. It's a hundred-to-one shot. Still and all, it's one of those things we gotta cover, Ed." He hung up.

BRUNDAGE shook his head dubiously. "You ain't gonna lay the finger on the lads who did this job just by puttin' the peep on the hockshops. This mob was from out of town."

"Why do you think so?"

"I seen their car."

"Where?"

"Couple of blocks down. Green sedan with Jersey pads."

Hansard swore and reached for the phone again. "Why the hell didn't you say so when I was talking to headquarters! How did you know it was their car?"

"Well, I don't—for sure. But it was there when I beat it down on Hester, and it wasn't there when I got back. Then that old hag selling pretzels down on the corner claims there was two guys and a frill came running over to the sedan and drove away like a bat outa—"

"Hello, Ed? Something to add to that alarm. All cars to notify all men on post. Pick up a green sedan. . . . What make, Brundage?"

"Buick, near as I noticed."

". . . . a Buick, maybe, Ed. Or any other green sedan with Jersey plates. Two men and a girl in it. . . . Nah, this Ames dope I'm talking to never heard about getting a license number. So long."

The headquarters man reached out, caught the private guard's necktie, yanked him close. "How many times you been told to take the plate numbers of any car parks near the Diamond Exchange after closing hours?"

"Leggo," snarled Brundage, "you're chokin' me! I don't know when that sedan parked there. They's a lot of Jersey hockers come over to do business before closing hours an' leave their cars

around here while they grab a bite. Anyhow, I told you I was in a hurry to check up on that rock-throwin'. If it hadn't been for that—"

"Yah!" Hansard sent him reeling back against one of the glass cases. "You don't stay on your post. You don't check on parked cars. You'd ought to have your watchman's license revoked. You had sense enough to notify the proprietor, here?"

"I tried to get Dumont on the phone. He wasn't home."

"Where's he live?"

"Over in Brooklyn."

"Well, try him again. Send him a wire—collect. Ask the phone company to give him a bell every five minutes until they get him. But get him over here."

"I'll do the best I can."

"And soon as you see him, get me a complete check-list of all the ice that was glommed. I want the number of stones in each ring, the carat weights, settings—"

"Sure, I know."

"You don't know your rump from a hole in the ground. If you get hold of anything phone it in to headquarters, extension four-o-two. And don't be leaving Dumont's here to run around and see if you can locate somebody who can give you a description of those three. We'll take care of that without any amateur kibitzing."

Hansard got out of the store, up to the corner of the alley. He half expected some of the Homicide boys to be down there, but maybe the word hadn't gotten through that MacReady had died. Or perhaps they'd come and snapped their photographs and were now combing the district for eyewitnesses. . . .

The sharp contrast between the blinding brilliance of the row of windows at the Diamond Exchange and the utter pitch-blackness of the alley made it difficult for him to adjust his eyes quickly. He slipped on something greasy underfoot.

He put his flash on it and his nostrils flared in repugnance. This was where

Tom had taken it. He swung the circle of light up and down the cobblestones. Besides MacReady's blood, there was nothing to see except a couple of those small, white, slotted cards in which rings are displayed. Each card bore the caption—*Absolutely Perfect Blue-White—22-Carat Setting—Latest Style.*

A couple of chunks of limestone had been chipped from the building wall by flying lead but there was nothing else.

CHAPTER TWO

The Girl in the Hock Shop

MIKE strode grimly through the alley, over to Centre Street, up to the block-long white stone building at Number 240.

He went down a freshly scrubbed corridor smelling of antiseptic, turned in at a door marked—*DETECTIVE BUREAU—LOST PROPERTY DIVISION.*

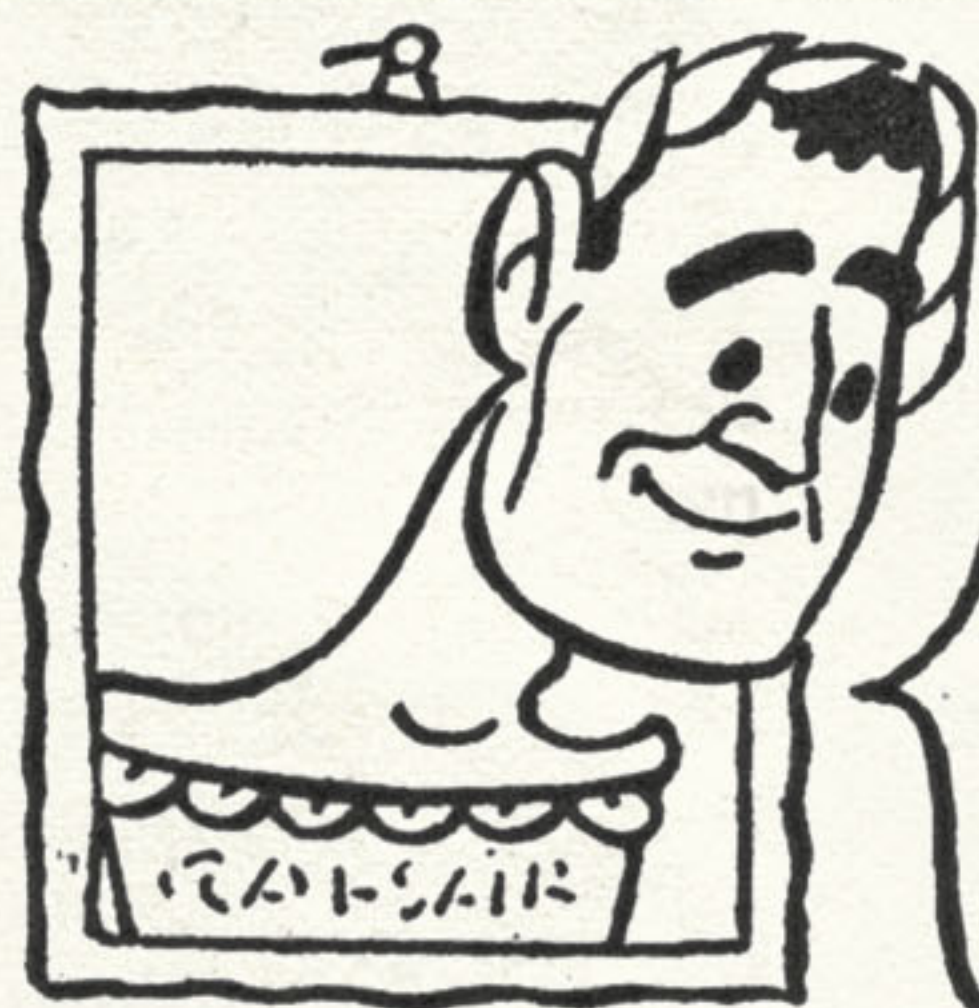
There was a long counter running across the front of the room, behind it half a dozen small oak desks. There was only one man in the office, a thin, sharp-featured individual with glossy black hair, shaggy eyebrows and an expression of perpetual surprise on his face. He sat in a swivel chair, with his feet up on the lower drawer of his desk. This was Ed Schmidt, Hansard's working-partner. He was drawling into a telephone.

"Yeah, that's what I said. Report by phone and pronto. That don't mean you shouldn't send in the regular descriptive cards on everything that's been hocked in your shop today. If I don't get a brown envelope with a bunch of those cards from you in the morning I'll know you've either gone out of business or you're trying to give us the run-around, Abe. But about those solitaires—it's important. They're hot as the electric chair."

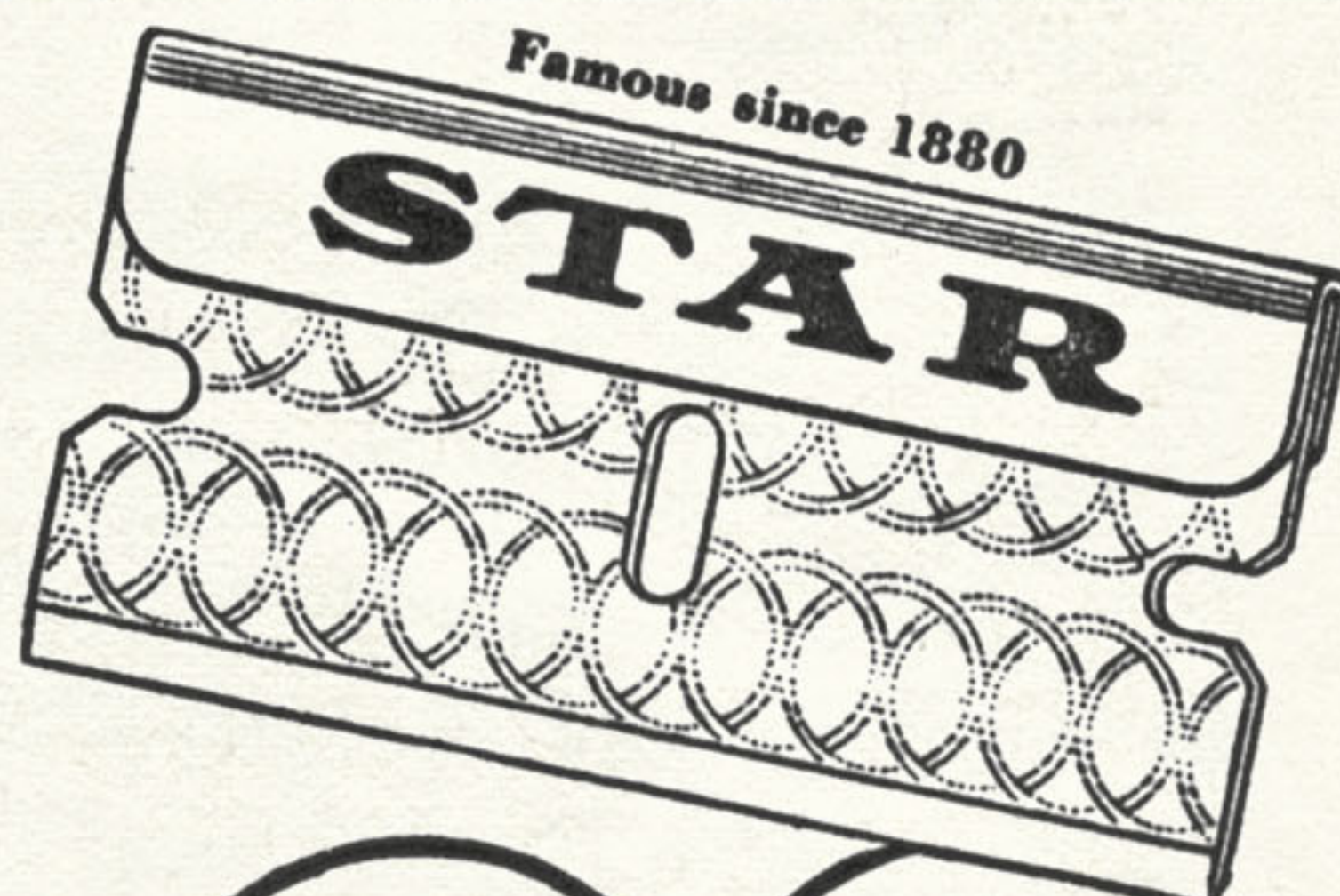
Hansard sat at his desk and gloomily fingered the day's list of property, lost and stolen. There were wallets reported from the midtown section. Their only chance of recovery lay across the hall in the offices of the pickpocket squad. Another epidemic of lost dogs in the Washington Heights area probably meant that the old "dog racket" was being worked again. And there was the usual assortment of missing handbags, wrist-watches and briefcases—mostly testimonials to their owner's forgetfulness.

None of these held any interest for Mike. He would let the other boys on the squad look after them. By that tacit understanding which goes without expression in the police department, it was accepted that Hansard was after the mob that had shot down his friend, and that he would let nothing interfere with that job until it was done.

He knew that the likelihood of his finding the killers was remote, unless he had a streak of luck. For there would



TRY THE
STAR
WAY TO
SHAVE!



STAR

WORLD'S
LARGEST SELLING
SINGLE EDGE BLADE

4 for
10¢

12 for
25¢

be little doubt that this was the work of the same crowd that had bedeviled the pawnshop squad for nearly three weeks, with window-hole robberies from one end of Manhattan to the other.

"Mike," called the other man, hanging up the phone, "I got that file of lugs who've been involved in window robberies, from the Bureau of Identification. Covers twelve years. About sixty guys. But more than half of 'em are doing their home-work up at Stone College."

"Let me have a look-see, Eddie." Mike shuffled over the identification cards, with full-face and profile photos. "None of these answer the descriptions given by any of the bystanders at the other robberies, huh, Ed?"

"Not as near as I can make out. But we might as well go through the routine."

"Let Homicide do it, Eddie. They can put more men on it than we can. And anyhow, I got an idea it's a waste of time. I think this is a new mob, just organized."

The way they're going at it, Mike"—Schmidt came over and put a police flyer from San Francisco headquarters on Hansard's desk—"it looks to me as if they're old hands. Seven jobs, they've pulled. Nobody's caught 'em. Nobody's even got a cast-iron description. That takes some experience."

"Yeah. I guess so, Eddie." Mike studied the flyer.

It was an old one. It stated that all police departments should be on the lookout for William Sexton, recently a resident of San Francisco. Sexton was an expert at window work, had cleaned out five jewelry stores in one night and departed for places unknown. His method had been to use a couple of stooges to stand on either side of him, apparently inspecting the contents of a show-window, while he used a window-glass cutter, calmly inserted a cane with a wad of chewing gum on it and picked up such items as his fancy dictated. After the desired merchandise had been abstracted, the busy Mr. Sexton would

calmly paste a poster of some sort over the small hole and depart.

"This looks good," Mike grunted. "Only there's no photo."

"Good reason why," Schmidt pointed out. "They never caught him. They picked up that dope from stoolies. Wouldn't you say this Sexton might be our man?"

"It's a thought. All we got to go on is—five feet six or seven, hundred and sixty pounds or thereabouts, brown hair, brown eyes. I can't walk from here to Broome Street without bumping into half a dozen guys would answer that description. Tell you what, Ed. Wire Frisco. Ask 'em if they've got any later dope on this punk."

"O.K."

"And send out a teletype to all states we got working agreements with, giving his description. Include the green sedan in the Jersey notice. And warn all of 'em to be on the lookout for anybody trying to hock or sell unset ice."

"Anything else, Mike?"

"Yeah. Check over the lists of arrests MacReady made, the last four-five years. See if any of those bums had any jewelry-store robberies in their records. I have a hunch maybe this slob who shot him, did it because Mike knew him and put the pinch on him at some previous time."

The phone rang. Schmidt answered. "Yeah? Hold the line a second, Elias." He put his hand over the receiver. "Litzman calling. Up on Sixth Avenue. Says there's a floozie trying to put the bite on him for two hundred bucks on a rock worth six or seven C's anyway. Wants to know what to do with her."

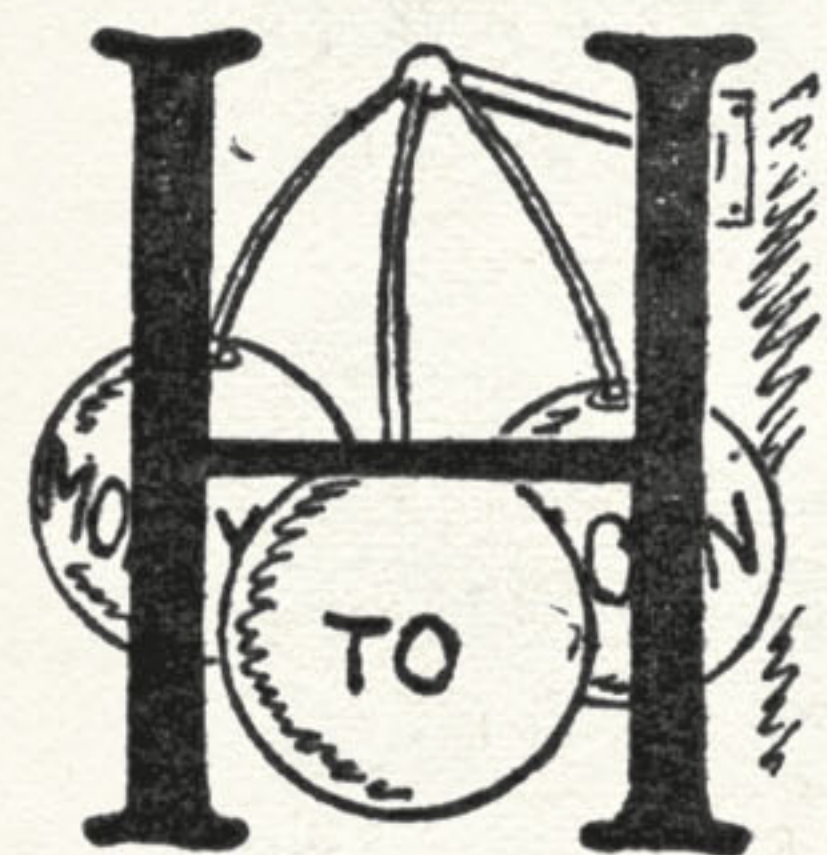
"Tell him to stall her. Kid her along. Haggle with her. Tell him if he lets her go before I get up there, I'll dig that old receiver charge up and slap him in the jug for sure." Mike grabbed his overcoat, got to the door. "And Ed—"

"Yuh?"

"Tell him to work it so he gets her prints. On his showcase. Or maybe a fountain pen."

He got into the corridor before Schmidt yelled: "Want I should notify the radio Rollos?"

"No," Mike called back. "I'll do that. If I need 'em."



HANSARD'S coupe hit nothing but the high spots on the way uptown. This might be a wrong lead, of course. No telling whether the skirt at Litzman's was

the same one Tom MacReady had spotted down on Little Maiden Lane. But if she wasn't, it was a damn queer coincidence. Women didn't do much legitimate pawning late at night. That was a male trick, for booze money. Women usually did their hocking in the daytime, when they could buy something they needed with the money they got. But if this was the same dame, seconds might count. Litzman might not be able to stall her off, for long. She'd be sure to get suspicious.

Still, there was something screwy about the set-up. That window-job had certainly been done by a professional mob of heisters. Yet no gem thief would be dumb enough to suppose he could get away with pawning a piece of glitter within a couple of hours after the stuff had been lifted.

It was ten minutes past nine when Mike got out, a block below Litzman's. He forced himself to stroll leisurely toward the hockshop—past a couple of employment agencies.

It wouldn't do to come tearing into the shop. There might be a lookout waiting outside, or across the street. That was why he hadn't wanted the radio cars notified. A lookout would have spotted police cars before they could have closed in and given the alarm.

He turned in, hesitantly, under a dingy sign from which hung three tarnished gilt balls. The window was plastered, inside, with a miscellaneous network of watches, binoculars, shotguns, revolvers, banjos, carpenter's levels, flutes, fish-

ing rods. Phony "flash wares" bought at auction, Hansard knew, for sale to overwise suckers.

The girl was still there. She was talking earnestly to Elias down at the far end of the counter. A bleached-out aluminum blonde with plenty of curves where they counted, and a pinched, sharp little face with too much rouge and lipstick on it. She wore a short seal jacket over a thin blue silk dress, and if Mike Hansard was any judge, she was scared silly about something.

"Won't you please hurry," she was saying, shrilly, to the two men behind the counter. "I tell you I've got to catch a train."

Old Elias Litzman looked at her mildly over his steel-rimmed spectacles and fingered his scraggly beard thoughtfully. "In a transaction of this size, it is necessary to make out the papers correctly. I have my pawnshop license to protect—"

"I understand. But I've given you all the information you've asked for."

"How do you spell your first name, Miss Sampson. Or here"—the pawnbroker deferentially handed her his pen—"if you will just fill this in, yourself. Full name and address. Phone number, if you have one. . . ."

The girl wrote eagerly.

Hansard rested his elbows wearily on the counter, took his watch out of his pocket as if he were greatly embarrassed.

The younger Litzman came up to him, briskly. "You wish to make a loan, gentleman?" He slid a slip of white paper under Mike's hand.

"Like to get about five-six bucks on the turnip. It's worth twenty-five, at least."

On the slip he read—

Stones: One diamond
Weight: One and one half carats
Setting: 22k. yellow gold
Inscriptions: None
Maker's name: None

Mike tucked the pawnbroker's record unobtrusively away in his pocket. "I got to have five dollars, anyway."

Under his breath he added: "*Nobody with her, Sol?*"

Sol Litzman examined the watch's movement with professional disdain. "Five I couldn't let you have. Watches like them are positively a drag on the market, these days. Maybe three." He whispered: "*All alone, Mr. Hansard.*"

"You can sell it for fifteen. A fella offered me fifteen."

Sol shrugged, scornfully. "You should taken it."

"Gimme five seeds on it." Mike murmured: "*Ever seen her before?*"

"Where'd you get this watch, mister. You're so anxious to get rid of it, maybe it ain't yours. *Never laid eyes on her, so help me.*"

"It's mine," Hansard grumbled. "Those are my initials, inside the case, there. *What's her say-so?*"

"*Claims she's a show-girl. Used to be in burly. Out of a job. Claims she's had the ring couple of years, Guy gave it to her.*" Sol laid the watch on the counter, with an air of finality. "Three-fifty is absolutely our outside limit, my friend. Take it or leave it."

"I'll split the difference. Make it four, huh? *You think she's leveling, Sol?*"

"Well, so I'll do it. If you don't come back and redeem it, I lose money, I'm telling you. *We put the ring under the glass, Mr. Hansard. She's lying, positively. Ring ain't ever been worn by nobody. Anyway, showgirl's rings always got a little grease paint on 'em that hold the dust under the setting points. There ain't no dust of any sort under the points on this ring. Write out your full name and address, please.*"

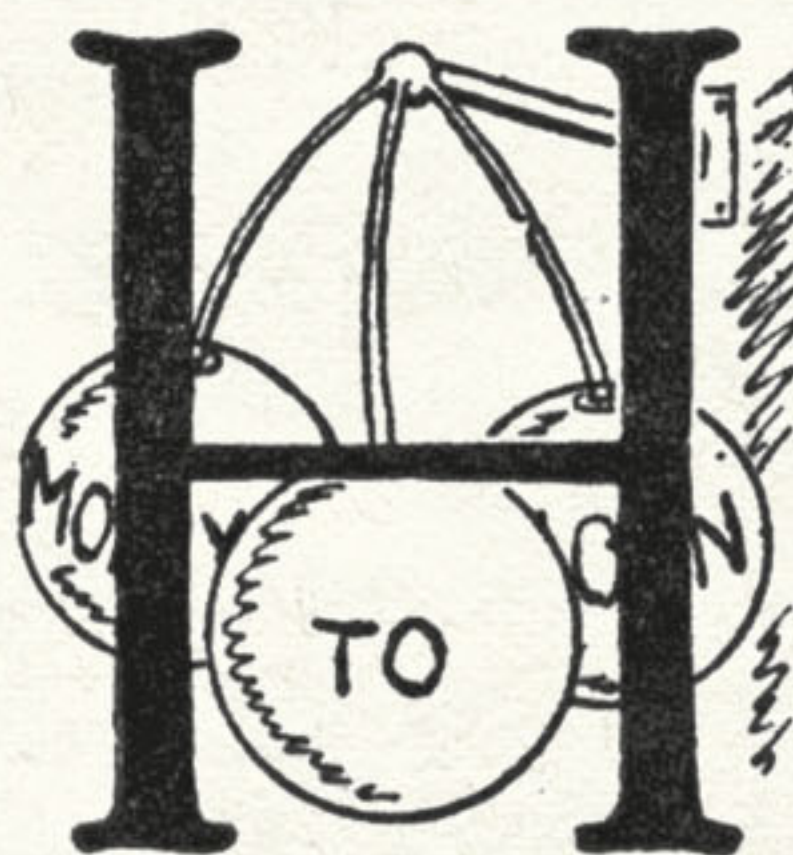
Mike spoke without moving his lips. "*How much will she take?*"

"Here's four dollars, mister. *She come down to a hundred-fifty.*"

"Much obliged. I'll be back for the watch. *Give it to her. I'll be responsible for it.*"

Sol turned toward the green steel cabinet back of the counter. As he did so, he nodded almost imperceptibly to his father. And as the plainclothesman

slouched toward the door, he could hear old Elias saying: "I take a chance, young lady. Actual I ain't got a right to let you have the money. But you say you got to get to San Francisco. You give me your word. Absolutely you redeem the ring, so I make an exception . . ."



HANSARD glanced back through the intervening lacework of opera glasses, ukeleles, cocktail sets, drawing instruments. The girl's head was thrown back.

She was drawing a deep breath as if a terrible load had been lifted from her shoulders. This could be the frill Mac-Ready had seen. It was the type of ring that had been stolen from Dumont's place. He had been able to tell from the vacant spots in the jeweler's window that most of the rings had been "engagement specials."

He surveyed the street. Between Forty-sixth and -seventh there was only an elderly couple strolling leisurely. No cars at the curb, just a battered baker's truck parked in front of a Coffee Pot, down at the next corner.

Mike slid into the doorway next to Litzman's. He'd tail her, see who she met, where she went. Maybe the mob had been desperate for dough, had to make a fast touch to get out of town. In that case . . .

She was coming. She was almost running as she pushed open the door, but she glanced warily up and down the block before she walked quickly downtown.

She got about ten paces when the baker's truck moved jerkily out from the curb.

The man behind the wheel was a horse-faced individual with an ugly scar slashing down from one corner of his mouth. Hansard saw the glint of metal in the driver's hand.

That was enough warning for Mike.

"Hey, kid," he yelled. "Watch that truck!"

She saw it at the same instant, screamed, turned and fled back for the shelter of the pawnshop doorway.

The truck speeded up. Little jets of orange flame began to spit from a hole in the side panel of the truck. Glass shattered above Hansard's head as he put out a foot, tripped the girl so she sprawled flat on the sidewalk.

The staccato bark of an automatic rifle echoed hollowly in the empty street. The heavy flat report from Mike's Police Positive crashed thunderously through the more brittle sound of the rifle-fire.

Something licked out with a hot tongue at his cheek. He dropped to one knee and aimed carefully as the gray truck roared past.

The door and window of the pawnshop disintegrated in a jangling shatter of broken glass.

At his feet the girl squealed, once—and lay still.

Mike fired at the driver, saw the windshield smash, put another bullet halfway down in the front door by the driver's seat. Then the truck was past. Lead smacked into the door jamb beside him as he thumbed fresh cartridges into his pistol, sent a burst of slugs at a rear tire. He heard the tire go, saw the truck swerve crazily around a corner.

A police whistle shrieked. Behind him, heavy feet pounded on pavement. Hansard stood up, flipped his left hand in the horizontal palm-up, fingers-back gesture that says "I'm a cop," everywhere.

A harsh voice behind him grated: "Which way they'd go?"

"'Round the corner," snapped Mike. "Gray truck. Tire gone. Watch it. They got a chatter gun—"

The patrolman raced for the corner.



HANSARD knelt beside the girl. His attempt to protect her had failed. One of those half-inch slugs from that automatic rifle had ricocheted from the metal casing of the pawnbroker's window, caught her

in the throat. She was still alive but when she tried to speak, a red froth bubbled from her lips and her eyes glazed.

Behind Hansard, old Litzman was screeching like a maniac. "Look, *nu!* Look what you done. A tip-off I give you and right away is shooting, is killing . . ."

"Shut up, Papa," yelled his son. "You ain't hurt. That poor girl, she's dead."

A radio car came down the avenue with a banshee wail, slid to a screaming stop. Two uniformed men came over cautiously, guns drawn.

Mike said: "Hansard. Headquarters hockshop squad. Shield one-seven-two-one."

One of the officers had a sergeant's chevrons on his sleeve. He glanced down at the girl, looked up at the left side of Mike's face. "They get you bad?"

Mike put his fingers up, touched his cheek. It was warm and wet. There was a jagged cut a couple of inches long where a splinter of glass had ripped him.

"Cut myself shaving," he gritted. "Tell the broadcasting boys to put out a thirty-one for an old Ford truck. Gray panel job. Two men, both armed. One's a guy with a long, narrow face. He's got an inch scar at the right side of his mouth. I didn't see the other guy. He's the one hit this kid with the stutter gun."

The sergeant motioned to his partner. "Phone inside. Headquarters, first. Then a meat-wagon." The patrolman pushed open the shattered door, got in to the telephone.

The muscles in Mike's jaws twitched. "Same two who put the clutch on a flock of stones in a Bowery jewelry store and knocked off Tom MacReady, coupla hours ago, Sarge. The blonde here was in on the heist. She pulled a fast one on her pals, must've wanted to take a powder. She tried to hock a piece of ice here with Litzman. They followed her. When she came out of the shop, they drove up and let her have it. I winged the lug who had the wheel." He bent down and picked up the girl's gilt-mesh bag.

The sergeant sheathed his gun. "Where'd this truck come from?"

Hansard jerked his head toward the Coffee Pot. "Parked in front of the scoff-shop down there. Might be some of the boys inside got an idea where it came from, but I doubt it. This was the same outfit who were supposed to be riding around in a green Buick sedan. The truck was probably stolen, half an hour ago."

"I'll drop in the lunch counter." The sergeant bent over to get a good look at the girl's face. "This dame didn't work this part of town. I'll guarantee that."

"Might not be from New York at all." Mike's face was stern. "But the fingerprint boys'll find out. This mob that knocked her off has gone kill-crazy. If we don't put the clamps on 'em—"

"Yeah." The sergeant pulled out his report book. "They might've holed in, right close by here. We'll give this precinct a going over. Don't worry about that. I knew Tom MacReady. He was a right cop."

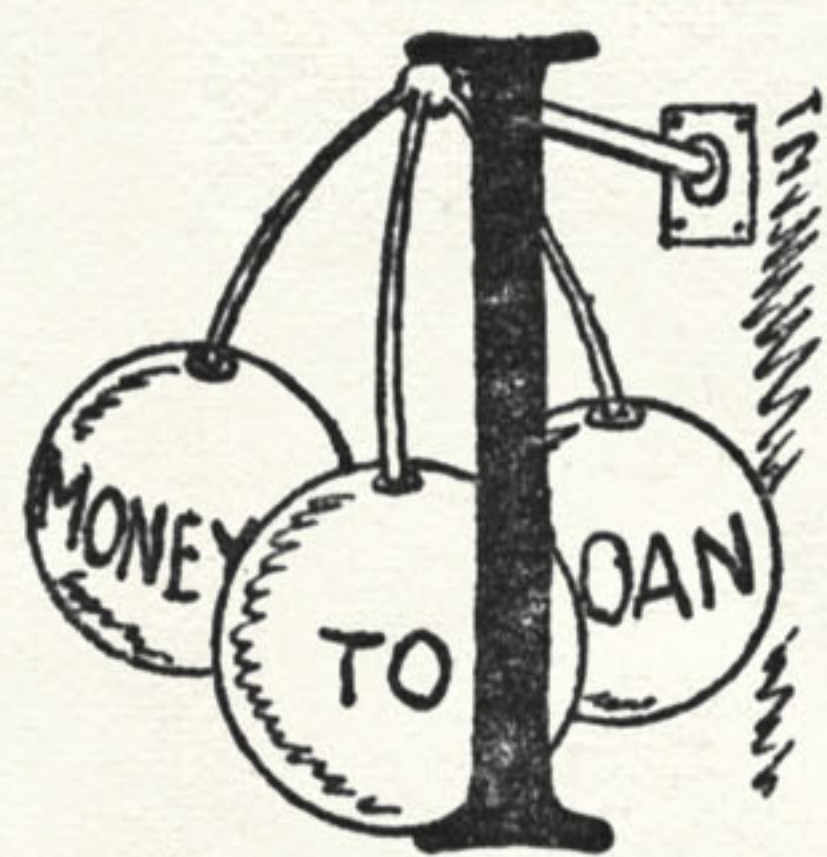
"One of the best," Mike agreed.

The other officer ran out of the hock-shop. "Tunnels and ferries and bridges all blocked. There'll be an ambulance here in a couple of minutes."

"Thanks." Mike stepped over the girl's body. "Get something to cover that up, will you? I'm going inside a minute. I'll stick around till Homicide gets here, anyway."

CHAPTER THREE

Lily Doesn't Work Here Any More



INSIDE old Elias was blubbing incoherently, in a frenzy of fear. Sol was still trying to calm him. Mike spilled the contents of the girl's bag out on the counter-top. Lipstick, cigarettes, gum, an address book full of phone numbers, a couple of old letters without the envelopes, a purse, some hair-pins and a few keys.

Mike opened the purse. There was a roll of bills, a couple of dollars in silver. He tossed the currency across the counter.

"Tear up that ticket, Sol. Here's the dough. Lemme have the ring."

The younger Litzman took the money as if it was a scorpion, went to the safe. Mike pawed over the miscellany on the counter, put the stuff back in the bag. The letters were addressed to *Dearest Daughter* and were signed *Mama*. There wasn't anything in them to tell who the daughter was, or where she lived or anything about her except that her mother was glad she was so well and happy with her work.

The names in the address book were Phils and Johns and Pauls and Bobs—no women. Most of the phone exchanges were in the midtown office section.

Tucked away in the back of the book, where he hadn't noticed it before, was a little piece of blue paper about three inches long and an inch wide. It was a remitter's receipt from the American Express Company for a money order. It was for twenty bucks, was made out to *F. O. Marshal*, signed by *L. Marsh*.

He went over to the telephone, worked the dial. After a second Schmidt came on.

"Ed? Saw some wood for me, will you? . . . Yeah . . . I want to know who L. Marsh was. The skirt who was with the two who put the burn on MacReady. They just fixed her up with a slug, too. L. Marsh is the name. I don't know anything about her except she's a five-buck floozie. But she sent an express money order to someone named F. O. Marshal on April twenty-second. Number is 1317522. Get me an address, Ed . . . Yeah, I'm still at Litzman's."

Outside the ambulance slid to the curb with bell clanging and bloodshot headlights. The emergency interne came in and swabbed off Mike's cheek with something that stung like fire.

"Y'oughta come back to the hospital. Have this treated right, officer."

"Later, maybe. Just do your stitch-in-

time stuff, doc. I got a rush job on hand."

The interne got out the needle.

Sol brought the ring to the plain-clothesman while the suture was being threaded into the flesh of Mike's cheek.

"It ain't the plate glass, Mr. Hansard, or the damage inside the shop here. But nobody'll come near us now. A thing like this'll ruin us, honest. Especially if it gets out that the poor girl was borrowing a little money from us and got murdered like that, right after. Couldn't you tell those newspaper men that it was accidental, that she just happened to be in front of our place of business . . ."

Mike couldn't talk back. He mumbled "No" as well as he could.

"There you are, officer." The interne slapped gauze and collodion over the wound. "Come around in a couple days and have it dressed."

"Sure." Hansard grinned lopsidedly. "That'll be fun."

The interne went out to help put the girl's body on a stretcher.

Sol held out his hands, despairingly, to Mike. "Suppose those killers come back. Maybe they'll think Papa and I could identify them."

"They know damn well *I* can. So they'll come after me, first. Long as I'm alive you don't have to work up a sweat about it. There's your phone. Maybe that's Ed Schmidt."

It was. "Jeeze, Mike. I just got the news over the short-wave. They get you bad?"

"Only a scratch, Ed. You get that address?"

"Yeah. I don't know if it's the right one. But the Express people say Lily Marsh lives at Four-seventy-eight West Seventy-second Street. Know what that is?"

"Riding academy, Ed?"

"That's what they tell me. I wouldn't know. I'm a married man, myself. But you're white, single and over twenty-one, so—"

"Go to hell, Eddie. Any other stuff come in?"

"Not from hockshops. Word about the truck"

"What?"

"Picked up what was left of it on West Forty-eighth. They'd folded it over a hydrant. Bloodstains on the upholstery of the driver's seat. You must've nicked one of 'em."

"I hope. That wouldn't even up the score, either. Any report from that stupe in the Ames patrol?"

"Yeah. He's got Dumont down at the store. Want me to cover it?"

"No. Stick to that phone for the time being. I'll have a look at the Marsh hangout and then run down to Dumont's."

The Homicide boys rolled up in two black cars, brought out their print kits and cameras, questioned Mike for a few minutes. Then he left them there, with the assistant medical examiner making chalk-marks around the body. He got to his car, tramped on the button up through Central Park, turned west at Seventy-second.



HE ground floor of number 478 was occupied by a glorified lunch counter, with shiny red-leather stools and lots of chromium and glass-brick. There was a big neon sign flashing over the door. Every couple of seconds the crimson-and-green tubing proclaimed—*THE MEATING PLACE Where Gourmets Gather*

There was a little hallway off at one side, a row of letter-boxes with name-cards in them. None of the cards bore the name of Marsh or Marshal.

Mike went up a carpeted flight. At the head of the stairs, behind an oval marble-top table, sat an enormously fat woman in a black lace dress. Her eyes peered out slyly from puckers of pink flesh. There was no way of telling where her chin ended and her bosom began. She patted a crown of permanent curls

with pudgy fingers covered with diamonds, and leered ingratiatingly.

"Evening, sweetheart. Which one of the girls did you wanna see?"

Mike grinned amiably. "Lily Marsh. She in?"

The madame's lips made an O! "She ain't honey. But maybe you'd like t' make the acquaintance of a cute little redhead. She's—" The fat woman stopped and squinted at the gold badge Mike was holding in the palm of his hand. Then she giggled. Her jowls shivered with merriment. "You're a man who can take a joke, aren't you, officer? I like a man who can stand for a little kidding once in a while." She reached down, pulled up her skirts, brought out a wad of bills from its stocking hide-out.

Hansard waved a hand. "Once in a while. But not tonight. Which is Lily's room?"

She put both hands flat on the marble, levered herself erect. "You ain't gonna get rough, or anything like that, are you?"

"Not unless I have to." Mike's smile was still agreeable but his eyes were frosty. "Which room?"

"Front, right." The stout woman pointed. "Want a key?"

"I don't want to kick the door down." He held out his hand. From somewhere in the folds of her dress she produced a flat key. "Just sit right down there again. Act natural. Don't bother to tip off anybody. Just go right on as if I wasn't around. Probably in a few minutes I won't be."

"I always play ball, officer. It's the safest way."

He went toward the front of the house, used the key. He kicked the door open, stood to one side. The room was pitch-dark, the shades were drawn in the windows looking down onto the street, although through them Mike could see the dull claret glare of the *MEATING PLACE* sign at regular intervals. There was an odor of musky perfume.

He held his gun in his right hand, felt around for the light-switch, with

his left. An unseen hand gripped his left wrist, jerked him off balance!

Mike wrenched himself free, but not before a two-foot length of lead pipe had smashed down across the back of his neck, half stunning him. He crashed forward, to his knees. A foot stamped savagely on his gun-hand, crunching the knuckles. The shoe, which had come within the detective's blurred vision, booted the revolver out of his grasp.

THE door slammed behind him, light flooded the room from rose-shaded bulbs in the ceiling. Hansard gazed up, groggily. Two men stood over him. One was short and squat. His arms were so long his hands hung almost to his knees. His face was long and narrow. There was a scar twisting down the right corner of his mouth. The left sleeve of his coat had a jagged tear in it. The fabric was soaked with something that looked like port wine.

The other man was tall and slender, with a boy's pink cheeks and flax-colored hair that waved as if it had been marcelled. He wore a suit of pearl-gray gabardine, a wine-red shirt and an apple-green tie. Neither of the two faces above him had been among the photographs Ed Schmidt had taken from the Bureau of Identification, Hansard decided.

The tall youth spoke languidly. "Don't waste time giving him the toe, Gorilla. Use the pipe."

The squat man grunted, swung clumsily with the chunk of lead. Mike did his best to roll away from the blow, but took it on the shoulder. His left arm felt as if it were paralyzed.

"He's one of them he-guys, Babe," spat the Gorilla. "Got guts."

"Never mind his guts, George. I want his brains smeared on the carpet. And make it snappy. He might have a partner hanging around somewhere."

Mike wished to God he'd *had* sense enough to lug Ed Schmidt along. Maybe he could summon help, if that fat dame in the hall wasn't in on the play. He tried to cry out, but the smash on the

back of his neck had done something to his vocal cords. He could only whisper.

The Gorilla could still talk all right though. "Can't I have a little fun with him, Babe. It ain't every day—"

"Kill him! Kill him now," insisted Babe in an ugly high-pitched squeak. "Cave his skull in. Knock his teeth out afterwards, for souvenirs, if you want to. I don't give a damn. But finish him off, first."

Gorilla George measured his distance, swung down his arm.

Mike twisted, rolled, stumbled to his feet.

Babe was leveling a gun at him, five feet away. The detective could see the bright blue eyes sighting along the barrel.

There was no time to make a decision. Babe would put a shot through his heart in another split second. And if the slug missed, the Gorilla would be on him and next time that lethal pipe would smash home.

Mike acted almost without thinking. As Babe's finger tightened on the trigger and the Gorilla's grunt of rage came close behind him, Hansard leaped.

Through the window

He took shade, curtain and sash with him. The glass crash was loud enough to smother the crack of Babe's gun. Mike didn't feel the impact of a bullet. But at that particular instant he didn't think it mattered much. One way or another, he was probably checking out. Unless his estimate of distance had been exactly right!

He could hear the warning yells of pedestrians below as he burst out over the sill. It wouldn't do any good to brace himself, but he couldn't help it. Something came up, slammed into him with terrific force. He grunted with the shock, but it wasn't the sidewalk, and it hadn't knocked him goofy.

He'd guessed right, then. The narrow, flat surface beneath him, that had stopped his fall, was the top of the *MEATING PLACE* sign. It was directly under Lily's window.

Women screamed from below. Mike twisted around to look down. There was a vicious stab of agony at his right side. That must be a cracked rib. The pain made him dizzy. He put out a hand to steady himself, knocked aside a length of hot tubing, saw the sign beneath him flicker and dim.

He gritted his teeth, got his knees under him, crawled backward till his heels touched the building.

A traffic cop sprinted across Seventy-second Street, shouting: "Don't move! Stay right where you are . . . Keep your head now. I'll get you!"

Hansard stood up, teetered precariously on the foot-wide top of the sign. He knew the traffic man, hollered: "Never mind me, Allison. Watch below there. Don't let anybody in or out."

"Got you, Mike." The policeman belowered gruff commands at the gathering crowd.

MIKE rested his elbows on the sill above him, muscled himself up. He hadn't taken all of the window-pane with him. He had to kick some of it out before he could climb back into Lily's room.

The light was still on, his gun still on the floor, over in the corner where Gorilla George had kicked it. He picked it up.

The fat woman stood in the doorway, drywashing her hands and whining: "I thought you said there wasn't gonna be any rough-house?"

Mike ignored it. "Where'd those two punks go?"

"Those men who ran out into the hall just now?"

Mike's lips tightened. "Don't stall. Where are they?"

She pointed to the stairs. "They went down. I didn't know you were after them. I couldn't have stopped them, anyway."

"I'll say you couldn't. You know 'em!"

"Never saw either of them before tonight, in my life. Honest to God."

"All right," he growled. "If you see either of them again, and don't report it to the precinct, you'll take a good long vacation at the city's expense." He went up to third and top floor, made sure there was no trap to the roof.

Allison yelled up to him: "Mike! Janitor down here says a couple of mugs beat it out back into Seventy-first, through the basement, a minute ago. One was a kind of ape-man with a scar on his face. The other one just a real sweet thing. They the ones?"

"That's the pair." Mike came down, described Gorilla George and the Babe in lurid detail. "Phone that dope in to the dispatcher. Tell every man on duty to pick up either one of those lugs on sight."

"They got guns, Mike?"

"They sure have. And they like to use 'em on a man's back. They'd have used one on me, right away, except they didn't want to attract too much attention here in a crowded district. The Babe shot at me, as it was."

"You look like you been in another fracas, somewhere, Mike. Get chewed up a little?"

Mike put his hand up to his cheek. The cotton and collodion bandage was still there. "Rather be chewed up than boarded up, Allison. I still got my luck. Never mind filing an accident report. But after you finish with that alarm, you might phone Homicide and tell 'em what happened up here. Those punks must have a hangout in town somewhere. They know their way around too well to be strangers. So maybe some stoolie can help us out."

He went back to Lily's room, closed the door. There was no doubt this was the blonde's "place of residence," even if she didn't always sleep here. There was another one of those letters in the bureau drawer, in the same handwriting, signed *Mama*, but very little else. On the dresser was a pyroxylin toilet set in flamboyant lavender-and-gilt.

Mike thoughtfully stuck the hairbrush in his pocket, went out and locked the

door. He'd never seen a set just like that one. The fact might be worth a little nosing around.

He tossed the room key on the marble table. The fat woman eyed him fearfully.

"Lily won't be back," Mike said, curtly. "She's got a date with an undertaker. Keep everybody out of this room until an officer tells you different."

CHAPTER FOUR

Kredit Korner Clue



WHEN he went down and climbed in his car, it hurt him to sit straight behind the wheel. He found he could get by if he twisted sideways a little. That rib would give the sawbones a little something extra to play with when he went to have his cheek dressed.

The part the girl had played in the robbery and killing had been cleared up a little. She had undoubtedly been a pick-up, hooked into the crime without knowing what it was all about. Probably they'd given her the one ring as her part of the payoff. But when Mac-Ready had spotted them, been murdered for his alertness, the girl got cold feet and tried to run out.

That still didn't clear up the main problem. Who was behind this business? Neither the Babe or Gorilla George were more than cheap choppers. They wouldn't be likely to have planned this whole series of window jobs on their own.

Mike stopped in at a bar opposite the *News* Building and ordered rum—a double Demerarra, straight. He felt better directly he'd downed it.

When he got down to Little Maiden Lane, Brundage, the Ames Protection Service guard, was inside the jewelry store with a small, dapper, apple-cheeked man in pince-nez who wore a Vandyke that looked as if it were made of old manila rope.

He bobbed his head to Hansard, held out a neatly manicured hand and said: "I am Ramon Dumont. You are from headquarters, Lieutenant. . . ?"

"Yeah. Just Detective Hansard. Hello, Amesy."

"Hello." Brundage stared. "Judas Priest! They marked you up, didn't they? I heard about it from the harness bull who took MacReady's beat."

"I'm still a hell of a lot better off than Tom. You make out that missing property list, Mr. Dumont?"

"I have it here. The total amount is near seven thousand. But of course the thieves cannot realize any sum such as that."

"Don't bet on it," said Mike. "They might have ways and means." He put the list in his pocket, took out the hairbrush. "You sell this?"

Dumont examined it. "No. It is not an item we carry."

The Ames man goggled. "Nobody'd be fat-head enough to risk ten years in the pen for a hunk of junk like that, Hansard."

"I didn't think it was stolen, shamus." The detective tossed the brush on the showcase. "But it belonged to the skirt who was in on the robbery here. Figured maybe she'd bought it down here, used it as an excuse to case the store."

The little jeweler laid a finger alongside his nose, cocked his head quizzically. "As I say, it is not out of our stock. But it is possible"—he dived under the counter, disappeared from sight—"I might, perhaps, be able to tell you who is the manufacturer."

"That might help," Hansard agreed.

Dumont began to paw over illustrated pages in a catalogue.

Brundage said in an undertone: "I phoned a copy of the loot list to our Jersey office."

"Can't do any harm," Mike said wearily. "Won't do any good, either."

"That's what you Centre Street wiseys think." Brundage was nettled. "The Newark cops just give out with a stolen-car bulletin. Guess what car?"

"Don't tell me," Hansard said sarcastically, "it's that green sedan you saw?"

"Exactly," retorted Brundage. "And from the way you described that lug with the scar on his puss, I'd say he's one of the old Newark mob. A rat called Chuck Scanlon."

"You must be out of practice, Amesy. You're not calling your shots so good. The crut who put the bump on that blonde is named Gorilla George. I don't know if he comes from Newark or not, but I've good reason to believe he's still in New York."

"Well for Crysake." Brundage glowered angrily. "How you expect us to be any use on a job like this, if you keep all the info to yourselves?"

"I don't, fella. I don't. This is a cop case. A blue's been knocked off. It's a personal matter with those of us who knew MacReady, to get the guys who dropped him, Brundage. That lets you out."

"In a pig's whinny, it does. I been assigned by my office to follow through on this job. The insurance outfits are beginning to raise hell with Ames. So it's a personal matter with us, too."

The jeweler said excitedly: "Here it is. I've found it. It is a new design. The manufacturer is the Nik-Nak Novelty Company. They're up in Attleboro, Massachusetts."

Mike said briskly: "I hope they don't go to bed before ten o'clock up in Attleboro."



HE REACHED for the phone and dialed headquarters. "Eddie," he said, when he got his partner's extension, "we might have a lead. Up in the Marsh mouse's furnished room, I find a very gaudy piece of jewelry. A toilet set. It was made by Nik-Nak Novelty, up in Attleboro. According to their new catalogue, it's listed as Number 27VO and is called *Passionelle*. Hot

stuff, eh? Well, I figure maybe one of the killers might have given it to her. If so, it might help a lot to know where he bought it. Or stole it. Get on to Attelboro. I know it's late, but get the cops up there to locate somebody who can tell you who bought sets like that, around New York. And hustle, Eddie. Hustle."

Then he went to work on the loot list.

"Twenty-two solitaires, up to one and a half carats," he read. "Five bar-pins, mostly mellees. One platinum brooch with two rubies and six mellees. One yellow-gold brooch with a small cabochon emerald and five genuine pearls. One pair of diamond cuff-links, yellow-white stones, gold lovers'-knot setting." He glanced up curiously at Dumont, who was stroking his beard daintily. "Didn't look to me like there were that many empty spots in the display."

The jeweler shrugged. "I do not dress the window myself, naturally. But here is the clerk's notation for the close of business, last night." He took a typed sheet of paper from his pocket, unfolded it on the showcase. "I have crossed off the items which are still in the window. Those which I have not checked are obviously missing. If there has been any mistake it is obviously . . . ah . . . simply an oversight."

"You don't say." Hansard stuck the display record in his pocket, along with the list of stolen merchandise. "You want to be a little careful about oversights in a matter like this. Might get someone to wondering if maybe you don't know more about the robbery than you're telling."

Dumont was horrified. "But not at all. The list I gave you is accurate, to the best of my knowledge, I assure you. I cannot permit you to make insinuations. . . ."

Brundage tapped on the showcase with a scowl of importance. "The insurance companies will have to prosecute, if you're making a false claim, Mr. Dumont. I'm warning you."

"So!" The jeweler hissed, resentfully.

"You intend to intimidate me, to induce me to present a less complete list of my loses. Well"—his manila-rope beard stuck out at right angles to his neck—"you will not frighten Ramon Dumont. No. Not one little bit—"

The phone rang sharply. Mike got it.

"I caught the sales-manager in his office, working late, Mike. He checked his order book, and the Nik-Nak people sold that particular number to twenty-four jewelers in the metropolitan area."

"We haven't got time to fine-tooth twenty-four stores, Ed. Look up their cards."

"I already done it," Schmidt announced. "There's only two of the twenty-four on our blue list."

"Which two?"

"Salvatore Monterro, down on Nassau Street and that big outfit up in Harlem. Nathan Kutwik."

"Ah! Maybe you got something there, Eddie. Grab your hat. I'll pick you up, down front, in five minutes."

HE LEFT Brundage cross-questioning the jeweler, ran his coupe up to headquarters. Schmidt was waiting. "Pile in, pal."

"Holy cats, Mike. What smacked you?"

"Glass out of Litzman's window. I want to do a little smacking back."

"Can't blame you for that."

"They laid for me up at the blonde's hangout, too, Ed. Wanted to put me out of the picture because they weren't sure how much the blonde had told me before she died."

"How much did she tell you?"

"Not one damn thing. But I dug the Nik-Nak lead up in her room."

"It smells like trouble, Mike. Wouldn't it be an idea to let the Homicide babies do the dirty work up in Harlem?"

"A lousy idea. They'll be on the Litzman end, anyhow. But this business is right down our alley. We know this Kutwik is a chiseling fence, or he wouldn't be on the suspected file. Maybe

he's been engineering all of these window-hole jobs."

"His place'll probably be closed, this hour."

"Might. Might be open, too. They do more business in Harlem around midnight than they do in the daytime."

WHEN they rolled up in front of a dazzling corner in the heart of Harlem Mike got out of the coupe. The luminous sign said—*YOUR Kredit Is Good at Kutwik's Korner.*

"You can watch through the window, from here, Eddie. Don't let anybody climb on my back." Mike went inside.

There was only one man in the store, a tall, powerfully built individual with expressionless gray eyes and skin the color of tallow. "Something I can do for you, sir?"

"Maybe. I'm a police officer. You're Nathan Kutwik?"

The big man's eyes narrowed. "I am."

"Then you'll know about a girl who bought a dresser-set here a little while ago."

Kutwik pulled down the corners of his mouth and rotated his head slowly, from left to right. "I can't be expected to remember every person—"

"You remember this blonde. Friend of the Babe's and Gorilla George."

A pendulum clock on the wall ticked off several seconds before Kutwik answered. "These persons you mention. I can't seem to recall—"

Hansard shrugged. "Maybe they're the ones who're lying, then. They claim to know you, all right."

"That's quite possible." The expressionless eyes stared insolently at Hansard. "I have been here on this corner for several years now."

"Yeah. We been watching you for several years, too. You shouldn't have any trouble remembering these lads. They say they been doing business with you for quite some time."

Kutwik picked up a cocktail shaker made of ruby glass in the shape of a

barrel, ringed with silver hoops. "What sort of business?"

"Stones. Their statement says they just left a bunch of stuff with you." Mike was casual about it. As yet there was no indication his bluff was working. "I'm just waiting for the search warrant to come over from the station."

The proprietor of the Kredit Korner waved a bloodless hand. "Help yourself. You don't need a warrant in my store. Go right ahead."

The plainclothesman played his last card. "If it was only some hot ice we were after, I'd take you up on that. But this is a homicide case, Kutwik."

"Oh!" The jeweler set down the shaker, softly. "Someone has been killed?"

"The girl I just told you about. And a cop. You know how it is with the commissioner. When a policeman's been murdered we put on plenty of pressure, but we have to do everything strictly legal, to be sure no pratt of a lawyer can beat a conviction."

Kutwik took out a silk handkerchief, wiped his mouth. "This killing, now. It was in connection with those diamonds?"

"That's right. And the party who's fencing them is going to be charged as an accessory. It's a chair-job for someone. But of course, if you're in the clear, it won't worry you."

"Suppose"—the big man put both palms on the top of the showcase, bent over until his face was only a foot from Hansard's—"an honest business man had been deceived about the ownership of certain gems, and was quite unaware of the manner in which they came into the possession of certain parties attempting to sell them—"

"Go ahead. I'm supposing. . . ."

"Do you think the police would take this fact into consideration, my friend?"

Hansard smiled tightly. "They might. If the business man could help us to get a conviction."

Kutwik sighed. "I give you my word of honor I knew nothing of this killing. Naturally, under such circumstances, I

would immediately have turned the stones over to the authorities."

"I bet you would," said Hansard, curtly. "Let's see 'em."



HE jeweler emerged from behind the counter, walked with a curious shambling gait to the door of the Kredit Korner, locked it. Mike grinned to himself. That would give Schmidt something to fret about.

The big man came back, beckoned to Hansard, led the way to a partition at the rear of the store. On the way, the detective gave the once-over to the big steel safe which stood under an electric light out where any passing policeman could make sure it hadn't been tampered with. Evidently the jeweler didn't trust his privately purchased goods to its security!

There was a tiny cubbyhole of an office, a big glass-topped desk and a modernistic lamp of varnished wood and copper. Kutwik snapped on the light, sat down in a padded chair.

"Let's be open and above-board, my friend."

"Let's," Mike agreed.

"Perhaps there is . . . um . . . a reward for the arrest of these men you tell me about."

Mike stared. "Sure. Jewelers Association reward. Twenty-five hundred bucks or so, last time I heard. For evidence leading to conviction. Why?"

"As I understand it, you policemen are not qualified for such a reward, if you capture the criminals?"

"So which?"

Kutwik spread his palms, blandly. "Possibly we could work out some arrangement. You and I, eh? I give you the information, you see to it that I receive the reward. Then we split—"

Hansard shook his head in admiration. "You got your nerve. Putting a program like that up to me. Why, you putty-puss, you'll be getting all the re-

ward that's coming to you if you miss getting indicted for complicity in murder. Now cut out the horse and show me the glitter."

Kutwik sighed, pulled the lamp over in front of him. "You cops are so stupid about money matters. Who will it hurt, if you and I split that twenty-five hundred?" There was no answer from the hockshop cop, so the jeweler grasped the base of the lamp in his left hand, twisted the top with his right.

The lamp unscrewed, the top lifted off, and there was a niche in the wooden base about the size of a bird's nest. There were a lot of shiny eggs in it, round little gold eggs with diamonds in them.

Hansard laid them out on the desk. "All here but one," he announced. "I got that one in my pocket already."

"They wanted three thousand dollars for the lot," Kutwik murmured, resentfully. "Claimed they'd brought it over from Naples and smuggled it in."

"Don't give me any of that guff." Hansard scooped up the jewelry, dumped it in his coat pocket. "You knew where it came from. Probably you bought it, at that."

"Oh, I deny it, absolutely. I asked for time to make an appraisal."

"Did, eh? Tell me why a crook should trust you with five or six thousand dollars' worth of rocks. Unless, of course, they'd done business with you before on the same basis."

The fence arched his eyebrows, superciliously. "I am a reputable dealer. I wouldn't be likely to run away."

"Not unless you could make a dollar by doing it. All right. When were these rats coming back for their cheese?"

"Tomorrow morning, officer."

"Didn't they leave any address, any place you could get hold of them?"

Kutwik looked startled. "Why do you ask me? You have them under arrest, haven't you?"

"I didn't say so, mug. But I'll have you in a cell in no time at all, unless you answer my questions."

The jeweler groaned. "They men-

tioned a Nevins Street number. Over in Brooklyn 24781, if I remember correctly. But they were most particular that I shouldn't attempt to contact them."

Hansard wrote it down. "O.K., mister. I'll get over there and give a gander. You better close up shop now."

"I'd intended to."

"One more thing." Mike reached for the phone, dialed Spring 7-1000. When he got the switchboard man, he rattled off: "Hansard talking, hockshop squad . . . I'm up at 9744 Lenox Avenue. Jewelry store. Nathan Kutwik. Got that? The phone is Edgecombe 7-0741. Put a tap on the wire, right away, will you? Want a record kept of all conversations, numbers called, the works."

He hung up with the operator's comment still ringing in his ears. "What's the matter with you, Hansard? You know we got to get a court order before we do any wire-tapping."

Mike started for the front door.

"Where you live, Kutwik?"

"At the Concourse Savoy. On the Grand Concourse."

"You better beat it right up there. Stay there till I give you a ring."

The jeweler unlocked the door. "You won't double-cross me, Mr. Hansard. After my helping you, this way?"

The detective clucked derisively. "Tchk, tchk. You're a guy should talk about double-crossing! I'll promise you nothing except an even break. And you won't get that if you don't keep your nose clean from here on in."

CHAPTER FIVE

Ten Carats of Lead



HE WENT out, swung briskly past Schmidt, without speaking. After he'd gone halfway down the block, he flailed one arm in a come-on motion without turning around. His

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partner got it, slid the car up alongside.

"No dice, huh, Mike?"

"Plenty dice. I got the junk in my pocket."

"Ain't you going to arrest Kutwik?"

"Not yet, Ed. I'm not sure he's really working with these choppers. But we'll find out. You stick here, at this end of the block. I'll drive around to the other end. We tail him. If he comes your way, I'll see him and pick you up. If he heads my way, you're on your own. You better check in with H.Q."

Hansard dropped his partner, drove on around the block. The lights at the Kredit Korner were just going out as he hit the end of the street. A minute later the jeweler stepped out of the door. He glanced cautiously up and down the block, hurried toward Schmidt's corner. Mike followed with the car, keeping well behind him.

Kutwik turned down Seventh Avenue. By the time Mike saw Ed Schmidt, the fence was nowhere in sight.

"That Yellow," Schmidt snapped. "Headin' downtown. That's him!"

Mike grunted. "He's taking one hell of a roundabout route to get to the Concourse, isn't he?"

Through the northwest corner of Central Park, they trailed the taxi, to a short crosstown block between Columbus and Broadway. Mike stopped the coupe before the taxi ceased moving. When Kutwik got out of his cab and scanned the street, there was no indication anyone had been trailing him.

The jeweler paid off, hurried into a three-story brownstone house.

Schmidt said: "That's one of those remodeled joints with a couple of apartments on each floor. How do we know which one he's in?"

"We don't, Eddie. You stay here. Collar him if he comes out. If you get rough about it, nobody could blame you. Cuff him to the wheel and then hit the hall. Wait there until you hear a racket, somewhere. That'll be me. If you don't hear a rumpus in a couple of minutes, make one yourself and get some help."

"How'll you know where to head in, Mike?"

"I'll have to pull a Peeping Tom act. Up the fire-escape, at the rear. If he's not in one of the rear flats I'll go to the roof and come down inside."

"Don't climb into some dame's room by mistake, pal."

Mike told him to go to hell, got around back past a row of ash-cans, using his flash, found the iron ladder leading up past the rear windows.

THERE were lights on all three floors. The voices on the first floor were female, those on the second, an old man and a child.

But when Hansard put his ear to the window on the top floor he heard Kutwik say: "I don't want any part of it, Babe. I don't mind running a few legitimate risks. But this hot-squat stuff is too much for me."

The high-pitched voice of the Babe cut in. "You soft-bellied ———! What do you think you can do about it now?"

"All I want is my money back. I'll give you the stuff. You can get rid of it outside the state."

The Babe cursed him obscenely. "You got as much chance of getting back that grand as you have of staying in the clear if George or I get picked up, Nate. The junk was worth three thousand, any way you wanted to figure it. You chiseled us down to one and now you want to welsh on that."

"All right." Kutwik sounded tired. "Forget the cash. Come up tomorrow and take the junk back. I don't want it. It's too hot for me. I'd rather take the loss and throw the stuff down the sewer."

"Why didn't you bring it with you tonight, if you're so damn anxious to get rid of it?"

The jeweler said: "I don't want to touch it again. Much less carry it around where they could frisk it off me. You come up in the morning and get it. If you don't, I'll heave it in the river. I'm telling you."

MIKE squatted on the fire-escape and grinned sourly as he patted the bulge in his pocket where the rings were. The old buzzard was still after that reward, figured that by getting Babe and the Gorilla to return to the Kredit Korner in the morning, he'd square himself with the authorities and be able to claim at least a part of the twenty-five hundred. He wouldn't miss the thousand bucks he'd paid over to the Babe so much, then.

There was no more talking from within. Somewhere in the apartment a door slammed. Mike got out his jack-knife, went to work on the catch of the window. It was a gamble, busting into a crook's flat this way. But it would be even more of a gamble if he and Eddie tried to crash the front door. And maybe this rear window wasn't being watched.

It wasn't. He slipped the catch with the blade, put his fingers on the pane, pushed up gently. The window came up with no noise. He got out his gun, shoved the shade aside, stepped quietly over the sill. Then he closed the window softly. The Babe might notice a draft from an unaccustomed source.

The room he was in looked like a boudoir. Rose-pink spread on the bed, fluffy drapes at the windows, a dressing-table with a vanity mirror. But no women's clothes . . .

He stepped to the door leading into the hall. There was a rattling of ice in a glass, the sound of a syphon. Mike moved out into the hall.

The Babe, in a pair of vivid blue lounging-pajamas, was mixing a drink. He was lifting it to his lips when Mike said: "Hang onto it, sweetheart. With both hands. *Get both hands on that glass, fast!*"

The Babe did as he was told, watching Hansard with sullen eyes.

Mike stepped close to him, jabbed him gently with the muzzle of his pistol. "Turn around, Babe. Up against the wall there." He got the bracelets out of his hip-pocket, clipped one half of the

nicked cuffs to the killer's left wrist.

There was a buzz out in the front of the apartment, another and another.

"That will be Georgie the ape-man, huh?"

Mike snapped the other half of the handcuffs around a steam riser in the corner of the kitchen. "You stay here, beautiful. I'll go let him in. And if you yell or anything like that, I'll put a dent in that classic nose of yours."

Hansard went through the hall, past a daintily furnished living-room, to the front door. There was the sound of a key in the lock. Mike didn't wait. He jerked the door open.

Gorilla George fell into the room, his jaw gaping in astonishment. Hansard had his share of the same feeling. For behind the Gorilla, a look of grim determination on his red face and an automatic clutched in his fist, was Brundage, the Ames patrolman!

Things happened fast. The Gorilla let the momentum of his plunging entrance carry him into a dive for Mike's knees. Hansard chopped down with the barrel of his revolver, caught the ape-man beside the ear with force enough to crack the skull of an ordinary individual.

But the Gorilla didn't stop. He got those long arms around Hansard's knees, threw him heavily.

From the kitchen came a cry. "George. He's got me cuffed here!" The words spurred the scar-lipped man to a frenzy. Mike shot him once, through the shoulder, but George smashed a clubbed fist to the plainclothesman's jaw, wrenching his head to one side and sending a spasm of pain through him from the cracked rib.

Then Brundage took two quick steps, put the muzzle of his automatic in the Gorilla's right ear, pulled the trigger. The body collapsed on top of Hansard.

"Cry-sake, Brundage," Mike muttered. "You didn't have to do that."

The Ames man blew the smoke out of his pistol barrel. "He'd have killed you, wise guy. He was heading upstairs to do just that, when I ran into him."

Mike got painfully to his feet. "Didn't you run into my partner, too? I left him down there, on guard."

"Sure." Brundage turned the Gorilla over with his toe. "But he wanted to phone for some more of you John Laws, so I told him to go ahead. Then when I got in the building, I'm trying to find which apartment belongs to this Babe Tyler, who used to buddy around with Dumont, an' who should come along but this rat? So I bring him up with me."

"George!" screamed the Babe, from the kitchen. "Where did he hit you, George? If that—— got you, I'll burn his eyes out!"

Mike nodded toward the kitchen. "Georgie's boy-friend, or something. The one who drilled Tom MacReady."

Brundage stuck out his jaw belligerently. "I'd like a crack at that punk. I'll run him over to the precinct house for you. You ain't in no shape to man-handle him, fella."

Hansard said: "I'll be O. K. Bent a rib last time I had an argument with these two. But you can help me with him, unless you've got ideas about collecting any part of that Jeweler's Association reward?"

The Ames man shook his head. "I ain't eligible. All I'm doin' is tryin' to protect my job. That's why I hammered Dumont until I dragged the Babe's address outa him. Gimme the cuff-keys. I got a couple of new grips I want to show that scut."

Hansard took a key from his vest pocket, tossed it to him. "Don't bang him around too much. Prosecutor'll give us trouble, if you do."

Brundage went into the kitchen.

Mike waited until the private patrolman was out of sight, then followed on tiptoe. He peeked around the corner.

Brundage was having trouble with the lock on the handcuffs.

"Hurry up," whispered the Babe. "And give me a gun."

"Left-hand pocket," muttered the Ames representative. "This key don't fit."

"Damn right it don't," Mike snapped. "You don't think I was sap enough to fall for that line of horse, do you?"

Brundage snarled, fired. But his aim was spoiled by the Babe, who was desperately trying to tug the extra pistol from Brundage's pocket.



MIKE took his time, steadied himself against the door jamb, shot Brundage in the navel. He had to put another slug in the same place before the private cop sank to the floor and dropped his gun.

The Babe had managed to get the automatic from Brundage's coat before the Ames man fell. He lifted it, sighted.

Hansard came in fast, knocked the muzzle aside, clipped the Babe once across the teeth with the barrel of his own .38.

The killer moaned and sagged limply against the chain of the handcuffs.

Brundage rolled over on his side. "They'll get you for this, copper. My people'll get you."

"Sure they will, Ames." Mike ran water in the sink, put his head under it, said sputtering: "They'll get me to accept a medal for turning up a traitor. As well as a guy who's wanted by the Frisco police."

"You're crazy. Ain't . . . first time . . . cop's gone . . . gun-crazy." Brundage put a hand to his belly. Somehow the gesture reminded Mike of Tom MacReady on the operating carriage.

"No." Mike wiped his face on a dish towel. "I might have been a little dumb. But not wacky. I had sense enough to figure out that the louse behind all these window-hole robberies must be somebody who knew a lot about the kind of stuff in jewelry-store windows and when the Ames men wouldn't be around and what time the harness bulls would be on a different part of their beats. A guy like Dumont wouldn't know all those angles. He wouldn't be able to find out,

either. And naturally, a couple of torpedoes like the Gorilla and the Babe here wouldn't have that information. But you would. And working with Kutwik, you'd gotten away with it for a long time. Using a different mob of killers every so often and knocking them off yourself, when you were through with them, I suppose."

The Babe whimpered: "George. You shot George?"

"Not me," Mike said. "I would have, only your boss beat me to the punch."

The youth in the pajamas reached over, clawed savagely at Brundage's face. Mike bent down, clipped him.

"Mike! Where are you, Mike?" It was Schmidt's worried voice, calling from the front door.

"In the kitchen," Hansard shouted.

Schmidt came running in. "Holy cow!" he breathed as he saw the two men on the floor in the corner. "Good thing I sent for an ambulance, huh?"

"What'd you do that for, Ed?"

"That jeweler, Kutwik. I went away from the car and left that Ames gent to watch him. When I come back, the Ames lad is gone and Kutwik has a hole as big as your thumb, in his chest."

"I hope he'll live," Mike growled, "to testify against this crooked private cop. His name isn't Brundage, of course. It's Sexton. But it won't make much difference. The Babe will go to town on the stand. Brundage, or Sexton, bumped the Babe's boy-friend."

"Jeeze, Mike! What a shambles! Which one shot the blonde?"

"The Babe, there. On Brundage's orders, no doubt. The girl got panicky when Tom was shot and tried to skip. They had to blot her out or the game was up." He went over to the half-conscious youth, ran his fingers through the marcelled hair. "Know what I was wondering, Eddie?"

"What, Mike?"

"How this baby will look with his head shaved."

ON THE NEXT PAGE—

\$'s

AND



It isn't often an editor can tell an artist to go ahead and make as many errors in his illustrations as he wants. But that's what happened when we asked I. B. Hazelton to do the pictures on the next two pages. And *how* he followed the suggestion. The pictorial story of the famous Fall River murder case is a hophead's dream of mistakes, flaws, wholesale violation of fact—and all you have to do is drop us a line telling us what's wrong with these pictures—oh, yes, the captions that form the text are full of error, too—accompanying your answers with a not-more-than twenty-five (25) word criticism of BLACK MASK. The reader who writes in giving the most complete list of all the errors Mr. Hazelton has made in telling of this crime, and makes the most constructive criticisms and suggestions on how BLACK MASK may be improved, will receive a check for \$5.00 and the next five winners will be presented with a year's subscription to BLACK MASK. In the event of ties, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

BLACK MASK

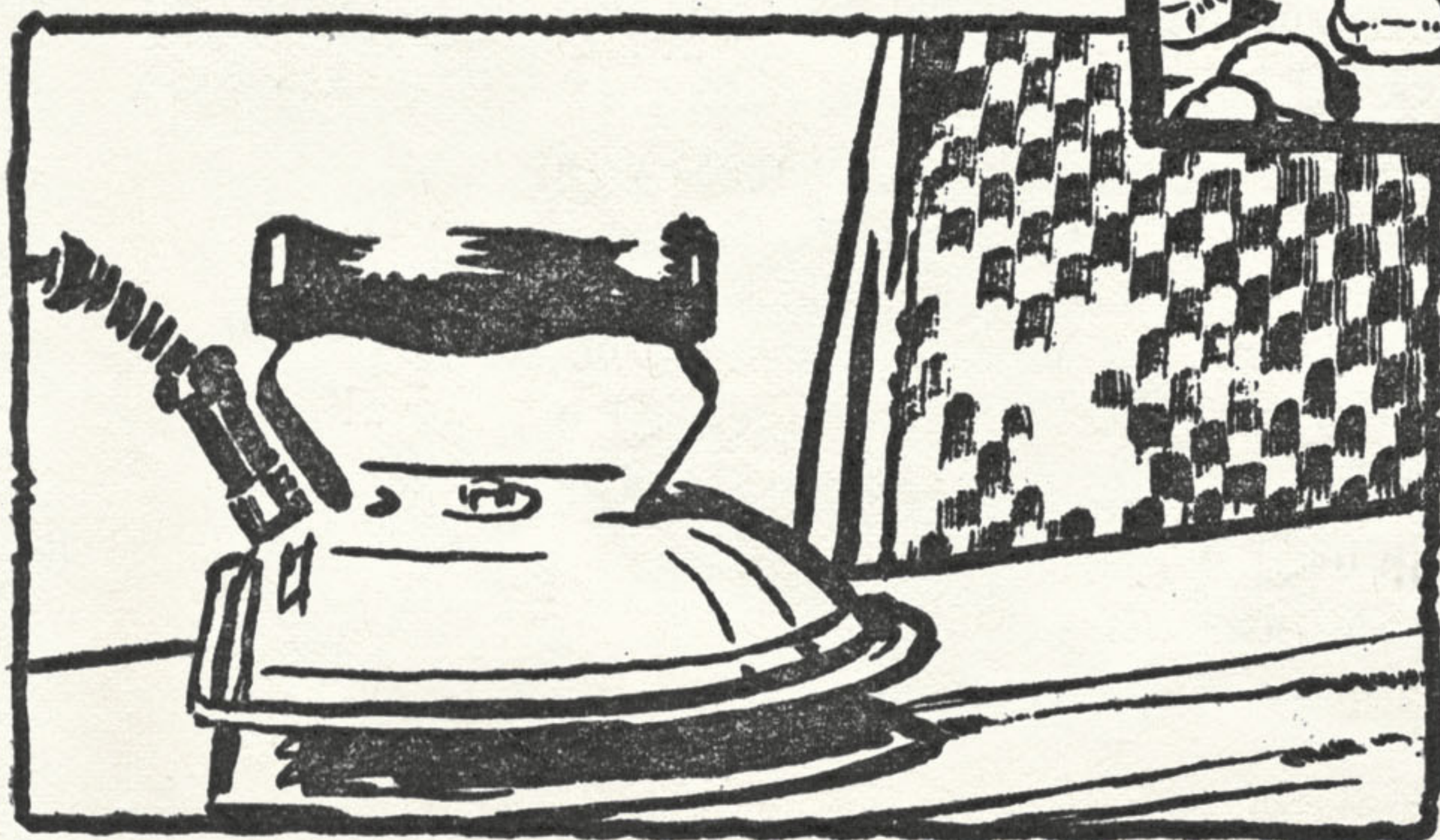
All answers should be addressed to THE FAMOUS CRIMES CONTEST EDITOR, BLACK MASK MAGAZINE, 210 E. 43 ST., NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK. No letters will be returned nor can we enter into correspondence regarding them. Answers to the contest in this issue must be in this office before noon, JULY 1st. Winners of this contest will be announced in the OCTOBER issue of the magazine.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE BORDEN MURDERS



1 blazing hot day. Lizzie was immediately suspected of the crime as she was known to have purchased shotgun shells the day before (6) from the local hardware. However, a strange man (1) carrying a shotgun was seen by neighbors to rush from

3 IN August, 1892, Lizzie Borden, only child of Mr. and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson Borden of Fall River, Conn., was arrested for the murder-by-shooting of her parents. The ghastly double crime occurred in mid-morning of a



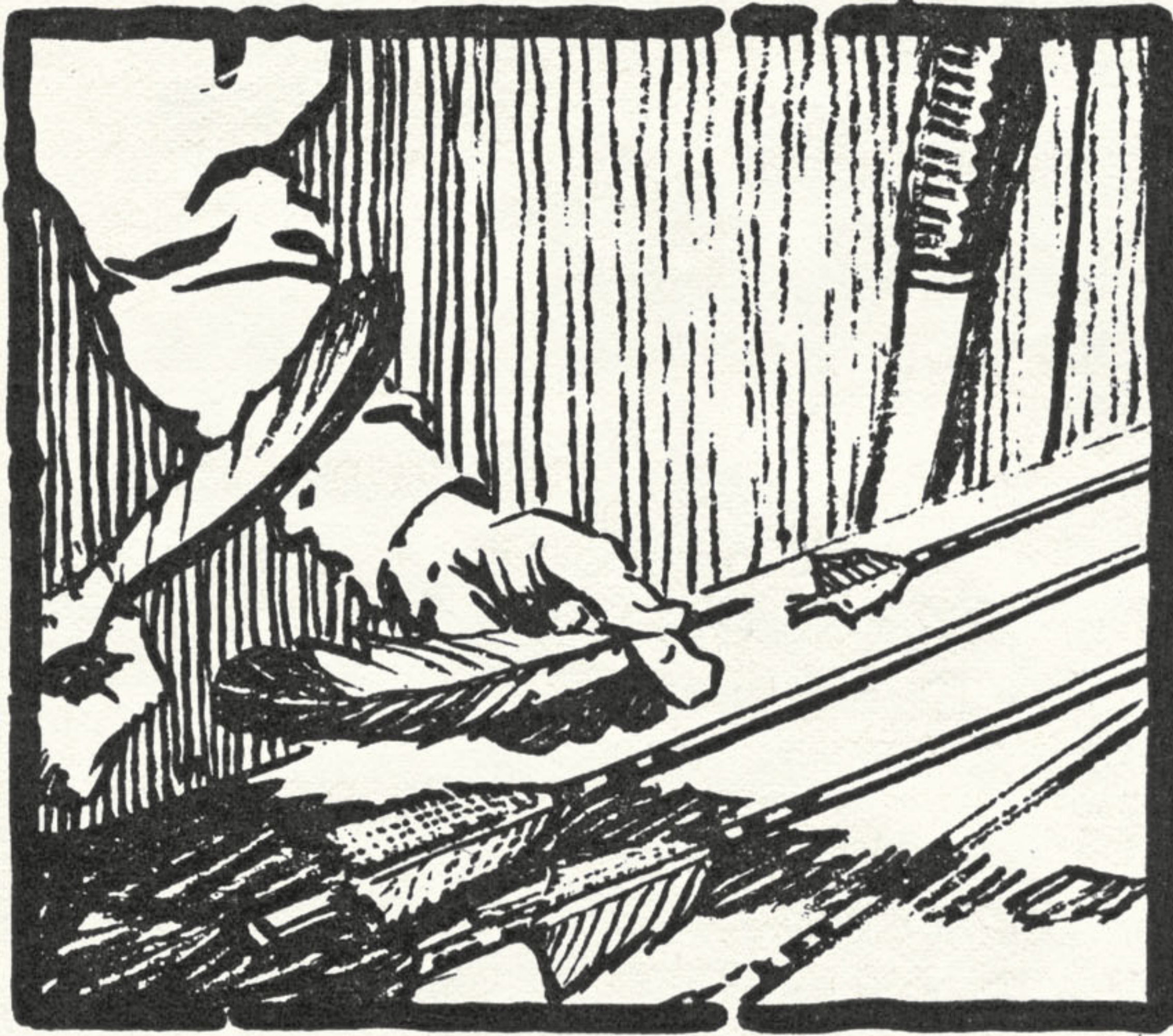
4 the house and flee in a buggy immediately before the bodies were discovered, so it was assumed Lizzie had

THIS FAMOUS CRIME?

IN FALL RIVER

2

an accomplice. Lizzie, who swore that she was slightly befuddled from drinking too much port wine, claimed she had been out in the back yard



5

swore she had been ironing (4) up to the time in question. When her father was discovered dead in his armchair, her mother on the floor of the cellar, Lizzie fainted from shock. She was convicted, despite protestations of innocence but later pardoned by the governor of the state after serving six years of a 20-year sentence.

6

gathering and eating chestnuts (3) at crime-time and after that (5) went to the barn hunting for feathers for her arrows as she was an ardent archer. She

See Page 49 for announcement and explanation of the above. NEXT MONTH — New York's Knickerbocker Athletic Club Murder Case.



CASEY AND THE BLOND WREN

by

GEORGE HARMON COXE



LASHGUN CASEY was bored. For the past twenty minutes, while the *Ruthania's* gangplanks were being lowered, he had trailed McCall, the ship-news man, in the hope of getting a worthwhile picture or

The man behind the gun said: "Drop it lady!"

There were two kinds of people that got the goat of the number-one photographer on the *Express*—the camera-crazy and the camera-shy. The blond little British wren was the latter—lens-leery though lovely, and she had a reason. A lead reason calibered to fit a blue-steel argument that couldn't be refuted by words alone.

two. Instead, he had found the shipload of passengers singularly nondescript, with not even an actress or chorus girl to give him the opportunity to snap some leg art and break the routine.

And then, as the ship emptied and they were about to leave, he saw the man with the cane step out of a passageway and hesitate a moment, surveying the nearly deserted deck with cold, steady eyes.

In spite of the noticeable limp he stood very straight, his heavy ulster square across the thin shoulders, the lines in his lean face tight and deep. Gray, austere, and no longer young, there was something very British about him even before he spoke.

"Sorry," he said coldly, as McCall stepped up and identified himself. He took a step as if to pass, then he saw Casey lift his camera. With that he turned on his cane and stepped back into the passageway.

"*Hmm*," breathed McCall. "Touchy." Casey grinned, no longer bored.

There were, in his life, only two kinds of people who gave him trouble—professionally, that is. One was the publicity crazy lens lice who went everywhere just to get their pictures taken with people of some importance, and who frequently were circumvented only by wasting a flashbulb and forgetting to pull out the placeholder slide. The other class was made up of Morgans and Toscaninis who, for some reason or other, hated photographers and refused to pose.

Because the man with the cane was one of these, Casey was interested. Not that the picture would be printed necessarily, at least until he knew who his quarry was, but Casey liked a challenge. That's why he was number-one camera for the *Express*.

"Come on," he grunted, the grin still splitting his broad solid face as he started down the gangplank. "I'll get him on the pier."

He found a place beside a concrete pillar just inside the customs shed, and while he waited he adjusted his shutter

and focus and made sure the flashbulb was screwed in. When McCall nodded he moved a half-step around the column, taking a quick glance toward the gangplank as he did so. Right then he realized that there was someone else aboard the *Ruthania* who was worth a picture.

SHE came down the gangplank a half-dozen steps behind the man with the cane, a slim, blond girl, tall and aristocratic-looking in her tailored tweed suit, one hand on the railing and poise in every movement.

Casey saw this much before the man with the cane stepped from the shelter of the canopied gangplank, limped across the pier and into the shed. When he stopped to orient himself, Casey stepped out in the open and snapped the shutter.

It was practically a full-face shot, and as the bulb exploded light in the shed, Casey noticed that in spite of the crowd milling about the concrete floor there were but three people in the range of his finder—his man, the girl, who was now but a step or two to one side, and a squat, dark fellow with thick-lensed glasses, who leaned idly against another pillar a few feet in the background.

Casey heard the clipped English accent of the man with the cane, his protesting, "Here! I say now—" and then he moved past, ignoring his sputtering victim for a last look at the girl.

Her reaction puzzled him. He had noticed the look of startled surprise as he lowered his camera, and now her smooth young face held an expression that seemed like consternation, or alarm. He was still wondering where she had been hiding and who she was when he came to the customs gate.

Tom Wade greeted him with a grin as he and McCall passed the uniformed official and Casey said: "You going back to the office?"

A curly-headed youth with a round, goodnatured face, Wade had ridden down with Casey and McCall, his pockets bulging with placeholders, to cover an assignment on nearby Fish Pier, and

had agreed to wait for them if he finished first.

"Sure," he said. "Aren't you?"

"I got a call from Jake Cohen," Casey explained. "He says he's got a good buy in a second-hand six-inch lens. It's almost five now and if I don't step on it he'll be closed." He shoved his exposed plateholders at Wade. "Take 'em back for me, will you?"



WHEN Casey came into the studio ante-room on the third floor of the *Express* Building, Egan was holding up a *Racing Form* in front of his face, but he wasn't picking a horse, he was looking covertly over the top of the paper and eyeing the girl with frank admiration. She sat on a rickety chair near the door, her knees crossed and back straight. Her head came round as Casey stopped in the doorway. Her glance met his and held it.

Egan rattled the *Racing Form* and stood up. "She"—he nodded to indicate the girl and winked—"she's been waiting for you, Flash."

"It's about that picture."

She was on her feet now, a certain breathlessness in her manner, and Casey knew then that the impressions he had formed so quickly down at the customs shed were correct, but not complete. Her slenderness was softly curving in spite of the tailored suit. She *was* tall, and young, not more than twenty-two or -three. But until now he had not known that her eyes were clear gray—nor about the satin smoothness of her skin nor the texture of her straw-colored hair. She was not really pretty, her face was too thin and too severe, but Casey had the photographer's eye for line and he knew the bone structure was good and that she would grow beautiful with the years.

"The one you took at the customs shed," she added quickly when he did not speak.

Casey stalled, amusement in the back

of his eyes and his face blank. "Did I take a picture of you?" he asked doubtfully. "I don't seem to remember—"

"It wasn't of me exactly. It was a man with a cane, really, but I know I was in it and—well, I wondered—" She broke off and began again, with the charm turned on. "Could I have that picture, please?"

"Why?" he asked goodnaturedly, discounting the charm because he had faced such requests so often.

That stopped her for a second or two. Then she was speaking in a low, modulated voice that was soft with an accent that could have come only from London—or the stage.

"I'm not supposed to be here," she said. "That is—" She broke off again and lines moved in her face and he saw that she was smiling. He didn't believe the smile. It came only after an effort and was a studied, shallow thing that did not go with the eyes.

"As a matter of fact," she went on, "I came over here to be married. I was supposed to leave Southampton today but I found I could get a cabin on the *Ruthania* and took it, and well, I'll have a week or more, you see, before I'm really due here."

The grin that was in the back of Casey's eyes fled to leave them dark and probing and skeptical. "Oh," he said.

"Yes. It's just"—the smile faded and she lowered her glance—"one of those silly ideas one has. I'd like to have my week to myself and be by myself and do as I please. Not that I don't love Paul. It's only that I'd like to have this time as my own, and if the picture was printed in the paper it would be frightfully awkward."

There was a little more of this, all of it leaving Casey strangely unconvinced. He didn't know why. The words were not unreasonable and the eagerness to impress was unmistakable. But the melody was a little off key and presently he looked past her at Egan.

"Wade been in?"

Egan shook his head and Casey leaned

over his desk, picked up the telephone and asked for McCall. "Wade come back with you?" he asked, and when McCall told him Wade had stopped on Washington Street for a beer, Casey added, "Oh, he did, huh?" and replaced the instrument thoughtfully.

Cohen's pawnshop had been closed when he arrived and as a result he had come directly back to the *Express*. Wade, apparently, was taking plenty of time over the beer.

"You'd better leave your name and address," he told the girl.

"Allison." She hesitated, gray eyes doubtful. "Nancy Allison."

"Where can I reach you?"

"At the Clark Hotel."

"All right," Casey said, "I'll let you know." He saw the quick concern in her glance and met it with steady speculation, knowing now that he would not have given her the picture if he'd had it—not until he was satisfied as to the real reason which prompted this routine. Since he had a good excuse, he used it, explaining how he had given his plates to Wade.

"So I haven't got yours," he said, "because Wade hasn't come back."

The gray eyes clouded and Nancy Allison's, "Oh," was keenly disappointed. "Then—"

"I'll let you know," Casey said again, and left it that way, so that the girl had no alternative but to leave.

"Nice," said Egan approvingly when

she had gone. "You'll let her know, huh? At her hotel. My-my."

Casey growled absently, stood for a moment with thick brows bent in thought. Then he went upstairs to the city-room, dark eyes narrowed by the puzzles in his brain.

McCall was tapping out a story at his desk. "Wade get back?" he asked, not looking up.

"No." Casey hesitated, continued bluntly. "Did you check up on that guy with the cane? The one that didn't want to be interviewed?"

McCall stopped typing, nodded, picked up a slip of paper from his desk. "Name of Banning," he said. "George Banning. Came in on an English visa. That's about all the purser knew about him."

"Travel alone?"

"Yep. Single stateroom with private bath." McCall glanced up, one brow cocking. "Why? You got something?"

Casey shook his head, his brow furrowed. "Not a thing. Not even my picture—yet."



CASEY found Wade as he came along the narrow alley from the parking space in back of the *Express* Building on his way back from dinner. Night was closing

in fast over the city and here in the canyon between the grimy brick walls it was already dark so that Casey did



not see what tripped him but only felt the limp form under his foot as he stumbled to one knee.

He struck a match. The flame flared briefly and the walls withdrew and a yellow glow bathed a round smooth face that was white and still. The hat had rolled aside, disclosing a matted patch in the curly hair behind the ear. A cobblestone was stained with dark red spots. The wind, cold and raw as it drove in from the ocean swirled down and eddied along the alley floor.

The match went out and Casey was suddenly cold with an inner chill that put stiffness into his muscles. He knelt that way for seconds, incredulous, while the dust swirled about his ankles. Then, with a savage grunt, he lifted Tom Wade in his arms and hurried for the lighted sidewalk ahead.

A group of pressmen coming in from supper drew back as he passed through the narrow foyer. They followed him into the classified room, huddling about and muttering as Casey put Wade on the settee by the windows.

"A doctor!" Casey ordered of the single clerk behind the counter, and the clerk had the good sense to reach for the telephone before asking questions.

When they found out that Casey had nothing to tell, the pressmen fell silent, watching him feel for a pulse beat and make a pillow of his coat. Suddenly he rose, and they moved out of his way.

He found Wade's platecase in the alley close to his hat. He brought it inside and opened it. When he saw that all of the plateholders were missing, the muscles in his face got hard and anger made his dark eyes hot and bright.

The doctor was noncommittal, calling for an ambulance after his first quick inspection. "He'll probably be all right," he said finally, "but we'll have to put him under observation until we know."

A burly truck driver had been stationed at the door and only those who had some good reason to be there were in the room. Among them were Blaine, the city editor, and McCall. Blaine, with

his lean, unsmiling face and prematurely gray hair and cold gray eyes, Blaine the disciplinarian who accepted sentiment only in a human interest story, who refused excuses and was the best desk man in the city. The moment he spoke, Casey knew that McCall had told him too much.

"Who would want to slug him?" Blaine asked curtly. And when Casey said he didn't know, "Why didn't you bring your own plates in?"

Casey told him, just as curtly and with more feeling.

"He had an assignment of his own, you know," Blaine said. "If he'd come back with McCall—"

"You'd have had your plates, wouldn't you?" Casey finished resentfully.

Blaine glared at him and spoke to the doctor. "See that he has the best," he said, and left the room.

CASEY stood beside the settee, a burly man with a broad rugged face and thick brown hair peppered with gray at the sides and shaggy at the nape. The ruggedness of his face stood out now because the set muscles made grim bunches at the hinge of his jaw. The look in his dark eyes was unpleasant to see, and his voice had a vicious edge.

"What'd they hit him with?" he asked.

The doctor closed his bag. "Something with a hard edge."

Casey looked down at the still figure and then, suddenly, he saw that Wade's eyes were open—vacant, pain-ridden eyes until they focused on Casey. The smile came, weakly but definite.

"You must've had something special, Flash. What was it?"

"I don't know, kid." Casey made his voice hearty, though his throat was thick from the smile. "But we'll damn well find out."

"I tried to give them an argument." Wade's eyes closed again and his voice trailed off. "They played kind of rough, pal."

Casey's hand closed on the arm of the

settee, twisting with white knuckles until the dry wood cracked. "Five foot six and a hundred and thirty pounds," he muttered, speaking to no one. "They didn't have to slug him."

He rode in the ambulance with Wade, hoping that there would be another conscious spell in which he could learn something about the "they" who had done this. When, after the youth had been put to bed, he found there was nothing he could do, he went back to the office. There he found waiting for him a chubby individual with a taxi-driver's shield pinned to his cap. He had, he said, heard about Wade.

"And I been thinking about it, Flash," he said. "Maybe I picked up the guys that put the slug on him. I'm parked down by the corner, see? And two parties come out of the alley. Just about the right time, too."

"What did they look like?"

"Well"—the driver rubbed the stubble on his chin—"just ordinary-looking guys, sort of. One was thin and kinda tallish and the other was maybe a couple of inches shorter and heavier—a good-looking guy."

Casey's grunt was derisive. "That's a big help, Hoxie. Just two guys named Joe, huh? Hell, didn't you see anything?"

"I don't know anything then, do I?" Hoxie said defensively. "They want a ride and they climb in."

"Where'd they go?"

"They went—wait a minute. I did notice one thing. The thin guy had a scar across the corner of his mouth."

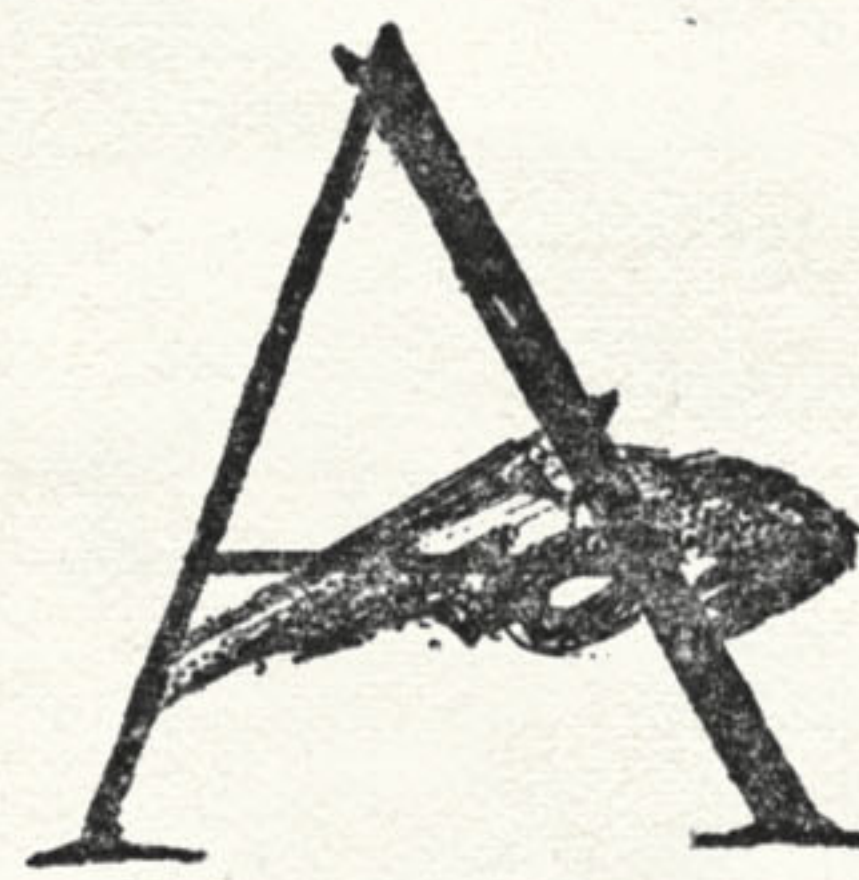
"Where'd they go?" Casey pressed.

"Down to the corner of Stuart. I had to park while one of 'em made a phone call. When he came back he said he had to go to the Bradwyne Hotel, and that the other guy was to go back to Radnor's. So I took him there."

"Radnor's?"

"An antique joint just off Boylston."

"And the Bradwyne," Casey said thoughtfully, dark eyes narrowing, "is right across from the Clark."



POLICE car was parked a short distance beyond the marquee of the Bradwyne and Casey, bent on having words with the house detective, spotted it as he turned in.

The chauffeur, in plain clothes, said, "Hello, Flash," and answered Casey's question as to why he was waiting here matter-of-factly. "Somebody got shot."

"Who's handling it?"

"Logan."

Casey strode into the lobby, folding a bill in his palm so the 5 on it showed as he came up to the bell captain.

"Twelve-five-o," said the captain cupping his hand.

Casey rode up and turned down the twelfth-floor corridor. There was a man at the far end. He turned out to be a burly plainclothesman and he was leaning against the pastel-gray casing that framed the door of room 1250.

"Hi, Lafferty," greeted Casey.

"What do you want?" said Lafferty, scowling suspiciously.

Casey was already reaching for the doorknob and he nearly broke his wrist when the plainclothesman blocked him. "You can't go in there," he stated flatly.

Casey looked surprised and hurt. "But the lieutenant sent for me."

"Yah—"

"O. K." Casey shrugged. "It's up to you. I'll have to tell him you wouldn't let me in."

It was a good act and Lafferty wavered. "Yeah?" he said doubtfully. "You wouldn't try to kid me, would you, Flashgun?"

Casey remained silent but continued to look hurt, and with a reluctant stare at the big photographer Lafferty turned and opened the door, intent on sticking his neck into the room and asking his question.

The instant the door moved Casey pushed forward. Lafferty strangled on a curse and arched his back, but Casey had a little momentum, and he was just

as big as Lafferty. In the end the plainclothesman had to let go of the doorknob or lose his arm. He let go and the two of them stumbled across the threshold with Lafferty running interference.

Four men stood in the room. A fifth was stretched on the floor, a still slender figure with gray hair and mustache and a thin, lined face. There was a dark stain on his waistcoat and nearby lay a gun—and a cane.

Startled by the entrance the quartet stared at Casey. Warbeck, the house detective, began to grin and so did the plainclothesman and the fingerprint man and photographer. Lieutenant Logan just bent an eye at Lafferty, and stared sourly.

"I shoulda known," choked Lafferty, face purple and breath coming hard. "He said you sent for him. I shoulda—"

"You can't come in here, Flash," Logan said wearily, ignoring Lafferty. "Not till the M. E.'s been here. You know that. Go on, now, shove off."

"If you say so," Casey answered in mock regret, "but I thought you'd want to know some things about *him*." He nodded at the still figure on the floor.

"And you can tell us?"

"I took a picture of him this afternoon. Name's Banning, isn't it?"

He catalogued the condition of the room—the overturned chair and table, the broken lamp—as he spoke, and without waiting for Logan to voice his surprise, Casey told him what he knew, his voice flat and direct until he began to speak of what had happened to Wade. Then his tone took on an edge, and his eyes got sultry.

"You think there's a hook-up between the two that jumped Wade and this?" Logan asked when the story was finished.

"I thought there might be," Casey said. And, after a pause, "Know anything about him?"

"Not much." Logan rubbed his chin and pushed out his lips. "He was shot twice with that Webby at close range, and his name on the register downstairs

is Banning, all right. But—things we found on him say he's Eric Kirkman, and he's got some tie-up with the British navy. It could be phony. We're trying to get in touch with the British consul.

"We may get a line when we find the woman."

"What woman?"

Casey's lids came down and he waited.

"She came up here somewhere around the time that a fellow across the hall heard what sounded like shots. And it just happened that the same elevator boy took her down. She was up here four or five minutes and she was like a ghost—so the boy says—when she rode down. Had to speak to her three times when the car stopped in the lobby before she got out."

"*Hmm*," Casey said, still waiting with nerves a little tight.

"We've got a pretty good description of her," Logan went on. "Slender, blond, young, brown tweed suit and English accent. If she took a cab we might nail her."



HE door opened at Casey's second knock. She had her hat and coat on and a handbag under her arm. She stiffened and paled when she saw him and for that first second or two her jaw sagged and many things battled it out in the depths of her gray eyes. In the end a mantle of distant politeness settled over her.

"Oh," she said. "You—come in, please. You"—she hovered over him when she closed the door—"you have the picture?"

Casey looked right at her, not speaking until he saw her forces crumble and the color start to ooze from her cheeks.

"No," he said, watching the fear come into her eyes. "I thought maybe you had those plates," he added, and went on in clipped hard sentences to tell about Tom Wade.

She heard him out, the whiteness coming about her jaw. "But that's ridicu-

lous," she said finally. "Why should I have come and asked for the picture if—"

"Because," said Casey, "when you asked you thought I had already delivered the plates to the office and there was no other way of getting the one you wanted. That's why you gave me your right name and address. Afterward, when you learned that Wade had the plate, and had not yet returned, it made things much simpler."

He went on with his theory, guessing, bluffing, filling in gaps. "Wade wasn't very big," he said in the end. "And there were two of them. Are they the ones that shot the Englishman—or was that your job?"

She caught her breath, the recoil of her nerves a visible thing. He waited for her to speak, then tried again.

"You followed him off the boat. You were in that picture with him."

She stood perfectly still, nothing changing in her face, and his dark eyes got morose. Abruptly, with a shrug and a half-audible grunt, he stepped to the telephone and picked it up. "Hello," he said, and then her voice rose up behind him sharp and jerky, and something thudded softly to the floor.

"Put that down!"

Her very tone checked him, and when he glanced over his shoulder he saw the little automatic in her hand. On the floor near her feet was the open handbag.

Casey put down the instrument, his lips forming a tight little smile as he faced her. The gun was steady in her hand, and she was backing toward the door, her handbag forgotten. He stood watching her slow backward progress until, reaching behind her, she found the knob.

"Look," he said, his voice no longer hard, "why don't you tell me about it? You're using a gun to run out, but what will it get you? The minute you shut the door I'll call the desk. They'll grab you before you can get out."

That did it. The reasonableness of his statement penetrated the defensive shell

she had built up and she had nothing left with which to fight. With a sob she dropped her arm and leaned back against the door while tears welled in her eyes.

Two long steps took Casey to her side. He put his hand under her arm and led her gently to a chair. Then, to give her time to gather her composure, he busied himself with other things. He shut the door, which had swung open. He picked up the handbag. He took the automatic from her limp fingers and put it inside. Then he swiveled a chair from the desk and sat down, straddling it as he faced her.

"I'm sorry," she said huskily. "And—and thank you for stopping me."

"You were there, weren't you?" he said gently. "He was dead when you found him."

"Yes."

"Who was he?"

"Sir Eric Kirkman."

"And he was in the British navy?"

"He was a captain—retired."

"You came over with him. You came to ask me for the picture on his account, not on your own. Why?" He offered her a cigarette as he spoke, and after a slight hesitation she accepted and he held a light. After that she began to talk in a low even voice without further prompting.

"Sir Eric had rather a bad time when war was declared," she began. "No one would have him and naturally he was furious. He'd been in the Battle of Jutland, you see—he was on the *Barham*—and he came out of it with his life and that's about all. A shell splinter tore away part of his chest and most of one thigh, and he's been practically an invalid since then. But now we're at war he just had to do something and he stormed about the War Office until Alan got busy and finally managed to wangle something for him in naval intelligence."

"Alan?"

NANCY ALLISON said, "Alan is his son," and spots of color came back to her cheeks. "He was a cadet at Dart-

mouth during most of the first war and now he has a ship of his own—a destroyer—and of course that made it all the harder for Sir Eric to stand idly by. He could have had a berth of some sort in the Home Office but it would have been a courtesy desk job and he knew it. The job he took was a courtesy assignment, too, but it was Navy and that made a difference.

"Well"—she sat up, sparks kindling in her eyes—"he surprised them all. They didn't pay much attention to him and so when he did get a bit of information that seemed promising he followed it up alone. In the end he was instrumental in breaking up an important espionage group. One of the men arrested was the head of the bureau and certain documents were found that not only contained a list of agents operating here in your country, but information about their objectives and methods of operating. He had copies of these documents—and some photographs—with him."

"And somebody found it out," Casey said.

"He was to deliver them to someone from the Embassy staff tonight, so that our intelligence bureau could combat the efforts of these agents, whose job it is to keep track of the movements of our ships. He also hoped that by revealing certain other information to your own naval intelligence he might offer additional facts that would be of vital importance to your country as well."

A spasm crossed her face and tears welled up in her eyes as she spoke. "He tried to save them. He could have given up, but he tried to fight and he had nothing to fight with but one good leg and a cane."

"And a heart," Casey said, and found his throat hard and thick inside. He looked down at his cigarette, mashed it out savagely when he remembered Wade's, "I tried to give 'em an argument, Flash. But they played kind of rough."

A sullen, smoldering rage came over him and the muscles coiled at the side

of his jaw. "And where do you come in?" he asked quietly.

"Come in?"

"How did you happen to come over with him? Why didn't you stay at the same hotel?"

"Oh, I'm in the Women's Royal Naval Service."

"What they call a WREN?"

"Yes. We drive cars and do cipher work and decoding—that sort of thing. I was helping Sir Eric."

"And you're in love with his son." Her eyes were enormous on his and he saw the answer there and said: "So you came along to look after him."

"He thought it better that I travel separately and stay at a different hotel," she explained dully. "He—he loved to be mysterious about things. He was so pleased that he could help. I came to you for the picture without his knowing it. If I had only stayed with him—"

CASEY stood up. "There's an antique shop in town called Radnor's. Ever hear that name?" he asked.

"Why, yes," she said quickly, her eyes widening. "Sir Eric mentioned that name to someone over the telephone once. That—that's where I was going when you came."

"All alone, huh?"

"I had to. I didn't know quite whom to call, and the Embassy men weren't coming until ten, and I knew the police would be around and—well, there are copies of those papers, but by the time anyone could do much about it the agents listed would be able to scatter. And it wasn't only that."

She broke off and he saw that the tears had stopped. She was looking beyond him at something which she alone could see. There was some strange and shining faith in her face but when she spoke he knew this dream of hers had slight basis in reality and he felt again the thickness in his throat.

"Maybe it sounds silly to you," she said, still not looking at him, "but more than anything else in the world I want

the envelope the murderer took. Not for what it contains, but because if I have it no one will ever know that Sir Eric failed. I could tell them he gave it to me for safe-keeping, that I had it all the time. And then Alan and the others he worked with—well—they'll all know he carried on and that after all they made no mistake in trusting him. If I could only do that for him— You do see, don't you?"

"Yes, I see," Casey said.

"Only"—the fire of her desire and imagination went out of her eyes—"I guess there was nothing I could do. I wanted to find Radnor. I was going out to look—don't ask me where. It was stupid of me. I knew it then. There isn't even such a name in the telephone directory."

Casey blinked his surprise. "Are you sure?"

Furrows appeared over his shaggy brows as he pawed through the telephone book and saw that she was right. He tossed it back on the stand, his eyes sleepy in a grim sort of way.

"There's a fellow I want to see," he said thoughtfully, "and after that maybe we can take a look together. Want to?"

"Very much," said Nancy Allison.

BOYLSTON STREET was alive with light and the movement of mid-evening traffic. Around the corner, Lakeland Street was lifeless until morning, its shop windows dark and the sidewalks deserted.

Hoxie's cab swung toward the curb in the middle of a block, stopping before a modernistic narrow front sandwiched between a book store and a milliner's. The windows, closed off by wooden panels at the back and filled with chairs and vases and shawls, mirrored the progress of the cab against the darkness of the street, and across the glass panel in the door was the word *Jerauld's*.

"Where do you see Radnor's?" Casey demanded.

"I don't see it," said Hoxie, "but this

is where I took the guy. He got out in front of the book store and when I pulled out from the curb I see him turning in here."

"Could we wait?" Nancy Allison asked.

"Yeah." Casey climbed out, pulling his camera and platecase after him.

Two cars sped by while they were talking, and after Hoxie had driven off Casey saw a man smoking in the doorway of a brownstone front across the street where a *Rooms To Let* sign hung in the window. Other than this they were alone in Lakeland Street.

They lit cigarettes as they stood there on the sidewalk, and it was not until Casey moved through the entrance and up to the door that he noticed a crack of light squeezing past the drawn shade.

"Hah!" he grunted softly and angled around until he got his eye to the crack. Gradually a section of the interior emerged from the shadows and he saw that beyond the darkness in the foreground a light gleamed, its beam focused upon some sort of screen. When his eye adjusted itself he identified a silhouette before the screen as a man—on his knees—doing something to the screen.

"What is it?" Nancy Allison breathed.

"Somebody's in there," said Casey, and knocked loudly on the door. He had to knock again before the lock clicked back and the door inched open, framing a face that had no substance in the shadows.

"What is it?" The voice was gruff, irritable.

"Is Mr. Connolly here?" Casey asked casually.

"No."

"That's funny. I was told he worked in one of these stores. You don't happen to know—"

"No. He doesn't work here. I don't know any Mr. Connolly."

Casey kept one eye on the door. It had opened perhaps a foot during the conversation and he made out certain details—the solid blond face, the deep-

set eyes, the hand that remained steady in the coat pocket, fashioning a hump that pointed straight ahead.

"O. K.," he said. "Sorry to bother you."

Behind him Nancy Allison made a sucking sound. Casey backed a half-step, his eye still on the door as it started to close. He waited until the last instant, until only an inch crack remained. Then, before the lock could click, he drove his lowered shoulder against the door.

The door flew open a foot or so, checked suddenly against the body behind it, bounced, then went wide as the drive of Casey's powerful legs knocked the man over backwards. Carried off balance by his charge he went down on top of the fellow, grabbing for the hands and pocket as he dropped and trapping the gun. He took a wild, futile punch on the cheek, then he was on his feet, dragging the man with him, ripping the gun from the pocket.

That ended it and he asked Nancy Allison if she could lug his platecase into the shop and close the door. He found a light-switch and snapped it on. They went along a thick carpet between rows of miscellaneous furniture and pottery and tapestries to a cleared area at the rear where there was a desk. The single light focused upon a large oriental screen standing a few feet in advance of several others like it.

All this had happened without a sound from the blond man. Even now, as Casey studied the handsome sullen face, he said nothing, but stood immobile, his eyes wild with hate and frustration.

"Take a look through the desk," he told Nancy Allison.

WHEN the girl bent over the desk Casey stepped up to look at the screen, noticing a small easel, a glassful of tiny brushes, a pot of varnish. He felt of the screen, found it sticky to his touch. Then, as he started to circle the blond

man, he saw the piece of paper sticking from his coat pocket.

The fellow jerked about but when he felt the thrust of the gun he bit his lip and stiffened. Casey unrolled a thin, tissue-like piece of paper. Upon it was drawn a plan of some sort. He could make nothing of it. It did not seem complete, but rather a part of some larger unit, the central points being designated by numbers. Frowning, he put it on the desk and asked Nancy Allison if she had found anything.

"Yes," she said without enthusiasm, "but—not the envelope."

Casey's lips tightened and he let his eyes move about the room. A topcoat thrown over a chair held his gaze and, moving to it, he put his hand in one of the pockets. Instantly a quick gleam shone in his eyes. Then the lids narrowed and got sleepy and he took out six or seven plateholders. When he had slipped them into his own topcoat pocket he called Nancy Allison over and gave her the gun.

"Watch him," he ordered, and shrugged out of his coat.

The blond man stood perfectly still at first, but as Casey approached his eyes darted from side to side, and he began to back up. He kept moving backward, eyes held by Casey's now, until he touched the wall. Then, with a quick, desperate shifting of weight, he whirled and lashed out with his right.

Casey took the blow on his forearm, grabbed the fist and spun the fellow, at the same time driving his own right hard against the mouth.

"That's for Wade," he said, and caught the man as he slumped, dragging him over to lower him into a chair. "Where's Radnor?" he demanded when the man opened his eyes.

The eyes blinked. For a brief instant fire flashed, but some inner impulse quickly quenched it, leaving them dull and stubborn. Casey slapped him twice, hard, rocking the man's head. He looked over at the girl, who stood watching him with eyes wide and face stiff.

He sighed regretfully, stepped back.

"I guess we've got to wait for Mr. Radnor," he said. "But now I think I know the guy I'm looking for." He paused, seemed reluctant to finish. "Only I think maybe we ought to have some help."

He picked up the telephone as he spoke and called police headquarters. When he was told that Lieutenant Logan was out he left word to have him call this number, and then looked up the listing of the local office of the F. B. I. He knew the agent in charge here, but it did not help because there was no answer.

"I'm glad," Nancy Allison said quietly when he hung up, and he eyed her curiously, not quite understanding, until she said: "Now we'll have to wait right here, won't we?"

"For a while," Casey said, remembering now the goal this girl had set.

The odds against success and the risk involved meant nothing to her. This, it seemed, was a better chance than she had hoped for, and nothing mattered now save that she find the envelope for Sir Eric.

Pity fused his thoughts as he sensed how very real and steadfast was her conviction and how little the likelihood of success. Thinking about this made him ashamed of his own selfishness. Someone had grabbed some of his plates, had slugged Wade in doing it. And he was sore and he'd set out in a bull-headed, they-can't-do-that-to-me mood to get back those plates and pay off. Watching Nancy Allison he knew that he was witnessing a drama of far greater importance than anything he himself had ever done. One man had given his life. This girl stood ready to forfeit hers if necessary—and for something that had no reward beyond that of doing one's duty.

Troubled deeply by such thoughts he stared for a long time at the screen and paints and varnish, and gradually his concern moderated and an enigmatic brightness kindled in his dark eyes.

"Can you watch him all right?" he

asked the girl, and when she nodded, he opened his platecase. Held together by an elastic he found the cut filmholders he sought, but he muttered softly when he was unable to locate the filters he wanted.



HE WENT back to the telephone, called the *Express*, and talked with Eddy, one of the office boys. "Go down to my desk, Eddy," he directed. "Top right-hand drawer. You'll find a box of filters. They're all marked. Bring down the ultra-violet and infra-red ones."

He gave Eddy the address, and had started to explain his idea to Nancy Allison when it happened. Actually it happened right before his eyes. He saw the whole thing develop, yet he was powerless to stop it or to give any warning.

One second he was talking to Nancy Allison and watching the blond man in the chair. The next he was staring at a door in the rear wall behind her that had opened a silent foot and now framed the snout of a heavy automatic. Before he could speak the man behind the gun was in the room and a thick deep voice with a snap to it said: "Drop it, lady!"

Casey froze as he saw her hesitate. She stood stiff and straight, brows high, her hand tight on the gun. But she did not drop it. She started to turn.

"No!" yelled Casey. She looked at him and stopped, bewildered and hesitant. "Let go of it!" he ordered. "It's O. K. Drop it."

He relaxed and began to breathe again when the gun thudded to the floor. After that the man in the door took on individuality—a thin, dark man with a long pointed jaw and a scar across his mouth.

"He's the one!" Nancy Allison's voice rose sharp and bitter. "He did it!"

Casey stared, incredulous. No! This could not be Radnor. This was the man Hoxie had described, one of those who had slugged Wade. This wasn't the man who Not until then did Casey

realize that Nancy Allison was not looking behind her, but straight ahead.

He wheeled. There, coming through the front door, a key in one hand and a gun in the other, was a squat, dark man with thick-lensed glasses. Casey knew then that the girl was right, for this was the man who had been in the background of his finder when he had taken the picture of Sir Eric.

"Yeah," he said thickly as the man advanced. "It had to be that way. You were the one who didn't dare have your picture printed. You were at the dock to follow Sir Eric, huh? And you sent your two guns to get the plate back. One of them saw me give the plates to Wade and—"

"He did it!" Nancy Allison said again. She hadn't moved and her eyes were still wide. "I saw him come around the corner of the corridor when I went to see Sir Eric."

The squat man's shoulders moved in a shrug. "It was too bad," he said in a voice that was curiously soft for his bulk, a softness that seemed unhealthy and menacing as he continued. "We had little time." He glanced at the girl. "Not until this morning was I notified by radio that Franz had been taken and that you and Sir Eric were due today."

"You murdered him," she said.

"He attempted to struggle." He said this regretfully.

"He was practically a cripple," Casey said grimly.

The man shrugged. "He tried to use his pistol."

"You took the envelope," Nancy Allison said. "You are Radnor."

"Yes," the man said, and there was a certain cold pride in his manner.

From the corner of his eye Casey saw the blond man move. He had seen him retrieve the gun Nancy Allison had dropped, but his attention had been focused on Radnor. He turned too late.

He saw the hate flame in the eyes, the swinging hand that ended in the gun. Nancy Allison screamed and he pulled away—but not enough. The barrel

whipped against his jaw and something exploded in his head and he sagged to one knee. Through the hum of noise and the pounding of pain he heard a soft voice say: "That can wait, Philip. Please. We haven't time now. Waldo has the light truck in the alley. Load the screens."

Philip sulked. A pout appeared on his handsome blond face and reluctantly he put away his gun. "I haven't finished this one," he said, and, picking up the brush and varnish pot, resumed his work.

Casey got to his feet, the inflection of the squat man's, "That can wait, Philip," ringing in his ears. It was spoken softly, but with a dispassionate clearness that hit him with a sickening jolt. He looked across at Nancy Allison, looked at her and knew that he had involved her in something more desperately fantastic than he had ever imagined.

There was more at stake here than assault and murder. This time he had stepped out of his class. This was big-league. And when Radnor was ready to leave, Casey was aware that he and Nancy Allison would not be left behind. And yet, somehow, he did not think she minded as much as he did.



HE WATCHED Philip finish with the varnish and put aside his painting paraphernalia. Waldo, meanwhile had started to carry the other screens to the alley. Then Casey remembered something, and, remembering, knew that there remained one chance that he would have to take.

Casualty he moved his hand toward his pocket, checking the movement openly when Radnor said: "You will keep your hands where I can see them."

"Sure." Casey shrugged and turned to Nancy Allison. "Have you any cigarettes in that bag?"

He stepped slowly, idly, toward her as he spoke and his eyes signaled as best

they could. She moved her lips to speak when, suddenly, something flickered in her gray eyes, bringing a gleam of understanding and hope. She began again, saying: "Yes, of course."

Casey held out his hand to receive the bag, but she made no move to give it to him. Then a sudden thrust of fear hit him hard.

"Just toss it over," he said quickly.

"I'll get one for you," she said, fumbling with the catch.

Things happened so fast then that only in retrospect could he put together the proper sequence. She stood there very straight and slim, with her shoulders pushed back hard and her young face white and stiff with her determination as she defied her fears.

He took one long step towards her, saying: "No, wait! Nancy!"

Behind him he heard Philip's ugly warning. But he couldn't stop. She had her hand inside the bag now. He reached out to grab it as she tugged at the gun and then, when he saw he couldn't stop her, he lunged forward.

His hand found the bag and his shoulder hit her arm, knocking her down behind the desk. Still moving, he went to one knee and the automatic was in his hand, and something hit the desk throwing splinters in his face and there was an explosion of sound behind him.

He pivoted, gun up. Somewhere in the distance there was the sound of commotion against the background of a crisp, incisive command.

Again a gun roared. Amazed that he had not been hit he fired. A second, louder explosion answered him back and then he saw that Philip had dropped his gun and started to sag toward the floor.

Not understanding, nor knowing if his shot had hit Philip, he saw that Radnor had his hands up. Just inside the back door were two men with guns in their hands and moving in behind them came two more. One was Waldo, his arms raised. The other held a gun against his spine.

"Just hold everything," one of them

said while a second started for the front door.

They were hard-eyed, efficient-looking men, these three newcomers, strangers to Casey, so that he stared at them without knowing what the score was until the front door opened and he saw McManus, the F. B. I. agent he had tried to telephone.

Not until then did he look back at Nancy Allison. She had come to her feet. She was staring at Radnor and suddenly something in her eyes reminded him of one more job that had to be done. Quickly, while he still had time, he put the automatic on the desk, stepped up to the man, spun him over behind the desk and let go with a hard left hook.

Radnor went down, toppling over backward, and Casey said, "One for Sir Eric," and fell on top of him. In that same falling movement he arched himself so that he could slip one hand inside the unconscious man's coat. He had jammed the bulky envelope up under his vest before hard hands grabbed his shoulders and a voice said, "Lay off!" and he was dragged to his feet.

"Don't you hit them when they're looking any more, Flash?" McManus said dryly.

"This was an extra-special case," Casey said. "And where've you been? I tried to call you."

"Did you?" McManus cocked one brow and blew out his breath. "We weren't quite ready but maybe it's all right."

Casey, remembering now the man who had lounged diagonally across the street after the taxi had left them on the sidewalk, said, "Oh."

B

EFORE he could continue, a pounding shook the front door and when it was opened in popped Eddy, the freckle-faced office boy, with Casey's filters.

"Have they heard from Wade?" Casey asked.

"He's going to be all right," Eddy said. "He's come to already."

Quick relief shone in Casey's dark eyes. "Hah!" he said gratefully, and moved toward his platecase.

"Forget it," McManus said. "No pictures of this, Flash."

Casey saw that argument was useless, but he opened his platecase nevertheless, saying: "But I can get a couple shots of that screen, can't I?"

He knew from the way McManus grinned at him that he couldn't, so at last he slipped on his topcoat and reassured himself by wrapping his hand around the half-dozen plateholders in the pocket before he said, crabbing in a tolerant sort of way: "My pal, huh? O. K. But they've got pictures on them—those screens. Underneath those fancy figures. They ought to show up with the right kind of filter."

"I wouldn't be surprised," McManus said. He picked up the tissue sheet Casey had tossed on the desk. "Harbor defenses," he said. "The screens came in a month ago, about thirty of them. When customs found out they had reshipped a few, we checked up." He glanced at one of the other men. "We've been working it out with naval intelligence."

After that Casey had to do some talk-

ing. It took him quite a while, but what he said was convincing and after Nancy Allison had corroborated him McManus seemed satisfied.

"But I still don't get it," Casey said as he finished. "You didn't know about Sir Eric or the dope he had."

"Not a thing," McManus replied. "The English are working on their problems and we're working on ours. It just happens that this time we're bucking the same outfit. Radnor had to reach Sir Eric to protect his bureau—if what you say is true. At the same time he was doing this on the side"—he gestured toward the screen—"for possible future use. And that's where we come in."

He glanced at Nancy Allison. "You'll want to get in touch with your Embassy. If they want to cooperate it'll be a help."

He moved to the telephone and Casey said, "I'll have that cigarette now," and drew Nancy Allison into a corner. He took her bag, opened it, slipped the envelope into it from under his vest. "You'll have to see this thing through, I guess," he said quietly, "but here's something for you."

"For Sir Eric," Nancy said, her eyes shining and her mouth soft.

"For Sir Eric," said Casey, "and for you."



INSPECTOR ALLHOFF, most-cordially hated copper that ever was mustered on the rolls of New York's "Finest" is back again—coffee-pot, dirty shirt, foul disposition, clay-pigeons-in-uniform and all—well, not quite all. If you'll remember, the cynical inspector doesn't have any legs. But the loss of his gams is more than compensated for by the none-such brain he packs under his uncombed pate. "There Was A Crooked Man—" is the title of this smashing new

novelette by D. L. CHAMPION and you'll get a kick out of it. The inspector did—even without his pedal extremities—when a fellow crutch-carrier walked in on his Centre Street sanctum and asked for help in the screwiest murder-mixup that had descended on that seabroos dive in many moons.

And "Bail-Bond" Dodd, that extraordinary luminary of the criminal courts, is with us again in *This Will Kill You!* It's NORBERT DAVIS at his best.

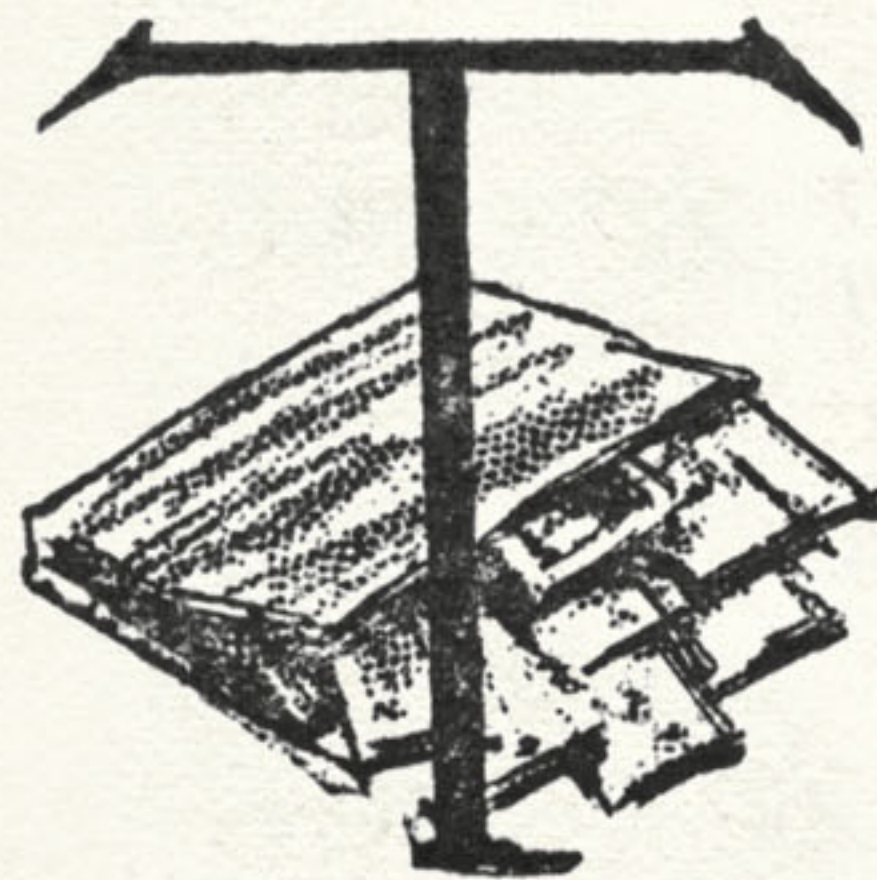
And there's a Marquis of Broadway story, too, by JOHN LAWRENCE, *The Death of the Party*. And stories by O. B. MYERS and others.

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**DIME
DETECTIVE
MAGAZINE**

TOO TOUGH

By JOHN GRAHAM



HE parcel-room clerk in South Station gave Vic Smail a nervous wink at 9:25 o'clock that morning. Then he reached for the travel-stained pigskin kit

bag, high on the rack above.

Vic brushed toast crumbs from his lap, carefully put aside a half-empty con-

tainer of coffee. He stood up, strolled toward the employees' entrance, quietly pulled the door shut behind him and rounded briskly into the station corridor.

Out of the corner of his eye Vic saw the man who was claiming the kit bag. He was tall, about forty, deeply sun-



The taxicabs were caught in the cross-fire—literally ripped apart by the hail of lead.

The trouble with some guys is they don't know the difference between tough and too tough—too smart and just smart enough.

tanned, wearing a pearl-gray polo coat, a gray plaid cap. Vic was sure he had never seen him before.

The man took the bag from the counter, counted out some change for the clerk and started toward the taxicab runway. Vic moved abreast of him, weaving through a late rush of commuters. Across the broad station floor he caught a glimpse of Ben Girsh, his friend and fellow operative, sauntering into the lunchroom. Vic smiled to himself, glanced back at his quarry. The man in the polo coat appeared to be in no hurry and Vic beat him to the platform doors by a dozen steps. He hesitated, saw the man was still coming and pushed on through.

The platform was deserted save for the starter, who lounged against a pillar rolling a cigarette. The only cab in sight was on the opposite side of the runway and driverless. The starter looked at Vic, wet the edge of the cigarette paper with his tongue and grinned. He said: "No good, mister. Don't you read the papers?"

"What's up?"

"Strike."

"Again?"

The starter nodded. "The third tie-up in two months. Can't say as I blame the boys." He paused to light the cigarette. "They walked out at six o'clock this morning."

Vic looked across the runway. "Whose hack is that?" he asked.

The starter shrugged. "Independent. Musta got scared off. He drifted in, messed around with what he said was engine trouble. Pretty soon he went inside."

The man in the polo coat came toward them, a puzzled frown on his face. "Aren't there any cabs?" he asked the starter.

Informed of the taxi strike he said: "Damn nuisance. I suppose I'll have to walk. How far is the Hotel Everlyn?"

The starter calculated. "Clifton Avenue at Twenty-third. . . . A good four miles."

Vic Smail chimed in. "I've a car parked down the street a couple of blocks. If you'd like a lift. . . . ?"

The man's face was so brown that his blue eyes seemed almost colorless as they studied Vic. He smiled bleakly, said: "I guess not. Thanks just the same." He turned back to the starter. "Hasn't that cab a driver?" he asked, pointing across the runway.

"He's gone inside," the starter said. "And it might not be safe."

"Nothing is these days." The man handed the starter a folded bill. "Will you see if you can find him? I'll wait in the cab."

Vic started hurrying along the platform toward the street and his own car. The man in the polo coat was crossing the runway. Vic glanced back and saw him turning the handle of the cab's door.

An instant later there was an ear-blistering crash. Vic toppled, landed on hands and knees. The building rocked, the concrete runway cracked and buckled. The air was filled with choking fumes, flying bits of metal, broken glass. A woman's scream echoed from the corridor of the station. Vic knelt, shaking his head to clear it.

When he turned he saw a twisted mass of wreckage, the glimmer of flame, a pall of smoke. There was no sign of the man in the polo coat.



VIC leaned forward on the edge of the desk, mopped his round red face, smoothed back still damp wisps of hair. "That's all there is to it, boss," he said.

"He was there one minute—then boom!"

Les Stoddard, head of the Aetna Agency, sat looking out the office window, chin down, unspeaking. He was a little man, almost frail in appearance, with sloping shoulders, delicate hands. His face was solemn, deeply lined, somewhat melancholy. Among the things you first noticed about him were his eyes,

deep-set, a smoldering brown, speculative yet kindly—and his hair, snow-white and very thick. He remained motionless, as if listening intently to the ticking of the office clock and Vic Smail's labored breathing. After a while he shifted slightly and asked in a dull voice: "How about the kit bag?"

Vic shrugged. "He took it with him."

Without changing expression, Stoddard said: "That's one way of blowing fifty thousand bucks."

"Fifty thou. . . . !" Vic jerked back. "You mean he had it in the bag?"

"What did you think was in it? Old newspapers?"

"I didn't know," Vic confessed. "Nothing was said to me, except that I was to relieve Ben Girsh in the check-room at nine o'clock and watch that bag."

Stoddard's eyes narrowed as he turned from the window to face Vic. "By the way, who was it told you to do that?"

"Cora told me," Vic answered. "Why?"

"Cora Winters?"

"Naturally. I wouldn't be taking orders from anyone else. She's your own secretary, and when she phoned. . . ."

"What time was that?" Stoddard cut in.

"About one o'clock. I was in bed at the apartment when she called. She said you told her to."

"It's damn funny," Stoddard mused. "Do you happen to know where she is now?"

Vic looked puzzled. "No, I don't know anything about her. Why?"

"She's not here is all. Hasn't shown today. And her home phone doesn't answer."

"Maybe she's sick," Vic suggested.

Les Stoddard looked back at the window. "I thought of that. Still, she ought to call in."

"She might have stopped at a doc's. Be in later."

Stoddard nodded. "We'll see. Now tell me anything else about the affair at the station that occurs to you."

BEN GIRSH came into the office while they were talking. Heavy-set, dark, and usually immaculate, Girsh looked mussed and puffy-eyed from his all-night vigil.

"Pick up anything?" Stoddard asked.

Girsh shook his head. "I didn't have a basket."

"How about the cops?"

"It was a job for the fire department. They needed a hose to clean up that mess."

"I don't get it," Vic Smail said. "Particularly since he had all that dough in the bag. With robbery for a motive—"

Stoddard silenced him with a gesture. "There's more to this than robbery." He got to his feet, paced the office slowly. "I'm going to let you mugs in on it, although I admit I don't want to and will probably regret it. I planned to manage this case alone. It needs special handling and care. No rough stuff will do. And knowing you two and your tactics. . . ."

Vic, fidgeting, interjected: "Never mind the preaching, boss. What's up?"

"It's got to be kept dead quiet," Stoddard warned. "Benton Meade, president of the Gray Stripe Cab Company, was snatched day before yesterday."

He paused to let this information sink in, noting the astonishment on the faces of Vic Smail and Ben Girsh.

"Meade was on the way home from his office in a limousine," Stoddard resumed. "Someone slugged the chauffeur at a traffic-light stop, disappeared with Meade and the car. The chauffeur came to in a ditch about eight miles out of town. He reported to no one but the family. They came straight to me."

"You probably can guess why we have to keep the hush on the whole business. Meade had a strike impending—it's here today—the third in a row. Maybe the strikers had something to do with this job. On the other hand, maybe they didn't. But it's the wrong kind of news to get circulated at a time like this. That's why it's a case that has to be handled with kid gloves."

"The chauffeur says he didn't see anyone. He got smacked down before he had a chance to turn his head. The limousine was abandoned that night down along the waterfront. The cops picked it up—but only as a stolen car. It's back in the Meade garage. Naturally, the family's in terrible shape. Meade's wife and daughter are on the verge of collapse. But they're dead game, and in full accord with my ideas for handling the case.

"Yesterday they got a note from the kidnapers, who demanded fifty grand cash, directed them to put the money in a bag and have the chauffeur check it at South Station. There was the usual stuff about no cops and no new bills. Then—and here's the joker—the check for the bag was to be turned over by the family to someone from out of town—anyone they wanted to pick as long as he was a stranger here—who was to claim the bag, get a cab at the station and start for the Hotel Everlyn."

Vic remarked: "Now I see why the guy didn't want a lift."

"You mean," Ben Girsh demanded, "that you offered him one?"

"Sure. How was I to know. . . . ?"

"The note stated further," Stoddard went on, "that the man in the cab would be stopped enroute to the hotel, relieved of the bag and allowed to go his way unmolested. And that was all."

"Jeeze!" Vic exploded. "That's enough!"

"You'd think so," Stoddard agreed, "but apparently the kidnapers don't. Now it's murder in broad daylight, fifty grand blown up and Meade still missing." He glanced at the office clock. "Come to think of it, so is Cora."

"What's this?" Girsh inquired.

"She must have exhausted herself waking up Vic on the telephone in the middle of the night," Stoddard said. "Incidentally, Vic, I didn't tell her to call you."

"You didn't!" Vic Smail sat up again, his eyes widening with surprise.

"Don't be alarmed. Stranger things

have happened—and may very well continue to happen." Stoddard reached for his misshapen felt hat on a wall hook. "I'm going out for a talk with the Meade family. There's a couple of angles to this. . . ."

Vic said: "How about strike headquarters, boss? I know those union birds from the last tangle."

"Not a bad idea," Stoddard agreed, "if you'll keep out of trouble and not tip your hand. And, Ben, much as you need sleep, I'm afraid you'll have to keep the office open for a while.

"What the hell ails Cora?" Girsh grumbled.

"You might try to find out," Stoddard told him. "It'll help you keep out of trouble." He pushed the telephone across the desk and walked out quickly.



Vic shouldered his way through a crowd of idle hackmen on the sidewalk in front of strike headquarters. It was a bad-tempered crowd, hard-eyed and ominously quiet. Vic half expected a rap on the head as he made his way toward the stairs of the loft building. All he got was a couple of surly looks.

The stairs were deserted as was the meeting-room above. A gray light filtered through the dirty windows. Newspapers and cigarette butts littered the bare floor. Vic crossed to a hallway at the back of the room, pushed open a door marked *Private*.

Ed Holohan, red-headed, thick-necked business agent of the hackmen's union, started up belligerently.

"Can't you read, you ———!"

"Easy, Ed," Vic counseled. "Your blood pressure." He moved into the room, faced Holohan across the desk. "Just a social call. I dropped in to see how you and the boys are doing."

Holohan eyed him coldly during a long pause. Finally he said: "Drop out, Vic. On your way. What we're doing is none of your business."

Vic shrugged goodnaturedly and seated himself on the desk-edge. "You'd rather have me than the law, wouldn't you?" he asked.

"No!" was the prompt reply. "We got nothing to be afraid of unless you're stooling for the fleet-owners again."

"You've got me wrong, Ed."

"Not this time. You helped to glom the last strike for us."

"Don't be childish. You didn't have the strength to swing it last time. I saw that and said so. If that was spoiling your strike . . . O.K., I did it."

"We got the strength this time! There won't be a hack on the streets until the employers meet our demands! Now run out and peddle that around!"

"Sure I will . . . if it's true. You guys deserve a break."

"Never mind the sob stuff. We're making our own breaks this time. We've got them on the run. Benton Meade's so scared he won't even see us."

"What makes you think so?"

"I've tried for two days to fix a conference. His office is stalling. They say he's busy." Holohan laughed harshly. "I'd like to know what doing!"

"So would I," said Vic, glancing sharply across the desk.

"Huh?"

"Nothing." Vic riffled the pages of a telephone book, pushed it away. "Maybe he's lining up some new drivers."

Holohan's jaw shot out, his color mounted. "Let him!" he yelled. "And if you were sent to tell me that, you take back word that we know what to do with scab drivers when they hit the street!"

"My! My! You wouldn't resort to violence, would you, Ed?"

"You figure it out. If Meade is running in scabs—yeah, and private dicks—we'll show him what fight means!"

Vic nodded, then asked: "Who's running in the bombers?"

Holohan barked angrily: "You tell me!"

"I'm asking you," Vic persisted.

"Anything else you'd like to know?"

Vic straightened, got to his feet. "There is," he said, "and you've got all the answers."

"So what?"

"So you'd better start telling me before I start beating them out of you."

"Why, you ——!" Holohan came up with an obscene snarl, flinging over the heavy desk as if it were cardboard. Vic jumped back, snapping the door lock with one hand, whipping out his automatic with the other. Holohan stood rooted, tense, his eyes on the gun.

Vic said: "If you're not heeled, Ed, we'll do it this way." He stepped forward, tossing the automatic into a wastebasket in the corner of the room. His left fist lashed out, crashed Holohan's jaw.

THE big red-head went back a step then hunched his shoulders, charged. Vic poked another hard left to Holohan's nose. Blood spurted. Holohan came on, hurling ponderous blows. Vic ducked and sidestepped, shooting short punches at his opponent's head. Suddenly Holohan closed, smothered him in a bear-like grip. Together they thudded to the floor.

Holohan freed one arm, clubbed at Vic's face. Vic covered, gouging with his elbows. He squirmed desperately as Holohan reached for the wastebasket. He saw the man's fingers claw at the edge, heard the basket topple. With a quick twist he came up, pinioning Holohan's outstretched arm beneath his knee. As Holohan rolled, Vic rolled with him, locking his other leg around the trapped arm, putting on the pressure with both hands.

Holohan struggled, kicked, reached for Vic's throat with his other hand. But the armlock held, grew more intense. Sweat rolled from the big man's agonized, blood-streaked face. His teeth gritted. There was a battering on the office door, shouts outside.

Vic gasped: "I'll break it, Ed, if you don't talk fast!"

Holohan made one final effort to free his arm, sank back groaning as the hold tightened. The noise at the door grew louder.

"Quick!" Vic panted. "Or else. . . !"

"See Gordon," Holohan moaned. "It's Link Gordon." As the armlock eased off, he babbled: "Gordon's brought hired guns into town. He's gonna set himself up as an independent while we fight the fleets. . . ."

Vic prompted: "And it was an independent cab that went up at South Station."

Holohan mumbled: "They'll try to pin it on us . . . just like you. . . ."

"You half-wit!" Vic snapped. "I wasn't trying to pin anything on you. I just wanted some information." He got to his feet, scooping up the automatic.

"Next time I ask questions be a little more civil, will you?"

Holohan, still on the floor nursing his arm, pleaded: "Lay off this, Vic. We'll take care of everything, including Gordon."

Vic mopped his face, avoiding a rapidly swelling eye. He said: "I'll let you know about that later, after I've seen Gordon myself. Now call off those mugs outside before I have to shoot somebody."

Holohan stood up, unlocked the door. Vic was behind him, gun in hand. "It's all right, boys," Holohan said to the group in the doorway. "A little personal matter between Vic and me. He's leaving now. Let him alone—for the time being."

Vic, walking out, called over his shoulder: "I'll be seeing you, Ed, out of my good eye."



T O D D A R D sat scowling across the office desk at Vic Smail. "It's what I've always told you," he complained. "You can't think beyond a fight.

If you can't use a gun or fists you're not

interested in a case. Hell, what are your brains for?"

Vic cupped his sore eye gingerly and tried to look sheepish. "I got a lead on that bombing and maybe some future strike trouble," he pointed out. "If this Gordon—"

"You got a face that looks like a horse stepped on it," Stoddard corrected. "Why not use your head instead of your muscle, at least part of the time?"

"O.K., boss."

"I mean it," Stoddard insisted. "You and Girsh are just alike. You think you're tough—hard guys. But it's a lousy way to do business and I don't like it."

"O.K., boss."

"Tell Girsh what I said, if you can find him."

"He left a note here. Said he'd located Cora at St. George's Hospital and was going out there. She was brought in unconscious from an overdose of barbitol."

"Barbitol? What was the matter? Couldn't she sleep?"

"Don't ask me."

"Send some flowers. I'll try to get out and see her tomorrow."

"The Meade thing's keeping you busy?"

"They ought to be getting another note from the kidnapers soon . . . seeing as how the first fifty grand was blown up."

"That makes it pretty expensive," Vic said reflectively. "Who was the fellow in the polo coat?"

"Lawrence Dean. Did you ever hear of him?"

Vic shook his head.

"Neither did I," Stoddard said, "but it seems he was a steel man, well-to-do, sweet on Meade's daughter. He drove up from Oreville last night at her request and went to the station this morning to do the job for them. You know the rest."

"What are you going to do?"

"Keep working."

"And the cops?"

"Not yet. I may have to call them in later. A lot depends on the way the strike progresses."

"You want me to stick on that?"

Stoddard sighed. "If I could trust you—"

"Sure you can, boss."

"Remember, we're not representing anyone officially. But if you get hold of anything concerning Meade's whereabouts—"

"Sure. I understand."

"And not a word about this fellow Lawrence Dean," Stoddard cautioned. "If the cops link him with the Meade family the cat's out."

"Don't worry," Vic said. "I'll stick to the strike. Maybe if I could settle it they'd turn in Benton Meade." He walked toward the office door adding: "Of course that's just a crazy idea of mine."

"Crazy is right," Stoddard assured him

EMERGING from the lobby of the building, Vic saw Livingston and Novak, from headquarters, standing on the curb beside his car. He turned back quickly but Livingston overtook him beside the elevator-bank.

"Relax, Vic," the detective said.

Vic replied casually: "I'm pretty busy right now. Drop around tomorrow or the day after."

"This is a pinch, Vic."

"What the hell for?"

"Assault and battery. Ed Holohan's the complainant."

"I don't believe it."

Novak had edged up, watching Vic carefully. Livingston said: "I don't care whether you believe it or not. We're taking you in."

"I had a row with Holohan," Vic admitted, "but it was strictly a personal matter."

Livingston nodded. "I can tell from looking at you. Come on."

Vic went with them, complaining: "Imagine that heel, Holohan. We have a little fight and he turns me in."

Novak laughed. "Let's use your car, Vic," he said. "You drive."

The two detectives crowded into the front seat beside him and Vic started the motor, pulled away from the curb. On the way downtown, Livingston asked: "What was the trouble with Holohan? Strike stuff?"

"Well," Vic answered, "maybe."

"Come on, let's have it. We'll be mixed up in that strike ourselves if the going gets rough."

"I don't know anything about it."

"No, of course not," Livingston scoffed. "That's why Benton Meade hired you during the last strike."

"Well, he hasn't this time."

"Why not?"

"Ask him."

"But still you beat up the union's business agent. It doesn't make sense."

"I told you it was a personal matter between Holohan and me. We don't like each other."

"All right, but why pick out today to sock him? D'you think Holohan planted that bomb for you?"

Vic blinked. "What bomb?" he said quickly.

"You know the one I mean."

Vic hesitated, then laughed. "You're screwy, Livingston."

"You're not going to tell me you weren't at South Station this morning."

"Oh, I was there all right. But if Holohan was trying to bomb me this morning he wouldn't be running to you now and squealing that I slapped his face."

Livingston thought it over. "You can't tell. I don't trust Holohan any more than I do you."

"How much is that?" Vic inquired.

"About as far as I could drop-kick this automobile."

"I'm not flattered," Vic said, "if the size of your feet are any indication. . . ."

Livingston interrupted with, "Never mind! Let's get back to the bombing."

"There's no hurry," Vic said. "I'll have to answer these foolish questions all over again at headquarters."

"That's right," Livingston agreed.

Vic swung the car off Pearl Street and headed through Public Square. A moment later he jammed on his brakes and yelled: "Look, you guys! Someone's getting lumps!"

A crowd of grim-faced, determined men had surrounded a taxicab diagonally across the roadway. The driver had been forced to stop or run them down. Now he was being dragged, fighting, from behind his wheel. Some of the crowd were jerking at the handles of the cab door, others were stabbing at the tires.

Novak, jumping out of the car, shouted: "Hold it, Vic! I'll take care of this!"

At that moment a man in the back seat of the taxicab started shooting. The roar of gunfire topped the din about him with complete finality and was followed by a second's breathless hush. Then the mob broke and began to scatter, running. All but two men, who lay where they had flopped to the pavement, sprawling.

Livingston had a police .38 in his hand, climbing out of Vic's car. "You wait here," he muttered.

Vic saw the cab-driver kicking frantically at his starter and the gunman at the sliding window behind him shouting orders. But the taxicab refused to start.

With sudden decision Vic eased his own car into gear and pulled down the street. The move left Livingston uncovered, sent him scurrying into a doorway. Vic glanced back, laughing, then spun the car around in one turn. Motor racing, he pulled abreast of the taxicab, knocked open his door.

"In here, punks!" he shouted. "Quick!"

The driver hesitated, but the gunman came clambering across the running-boards at once. He ducked into the seat beside Vic, yelled: "Let's go! They got nothing on *him*!"

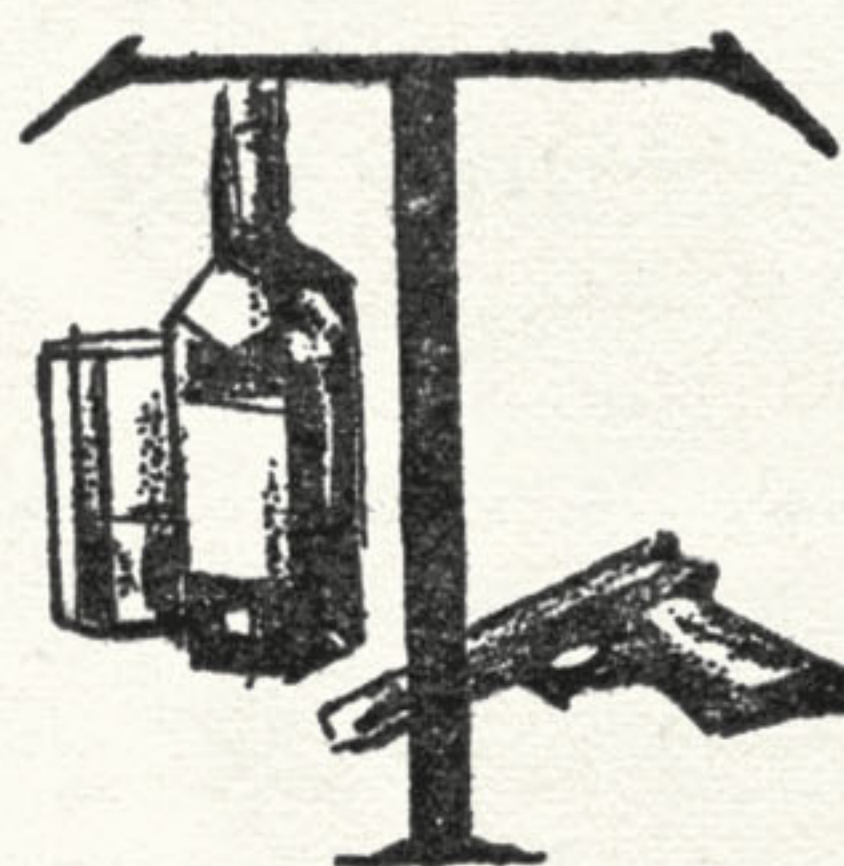
Glass broke behind them. In his rear-view mirror Vic saw Novak approach-

ing on the run, pistol smoking. He slumped over the wheel, released his clutch and sped recklessly across the square. Swerving into a side street without cutting speed, Vic saw Livingston and Novak both shooting after him. He grinned maliciously, drove through a red light at the next intersection, then made a sharp right turn and cut into an alley.

"All right," Vic told his passenger. "You'd better drop that rod overboard, just in case. Then sit up. We're hitting the main stem."

The gunman complied. "Where you taking me, pal?" he asked.

"Back to Link Gordon, safe and sound," was the answer. "Tell me the quickest way to get there."



WENT Y minutes drive along the waterfront and Vic, at the gunman's direction, pulled up in front of what appeared to be an abandoned warehouse. Windows of the dilapidated brick building were boarded up and the heavy double doors at the end of the driveway sagged on rusty hinges.

Nevertheless, the doors swung open as Vic's passenger got out and approached them. He motioned Vic inside and followed on foot. "Pull up and wait," he called. "I'll tell the boss you're here." He started away, then came back to inquire: "What's your name?"

Vic told him, saw that it failed to register.

Meanwhile the doors had been closed. Vic watched half a dozen men in mechanics' overalls moving about the shadowy interior of the long room. Lined against the walls in double rows were taxicabs—the independent variety. There was a lighted workshop in the rear, noisy with activity. Near the front doors he had just entered, Vic spotted two armed guards.

A creaking freight elevator descended, a freshly painted cab was rolled off and

moved into the line across the floor.

Vic's recent passenger returned, summoned him with a gesture. "Gordon'll see you upstairs," he said. "He's in a lousy frame of mind."

"What's troubling him?" Vic asked.

"Six cabs smashed so far today and a couple more pushed off piers." The gunman's mouth moved in a sour grimace. "This way—and talk fast."

LINK GORDON, broad, bulky, with a flat, scarred face and the neck of a wrestler was standing with his back to the wall of the cubicle he used as an office, waiting for them. He shot a suspicious look at Vic, but seemed amused at the sight of his visitor's black eye. He waved the gunman from the office and began: "You're the Vic Smail who works with Stoddard, so you ain't here to do me any good. I suppose I owe you for keeping that hood out of the can."

Vic shook his head, sat down. "I was on the way to jail myself at the time," he said. "Your boys putting on a show gave me a break."

"What were you going in for?"

"Socking Ed Holohan."

Gordon's thick lips curled in a grin. He took a square bottle and glasses from a desk drawer, saying: "Then I still owe you. Help yourself and tell me what's on your mind."

Vic drank, studied Gordon who had seated himself behind the desk. "It occurred to me," he said, "we might go on doing each other favors."

"Maybe yes. It depends. What can I do for you?"

"You can go on not liking Holohan?"

"That's easy." Gordon's eyes narrowed with shrewdness. "And what do you do?"

"Give you some information that will save you a headache—and a lot of cabs."

"So? That's quite a fancy proposition," Gordon mused. "But I'll tell you plain, mister, I've already got the headache and I want no part of Holohan."

"Listen," Vic said, "You and I see eye to eye on that buzzard. I hate his

guts. Sure it's mutual, but he's not wasting any love on you either."

"So he's a pain to both of us. So what?"

"You be the doctor," Vic said pointedly.

Gordon grinned again. "That's what I thought. You want some favor—a murder. I should do the dirty work for you and Stoddard? Yeah, and Benton Meade."

"Why Meade?"

"You're tied in with him. Everyone knows that."

"Then everyone's wrong. And it's a funny thing, you bringing that up. I figured you were tied in with Benton Meade."

Gordon put his drink down, spluttering. "Me!" What the hell. . . ?"

"Sure," Vic said. "You're not bucking him and the union both. Not single-handed. You may be plenty tough and have a good-sized roll, but—"

"Never mind about that stuff," Gordon interrupted. "Let me tell you about Meade."

Vic sat forward attentively. "A pleasure," he said.

Gordon poured himself another drink, swallowed it slowly. "On second thought," he said, "skip it. Either you're trying to con me or you're plain nuts."

"No," Vic said, "but I may be wrong. It was just an idea."

"You're full of bum ideas, mister," Gordon told him. "First you want me to get Holohan for you—"

Vic broke in: "Nothing the matter with that. That's still a good idea."

"Look," Gordon said with a show of patience, "I'm a very busy man. I've got enough trouble."

"If that's what you think now, wait until tonight."

"What about tonight?"

Vic hesitated. "I could say skip it, too," he pointed out, "only I'd like to play ball with you and get Holohan properly taken care of. So I'm going to go right on doing you favors. Here's the layout."

"The strikers are going to start shoving your cabs off the Doric Line pier at nine o'clock tonight when the Norfolk boat docks. They'll be concentrated there, set to wreck or sink every cab of yours in the neighborhood."

"Where'd you get this information?" Gordon demanded.

"Straight from the feed-bag," Vic said blithely. "Strike headquarters."

"And is Holohan going to be there at the pier?"

"To the best of my knowledge, yes."

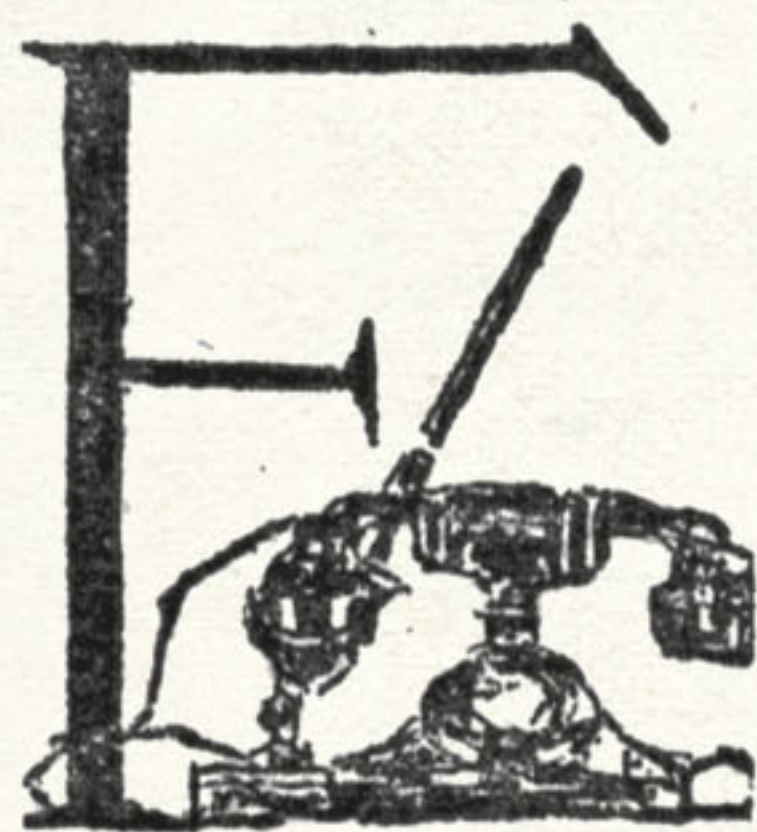
Gordon cocked an eye at the ceiling, pondered. "If you're a right guy," he said slowly, "and this dope is anywhere near correct, I'll do you a favor that is a favor. Maybe even a couple of favors."

"Take your time," Vic said.

"It won't be long if you've told me a straight story," Gordon said. "I'll take care of Holohan personally—tonight!"

"You're not so tough to do business with," Vic offered his hand.

"We'll see," said Gordon.



FIVE minutes later Vic was well away from the warehouse, headed for home by a devious back-street route. When he reached the apartment he found Girsh waiting, propped up on the lounge, a half-empty bottle of Scotch on the table beside him.

Vic took one look at Girsh and moved the bottle out of reach.

"I need it, Vic," Girsh complained. "I just came from the hospital. Cora got it."

"Cora got what?"

"A knife under the ribs. She's dead—murdered."

Vic stiffened, sucked in a breath. "How come?"

"A strange thing," Girsh said, leaning back and closing his eyes. "She was feeling better this afternoon, snapping out of it, the nurse told me. She was in a private room and had a couple of callers. The last visitor left just before I

arrived. The nurse said it was O.K. for me to go in—she was sure Cora was still awake." Girsh moved shaking fingers across his forehead and reached for his glass before resuming. "But it—it was terrible, Vic. I stood there looking at her—I don't know how long. Then I let out a yell that brought the nurse running."

"Cora had rolled over on the knife. The sheets were all stained red. . . ." Girsh's voice died out, he turned his face away.

Vic stood watching him, then moved the bottle back across the table. "I feel like a drink myself," he said. "Poor Cora. That's tough." He gulped down a shot of the whiskey. "Didn't the nurse know. . . ?"

Girsh said quickly: "Not a thing. They don't take visitor's names out there. She only had a vague idea what the guy ahead of me looked like."

"But Cora hadn't been dead long."

"It was hard to tell. Maybe two minutes—maybe ten. The nurse got panicky. The whole hospital was upset."

"I can imagine," Vic said. "What'd you do?"

"Learned what I could," Girsh answered. "Gave them the information they wanted in turn. Then I came out here. I felt sick—still do."

"Sure. Take it easy." Vic walked to the telephone table near the door, picked up an envelope lying there. "Does Stoddard know about Cora yet?"

"I doubt it, unless someone in the hospital caught him at the office. They expected me to tell him—but I hate to."

"Naturally," Vic agreed. "The boss will be plenty upset. He was fond of Cora. She'd been in the office a long time." He tore open the envelope, adding: "But I guess we better get word to him, even if he has got the Meade case on his mind."

Vic unfolded the note paper, read it quickly, glanced up. Then he studied the note at length and re-folded it, smiling. "More news for the boss," he said, dialing the office number.

When Stoddard's voice came over the wire, Vic said: "Here's a hot one, boss. I just got a note from Benton Meade's kidnapers, warning me to lay off."

"So did I," Stoddard responded. "What else did they say?"

"That if I don't, I'll get the same as Lawrence Dean."

"That's a new line. Nothing like that in mine. They know who they killed, eh?"

"Apparently."

"Save that note. I want to see it. And how d'you suppose they figure you're on the case?"

"They probably know I work for you and that you're handling it," Vic answered. "And, boss, there's something else."

He hesitated, groping for words.

"It . . . it's about Cora. . . ."

Stoddard was silent a moment, then answered in a low voice: "I've heard about it. Is Girsh with you?"

"Yes. And pretty sick."

"When am I going to see you two again?"

"Later tonight. I've got something pretty hot on the strike. Link Gordon's mixed up in it, but I can't tell you any more on the phone. Maybe we'll get a break out of it. I'll know for sure by ten o'clock."

"All right, come in then. And tell Girsh to do what he can about the other—about Cora. I'll want to take a hand in that just as soon as I can get a breather."

"Sure, boss." Vic racked up the telephone, waited briefly, then dialed union headquarters and asked to speak to Ed Holohan.

"Listen, bum," he said when the business agent answered, "this is your little playmate, Vic Smail. Instead of trying to put over a rap on me, here's a real job for you . . . that is, if you're man enough to go for it. All you've got to do is bring your wrecking crew to the Doric Line pier before the Norfolk boat pulls in tonight. Link Gordon, in person, and his mob will be there. . . . Yeah,

in their cabs. Don't thank me for the tip, I only want to show you up for a yellow rat."

He hung up quickly and winked at Girsh.

"Just setting the stage for a little fracas," he explained, working the dial again. Into the phone he said: "Let me speak to Livingston."

The mention of the headquarters detective's name brought Girsh upright, muttering: "What the hell are you doing, Vic. . . ?"

Vic winked again. "Get a load of this."

A MOMENT later the connection clicked and Livingston's answer came over the wire. "Sorry I had to run out on you this afternoon, Livingston, old boy," Vic began, "but I'm going to make it up to you with some dope that'll put you in line for promotion." He waited patiently while the detective raged, showering him with abuse. Then he resumed: "So now I'll tell you what's going to happen, pal. At nine o'clock tonight Link Gordon and his hoods will ride up to the Doric Line pier looking for trouble. They'll be set to gun out any and all strikers. If you show there with plenty of help you ought to bottle up the whole mob. You'll not only get Gordon himself, you'll do a lot toward ending the strike. Thus you become a hero, Livingston, a model cop—right down to your fallen arches—due to the consideration and good wishes of your old chum, Vic Smail. . . ."

Vic interrupted another tirade of abuse by adding: "Take my word for it, you'll have a fight on your hands. All hell's going to pop."

This time the detective began barking questions.

Vic cut him short with, "That's all I can tell you, Livingston. Take it or leave it."

He hung up and turned to Girsh. "Better begin pulling yourself together, Ben. We've got a hell of a big night ahead of us. . . ."



WO BLOCKS from the Doric Line pier Vic pulled into the shadows and parked. He glanced at his watch. It was 8:45.

After a careful survey of the street in both directions he slid from behind the wheel and started on foot for the pier.

Rounding into the side street that led to the paved square fronting the pier sheds, Vic noted with satisfaction that the entire neighborhood was comparatively dark. Street lamps were few and far between, and trucks at the freight entrance to the pier, and private cars parked in the center of the square, had their lights dimmed. The Norfolk boat was not in sight.

Vic strolled casually along the sidewalk, keeping in the shadow of the building. No cabs had appeared as yet. Only a handful of men loitered along the curb.

As Vic passed a pile of crates that jutted across the walk he was seized with startling suddenness, spun around. A powerful hand was clamped across his face, wiry fingers jerked at his collar from behind.

Vic shoved at the hand that was smothering him. It came away to disclose Holohan, the union boss, jaw thrust out and regarding him with baleful eyes less than a half-step away. Vic jerked, trying to free himself from the choking holds, and realized that two more pairs of hands had seized him from behind.

"All right, wise guy!" Holohan was snarling. "Stay right where you are and take it! You're the one who arranged this party. Now you can be guest of honor!"

Vic gulped, tried to speak. A fist from the darkness thudded against the side of his head. Holohan warned: "None of your lip! You've talked enough for one day!" He moved still closer, thrusting his battered face near Vic's. "It never occurred to you that we'd have a couple

of men planted in Link Gordon's outfit, did it? Or that Livingston would check your tip with us? Well, that's where you outsmarted yourself—trying to jam us with Gordon's mob and the cops at the same time. Now if any shooting starts you'll get a front seat. Way in front!"

Holohan broke off as a voice whispered from behind him.

He stepped to the curb and peered across the square.

From the narrow street entrance was emerging a line of taxicabs, newly painted—all independents—heading toward the pier. The cabs circled the central parking space in the square, pulled into the curb at the far end. Thus they commanded the side street as well as the square itself. Still the Norfolk boat had not docked.

Calculating his chances in the event a street fight broke, Vic decided to risk it. With a quick twist he tore his right arm free, dug for his shoulder holster. A crashing blow on the jaw sent him spinning against another of his captors, but the gun came out blazing.

The roar echoed across the square, brought instant response from the parked cabs. Flame belched from open rear windows, bullets thudded into wooden walls, ricocheted along the street. Vic went down in a pile of diving, crawling bodies. A heelplate ground into his wrist and the automatic fell from his grasp.

Sirens screamed in the side street and the gunfire broke off abruptly . . . only to be renewed a moment later with increased frenzy.

Squirming toward the curb, Vic watched Gordon's mob clash with the police. The first of the taxicabs to leave the square and head into the side street were caught in a cross-fire, literally ripped apart by a hail of lead. Tires blew, glass splintered and above the din of firing came the agonized yell of a wounded driver, who leaped from his seat, tottered crazily and plunged face down to the pavement.

Vic saw the bulky Gordon clutching a sub-machine gun and leading a knot of gangsters in hurried retreat on foot toward the pier. Police cars were edging into the square and spreading out to angle their fire at Gordon and his followers.

Vic raised to one knee, shouted: "Here they come, Holohan! We've got Gordon trapped! Let's take him!"

"Take him yourself!"

The voice came from behind a barricade of crates.

"Where's my gun?"

A hand reached from the shadows and knocked against Vic. His groping fingers closed on the butt of an automatic. Crouching low, Vic ran into the square, approaching Gordon directly from behind.

Two of the gunmen with Gordon dropped their weapons simultaneously, broke for cover. Gordon hurled curses after them without pausing in his fire at the police cars that were closing in about him.

Twenty yards in the rear, Vic stood erect, bellowed: "Drop it, Gordon! I've got you cold!"

The mob leader whirled, weapon flaming. Vic slid to the pavement, raised his automatic, aimed carefully. Before he could pull the trigger, Gordon gave a gasping cough, slumped forward in a heap. The sub-machine gun clattered to the street. Four remaining mobsters hesitated, unnerved, leaderless. The police closed in with a rush.

VIC got to his feet in bewildered surprise as Les Stoddard climbed from a police car, approached with Livingston and Novak.

"Hey! What you doing here, boss?" he shouted.

Stoddard walked closer, pushing back his ancient felt hat to regard Vic with sorrowful mien. "Winding up my case is all," he said. "Hand over your gun, Vic."

Vic's lips twitched in a smile that faded quickly as he observed Stoddard's

revolver pointing at his chest. "What's up, boss?"

"Your game." Stoddard spoke coldly, his eyes glued to Vic's. "Your squeeze play didn't quite come off. Now hand over that gun. The police want you."

Vic surrendered the automatic with a shrug. "The heat's got you, boss. Livingston wanted me for assaulting Holohan, but after this night's work he ought to reduce it to a "dis con" rap or spring me altogether."

Stoddard smiled ironically. "He wants you and Ben Girsh for murder, Vic. Three murders, to be exact. Benton Meade, Lawrence Dean and Cora Winters. We've got you dead to. . . ."

Vic dived forward, clutching at the sub-machine gun beside Link Gordon's body. With a scarcely perceptible motion of his arm, Stoddard batted his revolver against the base of Vic's skull.

Livingston knelt beside Vic, then looked up.

"You were plenty quick with that, Stoddard," he commented approvingly.

Stoddard pocketed his gun slowly. "I can be tough, too," he said. "When it's necessary."



VIC CAME to with an aching head as the squad car drew to a halt fifteen minutes later. He was bundled out, marched between Livingston and Novak into Stoddard's office. Girsh was there, bound hand and foot to a heavy chair, gagged with a towel.

"There's the other one, Livingston," Stoddard said. "Neatly tied up for delivery."

"Much obliged." Livingston smiled gratefully. "And what about this confession you spoke of?"

Stoddard said: "Take his gag out. He'll talk. He's tired of being tough. I smacked all that out of him earlier tonight when I caught him piling Benton Meade's body into the rumble seat of his car. I was waiting in the garage in

back of their apartment house, expecting such a move."

Vic shuddered, sank to a chair. "You—you've got Meade's body?" he muttered.

"And that's not all." Stoddard reached under his desk. "Here's a pillow slip I found hidden in your closet at the apartment. It contains the fifty grand you took from that kit bag at South Station this morning, after sending the checkroom clerk out to get you toast and coffee."

Stoddard turned to the headquarters detectives. "That clerk will make you fellows a nice witness. So will the cab-starter at the station. He can identify Girsh as the driver of the cab that blew up when Lawrence Dean got in. The bomb was wired to the springs in the rear seat. Weight on the springs completed the circuit. You'll find some leftovers from that homemade bomb in their garage, also the license plates they switched from the hack they stole and later blew up.

"In case you're puzzled," Stoddard continued, "the idea in back of the bombing was not so much to kill Lawrence Dean as it was to cover their theft of the fifty grand. They didn't know Dean and had no motive for bumping him off other than to completely stall any search for that ransom money."

LIVINGSTON, who was busily jotting notes on the back of an envelope, said: "So much for the bombing."

"That's only one item," Stoddard agreed. "The Benton Meade snatch was the start. Vic Smail and Ben Girsh figured—and rightly—that the strike trouble would result in a soft pedal on the kidnaping and, what's also important, that I'd be called in to handle the case. Thus, they'd be working on the inside, presumably helping but actually hindering me.

"They worked out the time element carefully. They knew Meade. They knew the strikers. Pretty well assured

the walk-out would be staged on schedule at six o'clock this morning, they laid for Meade night before last and got him without much trouble. You see, they'd worked with him before, knew his habits, the route he drove home.

"But, by the same token, Meade knew them. Which meant they had to bump him off as soon as they got him. When that was done, all that remained was to collect the ransom by a tricky device and then pin the blame for the whole business on someone else. In casting about for the logical victims of such a frame-up, they hit upon Ed Holohan and Link Gordon, both of whom had plenty of reasons to want Meade out of the way.

"That's where Vic started his squeeze play—first getting Holohan into a fight, later, pulling Gordon off his base with that double-cross tip on trouble at the pier. There was sure to be a fight down there tonight—gunplay. Vic was ready to kill Gordon himself if necessary. The police saved him the trouble. But don't forget he was there, gun poised, when Gordon got it. And I'll tell you why he was there.

"Vic and Girsh had decided to frame Gordon for the kidnaping of Benton Meade. Their plan was to have Girsh dump Meade's body in or near Gordon's warehouse headquarters while Link and most of his mob were away, decoyed into a fight and, as it turned out, death. Gordon, dead, couldn't defend himself from the rap they had framed for him. Meanwhile they'd written some fake ransom and warning notes. Vic even addressed one to himself. All in line with their plan of diverting suspicion and throwing me off the trail.

"But I got on the right track late this afternoon when Cora Winter's brother came to see me. He was the visitor that preceded Girsh at the hospital. He learned from Cora that she had overheard Vic and Ben talking here in the office about the Meade snatch, hours before they were supposed to know anything about it. They guessed she'd

overheard them and realized their danger.

"So Vic took Cora to dinner and doped her drinks with barbitol. They hoped to have the ransom money safely cached and the kidnaping pinned on someone else by the time she came out of it. But when Girsh went to the hospital to check on Cora's condition this afternoon, he found her getting better fast and plenty sore. She was so sore, in fact, that she made the mistake of accusing Girsh and Smail—and got the works.

"Girsh admitted that. He told me of stabbing her and holding her mouth shut to stifle her cries until she died. Then he sounded the alarm himself. That helped him to escape once more, but only temporarily.

"That was a bad bungle, their first misplay. And Girsh realized it. Vic must have too. Still they thought they had a chance to come through, bluff it out. But that stabbing shook Girsh up. It broke his nerve. He cracked completely tonight when I caught him in the garage. . . ."

Vic Smail was on his feet, stumbling across the room toward Girsh. He screamed: "Rat! Yellow belly! Couldn't keep your damn mouth shut, could you? Now you're going to burn! Both of us

will burn!" He broke off, babbling incoherently.

Stoddard snapped: "Get a load of that, Livingston! There's a real break!" He jerked the gag from Girsh's mouth, adding: "Fell for a little squeeze play of mine, didn't you, Vic? Let Girsh tell you—"

"Shut up!" Girsh was yelling. "Keep your mouth closed, Vic! I've told 'em nothing!"

VIC SMAIL tottered backward a step, looked dazedly from face to face, then began to sob hysterically.

Stoddard laughed grimly. "Tough guy!" he mocked. Then to Livingston, "Lock 'em up, copper. I guessed a part of that story I just told you, but it was mostly the truth."

Livingston untied Girsh, handcuffed his wrist to Vic's.

"They look good that way," Stoddard commented. "You might even stick them in the same cell. It'd probably save the state some trial money."

"Come along and watch what I do with 'em," Livingston invited.

"Not me," said Stoddard wearily. "Tonight I'm going to get some sleep. And tomorrow I'm going to get some new operatives. Smarter ones, and not too tough."

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the

invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 391, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 391, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

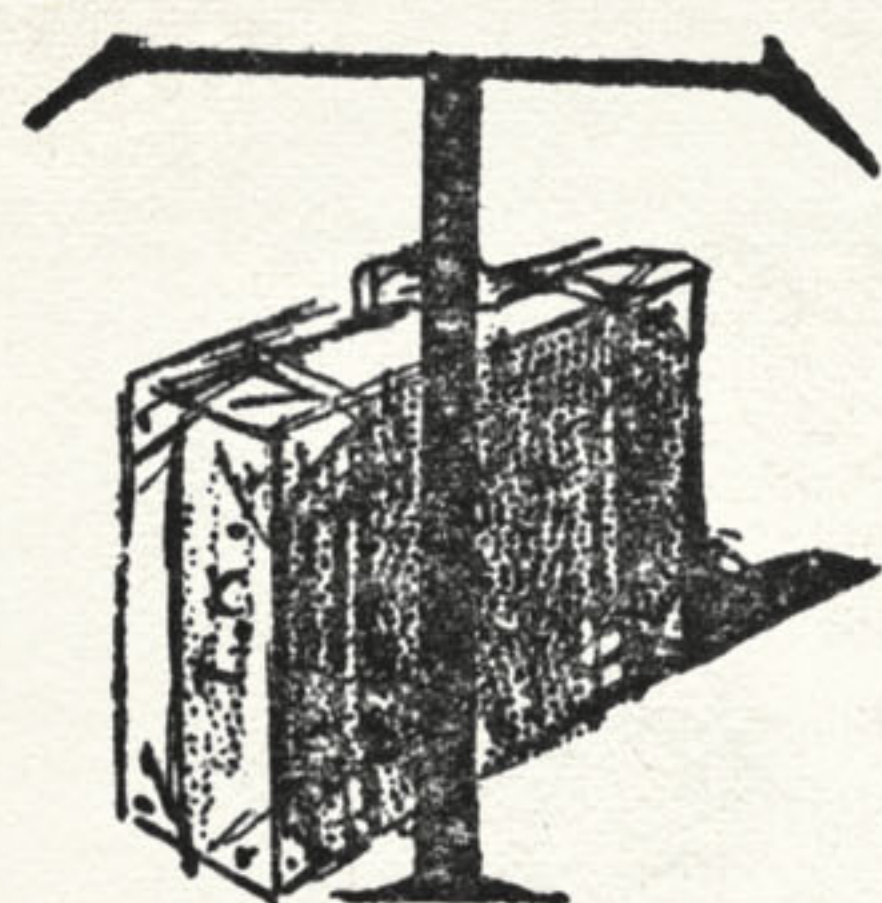
THE FRAME THAT DIDN'T FIT

By EATON K. GOLDTHWAITE



And who should tumble out of the trunk but Studs Gerber, a small-time porch-climber that had lately been spending a lot of somebody's dough.

Introducing Duke Brian and his sidekick, Franny Steinmetz, a pair of fast guys from Philly—and the amazing Mr. Fenwick Green, who always got sick *before* he took a plane-ride instead of waiting till he got in the air, then usually decided to go by train after all.



THE DOOR to Apartment D-20 opened as far as a length of chain would let it. I tipped my hat and told the woman that I was Duke Brian and the guy with me was Franny Steinmetz.

She said, "Wait," so I sank my heels in the hall carpet and sniffed at the incense coming through the crack in the door. I heard her repeat our names. Then I heard a newspaper rattle and another pair of eyes, a man's, showed at a spot lower down. The man said, "Oh, O.K!" Behind me I could feel my partner shift his gun from his shoulder to his coat pocket. The crack narrowed and the chain rattled and then the door swung open all the way.

I spend a lot of time around Philadelphia but I'd never seen him before. He wasn't very big and the butler's outfit made him look even smaller. He had a face the color and texture of one of my old golf balls. He had eyes that didn't stay aimed in one direction long enough for me to decide whether they were black or brown. He had a tight mouth like he might be bleeding inside. He stunk of cigarettes more than the room stunk of incense. He said: "Come in, Duke. I was afraid you wouldn't get here."

I told him I'd been on my way to the fights at the Arena when I got his message. I said I supposed he was Johnny Devlin.

He bobbed his head. He said: "Yeah, I'm Devlin. Franny knows me. H'ar'ya, Franny."

We crossed a foyer, and in one of those girandole mirrors I saw my partner scowl and heave his shoulders. He kept his hat on his head. He kept his hands in his pockets. He grunted, "H'ar'ya, Johnny."

Like most of the apartments in Belvedere Towers this one had a dropped living-room. There were monk's cloth drapes at the windows. There were a lot of prints including a Currier & Ives

Skaters in Central Park. The furniture was Hepplewhite and the rug was Gulistan. There was a stack of luggage with the white-faced young woman standing beside it on the rug. At the end of a hall a door was open and I could see a dining-room.

The little guy ducked behind us and closed the door. He dropped the anchor of the chain in place and ducked around us again. He padded across the Gulistan rug and stood by the girl. He said: "This is my wife, fellas."

I liked the firm thrust of her chin and the mold of her mouth and nose. She had clear, wide-set blue eyes that reminded me of my wife, Janet's. She was much younger than Devlin, even younger than Janet. I know class and she had it. She would have had a harder job concealing her class than her fright. I liked her in the dinky white-apron-and-black maid's outfit. Anyway you looked at her the reaction was pleasant. I bowed and said: "How do you do, Mrs. Devlin?"

She nodded very seriously and looked at her husband.

I'm forty, but Devlin was older than I am. His mouth twitched and his slim white hands busied themselves with a cigarette box. "Cigarette?" he said, and I helped myself. He was bursting to talk and I let him. "I called you up because I'm in a jam, Duke. A bad jam that'd be a bum rap even if I could afford to take it. And I can't. So that's why I called you up."

I sat on one of the Hepplewhite chairs. Franny spread himself before the door but he didn't take his hat off and he didn't take his hands out of his pockets. I didn't remind him about the social conventions. He knew Devlin and I didn't. The woman stood by the trunk, holding for dear life to one of the straps. Her husband paced up and down, talking through and around puffs on his cigarette.

"I been a two-time loser, Duke. Holmesburg and Eastern. That's why I can't afford to take a rap. That's why

I called you instead of the cops. You was on the inside once, too, so you know what it's all about. And you're sittin' right in this man's town, so you're the one I called."

It's getting so it doesn't bother me when they start that "you, too" stuff. I said: "What did they get you on?"

"Your trouble, Duke. I couldn't leave the pretties alone. Maybe you remember the Vandever necklace job? That was my first mistake. It cost me a stretch at Eastern. I still hadn't learned, and they got me cold turkey breezin' out of the Bellevue with all of Anna Martin, the opera singer's, pearls. Hell, I got no squawk. They was right raps. I had 'em comin'. But this one isn't. And I can't afford to take it."

I grinned at him. "So you were a box man. I remember the Martin pearls. Who caught you?"

"Bill Kurtz. That was eleven years ago, and he was on his way up."

Bill Kurtz is a good friend of mine. "You've been straight since you came out of Holmesburg?" I asked.

The girl let go of the trunk strap. Her mouth trembled. "He has. Oh, you must believe me! John has been as straight as can be! We went to New York for a fresh start. I don't have to tell you how hard it was. We had no friends. We almost starved, but Johnny stayed straight. You've got to believe that, Mr. Brian!"



COULD believe anything she told me, almost. I couldn't believe that she had married him when she was twelve years old. I asked: "How long have you been working here?"

"Three months."

"Who do you work for?"

"Fenwick Green. He's a swell guy, Duke."

There was a picture on the radio. I'd heard of Fenwick Green. He was a dippy philanthropist who picked bums off

park benches and gave them jobs in some kind of school he ran. Sometimes the experiments didn't turn out so hot, but I'd never had any of his cases. I went over and picked up his photograph. It was pretty good. He was an elderly man with a rather austere face but contrasting goodhumored eyes. But the picture didn't interest me so much as the frame. The frame was a cheap imitation of gold and a bad fit.

I asked: "Where is he now?"

"In Florida. He left Camden airport at four o'clock P.M. That's why all the keysters. He was gonna send 'em by express."

The girl tossed me a worried look. "You mustn't mind Johnny. His language, I mean. It's only when he's terribly excited that he forgets. Really, Mr. Brian, all the old Johnny Devlin is dead."

I told her I was more interested in motives than language. I asked him: "Is this trouble of yours any trouble of Green's?"

He said, "No."

"All right, Johnny. What's the rap?"

He began to sweat. His eyes stopped bouncing and sank into a steady, hunted gleam. He rasped: "You're gonna help me?"

"That's the general idea."

Johnny Devlin moved. He pushed his wife away from the tall wardrobe trunk. He fumbled with the lock. The lock snapped open and he pried the trunk apart.

The body of a man tumbled out.

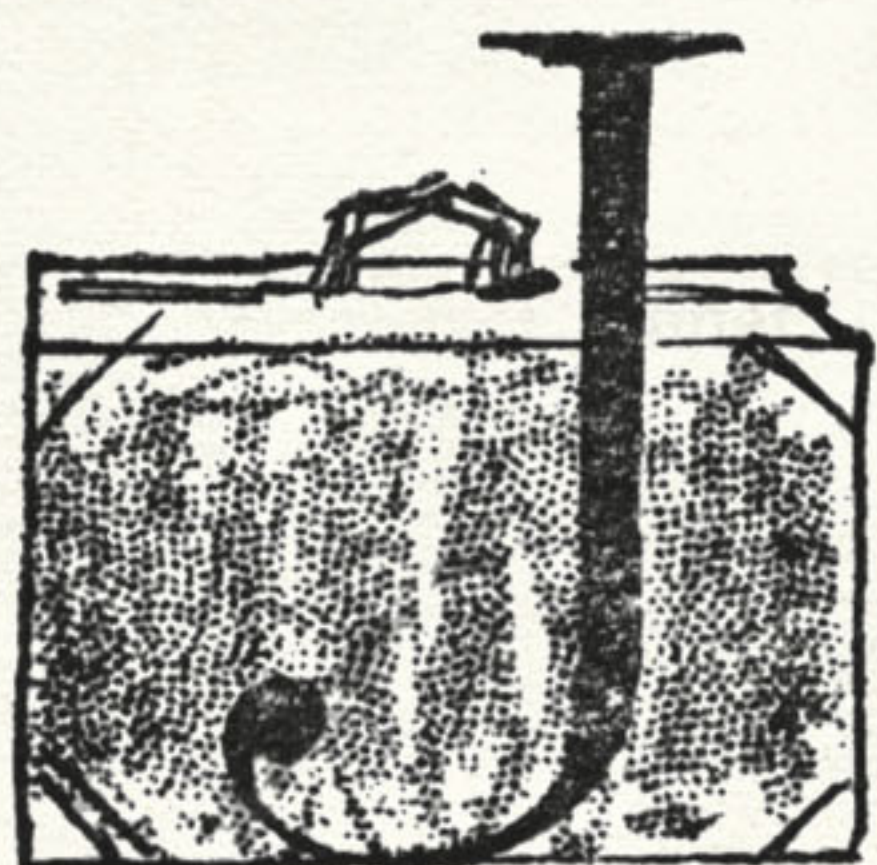
"Studs Gerber!"

I didn't need Franny's yell to tell me who he was. A cheap, small-time porch-climber that had lately been spending a lot of somebody's dough. There was only one hole, right over his heart, and it went all the way through. He had bled plenty. His tweed suit was caked with it. I went through his pockets and at the same time noticed that the Gulistan rug was damp and smelled strongly of soap. Studsy was cold but he hadn't started to get stiff yet. That would place

the time at anywhere from a couple of hours before now, which was close to midnight, to maybe four in the afternoon. Johnny Devlin had called the office at eight o'clock and Junior Stevens, my office boy, had had me paged at the Arena.

Studs Gerber's pockets had forty-five dollars, a .25 pearl-handled Spanish automatic, some trinkets, handkerchiefs and a handful of business cards. The cards were advertising *The Hollywood Boulevard Motion Picture School*, at an address on Market Street. I put the stuff back and looked at the luggage. There were two gladstones, two short wardrobes and a tall one, all pigskin and all labeled *Fenwick Green, The Palms, Miami Beach, Florida*. And there was the tall wardrobe from which Studs Gerber's corpse had tumbled. It was black fiber-covered basswood and bore no labels.

I said: "Tell me the story."



JOHNNY DEVLIN applied a fresh cigarette to a butt. His wife was sitting in a chair, with her head back and eyes closed. Franny was spread

in front of the door again.

Johnny Devlin said: "Green decides yesterday to go to Florida. He calls Knight's Tour Agency, that's corner of Sixteenth an' Chestnut, an' they tell him all the planes are booked solid for a week. So he stewes around all night tryin' to make up his mind to take a train. He gets train sick, and plane sick too, but he likes the shortest way, see? Well, this morning he sends me to Broad Street Station. And when I get there the ticket agent asks me am I John Devlin and I say yes and he says to go back home, that Green has called and changed his mind.

"So I come back here to the apartment—this is about noon—and Green has all this stuff out. He's just got a call that there's a plane cancellation, so

he wants to make it. So I pack a small bag and get his different pills together and promise to send the keysters tomorrow. I get a taxi and ride with him to the Camden airport."

I asked him what time it was when he arrived at the airport.

He said: "Two o'clock. That may sound funny, but whenever the boss is taking a trip he gets to the station way ahead of time. He goes in the john and gets sick. Then he's ready for the trip. So I stay with him until two thirty and he says he's gonna be sick and for me to go home. So I leave him and get here at a little after three. Mary was layin' out his stuff and I say let it go, that we'd do it tonight, and let's go see a movie. She says swell, because *Gone With The Wind* is at the Boyd an' matinee is popular prices. So we go there. Well, it's a four-hour show an' we have supper afterwards at Spider Kelly's on Mole Street. It musta been half-past seven when we got back to the apartment."

Johnny Devlin took a long inhale and crushed the butt in an ash tray. Smoke filtered from his nostrils and his shuttley eyes rested a moment on the girl. She was still sitting with her head back, but her hands were clenched.

Johnny said: "We came in here. We was full of the picture and we didn't notice the black keyster at first. Mary saw it first. She said, 'Where'd that trunk come from?' I said I didn't know. So I opened it—" He paused and raked sweat from his forehead with his shirt-sleeve.

I shook my head at him. I said: "Johnny, Johnny! No wonder you were tripped up on the Martin pearl job. What a story!"

The girl jumped from the chair and her eyes blazed at me. "It's the truth! In God's name—"

"You did a good job cleaning up the blood. Must've taken a lot of scrubbing."

"The blood come out of the keyster! It leaked out the bottom! It was all over the floor, so help me, Duke!"

I grinned at him. "Listen, Johnny.

Your story goes like clockwork up until you hit *G.W.T.W.* It goes haywire from there on. In the first place, you can't get into that show without reservations. In the second place, you didn't eat at Spider Kelly's because I was there myself. In the third place, this whole rug has been taken up and turned around. The worn place that should be near the steps has been shifted so that it's under the trunks. And you've burned incense in here to kill the smell of gunpowder."

The two of them stared at me. It would be hard to decide which was more frightened. They both said: "You—you don't believe us?"

"No."

Mary Devlin got up then and walked to the radio. She clasped her hands. When she turned around her eyes were up and her chin was steady. She said: "Tell him the truth, Johnny."

Johnny Devlin acted like he had been smacked with a blackjack. He sighed. "O.K., Mary," he said. He walked to a console and poured himself a stiff drink. "Want one?" he asked me. I shook my head. "O.K.," he said and tossed it in him. His hands didn't shake quite so much. He grunted,

"This sounds screwier than the other, Duke, but God help me it's the truth! When I came back from the airport we started packin' Mr. Green's bags. When we were gettin' the bags out Mary had noticed that our trunk was gettin' mildewed. I keep my army uniform and a few trinkets in there, and the uniform was full of moth eggs. So she was gonna give 'em a airing. Well, I was packin' and Mary was gettin' supper. She was in the kitchen when somebody knocked on the door. I went to it. It's this guy. I says, 'Yes, sir?' and he pulls back his coat like he's flashing a badge. 'Inspector,' he says. 'Got a complaint that your radio makes too much noise.' And I tell him that's impossible because the apartments are all soundproofed. So he pulls a gat and sticks it in my belly and says, 'Good! Then nobody'll hear me if you decide to get tough.'

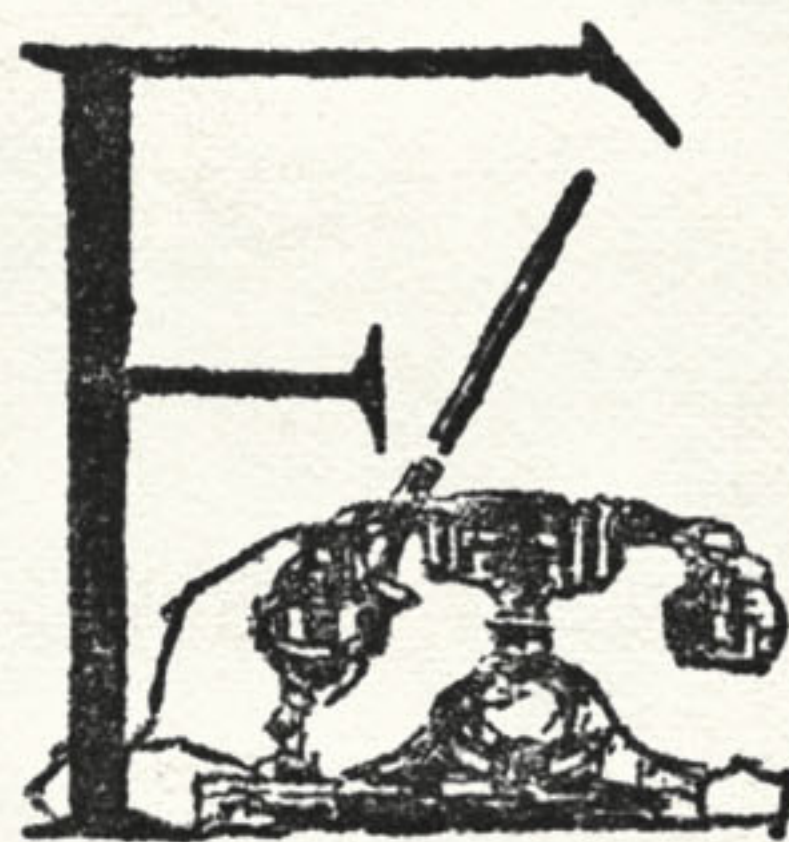
"So I had to let him in. 'Where does he keep 'em?' he says. 'What?' I asks him, and then Mary comes in out of the kitchen. She is standin' by that door, there. I'm over here, an' he is right where Franny is, a little nearer maybe. 'One yip and you get it,' he says to Mary.

"Then I heard the door. Just a little rattle. I hadn't had a chance to replace the chain. This guy heard it too. He whirled around and as he did, somebody fired through the door. He staggers back an' down the steps without even pullin' his own trigger. I stood for a minute an' Mary yelled at me 'Quick! For God's sake see who that was!' So I went. I didn't figure maybe I would get shot too. I just went. There was nobody in the hall. I came back in."

I looked at him and for the first time I noticed the little Purple Heart in his lapel.

I looked at her. Her face was pale and scared. I said: "So that's the story."

They said that was the story.



RANNY and I stuck around a while. I hated to do it, but I made them go through all the motions again, all but putting the stiff in the trunk.

Johnny Devlin said to me: "What would you do if you was in my shoes? I figured on shippin' the trunk to Walla Walla but Mary stopped me. She said it would be no use. She said they'd trace it and us, and then we'd be in a worse jam. So I called you."

I told him that was probably the first smart thing he'd ever done outside of going straight. I asked him if he had any money. Mary answered by pulling out a savings-bank passbook showing a balance of a hundred and twenty-eight dollars. She said she'd get me all of it if I needed it. To change the subject I asked Johnny what the Purple Heart was for, and she spoke up in a proud

voice: "That means he was wounded in the War, Mr. Brian."

I knew it. I asked: "All right, where *does* Mr. Green keep them?"

"Them? Whaddaya mean?"

"What Studsy was looking for."

Johnny Devlin and his wife looked at each other. "I don't know about this," he said slowly.

She settled it. She walked to the Currier & Ives and pulled it back. It covered a Mosler wall safe.

I nudged Johnny. "All right, open it up."

She moved between us and the safe. She looked at me very steadily. She said: "Don't ask him to do that, Mr. Brian. That's something he hasn't done in eleven years."

I shrugged my shoulders. I have my fine points too, but there wasn't any murder rap hanging over my head. I went to work on the safe. I had plenty of trouble with it—my hand isn't what it used to be—but I got it open. It was empty, but I didn't let Johnny Devlin see it. I whistled and slammed it shut in a hurry. I said: "O.K. Now we'll call Bill Kurtz."

Mary Devlin's lips got trembly and her eyes started to fill up. "You—you mean the Kurtz of the Homicide Bureau?"

"None other."

"Is it—is it necessary?"

"You bet your sweet life it's necessary," I told her, and Franny broke his record silence to chuckle.

MY HOUSE is one of those old ones on Spruce Street, and every morning at seven there's one particular truck that goes by and shakes the dishes in the corner closet so hard it wakes me. But it didn't this morning. I had been up since five, and I got a good look at it. It was a D.S.C. Mack, Number 78, and I decided to call Bill Kurtz and see if he couldn't get the mayor to have the truck run down Pine Street instead of Spruce. But Franny arrived, and since Janet was still asleep I took him down-

cellar and gave him his instructions.

I said: "You're to go to Camden Airport, Broad Street Station and Knight's Agency—to check Johnny's story."

He screwed his ugly mug into a look of something like intelligence and said, "Check!"

"Then you're to go to Belvedere Towers and find out if anybody heard a shot at six o'clock," which was the time I'd finally pinned Johnny down to.

"Check!"

"And get the names and all information possible on apartments rented in the past few weeks, or months."

Franny objected. "'At's kinda silly, ain't it? Bill Kurtz'll have all 'at stuff."

I told him he might have been a good bootlegger once but he was a lousy detective now. He grinned at me. He said: "How about 'at cute dame, Mary? Dontcha want me to ast her a few questions?"

"I do not. She's probably a Mrs. just to discourage guys like you. And don't get involved with any other dames, either. Now, scram!"

He went. Franny was really a good egg. I often wondered how he put up with me. We met in Trenton Pen. It was the only sentence I ever served despite the fact I had operated in Berlin, Paris, London and a lot of foreign cities where the police used to look down on American law-enforcement bodies as kindergartens. Franny swears he took a jail sentence to get out of the booze racket. I got mine in the Rittenberg diamond job in an Atlantic City Boardwalk hotel. And I was glad it was over. If it hadn't been for Trenton I wouldn't have met Janet. She was the "Society Girl Social Worker" who snapped me out of it. We made good newspaper copy for a while. I'm glad that's over too.

I didn't like some of the things Franny told me about Johnny Devlin. Franny remembered him as a kid in North Philly. Devlin was a wizard with a pool cue, and being about five years older, all the kids thought he was head

man. Franny said he used to be handsome then. A school teacher fell for him and ran away with him. Franny thought they'd had a kid—he wasn't sure. But Johnny Devlin was caught in the draft, so if he did have a kid it must have been while he was overseas. Johnny might be trying to go straight since Fenwick Green picked him up, but he didn't have such good companions. Franny told me positively he had seen Johnny shooting pool with Studs Gerber at the Monarch. If it hadn't been that I had instinctive faith in Mary Devlin I'd have let Bill Kurtz take charge in his own way.

Kurtz hadn't been to bed yet when I arrived at the Hall.

I said: "Bill, do me a favor. Let the Devlins be bailed."

B

ILL'S a big, rugged guy. He looks more like a farmer than a bloodhound. That's why so many mugs find themselves out on a limb with him. We haven't

any secrets and he's never used any varnish with me. His eyes explored my insides from cerebrum to intestines. He growled: "What're you trying to do, kid me? Johnny shot Studsy in an argument over who was going to cut who in on the Knapp robbery at Chestnut Hill. The Knapp housemaid just left here. She showed up by herself this morning and picked Johnny out of the lineup."

That was news to me but I didn't show it. I said: "Johnny may be a bad boy, but his wife is O.K. And the housemaid might be wrong."

"Yeah. So might you, Duke. I don't go for this wife stuff. In the first place, no law can make 'em testify. And maybe you remember we've had a string of house robberies in the past year without a break until the watchman at the Stratford surprised Icebox Sam Furman and put a slug through him. And there were no more robberies until Furman's gang, which included Studsy Gerber, picked up Johnny Devlin. So?"

"Listen, Bill. Let 'em get bailed. In the meantime, rig a camera opposite Fenwick Green's wall safe. I let Johnny think it was crammed with valuables. If he wants to lam he'll try to crack it and you'll get a picture. If he's straight, you won't."

Bill liked the idea. "Maybe you got something there, Duke. I need some evidence. So far we haven't found the slug that killed Studsy, and we haven't found a gun."

Bill was in good humor when I left him. I promised to make him one of my Welsh rabbits and he promised to stop around and see Janet. I went to a drug store and called the house.

Janet sounded sleepy. She said, "Yes?"

"Darling, how would you like to go in the movies?"

"How would I— Say, who is this?"

I went red. "Who the devil do you think would be calling you 'darling'?"

"Oh. That's better. Now you sound natural. I thought you said something about going in the movies. Silly!"

I told her there was nothing silly about it. I gave her the address of the Hollywood Boulevard Movie School and told her to go there. She said she would after I'd agreed to finance it. She has money of her own, but she's funny about some things.

Back at the Belvedere again I asked myself a question. If I wanted to buy a picture frame in a hurry, I asked, where would I go? I got the answer and went there. It was a little hole-in-the-wall near the University. A doddery old guy came out of the back. He asked: "What can I do for you?"

I told him, "You have some beautiful frames here. It's hard to imagine anyone buying one of these things," and I picked up a gold imitation just like the one Fenwick Green's picture had been in "when they could have something like that sterling-silver one."

His face lighted up like a Christmas tree. "It's the price, mister. Only last night a young woman rushed in here.

She was a lady. I know because I serve lots of ladies. She had a hammered gold frame that looked like somebody had tried to pound a pebble through one side of it. I told her it could be repaired but it would take time. She said she was in a hurry. She picked up one like you got in your hand and said, 'How much?' and I said, 'A quarter!' so she bought it. She'd said she was in a hurry but she waited for change from three dimes. And she wouldn't leave the damaged frame—"

I said they weren't so bad at that. I bought one for myself, laying down the exact amount. He was staring at me when I left.

There was a call from Franny when I arrived at the office. Junior Stevens had taken it. Some day I'm going to give that kid a haircut. He kept pushing his hair back and saying that Franny had called from Camden Airport. Franny had been very excited. He had been so excited it was hard to understand him, what with the airplanes roaring around and everything—

"What in hell did he say?"

Junior swallowed. "Franny said to tell you that somebody named Green didn't take the plane for someplace. He said nobody saw Mr. Green after he went in the bathroom—"

I WAS plenty bothered when I hit Arch Street, but not too bothered to notice a cab pull out right after mine. "Turn down Sixth," I told my driver. We turned and the cab behind us turned. "Go up Market," I yelled. We swung right on red and headed for City Hall. At Reading Terminal, when a light stopped us, the other cab was two behind. "Swing up Thirteenth," I told my driver. When we reached the bus station I shoved a dollar bill in his face and jumped out.

Inside the station the starter was yelling the names of a lot of small Jersey towns and that the Atlantic City bus was leaving on Track One. I charged through. The bus had started and the

driver glared at me. I shook my head. I ran in front of him into Filbert Street. A lone cab was in the stand and I climbed aboard.

The bus had passed into Filbert just as my cab got under way. A guy burst from the doors of the bus terminal and hopped around in the middle of the street. I knew him. He was Dago Frank Nunally, one of the old Furman mob.

"Where to?" my driver asked, and when I told him Chestnut Hill he grinned. I guess five-dollar fares are getting to be scarce.

THE Knapp Mansion was immense but it looked seedy. There was a sizable *For Sale* sign on the lawn, with the name of some bank as trustee. I get around in society, but that's when I'm not working, so I went to the back door. I leaned on the button for quite a while until I tumbled that it was out of commission. After the third or fourth knock a little old lady came to the door.

She was no more than five feet high. She had white hair and nice quiet eyes and one of those black velvet chokers around her neck. She had a nice voice. She said: "Well, young man, what do you want?"

"I want to talk to your housemaid," I told her.

"Housemaid?" She backed up a little and gave me a peculiar look.

"Sure. The one who witnessed the jewel robbery," and I showed her my badge.

The old girl hesitated. "Oh, that one! Well, we— She was hired from an agency. You see, my grand-daughter gave a party to entertain some friends. The maid was in only for the night and the following morning."

I wondered if Bill Kurtz knew about this. I said: "Is that so?"

She fidgeted with the door handle. She seemed to want to talk and I smiled. She opened right up. "You see, my grand-daughter has had a chance to go on the stage. She wanted to impress Mr. Brown, the promoter, so we— Since the

bank failed and my son died, things haven't been so— We wanted to help her and we gave a party. A lot of stage people, actors and like that, attended. It was while the party was in progress that the maid came screaming downstairs about the robbery. It was really nothing, just a few trinkets, but Gwendolyn, my grand-daughter, thought we should call the police. And they made quite a fuss about it, too."

So all they had against Johnny Devlin was the say-so of a floating domestic who had turned up by herself the morning after he was booked in the Gerber killing.

I said: "That's because there have been a great many unsolved jewel robberies. The police are trying very hard to catch the criminals."

"It was exciting, seeing our names in the paper again after so many years. But it made Gwendolyn quite angry. It seems that the men at the school thought the publicity might hurt her career."

"The school? What school?"

"The Hollywood Boulevard School. It's—let me see, now—"

I didn't wait for her to remember.



FRANNY and I met in the lobby of the Belvedere Towers. I glared. "What's all this rumble-bumble about Fenwick Green getting flushed down the plumbing at Central Airport?"

"No kiddin', Duke. Honestagod, nobody seen him after he went one way to the can an' Johnny went th'other to the Boulevard."

"Who saw him last?"

"The Admiral. You know, the guy that sells tickets an' answers questions."

"Did Devlin's story hold together at the other places?"

"Like the Union, Duke."

Franny's information showed that only four new tenants had taken apartments at the Belvedere during the past three months. Most promising of these

was also the most recent, a Mr. Dalby who didn't seem to receive many visitors or spend much time at home. He had rented E-24, which would make it the next floor above Fenwick Green's.

I asked him if anybody'd heard any shots. He said nobody'd heard any shots. I told him that Green had an office downtown somewhere and for him to use his own judgment. He hit me for a ten-spot, got a five, and the way he grinned I'll bet he'd have settled for a deuce.

I went up to E in the self-service elevator and didn't make any more noise than necessary. Franny had somehow mesmerized the manager into producing a passkey and I used it. Inside was a little foyer, like at Fenwick Green's. Beyond was another door which was also closed. I started thinking up some cock-and-bull story to tell Mr. Dalby if he should be home, and I opened the door—not far, but far enough.

Old Fenwick Green was in shirt-sleeves and looking mighty sour, perched on a day bed. In front of him, playing cards at a table, were Dago Frank Nunnally and Benny-The-Barber Murano. They both wore shoulder-harnesses and the harnesses had guns in them. Old Green saw the door open and he saw me and he jumped up and yelled "Hey!" like I might be the Seventh Regiment Cavalry.

I slammed the door quick and jumped sideways and at about the same time a half-dozen slugs smacked the door and let daylight through. I pulled out my rod and gave them back a couple and then I ducked through the foyer into the hall.

That's an awful long hall to try to run down with somebody throwing slugs at you. Belvedere Towers might have been soundproofed but I wasn't. I let out a yell and squeezed myself against the wall. The door to E-24 yanked open and Benny-the-Barber stuck his kisser and his gat around the corner at the same time. A slug whistled past my ear and I let him have it. His face went back in

but his hand stayed on the door jamb and I liked the looks of the slow downward slide it started. The elevator door clanged and Mack Johnson and another harness bull charged out. Dago Frank put one slug through my hat and he'd have nailed me with the next one if Mack hadn't beat him to it. Quick and cool, police style. The door to the foyer was blocked open with a lot of bloody mess and a thin, scared, "For Heaven's sakes!" came out. I told Mack that it was Fenwick Green and for the harness bull to hold the tear-gas until we had a little talk.

DOWN at headquarters Fenwick Green told us his story. It seems he went into the can at Central Airport, just as Johnny Devlin said, and he got sick. He had a long technical word for it which Bill Kurtz copied down very carefully. Then, after he was sick he felt he needed some air. So he went outside, and after he'd wiped his glasses he felt better. He started walking over toward the hangars and a taxi came alongside of him. He claims somebody jumped out and said that Johnny had been badly hurt in a crash and was in West Jersey or Cooper Hospital—he couldn't remember which they said. So he climbed into the cab and the next thing he knew a guy jams a rod in his ribs and another takes off his glasses and puts adhesive tape on his eyes. He showed, all right, that he'd been peeled somewhat roughly around the temples.

"Did you know where you were?" was the first question Bill Kurtz asked him.

"Well, I, ah— No, not exactly. I thought the room was similar to my own, but I couldn't be sure."

"Did you see anybody besides Nunnally and Murano?"

"No. Not a soul. It was awful—"

"Did they ask you to do anything? To write anything or get in touch with anyone?"

Fenwick Green showed some resentment. "They told me to keep my mouth

shut. They seemed to want the combination to my office safe, but I told them they were foolish. There's nothing of value in it."

Bill Kurtz looked puzzled, and I didn't blame him. He growled: "Sure that's all they wanted?"

"Ah—yes. They seemed to be waiting for instructions of some kind. They were quite apprehensive. I'm sure, Lieutenant, that the men are mentally ill. I have no desire that they be punished. If I could just talk to them—"

"Nobody's gonna talk to them now."

"But I do not understand. Perhaps you don't know who I am—"

"I know you right enough. But they're dead."

The police surgeon had to go to work on the old boy with smelling salts then. Everything was in an uproar. Bill got me aside. He said: "This is the dizziest snatch I ever saw. They take the guy right back to his own apartment house. What do you make of it?"

"They might be awful dumb or they might be awful smart, but they're dead and we'll never know. Studs Gerber might have been trying to make contact when he was knocked off."

"Yeah. He might. But do you know, Duke, I got a hunch that Mary Devlin is telling a straight story."

I grinned at him. "Oh, so you're beginning to fall too, are you? Did you get any pictures?"

Bill stared at me. "Pictures? I'd forgotten I installed that damned thing! Let's take a run up there."

We rode in his car back to the Belvedere Towers. A harness bull was on the steps and a mob was milling around. We created a mild sensation. Somebody yelled: "Look! There's Duke Brian!" A reporter stuck a flashgun in my face. I can remember when I got a kick out of that sort of thing.

Bill told me the Devlins had been bailed and he'd left orders for the boys to stay away from the apartment. He said Mack Johnson just happened to be in the building checking leads, which

was lucky for me. Another five minutes and it would have been Mack's party, or my funeral.

As we entered the apartment, Bill said: "This outfit is supposed to be fool-proof. A selenium cell trips the shutter when the light-ray is broken. In other words, you could be living in the room and walking around, but you'd have to go to that safe to get your picture taken. It's pretty clever. . . . I hope it works."

The place looked about the same except that the trunks and bags had been removed. While Bill was walking through the rooms I had another chance to inspect Fenwick Green's picture. Where it was, on top of the radio, was just about the height from the floor that Studsy's bullet hole had been. That gave me an idea and I looked at the plaster behind the radio. There was a little dent, like the corner of the picture might have hit it. I began to ask myself what kind of a bullet would have gone clean through Studsy, dented a gold frame and knocked it against the plaster.

From down the hall Bill's voice hollered: "This is some apartment! Mrs. Devlin even had her own room!"

Mrs. Devlin, my eye, I told myself. "What about the picture?" I called.

Bill was excited when he came back. "We got one," he yelled. "It worked! As soon as I get to a darkroom, we'll start to untangle this thing."

I said: "Wouldn't I laugh if you had one of your flat-foot understudies on super-pan'?"

I'D TOLD Janet to meet me for lunch at Spider Kelly's, and Franny showed up too. I stared at Janet. She didn't look natural to me, the way she walked and held her head. And there was cosmetic, a lot of it, around her eyes.

"I'm to have a screen test," she said importantly.

"A what?"

"A screen test. Ya-as, they seem to think that I'm the new type they need. Mr. Brown said—"

"When's this test gonna be, Garbo?"

"Don't be rude, darling. And don't get any cute ideas. It's all perfectly proper. The man is to come to Papa's tomorrow afternoon. He's to make one picture of me coming down the staircase, another in the library—"

"You mean some guy is going to make movies of you in your father's house?"

"Of course, dear. Don't shout. I can hear perfectly. They wanted a background I'm familiar with, so as to give me confidence. They—"

"What's the matter with my house?" I yelled but she went on talking.

"You don't have to be such a horrid grouch. There are oodles of girls I know that have been tested and failed. Peg Paterson, Anne—"

Something clicked in my mind. Gwendolyn Knapp— What a scheme to case layouts! They'd have pictures of the interiors of the best houses. Stairs, furniture, obstacles, entrances, exits—

I ignored Janet. I said to Franny: "What did you get at Green's office?"

"They was nobody home. So I used the old sleight o' hand. Just a office, that's all. There was nothin' in the safe. This guy Green must be a archyteck. His files was full o' house plans—"

I went out of Spider Kelly's like I had been given a hot-foot. I suppose I had been rude to Janet, and Franny probably would have been stuck with the check. She came after me yelling at the top of her lungs, with Franny behind her. I hopped a cab. It's a funny thing how an otherwise intelligent woman can nurse in her heart the idea of out-Crawfording Crawford.



BILL KURTZ' office was jammed. Mack Johnson, Johnny Devlin and his wife, some guy that looked like a lawyer, Fenwick Green, a guy that had on plus-fours and looked like a cartoonist's idea of a movie director. When Janet and Franny burst in the place was a bedlam.

"Shut up!" Bill Kurtz yelled, and everybody shut up but me.

I said: "You've had twenty-three robberies of homes of socialites in the past six months. None of 'em solved. The closest you came to a solution was finding Icebox Sam Furman after the watchman shot him. Right?"

Bill yelled: "What're you trying to do, embarrass me? Shut up!"

I didn't. I said: "Furman was one of the slickest boxmen in the country, and when he got his, the gang had to have a new one. Right?"

Bill growled something. I didn't look at him. I was looking at Johnny Devlin and he was looking at me. I said: "One thing about those jobs, they were all perfectly cased. There was a brain running the show. Now the brain needed a new boxman so he tried to frame Johnny Devlin. He planted a perjured identification in a phony robbery at the Knapp's Chestnut Hill place. He sent Studsy Gerber with it to make Johnny Devlin come to terms."

Bill started to listen. Somebody had come in and handed him a photograph that was still wet. He didn't look at it. He probably knew what it was.

I said: "In the meantime, Fenwick Green gets himself snatched. Now, there are two ways of looking at this thing. Either Dago Frank was running the show and he snatched Green to force Johnny back into crime, or Fenwick Green was running the show and he had himself snatched—"

Fenwick Green began to holler bloody murder. Mack Johnson, who is by no means dumb, slipped over to me and whispered: "What's the combo to Green's wall safe?" I told him and he slipped out of the room.

Green had quieted down a bit and I went on. "Or Green got himself snatched to get himself out of the way. If you look at it from that angle, Green had given Johnny a job figuring that he could use him sooner or later. But he hadn't figured on Mary. Mary was keeping Johnny straight and she thought

Fenwick Green was God because he had given them jobs. And because Green knew Mary would go to the cops, or to the chair if necessary, to keep Johnny straight, he had to keep himself out of the picture, because it's one thing to frame a two-time loser, and it's another thing to have to deal with his daughter."

Fenwick Green started to holler that he was being framed, that he had been snatched.

Bill Kurtz stuck the photo in his face. He snapped: "If you were snatched, how come you had time out to get your picture taken, Mr. Green?"

Fenwick Green moaned and went into a faint again. Mack Johnson came back in. He had a hungry look in his eyes. He put his hand in the back pocket where he doesn't keep his handkerchief and looked at Fenwick Green. He said to Bill Kurtz: "Davidowsky just opened this guy's wall safe. He found some of the ice from the Sarah Newell job, and a few of the rubies from the Paterson job."

Bill yelled at Green: "Why'd you kill Studsy Gerber?"

Fenwick Green said he was willing to admit he'd run the movie school to case robberies but he never killed anybody.

Bill Kurtz isn't so dumb. I knew he knew that Fenwick Green hadn't bumped Studsy. And I knew he knew he'd have a hell of a job pinning it on Mary without the gun or the bullet that did the job. And he knew no jury in America would convict a brave kid for killing a rat to keep her father straight. Maybe some day I'll tell him about the picture I got while he was looking at his selenium camera. The picture of a scared girl dragging an old army rifle out of a trunk. A rifle like her dad had lugged around France while she was hanging onto her mother's skirts. Bill Kurtz wouldn't have known about the rifle. It was probably in the mud at the bottom of the Schuylkill River, not far from a bullet-riddled frame that really fit Fenwick Green. No. Bill wouldn't have known about that. Or would he?

BEHIND THE



BLACK MASK



WE HAD hoped to reproduce a photograph of Flashgun Casey—in the flesh, believe it or not—on this page. Our sprightly contemporary, LIFE, a couple of months ago, ran at the head of its cameramen's credit column a pen-and-ink caricature of News Photographer Stedman Jones whose nickname among his confrères is Flash Gun (LIFE'S own spelling) Casey, "because of his resemblance to the famous fiction character."

BLACK MASK promptly called LIFE to ask if they had in their files a snapshot of Casey-Jones (pun intended) which we could turn over to Pete Kuhloff, our black-and-white illustrator, to use for a model—Jones is somewhere in Europe where all news-minded cameramen would like to be these days—and to reproduce *Behind the Black Mask* so you Casey and Coxe fans can see what he really looks like. The young lady to whom we talked at LIFE reported that she had dug up a snap of "Sted" Jones but that the "man who could decide whether it could be released for such purposes" was out to lunch. If he comes

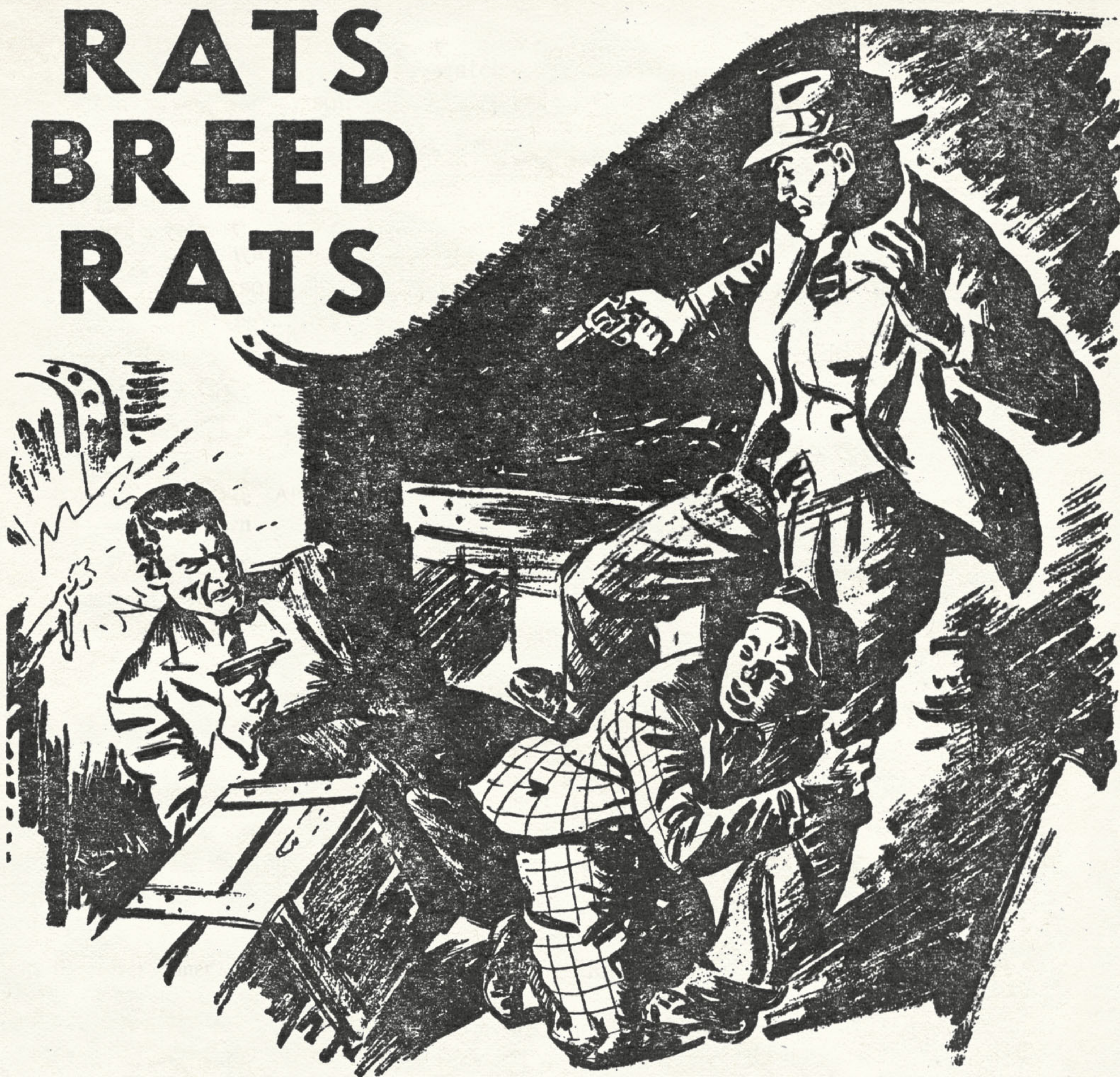
back before this issue goes to press and says O.K. maybe we can still squeeze it in. Otherwise we'll try to run it at some future time for there'll be more Casey yarns coming along from time to time and the Flash's name won't grow dim no matter how long it takes to obtain a likeness of Jones.

THE first issue of the new BLACK MASK under the Fictioneers imprint went on sale April 19th—at least that was the date it was scheduled to hit the stands! Our first fan letter—dated the 17th—arrived at our desk the morning of the 18th and said, in part—

I have noticed that BLACK MASK has been taken over by your company. I bought the June issue yesterday and will say that it does not seem to have been hurt by the change. The new price of 15c is welcome, too. . . .

A lightning critique indeed, seeming to indicate that its author managed to procure an issue a couple of days ahead of time and must have got right at it. We hope all our readers are as avid "firsters" and that such words of confidence and encouragement will continue to come to us from time to time.

RATS BREED RATS



Hango's half-pint kid came tearing in.

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

In which a tough cop and a sentimental newshound gamble against death with the soul of a killer's kid for table-stakes.

NOBODY knew better than Detective Sergeant Bill Teed himself how he got all the breaks in the capture of Benny Hango. In the first place he just happened to be watching a group of boys pitch pennies in front of the Alpha Café that night. He was interested in the sport because down in the detectives' room at headquarters he was no mean penny-pitcher himself. He was watching these

kids when Pop Walker appeared at the screen door of the Alpha and said to Bill Teed: "You *are* pretty smart, aren't you?"

Teed couldn't answer that question himself, so he followed Pop Walker back into the café. Pop had a big Alpha Café napkin tucked under the latest acquisition in his collection of chins, and the creases at the corners of his mouth held evidence of dinner. It was said that Pop Walker was digging his grave with his teeth, which was not strictly

true because the teeth he used were false. Pop Walker asked Bill to have a cup of coffee with him.

This Pop Walker had been police reporter on the *Courier* for twenty-odd years and he sometimes scooped the police as well as his rivals. Also, he was no one to hand out undeserved orchids. He had implied that Teed was smart at a time when Teed was feeling anything else but. Teed had been looking for and not finding this Benny Hango who was wanted for the murder of a teller in a bank stick-up that had occurred two days before. That Pop Walker had said Bill was smart when Bill didn't know what he had done that was smart, was no better than being utterly dumb.

"Why," Pop said, adding sugar to his coffee until heaven help the dishwasher who had to clean out his cup, "you're smart to be watching Benny Hango's son."

The fact that Benny Hango had a son had either escaped the police record or was considered of no importance to detectives. Teed had never heard of Benny Hango's son. All he had to go on was that the D. A. had a witness who would identify Benny Hango as one of the stick-up men and the murderer of the bank teller. But Pop Walker knew about Hango's kid. In fact, he said, the kid was out in front now pitching pennies.

LOOKING out the café window, anybody who had ever seen Benny Hango could pick out his kid from the others. The kid was maybe fifteen years old, but looked older in the face and younger in the body. He was slope-shouldered, skinny, undersize. He had his dad's thin, angular nose, his dad's glossy black hair, his dad's close-set dark eyes. His mouth, though, was a finer thing than his dad's.

Teed turned from the window thoughtfully pulling his chin, which was a good deal longer than all of Pop's facial terrace. "Pop, why in the deep dark hell have you been keeping this under your toupee?" He thought, damn

it, if this was anybody else but Pop you could call it withholding material evidence.

Pop's short brow got worried with wrinkles. "Well," he said slowly, "I like kids. I been watching this kid of Benny Hango's for several hours. What I intended to do was see if he'd lead me to Benny's hangout, and then I could report the hangout to the police and just leave the kid out of it. You know how I've always wished I had a son."

"Yeah," Bill admitted. He got up to go to the door, but Pop got hold of his coat-tail. "You wait," Pop said. His face was wrinkled up as though he had been eating green apples. "There's no use pulling up a weed if another grows right up in its place. Isn't that true?"

"Yeah, but—"

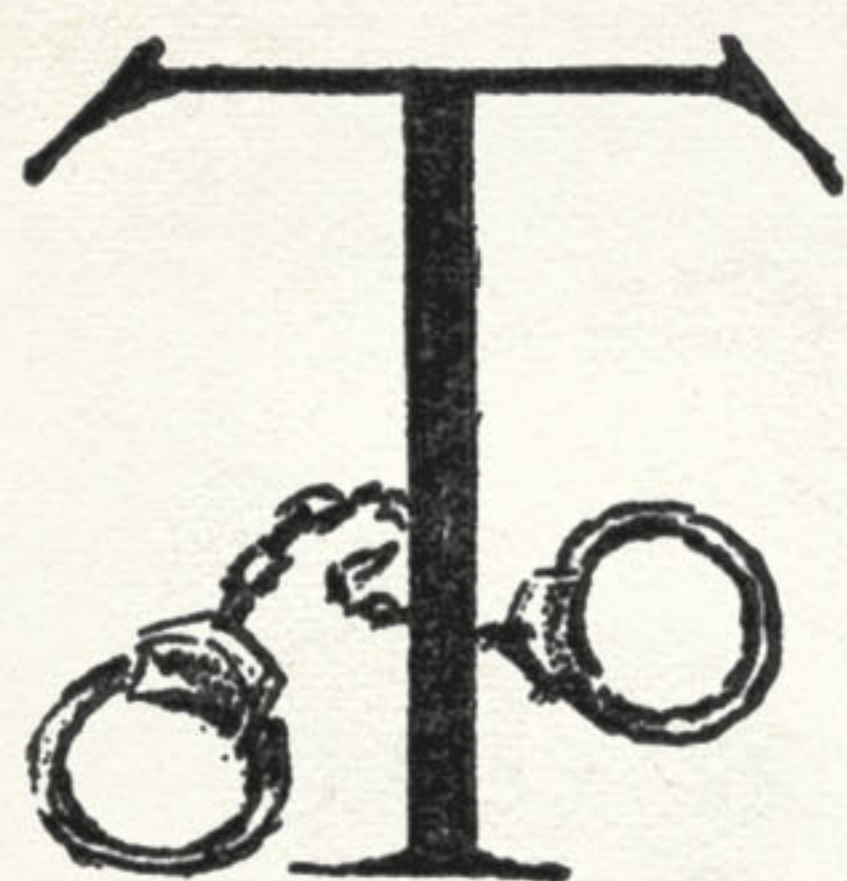
"There's good in that kid, Bill. But if he gets in dutch with the cops right about now, he'll grow up hating cops. And that's a good way to get off on the wrong foot—hating cops."

"I'll buy the kid a lolly-pop," Bill said.

Pop said: "You just think of Hango's kid as though he were your own. You give him a break and keep him out of it entirely. That kid ought to have his chance. You're going to fry his old man for murder, don't forget, and if you approach the kid with your usual night-stick diplomacy the kid will get the impression that his dad is a martyr."

Bill Teed spread his hands. "O. K. I said I'll go easy on the kid. I'll even hand him over to you and you can cuddle him to your bosom if you want to. Only I got to get Benny Hango or my own kids will be provided for by a relief ticket."

He jerked out of Pop's grasp and went out to look the kids over. The more he saw of Benny Hango's kid the more he saw of Benny Hango. The kid was just a miniature of his old man. At the penny-pitching, Hango's kid had been winning steadily, so there was no complaint from the other boys when he pulled out of the game.



TEED followed the kid, watched him visit a serve-self grocery where he bought bread and milk with pennies he had won and stole some cookies. From

there, the kid went to the basement entrance of a deserted building that walled in one end of a parking-lot. Teed followed along and eventually located the kid and Benny Hango in the furnace-room of the building, and through the door of the fuel cellar, where Teed was hiding, he could hear the two talking.

Teed approached the door. What he heard gave him the idea that Hango was wounded. And that was his second break.

"Lemme take your rod and get a doc for you," the kid was saying. His voice was just like his dad's except that it was an octave higher.

"I'm O. K.," Hango said. "You help me outta here tonight and I'll get some of the dough and blow. You been a damn good kid, Joey."

"But the bulls—"

"The hell with them," Hango said. "What did I do in the Peoria job? It's a sweet set-up, in Peoria. The joint is cased. We go in, clean out the cages. Coming out, what happens? Right in front of me is a cop. I give it to him in the belly."

At this point, Bill Teed pulled his revolver and shoved open the door. Benny Hango, dark, dried-up little stick of dynamite that he was, lay on a bed made of burlap sacks. His right trouser leg was slit and his leg was bandaged above the knee with rags. His gun was on an up-ended orange crate about three feet from him. Joey was on the other side of the orange crate and a little to the left. A candle was stuck in the regulator chain of the furnace, and that was the only light there was. The open bottle of milk was beside Benny, and he had a chunk of the bread in his hand.

Bill Teed couldn't be seen easily because he was at the edge of the circle of

candle-light. If it hadn't been for the kid, it would have been a cinch. "Put up your hands, Benny," he said. "Try anything and you'll get what the Peoria cop got. You're under arrest." He advanced to the edge of the circle of light and a little beyond.

Hango's kid said: "A dirty copper!" He looked from Teed to his dad as though he expected Hango to make a super-move. Benny looked at his gun and evidently couldn't decide on a super-move. Hango's kid couldn't quite understand this. He repeated, tossing in a few more adjectives, that here was a dirty copper.

Benny Hango sat up slowly and raised his hands. His hard eyes flickered into the candle-light. And then Benny's kid pulled the surprise. He came up from a squat to a standing position and Bill thought the kid was going to try and reach Hango's gun. Bill took a quick step forward and got the kid by the hair. Joey Hango simply stuck out his foot and pushed the orange crate over toward his dad.

The gun went with the orange crate, and Benny took it out of midair as it fell. He brought the gun around toward Bill Teed. Bill Teed was a hard man to gun because he was thin and fast and kept his nerves in cold storage. Besides, he had a wide edge on Hango. Bill got in the first and last shot and it took Hango through the right arm. Hango dropped his gun, and his face crimped with pain.

Bill Teed came down with both knees into Hango's middle, drove the killer's breath out of him. He got out handcuffs. Hango's half-pint kid came tearing in, his thin arms going like windmills, his lips naming the cop. Bill flicked the kid a glance, saw the wild, berserk gleam in his eyes. He warned, "Keep out, kid," then grunted explosively as the kid's dad landed a short blow to his middle.

Bill Teed slapped his gun barrel to the side of Hango's head to stun him while he got the handcuffs on. Joey shrilled: "You leave my old man alone!"

He beat both fists into the small of Teed's back. Teed brought his right elbow back sharply and the point of it cracked to the kid's chin. The kid went flat, and the crack of his head against the floor had more to do with keeping him quiet than the blow. Bill brought the dazed Hango's wrists together and clamped the cuffs in place.

Teed stood up, turned around, looked at Joey. He said: "It's tough, kid." Joey didn't say anything. His dark eyes were glassy, his teeth ground together. The kid was dazed but he was coming out of it.

Teed heard the popping of coal particles under foot, looked up, saw Pop Walker coming through the door. "I called headquarters," he said, "as soon as I saw where you were going. There'll be a wagon for Hango. I'll take the kid with me."

Joey Hango sat up. He said shrilly: "I'm going with my old man."

Teed shook his head. "You won't like it there. We're giving you a break. Haven't you got enough sense to take it?" He went over to Benny Hango, grabbed him by the handcuffs. "You get up on your feet, Benny. If you were planning to lam out of here tonight I guess you can walk as far as the police car."

Hango got to his feet. Sweat stood out on his thin, ugly face. He took one step with Teed and stopped. He hitched himself around so he could divide what he was going to give out between Teed and Pop Walker. "Get this," he said. "That's my kid. No damn thing you can do or say can take him away from me. If I take the squat for this, you two mugs are gonna hear from my kid, see?"

Joey Hango was hit hard, seeing his old man taken by a single cop. He didn't seem to notice the affectionate arm Pop Walker threw over his shoulder. He kept his head down and the lower lip of his fine mouth was trembling.

Teed gave Benny a jerk. He said: "I heard that kind of mouthy fireworks

from tougher mugs than you. But when you face the chair—"

Benny Hango cut through with a laugh. "You know what I'll do if it comes to that? Spit inna warden's eye. Let's go. So long, kid."

As Teed and the killer moved off toward the door, Joey tried to break away from Pop Walker. His voice, broken, sobbing, cried out: "I wanna go with my old man!" His puny fists lashed out at Pop Walker's moon of a face up there just beyond reach. Walker hung on to the kid.



ENNY HANGO, down at headquarters proved he was tough stuff. He couldn't be broken. The cops had an air-tight case against him for murder, but they couldn't get any information out of him as to whom he had been with on the bank job. Benny Hango might have been a rat, he had a rat's animal courage now that he was cornered.

All during the trial, Benny Hango's son lived at Pop Walker's apartment. Teed couldn't understand that at first, unless Joey Hango was just getting a big kick out of sleeping in a bed and getting his meals regularly and not having to steal the money he spent. Pop Walker was gone on the kid. He gave Joey money and told him to go down and buy himself a new suit. Bill Teed just shook his head and told Pop he had said good-bye to fifty bucks and the kid, too. But the kid came back, dolled up in the damndest pool-room regalia Bill Teed had ever seen. The kid even had a derby hat.

Joey Hango would sit around the apartment all day while Pop Walker was covering Hango's trial. He didn't seem to be interested in what happened to his old man.

One day when Pop Walker and Teed were eating at the same lunch counter, Pop told Bill that he had put Joey on the honor system. The kid would do

whatever he thought he wanted to do and could go anywhere, only he had to tell Pop about it when he got back. As he told this, Pop's round face became radiant. He was going to make something of the kid, he said.

"Yes," Pop said, chuckling, "the little devil got mixed up in a pool game at Rudy's the other night. He lost six bits. He came home and told me about that. And when—"

"Did he tell you that he played at Rudy's with a member of the Jigger Cullem mob, a gunman named Spig Morrava?" Bill asked.

The radiance of Pop's face dimmed a little. "Not Joey," he said. "Somebody else was. Morrava was there, but Joey didn't have anything to do with him. He told me."

Bill looked at Pop. He forced a laugh. "I was just kidding." But he wasn't kidding. He had seen Joey with Spig Morrava quite frequently. He had seen Joey give Morrava money—money that Joey got from Pop Walker. The way Bill figured it, Benny Hango had been working with the Cullem mob on that bank job. Jigger Cullem and his boys were just about broke, Bill thought, for they were unable to spend the hot loot they had taken from the bank. They were picking up money for food where they could find it, waiting for their loot to cool off.

Bill figured that was why Morrava was patronizing the Hango kid—because the pocket money that Pop furnished Joey could be used toward buying the Cullem mob food and drink. But Bill couldn't tell that to Pop Walker just then. Pop would have taken it too hard.

The trial of Benny Hango came out the only way that it could and the date for his death in the chair was set. Benny didn't take his sentence lying down but tried to climb the judge's bench and tell everybody off. You couldn't tell, though, whether this was defiance or a sort of yellow-livered hysteria.

You could see Pop Walker's hand in the stuff the *Courier* printed about the

trial. Pop was trying to make things easier for Joey Hango. Joey didn't seem to care one way or another. He continued to live off Pop and pal around with Spig Morrava.

"What do you intend to do with the kid?" Teed asked Pop.

"Well, as soon as all the publicity has died down and there's no chance of Joey being recognized as Benny's son I'm going to send him to a military school. I'll make a man of him."

Bill thought: "Maybe you are if Morrava and Jigger Cullem don't make something else out of him first."

Then there was that night when Joey Hango tried to break into a grocery store with a key somebody had given him. Bill had been following the kid and collared him before Joey got the door open. Somebody was covering for the kid—somebody in a car up the alley. That somebody fired a shot that didn't do any damage and then took it on the lam, leaving the kid with Teed. Bill Teed took the kid straight to Pop Walker and told Pop the story as quickly and as painlessly as possible.



WHEN Teed had finished, Pop got up slowly and went over to where the kid was sitting. He put both hands on the kid's shoulders and asked him if all this was true. Pop's eyes were shiny.

Joey Hango knocked Pop's hands down. His mouth sneered, and then it was very much like his dad's mouth. "Listen, fats, I been sitting around here playing you for a sucker because I like what you hand out. I like having a bed an' a place to eat. Easy pickings on the money, too, and I could help some friends a mine. You and that damn dirty copper sent my old man up. And if my old man fries—"

Teed said to Pop: "What this kid needs he's got waiting for him. I mean a paid-up tuition in the reform school."

"Shut up, Bill," Pop said. He went over to the kid, got him by the shoulders, shoved him across to the bedroom. He pushed the kid through the door, pulled the door shut, and locked it. He turned, looking deflated.

Bill said: "I'm sorry, Pop. But I think one reason the kid has been hanging around is that he's got some nutty idea he can get square with you and me for what we did to his dad."

"The kid has guts enough to try it," Pop said. "That's what makes it tough. There's stuff in the kid, good stuff."

"It's nothing more than you can expect, for him to turn out like this," Bill said. "Rats breed rats. You'd save a lot of grief for yourself if you'd just let me take him down to headquarters on the charge of trying to break into that grocery. That will at least get him away from the Jigger Cullem outfit. He'll learn fast from Jigger. The Cullem mob must have been the gang that Benny Hango was working with, but we can't prove it. We might be saving the kid from a murder rap later on."

Pop pounded one fat fist into the palm of its mate. "If I only knew, Bill. If we could only see into the future and see how Benny Hango is going to face the chair. I guess you know that Benny has been asking to see his son."

Bill Teed nodded. "And maybe that hasn't had me on a spot down at headquarters. I knew you wouldn't want the kid to see his dad, so I've been pretending I didn't know anything about Joey. You know, Pop, this personal stuff between you and me is O. K., but I think it's gone far enough. I better take the kid down to headquarters before something turns up that makes me get it in the neck from the chief. I got a family, you know."

Bill started for the bedroom door, but Pop caught his arm. Pop's face was pale, his eyes moist. "Don't do that, Bill." His voice was flat. All the appeal was in his eyes. "It's the last impression the kid gets of his old man that's going to count. If Benny Hango gets hold of

that kid long enough to talk to him, he'll ruin the kid. And if Benny turns up a hero in the electric chair, that'll finish the kid, too. But the reason Benny wants to talk to the kid is—well, there's a certain tragic sense of life in all men, an aching desire to be sure of some sort of immortality. And Benny hates cops and always has. It's almost a creed with him. His last desperate effort to grasp that immortality will be an attempt to drive that same creed home to the kid. That way, Benny will live again in his kid, see? We can't have that."

Bill said: "I'm not thinking of the kid. I'm thinking you're making an ass of yourself. Rats breed rats." He jerked away from Pop and went to the bedroom door. When he got the door open he found the room empty, the window open, the curtains breezing out over the fire-escape. He turned to Pop, his thin face screwed into a knot. "I'm a hell of a cop," he said. "The kid blew while we were talking all that stuff about immortality."



WEEK later Bill Teed and Pop Walker were compelled to witness the death of Benny Hango in the electric chair. Teed was among the official witnesses and Walker represented the local press. Benny lived up to all his promises, and the only reason he didn't spit in the warden's eye was that his spitting was not accurate enough. He did not die yellow.

The following morning, Bill and Pop returned from the up-state pen. Pop had no comments to make. He simply went off to his news office.

About noon, Teed was bending over the cigar counter at Rudy's poolroom, talking to Rudy, when somebody who was buying cigarettes shoved up against him. Teed looked around and saw that it was Joey Hango. Joey's lips sneered at the dick and that made his face a sort of living death mask of Benny Hango's

face. It startled Teed more than a little.

Joey bought cigarettes and shoved a hundred-dollar bill across the counter to Rudy. Rudy ran a dice game somewhere in his establishment, it was rumored, so Teed was not surprised when Rudy changed the C-note. Bill made no effort to stall Joey as the little punk swaggered out of the place. But he did insist on looking at the bill the kid had passed. One look at the numbers and he knew the bill was hot. It was part of the loot from the bank stick-up. Teed took the C-note and gave Rudy a receipt for it.

Bill noticed, when he put the note in his pocket, that there were gray grease stains on it and he meant to have a man in the police lab look at these stains before he went much further. But from Rudy's he drove to a drug store which was across the street from the ratty three-story walk-up where the Cullem mob hung out. He got there in time to see Joey Hango enter the Cullem place.

Teed used the phone booth at the drug store and called headquarters. He asked for a man to be sent around to the drug store at once. Then he called Pop Walker at the *Courier* and told him that he had found the Hango kid passing hot money and that he thought now was the time for a showdown. He hung up without telling Pop where he was. Teed didn't know but what this was a trick on the kid's part to get him into some sort of trap in which the Cullem mob was to serve as jaws. If that was what it was, he didn't want Pop or anybody else walking into the trap with him.

When the man came from headquarters, Teed gave him the C-note and told him to get a report on the grease spots on the bill and call him at the drug store. When the man started back to headquarters, Teed stood around in the drug store, watching the place across the street. He was there long enough to see Jigger Cullem go in about forty minutes later. Jigger was a crazy-looking hood, what with his broken nose on which sat large horn-rimmed glasses, and the blond

baby fuzz that grew on his head. He didn't look tough, but then neither does a black widow spider.

The report Teed got from headquarters was that the grease stains were a mixture of certain animal and vegetable fatty substances mixed with salts of magnesium and calcium. Teed knew that a mixture like that comes from the contact of soap and hard water. It gave him an idea.

As soon as he had that report, Teed went out of the drug store and there he met Pop Walker. Pop said: "You thought you'd put over a fast one, did you? I simply went over to headquarters and found out you were here waiting for a call. Where's Joey?"

Teed nodded at the building across the street. "Over there with his cute little pal, Jigger Cullem and maybe Spig Morrava and Mike Brandon. I'm going over there alone."

"If Joey's up there, I'm going with you," Pop insisted.

Teed shrugged. "I'm not going to mess up this sidewalk with you all over it. Let's go across the street."

The Cullem flat was on the top floor of the walk-up, and Teed's long legs took him up the first flight of steps quickly. He waited for Pop to join him. He said: "Pop, you're not barging into a mess like this with me."

"Like hell I'm not," Pop said.

"I'm sorry," Teed apologized, and then hit Pop on the point of his most prominent chin. Pop was out on his feet and collapsed into Teed's arms. Teed let him down easy and then went on up to Cullem's place.



HE door was opened by Jigger Cullem himself. Jigger's eyes, as he regarded Teed, looked like glass behind glass. In answer to Teed's question he said he didn't mind if Teed came in, though obviously he did. Teed went in and looked around the crummy little living-room

with its newspapers, whiskey bottles, playing cards, and cigarette butts lying around. The Hango kid was standing over near the window, a smoking cigarette in his fingers. Joey's fingers weren't steady.

"You have a warrant?" Jigger asked in his monotone.

Teed pulled his revolver. "This is it." He stepped up close to Jigger and relieved the four-eyed killer of his gun. He gun-drove Jigger over to where Joey stood and patted the kid's pockets. Joey wasn't armed.

"Let's go look at the bathroom," Bill said, thinking of the hard water and soap stains on that C-note. He prodded Jigger ahead of him into the bathroom, went over to the lavatory and tried to turn on the water. Opening the taps, no water came out. Cullem said if he wanted to wash he'd have to go to the kitchen.

Bill kicked under the lavatory with the toe of his shoe and discovered that the drain pipe was loose. He backed, motioned Jigger forward with his gun. "Tough on the plumbers' union, Jigger, but you'll have to take down that drain pipe. That's where the money is, isn't it?"

Jigger said, "What money?" and turned a little pale.

"The loot from the bank stick-up you and your pals pulled with Benny Hango."

Behind Bill, somebody said: "Drop the rod, dick."

Teed turned without dropping his gun. In the bathroom door was Spig Morava and red-haired Mike Brandon. Teed knew no matter how good a shot he was he couldn't gun both of those men before one of them gunned him. So he dropped his gun.

"The dick is in the know, Spig," Jigger said.

Morrava shrugged. "Just so he don't tell, we don't care."

"He won't tell," Mike Brandon said.

Joey Hango squeezed in between the two men in the doorway. His face was

white, like he might be sick any minute. Mike Brandon said to him: "You pick up the dick's gun, Joey, and then you and I will sort of square things for your old man by taking this guy for a ride, huh?"

"They'll frame you, Joey," Teed warned.

Joey stumbled forward and crouched to pick up Teed's gun. Jigger Cullem said: "And get my rod out of the dick's pocket, Joey."

Bill Teed looked down. He saw Joey's fingers close over the grips of the police gun and saw Joey's finger slide into the trigger guard. Bill knew that something that wasn't on the books was going to happen.



JOEY lifted the gun, spun around on one heel like a dervish. Still in a crouch, he fired. Spig Morrava looked like the most surprised man who ever lived—or died. His broad flat face went blank as he started sliding down the frame of the bathroom door, both hands clutched to his chest.

Mike Brandon's gun dipped a bit to take in Joey Hango. Bill Teed kicked Joey from behind, knocked him flat on the floor, and at the same time pulled Cullem's automatic from his pocket and gave Mike Brandon two shots—one through the leg and the other through the right arm. Going down, Mike Brandon tried to cross his gun to his left hand, but Joey came up from the floor to rush Mike and managed to get to the gun first.

At about this time, Jigger Cullem tried a flying tackle that took Teed from behind and thigh-high. Bill came down, squirmed over to put the gun on Jigger. Jigger released Bill's legs to try and get hold of the automatic Bill Teed was using.

Bill used the gun to slap a barrel blow to the side of Jigger's head.

Pop Walker broke into the Cullem

apartment about that time to see Joey Hango grinning and shaking hands with a grim and slightly puzzled Bill Teed. Joey was saying that he had planned this all the time. He had passed that hot note right under Bill's nose as a way of telling Bill where he could nail the bank stick-up boys without much trouble. Joey had found out where the money was hidden and had swiped one of the hot notes just to use as a signal to Bill. He wondered if that sort of made up for things and if Bill thought he'd make a good cop later on.

WHEN the police were cleaning up the Cullem place, Teed got Pop off in a corner and asked what he had done to make the Hango kid change overnight. Pop didn't know. He hadn't said anything that would have caused the sudden change. No, Joey must have made the right decision himself.

"Of course," Pop added, "this might

have had something to do with it." He picked up a sheet from the morning *Courier* that was on the table in the Cullem living-room. There was an item on the sheet, by-lined by Walker. It read—

HANGO BREAKS DOWN ON WAY TO CHAIR

GANGLAND'S LITTLE IRON MAN CRIES FOR MERCY AS LIFE OF CRIME DRAWS TO A CLOSE

Bill didn't read any farther. He just looked at Pop Walker and said: "You damned liar."

Pop said: "I felt that the last impression of his dad the kid got would determine what he decided to be. I knew a yellow streak down his idol would make the kid ashamed of his dad and of the kind of life his dad had represented."

"So you just painted the yellow streak on," Bill said.



Georges Surdez writes "—But a First Class Fighting Man," a first class fighting nov-
elette of the Foreign Legion, wherein a corporal young in years but old in the ways of a soldier has to gamble death in uniform against life in ease in mufti—and makes a soldier's choice.

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10,001 MOTIVES

A "Bishop"

By WYATT

CHAPTER ONE

The Face at the Window



THE Bishop was shooting craps in one of the upstairs gambling-rooms when the murder took place. I was standing beside him, holding his money, because the Bishop has a peg leg—he wears an artificial foot—and always carries a cane in his left hand. This leaves only his right hand free and he doesn't want to be bothered by anything but the dice.

He was in the middle of a hot winning streak. He'd shake the dice, keeping his hand palm down, balance back on his heel and his cane, look owlishly around at the other players and say: "Wouldn't it be terrible if I were to fling a seven?" And then he'd do it.

The Bishop is a short, heavy-bodied man of about sixty, with a head as round and bald and pink as a balloon. He has small, puckish features and no neck between his round head and his big shoulders. He looks more like an aging overgrown imp than like a newspaperman. Actually he's the political writer on the *South City Democrat*, and has been on that same paper for forty-two years, or twenty years longer than I've been living.

This was at the Red and Black Gam-

Everyone in South City knew about the first ten thousand reasons why Ralph McDonald should have been bumped off. It was the ten-thousand-and-first that came as a surprise—to all but the Bishop and Mrs. Good, that pair of none-such newshounds who knew what could happen when a honey-haired fire-ball of Southern charm got cued with a little reverse English.

FOR MURDER

Story

BLASSINGAME

bling Club, at a party given by one of the city commissioners. A party given by a city commissioner at a gambling club will sound strange only to persons who don't know South City. The government airport there was being enlarged and this was in celebration. The com-



The closet door swung open and the corpse walked out into the room.

missioner himself wasn't present (he was entertaining some of the older officers elsewhere) but he'd sent a few cops to sit outside and keep everybody away except the invited guests. There were newspapermen, young men from the Civic Clubs which had worked to bring the

new addition to the local air field, the young officers, their wives and dates.

That was the set-up for the murder. It was a neat, clever murder and it would have been a swell case to cover if the Bishop hadn't got interested in it.

At this particular moment the Bishop was looking for a ten. He'd been rolling for two minutes and he couldn't make the ten and he wouldn't fall off. That's when we heard the shot.

It sounded loud enough to be in the room with us, though it was actually a couple of doors down the hall. It startled everybody—except the Bishop. He's never been startled at anything. A kind of electric silence struck the room and everybody stood tense and listening.

The Bishop said to the dice: "Be ten, I got no more time to play." It was a ten and I scooped up the money.

Then the woman screamed. I have never heard a scream like it—one single yell that sounded as if it would split the vocal chords. A woman yelling in terror, and I mean terror. It came from down the hall where the shot had sounded.

I was the first person into the hall, running hard. The second door on the right was open and I knew that was where the yell must have come from and I went skidding over the sill. I almost banged into the girl who stood just inside the room. She was staring toward the window on the left. Her mouth was still open, though no more sound was coming out. Her eyes bulged a half-inch from their sockets and her face was so bloodless the rouge looked black against it. She didn't say anything, just kept staring at the window.



LOOKED. There wasn't anything but an open window with copper screening and the night dark beyond. Even after I went close to the window I didn't

see anything except the shingled roof of the porch—this was on the second

floor—and a big overhanging oak tree.

Other persons were rushing into the room now and I turned back to face them. That was when I saw the corpse. It lay face down near the wall on the other side of the room. There wasn't any doubting that it was a corpse, because the bullet had hit the man right at the base of the skull.

The man's face was half turned toward me. He was—or had been—Ralph McDonald, the president of the Junior Chamber of Commerce and one of South City's richest young men.

There were four or five persons in the room now. One of them was the Bishop. It's surprising how fast he can move when he wants to. He was closing the door after him, locking it to keep the crowd out, and muttering: "Why the hell couldn't they have shot him two hours ago? Damn *Journal*'ll get the break now. Ai God! These dumb murderers."

The girl said, as if she'd been trying to say it for hours: "The face—there at the window! I saw it!"

The Bishop pegged over and looked out. "Nobody shot him through this window. No hole in the screen. Anyhow, looks like he was shot from behind, from about the hall door."

"There's a window down at the end of the hall," I said, "which lets out onto this same porch roof."

The Bishop was pushing and heaving and he finally got the screen up. Behind us everybody else in the room was asking the girl what had happened and she was just sobbing and saying now and then: "The face. . . . It was—terrible!"

The Bishop said: "Crawl out there, Eddie, and see what the hell she's squawking about. And see if the window at the end of the hall is open."

"I'm not going out there. The guy may still be hanging around. He might pot me, too."

"Ai God!" the Bishop said. "How'm I going to know what's out there if you don't go look? Go on! Crawl out!"

"There'll be cops up here in a minute. Let them look. They're paid for it."

"Do I have to do it myself?"

"Oh all right," I said.

I don't know why I let the Bishop bully me into doing all the crazy things he thinks up.

I climbed out the window onto the roof of the porch. The Bishop said, "Look at the window at the end of the hall," and turned back into the room again.

It was one of these huge, rambling, old-fashioned Southern houses and this side porch stretched almost the full length of the building. The roof slanted sharply so I had to walk with one leg bent at the knee to keep my balance. I keep peering all around, but there wasn't anybody on the roof except me. I went down to the end, where the hall window was, and both the window and the screen were open.

Whoever shot Ralph McDonald had probably stood in the hallway, I figured. After that one shot they'd run to this window, crawled out, and had either dropped off the edge of the porch or had climbed into the big oak which overhung the roof and got down that way.

I was considering this when I heard a noise in the tree.

If I'd had time to think I would have pretended I didn't hear anything. I'd have climbed in through that open window and got the hell away from there. But there wasn't time to think. I heard the sound and I swung around and peered up into the tree.

A tiny speck of light from the window reflected off one of the leaves. I saw the leaf move. And in that tiny speck of light I saw a hand—a hand that was no bigger than a doll's hand, a thing no more than one or two inches long, but all covered with hair. Then a face appeared. It was about the size of a baseball, matted with hair, and with eyes that gleamed blood red.

The thing made a weird peeping cry and leaped straight out of the tree onto me.



THINK I yelled. The Bishop says it was either me or a cat in heat. He says it made the girl's shriek sound like Talullah Bankhead's whispering. I went half crazy trying to tear the thing loose from my shoulder and when I got it off my shoulder it got into my hair. It was clawing at me and cheeping. Then my feet skidded from under me and I went sailing off the edge of the roof. I came down with a bang, fortunately in a freshly spaded flower bed.

The thing which had been on my head jumped off. It ran through a rectangle of light from one of the first-floor windows, and I saw it was a monkey.

I sat there and felt a little sick and cursed myself and cursed the Bishop and cursed John Bollo. John Bollo is the man who owns the Red and Black Club, the place where all this was happening. He was nuts about animals. Besides the monkey there was a parrot, two dogs, and a tame 'coon around the place. I knew that, but I had forgotten it.

I was still sitting there cursing when John Bollo came out. He chuckled when I told him what had happened. Even a murder in his gambling house didn't dampen John Bollo's good humor. He was plump, with blond hair and a fixed, beaming smile. Even when he was watching somebody make a long run on the roulette wheel or the dice table he'd just stand and beam at them until he looked stupid.

"Will Mr. Atticus"—the Bishop's real name was Roscoe Atticus—"kid you!" he chuckled. "My! You should have heard the yell you let out!"

"I wish I had killed that lousy monkey of yours," I said. I was feeling ashamed of myself, and angry, and even if I had fallen in soft ground it had been a hell of a bump.

We went back into the building. The cops who had been stationed outside were there now and one of them had phoned for Lieutenant Browder, who is

Science versus Crime in South City. Browder'd said keep everybody out of the room where the murder took place until he arrived.

John Bollo and I talked to the Bishop. "It was nobody but Oscar, my monkey, that Miss Howell saw looking in the window," Bollo said, grinning that silly grin of his. "It jumped on Eddie's shoulder and frightened him."

"Ai God!" the Bishop said. "I thought you were being scalped."

He swayed back, propping himself on his stick and looking at me. "You didn't find the gun while you were out there?"

"I didn't find anything except that damn monkey."

"The gun wasn't in the room?" John Bollo asked.

"Nope," the Bishop said. He turned toward the gambler, pivoting on his peg leg and his stick. His small puckered features were cherubic and his bald head shone pink. "You musta been sorry to see McDonald get it—with him owing you so much money."

There was a fraction of a second's hesitation. Then Bollo chuckled. "You sure learn things in a hurry, Mr. Atticus."

"That's what they pay me for." The Bishop waved one thick hand at me. "Come on, Eddie. Let's go talk to the girl."

I followed him, saying: "She's all upset now. And it's two hours after our deadline. Why not wait until this afternoon?"

The Bishop didn't even pay attention to me. "Her name's Nancy Howell, old Wayne Howell's daughter, and she was supposed to marry this man, McDonald." He walked straight through the room with the bar, even though it had been a good half-hour since he had a drink. That meant the Bishop was excited. There was something here which had him more interested than any average murder should. He was thirty-five years past police reporting, and when he got interested in a case now there was plenty to it. I knew Ralph McDonald had

been a prominent young business man, but it would take more than just that to make the Bishop forget a drink.

We stopped before a door at the end of the hall. "You talk to her," the Bishop said. "The women always love to weep on your beautiful shoulder."

"Aw, Bishop. I—"

"Go on, handsome."

The one thing that really gets me is to be kidded about my face. A guy can't help his face. I'd spent four years on the college boxing team hoping to get a bent nose or a cauliflower ear, but I never did. I said: "Now damn it, Bishop—"

"Ai God! If I had your face and my inclinations—"



IT WAS a long room furnished as a lounge with red-leather upholstered chairs and sofas. Nancy Howell was half lying on one of the sofas and a couple of girls were hovering over her. She was reduced now to a sort of quiet sobbing.

I said: "Excuse me, Miss Howell, but I've found out what it was you saw at the window. It was John Bollo's little monkey, that's all. I thought you'd want to know."

She was staring up at me. For a few seconds she wasn't making any sound at all. She wasn't even breathing. She said finally: "A monkey?"

She tried a small smile at me, although her eyes were still wet with tears and her lips quivery. "That must have been it. But it was such a shock. It was so—so horrible."

"It must have been," I said.

One of the other girls said I was awfully brave to go outside and look, and the other girl said she knew I was Eddie Edison and I was a reporter for the *Democrat* and her name and phone number was. . . . I would have made a break for it then, but the Bishop was right there and I knew he wouldn't let

me scam. So I asked Miss Howell if she felt well enough to tell what had happened.

"I—don't know. Maybe I ought to talk about it." She made a queer little frightened movement and put her hand on my wrist. I sat down on the sofa by her. She was a pretty girl, about twenty-five but now she looked very young and feminine and hurt. Her hair was blond and her eyes were big and gray. "I—I'd just got here, and I was looking around for Ralph—"

The Bishop interrupted: "You'd just got here?"

She looked up at him and touched a handkerchief to her eyes. "Yes. I wasn't feeling well and I phoned Ralph at his office this afternoon that I wasn't coming. But after I'd slept a while I felt better, so I dressed and drove out and I looked around for him and—" Her hands tightened on my wrist. She turned her little face toward me then and I could see she was trying to keep back the tears.

"I'd just met Ralph in the hall and we stepped into that room a minute 'cause he wanted to ask how I felt, and. . . ." Her fingers dug into my wrist. "That's when it happened!"

"You didn't see anybody? Anything except that face at the window?"

"That's all. I—I must have been too shocked to move." She began to cry softly. "I still can't believe it."

It was then I remembered the ten thousand dollars. I asked if she knew whether or not Ralph McDonald had had the money with him.

"The ten thousand dollars the Civic Clubs collected to buy the land for the airport," I explained.

"I don't think so. He wouldn't be carrying it in his pocket, would he?"

Out in the hall the Bishop dragged me through the crowd and into a corner. "Why'd you think McDonald had that airport money?"

On a paper the size of the *Democrat* a reporter has a lot of slush to cover besides his regular beat, and I had to write up all the Civic Club meetings as

well as police stuff. In trying to bring the new addition to the government airfield to South City three of the clubs had collected enough money to buy the necessary land and donate it to the government. "Ben Steiner from the Rotary Club, Muddy Marshall from the Lions, and Ralph McDonald for the Junior Chamber were the treasurers," I told the Bishop. "At their meeting tonight all the money was turned over to McDonald. I was there when they gave it to him."

"What did he do with it?"

"He was to put it in his office safe until tomorrow when the banks open."

There was a gleam in the Bishop's eyes that I didn't like. "Ai God!" he said. "Come on!"

"Bishop, now listen. . . ."

He went over to the bar and had a drink and said he wanted a pint bottle of whiskey. Their whiskey was all in quarts and the Bishop made them pour a pint into a flat rum bottle they had. He stuck that into his pocket and started out. For thirty years the Bishop has drunk two pints of whiskey every night, and on special occasions such as this, he'll double his quota. Yet he never buys anything but pint bottles. He says they fit his hand better. And besides, he says, if he was to ever start buying his liquor by the quart he might develop into a drunkard.

CHAPTER TWO

10,000 Motives For Murder



RALPH McDONALD'S real-estate office was on the second floor of a building on Commerce Street. The office door was locked. I said: "I told you it would be locked, Bishop."

"We'll go outside and climb up the fire-escape and get in the window. That's a spring lock on the door. You can open it from the inside and let me in."

I said: "There's a law against that

sort of thing. People get shot for breaking into houses."

"Hurry up!" the Bishop said impatiently. "We ain't got all night."

"Damn it!" I said, and my voice was thinner than I meant for it to be. "I climbed out on that roof for you, and what happened? I almost broke my fool neck. Every time you bother with a murder case, something happens to me. Why don't you stick to politics?"

"I am sticking to politics," the Bishop said. "You just let me tend to my own business and I'll tend to yours. Now hurry."

"But if the window's locked?"

"Then kick it out."

"And have the cops up here by the time the glass hits the alley! You know what Lieutenant Browder'll do if he catches me breaking in here. Even if he didn't put me in jail for life I'd never get another spot of news out of him."

"You let me worry about that prude. This thing is bigger than he is. Now get!"

I don't know why I argue with him. The Bishop can always make me do his dirty work, somehow or other, and I know it. Besides, he had me excited now. I knew this was a first-rate murder story for South City though I still didn't see the political angle that had Bishop Atticus so interested. But he'd said he was sticking to politics, and he'd said this was bigger than Lieutenant Browder—and I knew the Bishop didn't lie about things of this kind. So I was excited.

But I was still scared.



IT WAS black-dark in the alley. I felt my way along, stumbling over a stray tin can and making a noise that sounded to me like the bombardment of Rotterdam. I wondered if the cop on the beat would shoot me before I had a chance to yell and tell him who I was. And then I thought about the man who'd murdered Ralph McDonald

and wondered if he could be close by. I remembered how very still and dead that one bullet had left Ralph. My stomach felt queasy and my hands were dripping sweat and I thought I heard something roaring down the alley toward me—then realized it was just the blood pounding in my ears.

I could barely see the fire-escape against the sky. I reached up and got ahold of it and started to climb. The iron was rusty and sharp against my hands. It made little squeaking noises. But nobody shot at me and I reached the landing without trouble. I rubbed my hands on my trousers and got ready to go to work on the window.

The window stood wide open.

"Well, I'll be damned!" I said. It was careless of a man to leave an open window on a fire-escape, especially with ten thousand dollars inside. But the weather was hot, and maybe the money hadn't been left here after all.

I listened, and there wasn't any sound. So I stuck one leg over the windowsill, and then my head. And that's when the blow landed.

I thought I'd been shot. I thought the top of my head was blown off. I could feel myself falling and it was like falling through a sky full of exploding rockets of red and green and white with me turning over and over and over between them.

I must have struck the man across the knees as I fell, though I don't remember it. I remember hitting the floor and then there was somebody on top of me who seemed to be having convulsions trying to get off. I started swinging wild, crazy blows. Something banged me in the eye. Then my left hand got tangled up in a man's hair and I held on. I could tell from his hair where his chin should be and I let him have about four, one after another. I fought as a middleweight in college and I've put on seven or eight pounds since then and I was using them all. When I let go his hair there was a slumping noise as the fellow went limp on the floor.



I GOT up and groped my way across the office and opened the hall door. I was panting and I felt sick. I didn't know if I was hurt badly or not.

"Hello," the Bishop said. "Some kind of disturbance in here?" He pushed past me. "Where's the light? I don't want to bruise myself stumbling around in the dark."

He switched on the light, closed the hall door, then turned around and looked at the man on the floor. He was a thin, wiry young guy with inky black hair and one of these dark, sensitive, intellectual faces. He was out cold.

"You know him?" the Bishop asked.

"It's Ben Steiner. He and Muddy Marshall and Ralph McDonald were the three men who had charge of the funds collected by the Civic Clubs until the money was all turned over to McDonald."

"Thought I'd seen him. Must be old Ben Steiner's son." The Bishop knew the father of everybody in South City under seventy years old.

He turned around slowly, pivoting as usual on his peg leg—sort of revolving around it. And halfway around he stopped. "Yep," he said. "There it is."

It was a safe and the door was wide open. There were a few scattered papers inside, but there was no ten thousand dollars.

"There's your motive," the Bishop said. "Ten thousand of 'em." He limped over to a watercooler in one corner and put two fingers of water in a paper cup. He added an equal amount of whiskey from the bottle he'd brought and gulped it down. Then he refilled the paper cup with water and limped back and poured it on Ben Steiner's face.

After a few moments Steiner got up. He brushed back his wet hair. His face was already beginning to swell and grow discolored. His eyes were hard and black, with no expression in them. I couldn't tell what he was thinking, but I

could tell he wasn't afraid. He wasn't any more afraid than the Bishop was.

The Bishop said: "Did you get the money?"

Steiner looked at him squarely. "No."

"Who did get it?"

"I don't know. How would I?"

"You came here looking for it."

"I came to see if it was here. I was at the Red and Black Club when Ralph McDonald was killed and I was afraid it was because of the money. So I came to see if it was here."

"Looks like you would have turned on the light so you could see better," the Bishop said.

Ben Steiner just looked straight at the Bishop without answering.

I said: "Maybe we ought to search him, Bishop?"

There was a change in Steiner's face then. I can't explain it exactly because it wasn't that much of a change—just a look in his eyes. Maybe he was getting afraid. Maybe he was making up his mind what he would do.

He said: "No, I'm not being searched. I don't have the money, but I'm not going to be searched."

"Hell," the Bishop said. "We're a couple of friends. We're better than the cops."

"No."

The Bishop shrugged and started limping across the room toward the telephone. If he phoned the cops, we'd be in as tough a spot as Steiner, but he might have done it regardless. God would have a hard time trying to guess what the Bishop'd do.

When he picked up the phone, Steiner said: "All right. Search me. My wallet's in my inside coat pocket."

There was thirty-two dollars in it. I put it back and reached in his right trouser pocket and found fifty-five cents. In his left trouser pocket was a key ring and a half-package of mints. He wore a white cotton suit, without a vest. He had a watch in the watch pocket, a handkerchief in the hip pocket. He had another handkerchief in the breast coat pocket

and in the left coat pocket was a half-package of cigarettes and two paper books of matches.

I stepped around on the other side of him and stuck my hand in his left coat pocket. This put me on the left side of him, and he had plenty of room for his right uppercut. I saw it coming, but it took me so completely by surprise I was still thinking about dodging when it landed. I stumbled backward, hit a chair, and went over on my fanny.



I SAT there and I could see but I couldn't get up. I saw Ben Steiner whirl and spring for the hall door. He snatched the door open and leaped through—and came down flat on his face in the hallway. The Bishop had tripped him with his walking stick.

But Steiner just hit and bounced. By the time I got to the hall he was down the stairs and gone. I went after him anyway. And halfway down the stair I stumbled. I didn't fall. I just kept going faster and faster and I couldn't stop. I managed to aim for the street door, though. It was open. As I went out somebody tried to come in and we both spilled like a ton of brick on the sidewalk.

When I sat up and could see again I was looking at Muddy Marshall, the third of the three Civic Club officials who had known the money was in Ralph McDonald's office safe. He was sitting in the gutter looking dazed and his nose was bleeding.

Behind me a voice said: "What happened? What's the trouble here?"

I looked around and it was Lieutenant Browder, the pride of the South City police department.

I knew Browder wasn't going to regard lightly the fact that I had broken into the office of a man who had just been murdered—an office out of which ten thousand dollars had been swiped. Browder never regards anything lightly.

"What happened?" he asked again.

I couldn't think of anything to say, so I said: "Hello. Hello, Lieutenant."

He said: "You're both drunk. What are you doing here?"

I didn't answer. Muddy Marshall wiped away the blood that was trickling from his nose and said: "I was just starting in the doorway when this man ran into me. I don't know—"

He recognized me for the first time, blinking at me and looking drunk. "Oh, it's you Edison. Why this violent and felonious assault?"

"I stumbled."

The Bishop called cheerfully from the stairway inside the building: "Come on in, Lieutenant. We're waiting for you."

Browder swung around and looked at the doorway for a moment. His face was dark with suspicion. Then he went through the door and up the stair and Muddy Marshall and I followed.

The Bishop was standing at the head of the stair. The hall behind him was semi-dark. The door to Ralph McDonald's real-estate office was closed and no light showed over the transom. The Bishop was balanced on his heels and cane, the forward thrust of his stomach helping to keep his equilibrium.

He said: "We knew you'd be right down, Lieutenant. So Eddie and I came on ahead. We've been waiting. We would have gone in and had a chair, but the door's locked."

It was too, thanks to that spring lock. Lieutenant Browder didn't have to use the fire-escape though. He had McDonald's keys.

CHAPTER THREE

The Social Cesspool



T'S always fun to watch the Bishop and Browder together. They don't exactly hate one another, but there's no love lost between them. On the other hand, each respects the other.

Browder is a rather handsome, middle-aged man. He's a show-off and he has a good sense of the dramatic and he loves publicity. He will keep a case running just as long as the public stays interested. He lets out information to the papers a little bit at a time, so the readers get the impression that Lieutenant Browder is constantly zooming from spot to spot gathering new facts backed by scientific proof. But he's no fool. He's had two trips to the F.B.I. training school and he really knows his stuff. He's a man on the way up and he takes himself with deadly seriousness and he's honest. He'd work up a vagrancy case against Mrs. Roosevelt if he believed her guilty.

The Bishop never admits to any interest in details. He stood back now looking bored and having a drink while Browder worked. And Browder's thorough. He must have wound up with every fingerprint in that office. He probably knew the Bishop and I had been there, but he was waiting until his prints were developed, waiting until he had proof before he did anything. He worked that way.

The only thing he asked was: "Where'd you get that black eye, Eddie? And that lump on your jaw?"

The Bishop said: "Ain't it pretty? On him a black eye has lavender edges. He can't help it, but he's beautiful."

I said I must have got the bruises when I stumbled into Marshall.

Marshall's nose was still leaking blood into the handkerchief he held.

"You caused me bodily injury and harm," he said. "Distress and duress. *Duress per minas*. Violence sufficient to inspire a person of ordinary firmness with fear of loss of life or limb. Maybe I ought to sue."

He was a young lawyer only three years out of law school and he was supposed to be good, but some persons said whiskey would surely get him. He had a heavily fleshed face with red-veined pads beneath the eyes. Of course, he didn't drink as much as the Bishop, but

then the Bishop was a rare alcoholic genius who drank, as he said, "just to keep his throat wet," and liquor rarely had any effect on him.

It was Marshall—he'd been at the Red and Black Club when McDonald was shot—who had told Browder about the ten thousand dollars. "The sinister circumstance," Marshall said, having a drink with the Bishop at the water cooler, "is that I knew the combination to this safe. Ralph had to leave town tomorrow on business and I was supposed to put this coin of the realm in the bank. Perfectly legal transaction, you know. Witnesses, *et cetera*. Signed voucher from bank. And now the damn money's gone. How can I put it in the bank?"

The Bishop seemed to be growing bored. He said good-night to Browder and Marshall and we left.

DRIVING back uptown I asked the Bishop where was the political angle in this case, the angle that had him so interested. "Ai God!" he said. "It's all around you. This is South City! This is the Cradle of the Confederacy and Richmond is just an upstart. There ain't another town in the world like this one."

He was off on one of his favorite topics now—the foibles and idiosyncrasies of South City society and politics, which are often one and the same thing. He always said this was the reason he had stayed with the *Democrat* for forty-two years, "and never a day without a laugh."

"But where does politics fit in here?" I asked.

"Where the hell did the murder take place?" the Bishop said. "In a gambling house. And the party was given by one of the city commissioners. Now there's hardly a prude in South City who'll object to a city commissioner giving a party in a gambling house—as long as it's not made into an open scandal. But let the party get spread in the papers, they'll kick out the commissioner.

There's always going to be gambling and gals in this town, because the town wants 'em. But the town wants 'em kept quiet. Why? Well, nobody can live comfortably without sin. And a lot of folks can't live comfortably with it, once they admit they're living with it. This is just South City's way of preserving the fairest flower of its youth untarnished—and satisfied."

"But the murder's already committed," I said. "It *has* to go in the paper."

"Sure. But everybody connected with this thing comes from old, prominent families. If it's solved quick, finished, folks will hush it up. They won't talk about it, except to their friends, and nobody's feelings will be hurt by thinking they've got corrupt city commissioners. But let it drag on for days, with that prude Browder feeding out facts like gasoline on a fire, and Hank Murray will get himself elected by it."

"What kind of guy is Murray?"

The Bishop had a drink straight, which is rare, and spat out the window, which is rarer. "A self-respecting corn cob wouldn't wipe itself on Hank Murray. He wouldn't clean up this town—but he would make sure the graft went in his own pocket."

"Where does it go now?"

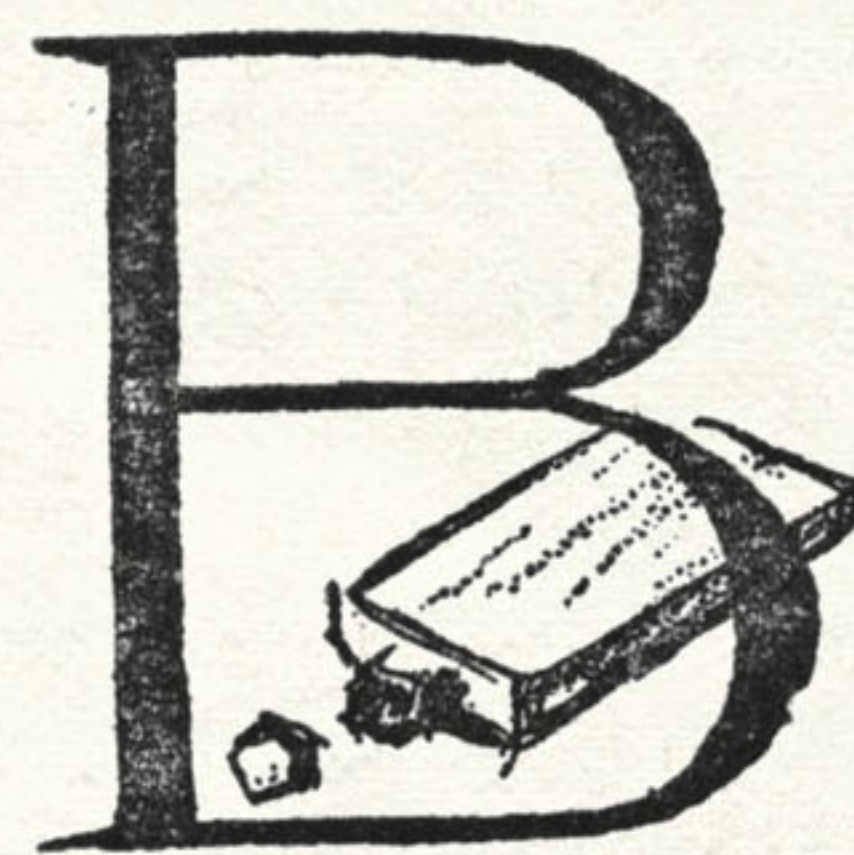
"Believe it or not, part of it goes into the police pension fund. And part goes to the Community Chest. And who the hell knows where the rest goes? But it's a good town. Lower taxes than any you can name. And not much city debt, and not much real crime. It ain't heaven, but it ain't Birmingham either."

I said: "It's a wonder you haven't exposed this in your column. I thought you wrote the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

The Bishop had another small snifter, swallowing this one slowly, and as if he liked it. "When I first went to work on the *Democrat* I wrote the whole truth. I wrote the whole truth about the South City baseball team for three days and after that they wouldn't let me in the park. I had to climb a tree and use a

telescope to cover the games. The team found out about it and sawed the limb half in two so next time I climbed up there the limb broke. That's when I broke my leg. It could have been set easy enough, but the doctor I went to happened to own stock in the baseball team."

The last time the Bishop had told me how he lost his leg he'd said it was shot off when he was too slow getting out of a window on the one occasion in history when a train on the South City-Mobile Railroad came in ahead of time. There were a vast number of stories about how Roscoe Atticus came to be called the Bishop and about how he lost his leg, but nobody could swear to the truth.



BACK at the Red and Black Club, where I'd left my ancient bus, I got out and the Bishop slid under the wheel of his own car. "I almost forgot, Eddie. Did you feel anything in Steiner's pocket before he socked you?"

"Not a thing but a silk handkerchief. At least it felt like a silk handkerchief. I know damn well he didn't have the money. I can't figure why he socked me and ran."

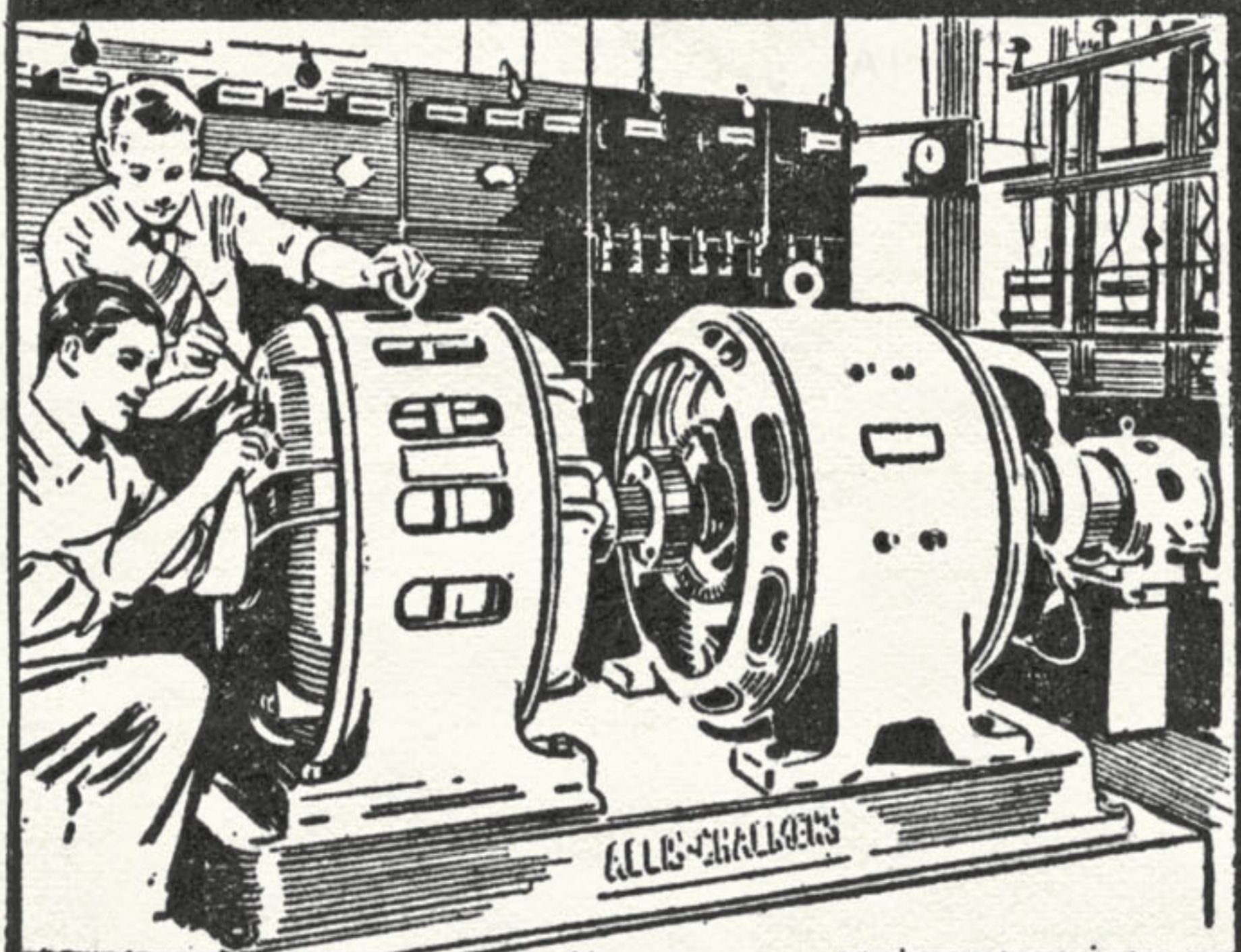
"*Umn-n.*" The Bishop rubbed one hand around the bald globe of his head. "*Umn-n*, you better be careful, Eddie. I don't think so, but somebody might be willing to kill for that handkerchief. They might even be willing to kill you just because you know about it."

He drove off and left me there staring after him.

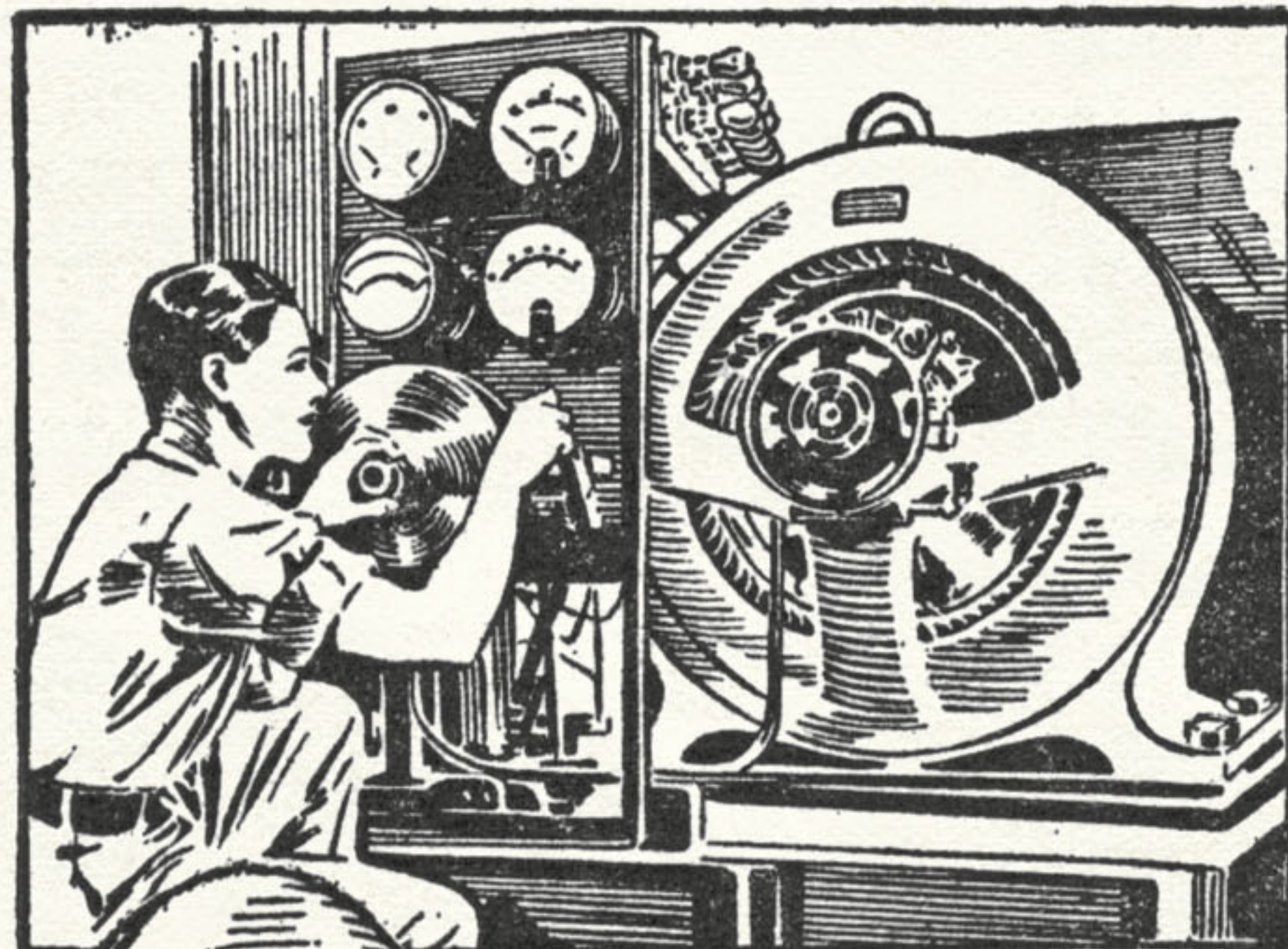
I was still standing there, staring, when Nancy Howell came out of the Red and Black Club with John Bollo. She had stopped crying, but her face was pale and strained. Bollo had his arm around her waist and he was grinning. For some reason I didn't seem to like that man.

They got in Bollo's Packard and drove off.

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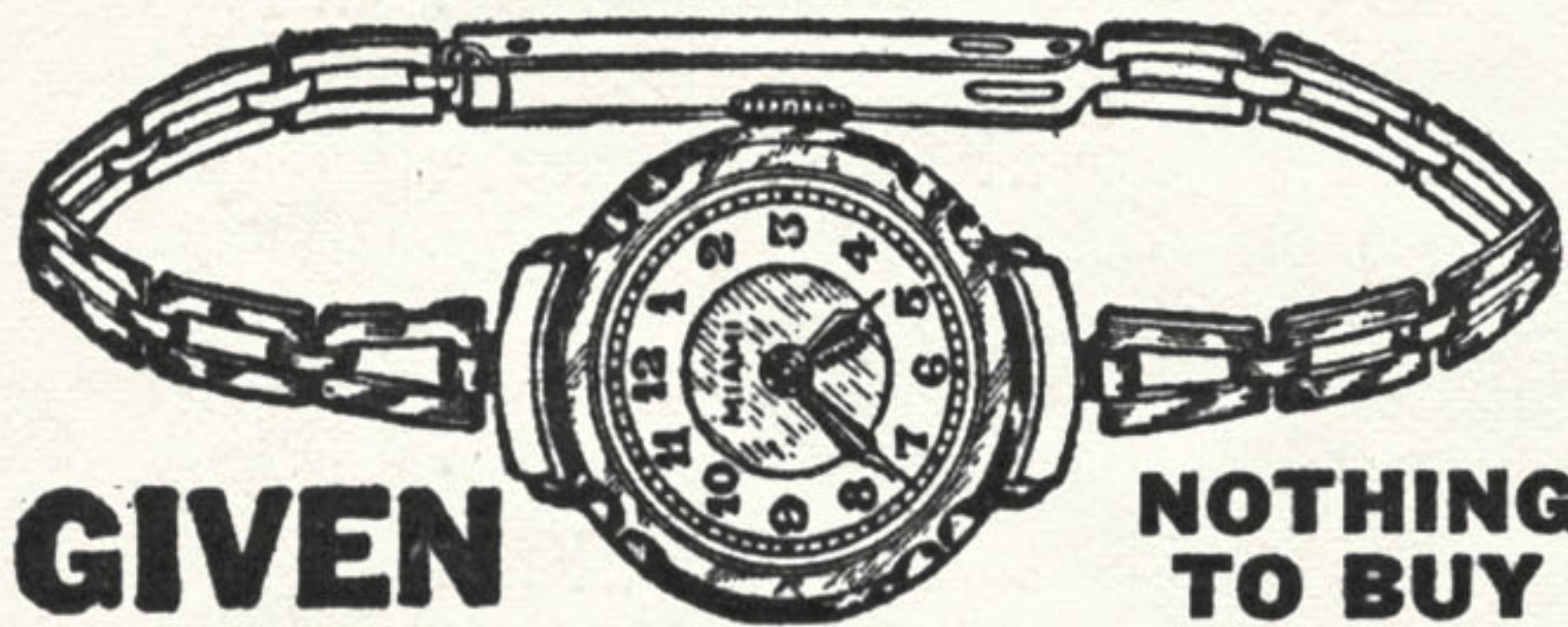
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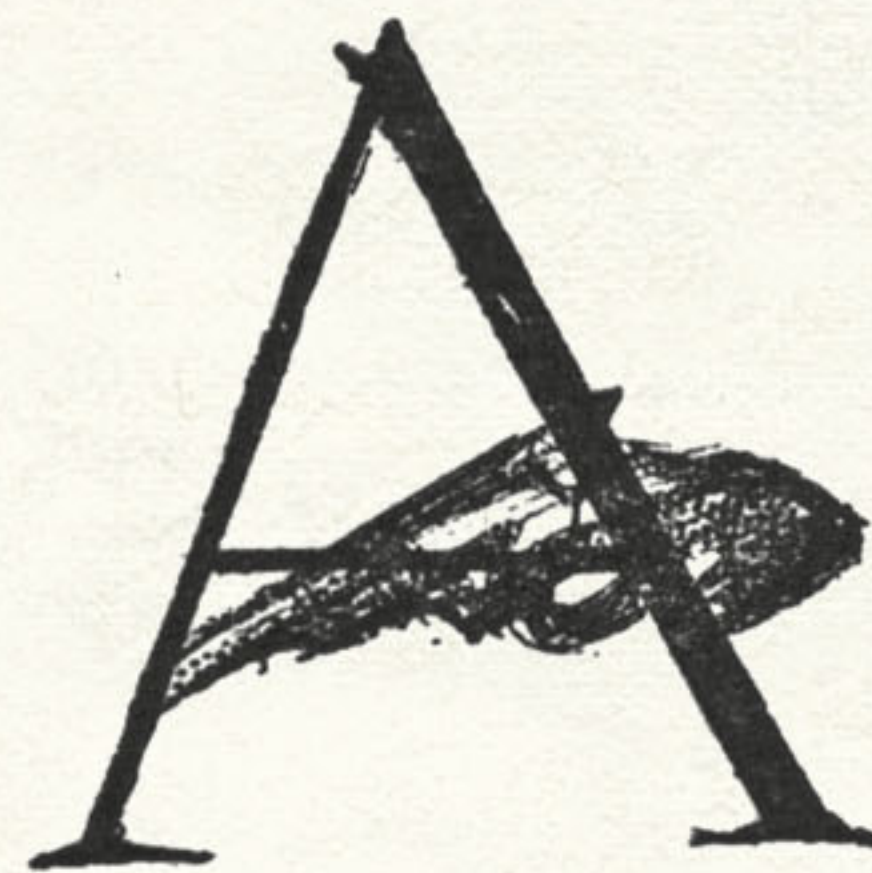
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Wyatt Blassingame



AFTER crawling out of bed, about two that afternoon, I went to Pete's Restaurant for breakfast, and while downing my ham and eggs I read the afternoon *Journal*. They played the story up big. The murder shot, the *Journal* said had been fired from a distance of more than ten feet, from about the hall doorway probably. It was a small-caliber gun the exact caliber not yet known. The murderer had probably ducked out of an upstairs window and dropped from the porch roof to the ground. Moulage imprints had been made of tracks found in the flower beds, but in other places the grass came up to the edge of the house and would not hold prints. Ten thousand dollars which various Civic Clubs had collected to buy land to be given to the government for enlarging the air base was missing. It was believed stolen, but a thorough check had not yet been completed.

Sooner or later I had to go down to headquarters and face Browder, and I knew that by this time he probably was sure I had been in McDonald's office before he got there. I wondered how much hell he'd give me, and on the chance that the Bishop might be at the paper and would go to headquarters with me, I went by the office. But he wasn't there. The city editor's book didn't have anything special for me on it. I went by the jail and the courthouse and the fire-station for the day's routine stuff. And finally I went on to headquarters.

As I was starting in the door Browder and a couple of plainclothesmen came out, walking fast. Browder saw me and his eyes got a hot glare in them.

He said: "I'm in a hurry, or I'd stop to talk to you. Be around when I get back." It was distinctly an order.

I went into headquarters and back to what Browder liked to call The Laboratory, though South City had spent no fortune equipping it. The *Journal* repor-

ter, Tommy Harris, was there with Bill Piker. Piker was a young cop, no older than I am, and Browder was training him as his "scientific assistant."

Piker's eyebrows went up when he saw me. "Browder went out just a minute ago. Boy does he want to see you!"

"I saw him leaving. What's his hurry?"

"A patrolman down by the railroad phoned and said he thought he recognized Ben Steiner—on a freight train headed out of town."

Tommy Harris said: "He was at the Black and Red last night when McDonald got killed, but nobody's seen him since. He didn't go home last night and about noon there was a report from his mother that he was missing. I think Browder's got him tied up with the shooting and the ten grand somehow. And listen, what's this you've done that's got the lieutenant so hot under the collar?"

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing. I'll be seeing y'all." And I left.

With Ben Steiner missing and maybe leaving town on a freight I didn't want to have to answer Browder's questions alone. I knew he'd take liberties with me which he wouldn't take with the Bishop—even the governor is leary how he beards the Bishop. He'd got me into this, now let him get me out. I went back to the office.



WAS heading down the hall for the newsroom when Mrs. Good saw me and called me into her office. Mrs. Good is the society editor. She is a gray-haired, rather handsome old lady with a firm jaw and bright dark eyes and she can outswear the British navy. The Anglo-Saxon words that even Hemingway characters are careful with are her favorites.

"Sit down, Eddie." She leaned back in her chair, took a puff from a quarter-inch cigarette that she held between the

blades of a huge pair of scissors, and said: "I've been sick all day because I didn't go to that brawl. But how the hell could I know somebody was going to get murdered? Who killed the — — — — —?"

"I don't know."

"That Howell tart was in the room when it happened, wasn't she?"

"She was talking to Ralph."

"Then she killed him," Mrs. Good said. "A damn wonder she hasn't killed somebody before this. She's done everything else."

"She can't be that bad. She's a sweet-looking girl."

Mrs. Good got the last possible drag out of her cigarette, flipped it into a spittoon and spat after it. Hers is probably the only society editor's office in the country that has a spittoon in it. On the side next the wall was printed *SOCIETY* but you didn't see that unless you turned the spittoon around. She said: "They all look sweet to you, Eddie. If all the tarts in the Junior League were as pious as the looks they get on their faces, the men in South City would be missing one hell of a lot of fun. Not that you make much use of your own face. Why don't you get around more?"

I went back to the original subject. "Whoever killed Ralph McDonald," I said, "probably did it for ten thousand dollars—though they must have stolen the money before they shot him. Maybe they knew that if he found it was missing he'd realize who took it. And you know Miss Howell wouldn't shoot anybody for ten thousand bucks. She's rich."

"She hasn't got a — — — nickel. Her father, old Wayne Howell, had pots of it, at one time or another, that he cheated people out of. But he didn't have it when he died. Judge Jones just finished probating the estate a few weeks back. Wayne Howell owed half the folks in the state. That's why Ralph McDonald decided not to marry her. That — — — — — wouldn't do anything that didn't add to his fortune."

"Somebody told me they *were* going

to be married, in just a week or two."

"Somebody told you, but Ralph McDonald didn't. He was trying to crawl out of that wedding. That's why she killed him."

It was a good theory. More than one man has been shot in South City because of broken engagements, but in this case I doubted it. Mrs. Good had been society editor so long, and has had to write so much sweetness-and-light that she reacts by always believing the worst.

The phone rang and Mrs. Good said: "Another old slut with some slop for my social cesspool." But when she picked up the phone her voice changed entirely. It dripped honey. "Hell-oo."

I heard the Bishop's cane pegging down the hallway then and I jumped up and grabbed him as he went by the door. "We're in a mess, Bishop! Lieutenant Browder knows we were at McDonald's office last night and he probably knows Ben Steiner was there, and now Steiner's missing! Vanished! They think he was seen leaving town on a freight train!"

"Well, well." Bishop Atticus didn't seem more than mildly interested. He waved his hand at Mrs. Good. "How are you this evening, Mrs. Good?"

She slid one hand over the mouth-piece, said: "Lousy as usual. Come on in and have a drink. I want to talk to you, too."

The Bishop pegged past me to Mrs. Good's watercooler, took a pint bottle out of his pocket, and broke the seal on it. With great deliberation he started mixing his two fingers of water and two of whiskey.

"Listen, Bishop," I said. "I'm on a spot! If Browder doesn't slap me in jail, he'll at least be so mad I'll never get any more news from him. What'll I do?"

The Bishop tossed off his drink. "Just tell him who's guilty, and let him take the credit. Give him a big play in the paper, and everything will be square again."

"Yeah. And how am I supposed to tell him?"

"Who does Mrs. Good think killed Ralph?"

From the middle of a conversation about pink organdy and lace Mrs. Good said: "That Howell slut."

"Is she?" the Bishop said. "Damn good-looking too. I think we ought to go out and see her, Eddie."

Mrs. Good hung up the receiver and swung around and spat at the cuspidor. "A coming-out party for the McPherson brat," she said. "That little pushover's already been out more times than an alley cat. Where you going, Roscoe?"

The Bishop was pegging out the door. "Eddie and I are going to see if what you say about Nancy Howell is true. Come on, Eddie."

"A lot of good it'll do you, at your age!" Mrs. Good yelled.

I said, "For the first time in my life I'm looking forward to being fired," and went wearily after the Bishop.

CHAPTER FOUR

Enter—The Dead



SINCE her father's death Nancy Howell had moved from the huge colonial home in which they had lived to a small white bungalow a half-block away. She was alone when we got there, except for a Negro maid who let us in, then went back to the kitchen to go on with preparations for dinner.

Miss Howell was still suffering from strain and shock, and it showed in her face, but she tried to smile at us. "I suppose y'all have to do this," she said, "but really I don't want to talk about it any more. I want to—to forget."

She was wearing a white linen dress. She had an excellent figure and although the dress looked modest enough you could tell she was under it. Her eyes, without tears in them, were more blue than gray. Her face was pale and there were shadows under her eyes.

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Wyatt Blassingame

We said the usual things and sat down and talked a few minutes. And then, abruptly, the Bishop said: "Is there any chance, Miss Howell, that the face you saw at the window wasn't John Bollo's monkey?"

She stared at him and a little of last night's fear came back into her eyes. "What else could it have been?"

"It could have been the murderer."

I could see her throat move as she swallowed. "I only had a glimpse of it, and it was beyond the window. It was small and hairy. That's all I could tell. It must have been the monkey."

The Bishop said: "If you thought it was somebody, would you be afraid to say so?"

After a moment she said: "I see what you mean, Mr. Atticus." The fear was gone from her eyes now. She looked straight at him. "If I had seen the man who killed Ralph and recognized him, I wouldn't be afraid to tell you, to tell the police. I wouldn't be afraid of what he might do to me. My father taught me how to use a gun, Mr. Atticus, and I can take care of myself."

"I'll bet old Wayne did teach you," the Bishop chuckled. But his little puckered features sobered almost instantly. "I didn't mean that you were afraid. I thought there might be some other reason."

"You mean that—that he was somebody I am in love with?"

"Somebody that you have reason to protect."

"I wasn't in love with anybody but Ralph." Her gray-blue eyes turned to me then. "Maybe I wasn't really in love with him. I liked him. I don't know. . . . But I wouldn't protect anybody who shot him."

"Not even Ben Steiner?" the Bishop asked.

She gave just the barest kind of start. But her voice was steady when she said: "Not Ben Steiner. I've had dates with him. I like Ben. But I've never loved him and I've never owed him anything."

After a moment she added: "Why do you name him?"

"He seems to have skipped out of town. And the cops are looking for him."

Her lips parted as though to speak, then closed again. Her breathing had quickened.

"What?" the Bishop asked.

"Nothing. Except that I don't believe Ben killed Ralph. I'd never believe it."

The phone rang then and she answered. It was evidently some girl friend offering condolences. They talked for a few minutes, and when Miss Howell replaced the phone and turned toward us again her face had gone completely bloodless. Her eyes seemed to overflow their sockets and there was a tortured look in them.

"All I want," she said huskily, "is to forget everything. And I'll never be able to. They won't let me."

"Who won't let you?"

"The persons who are supposed to be my friends. They keep calling. They keep reminding me. *They think I killed him!*"

The Bishop and I stared at her. I seemed to be still hearing what she had said, and it was incredible. Finally the Bishop said: "You're just upset. Why would anybody think you killed Ralph McDonald?"

"But they do think that! If only there was some way I could prove to them, could prove to everybody, that I'm innocent!"

"If you spotted the real murderer that'd be proof," the Bishop said.

She looked at him for long time out of those too wide, gray-blue eyes. She closed her eyes slowly and pressed her hand over them for a moment. "I don't know the real murderer," she said.

And about then I had my brain storm. I said: "There's a way you can prove you're innocent. There's a way you can prove it if you haven't fired a gun at any time the last day or two. The paraffin test!"

"What's a paraffin test?"

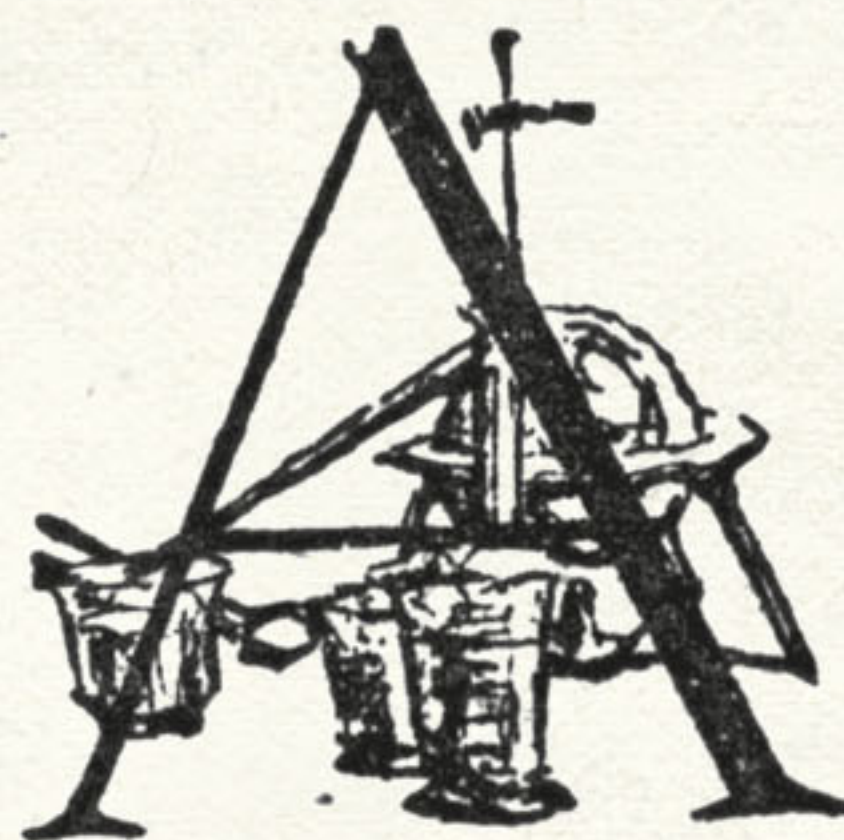
"I did an article for the paper on it a month or two back when I was writing about some of Lieutenant Browder's new methods. It's a way they can prove whether or not you've fired a gun during the last few days. If you have, there will be nitrate sticking to your hand. There's no way to wash it off. And it will show up in the test."

She was showing excitement. "Does the test take long?"

"Not very."

"Then I want it made. Now! I want everybody to know I didn't kill Ralph. Will you take me where they make it?"

I was suddenly remembering Browder and feeling unwilling to face him. But the Bishop said: "Sure. We'll take you down to headquarters."



SO WE were driving past the paper on the way to police headquarters the Bishop said: "Just let me out here, Eddie." I started to argue with

him, but I knew it wasn't any use. He'd rooked me again. I let him out and with no small amount of trepidation I drove Miss Howell on to headquarters.

For the first time in all my dealings with the Bishop, however, luck was with me. Browder hadn't yet returned from chasing after Ben Steiner, so I told Bill Piker what was wanted and he set about making the test on Miss Howell's hands.

Muddy Marshall was there. He seemed about two thirds tight and was in his customary good humor. He said: "So you're accused of the murder too, Nancy. I'll get a client out of this yet, if I have to defend myself."

I asked if they were accusing him.

"No formal charges," he said grinning. "But they found my shoeprint in one of the flowerbeds, and I'm supposed to hang around until Sherlock Browder gets back and then explain everything."

"What were you doing in the flowerbeds?"

"Ah-ha!" he said dramatically. "Not what you think. I was chasing after that damn monkey of John Bollo's. I wanted to give it a drink of whiskey."

"When was that?" I asked. "Was it before or after the shot?"

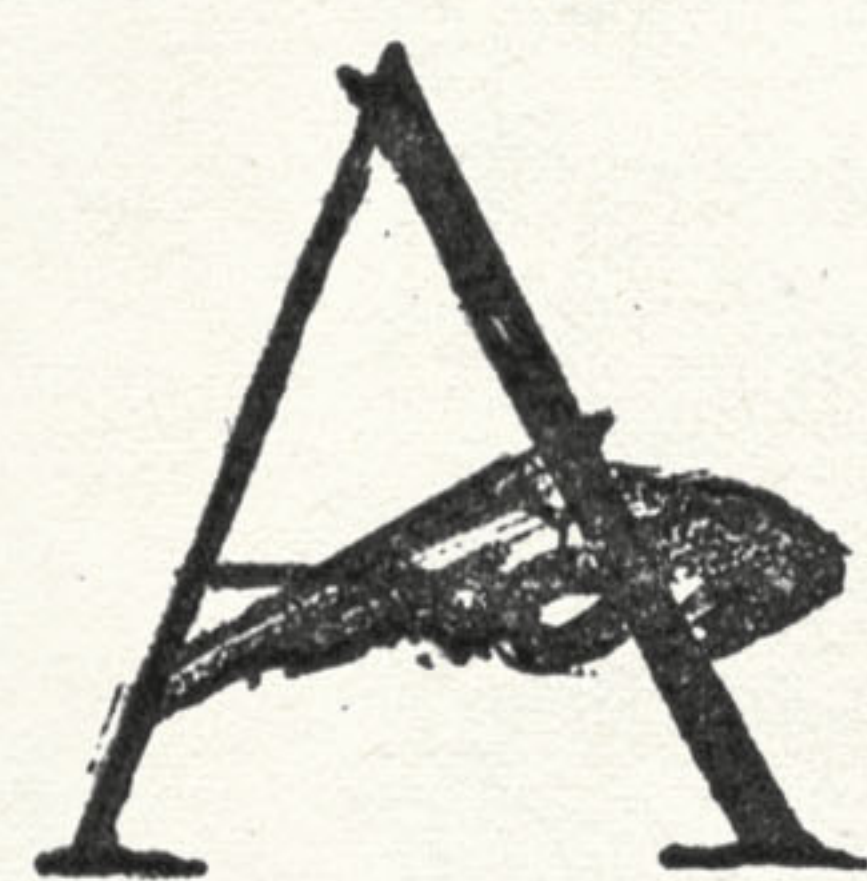
It was the way he looked at me then, for just a split instant, that gave me the idea he might not be as drunk as he pretended. He said: "I don't know exactly. I never heard the shot."

Bill Piker had finished his test and removed the smooth coating of paraffin from Nancy Howell's hands and examined it. "It's perfectly clear," he said. "There's not a sign of nitrate."

"That means. . . ?" she asked.

"That means you haven't shot a gun in the thirty-six to forty-eight hours."

She turned to me. It was the first time I had ever seen her actually smile without shock or tears or terror in her eyes. And I thought then that she was completely beautiful. She had a clean, washed look that was almost spiritual. She took my hand in both of hers. "Thank you, Eddie! Thank you. Take me home now."



AT HER front step I told her good-night. I had to go back to the paper and work. She said: "You've got time for one drink with me, Eddie. I feel so—so free. And it seems like years since I've felt that way. I want somebody to talk to."

Well, I should have been at the paper for the last hour but, well . . . I went in with her.

We went into the living-room and Nancy Howell took off her hat and tossed it on the sofa. She ran her fingers through her blond hair and shook it back from her ears. She called: "Mazzie, make a couple of Manhattans, please."

There wasn't any answer.

Nancy Howell said: "Now I wonder where that girl is."

She called Mazzie's name again, loudly this time. And still there was no answer.

"She must have gone to the store for something. Well, we can make the drinks ourselves."

We went into the kitchen and mixed a couple of Manhattans. Pots simmered on the stove. Dishes were stacked on a table. The cook had evidently gone out while in the middle of preparing the dinner.

We went back into the living-room and sat down on the sofa. It was a warm evening with the windows wide open. I remember that twice I heard insects bump against the screens. Nancy Howell sipped at her drink, then leaned and put one hand on my left hand. She said: "You've been awfully nice, Eddie. You don't know how terrible it is to feel that your friends suspect you of something horrible, and have no way to prove to them you're innocent."

"I'm glad if I helped."

"You did, a lot. Now—"

That was when we first heard the sound. In that first instant I don't believe that either of us recognized it, knew what the sound was. Yet after we heard it we both sat as silent and still as statues. I remember noticing that the liquor in my glass was not even trembling.

We must have sat like that for five full seconds. It seemed like five hours. And then we heard it again.

This time I knew what it was.

It was a man moaning. Not in agony but in something worse than that. If a corpse could struggle to reach life again, it might make a sound like that. Then the moan ended and I heard the faint scratching of fingernails on wood. It seemed to come from somewhere in the little foyer that we sat facing.

I said: "What was that?" I didn't look at Nancy Howell. I was staring at the empty foyer. And Nancy Howell didn't answer. After a few seconds we heard that muffled horrible moaning again, and again the sound of fingers clawing on wood.

10,001 Motives for Murder

I said huskily: "It's in the hall closet."
"Yes."

That was all she said. But it brought me around like the cracker on a whip.

It was a sensation that I felt not in any one place, but all through my body: in my fingertips and my brain and my feet, in my stomach and my lungs and my throat. It was a kind of electrical shock that seemed to shrivel my body, to make it shrink in upon itself. I couldn't move. I just stood there and stared at Nancy Howell's face.

I hardly recognized her. Her face was contorted and hideous. It was an animal face with the cheek bones sharp across it and the eyes narrowed and the lips peeled back from the teeth. She never dropped her glass, never spilled the liquor, and somehow that seemed the most horrible part of the whole business, the perfect way she balanced that glass as she backed across the room. Her eyes were riveted always on the closet door in the foyer, but she moved steadily backward to a desk in the corner of the living-room and reached back and put down the cocktail glass.

I noticed the way she was breathing, in deep quick gasps between parted lips—quick gasps that pressed her breasts tight against her dress.

Still looking at the closet door she reached behind her and opened a drawer in the desk. She did something I couldn't see plainly—there must have been a false bottom to the drawer—and drew out a key and transferred it to her left hand. She reached into the drawer again and this time her hand came out with a small pearl-handled revolver.

"Open that door," she whispered.

I gulped.

She looked at me for the first time and her gaze and the gun swung together. I thought the bullet was already plowing into my stomach and I felt sick. "Open that door!" She was still whispering—and for the first time I realized that she was insanely afraid.

I stumbled across to the closet and

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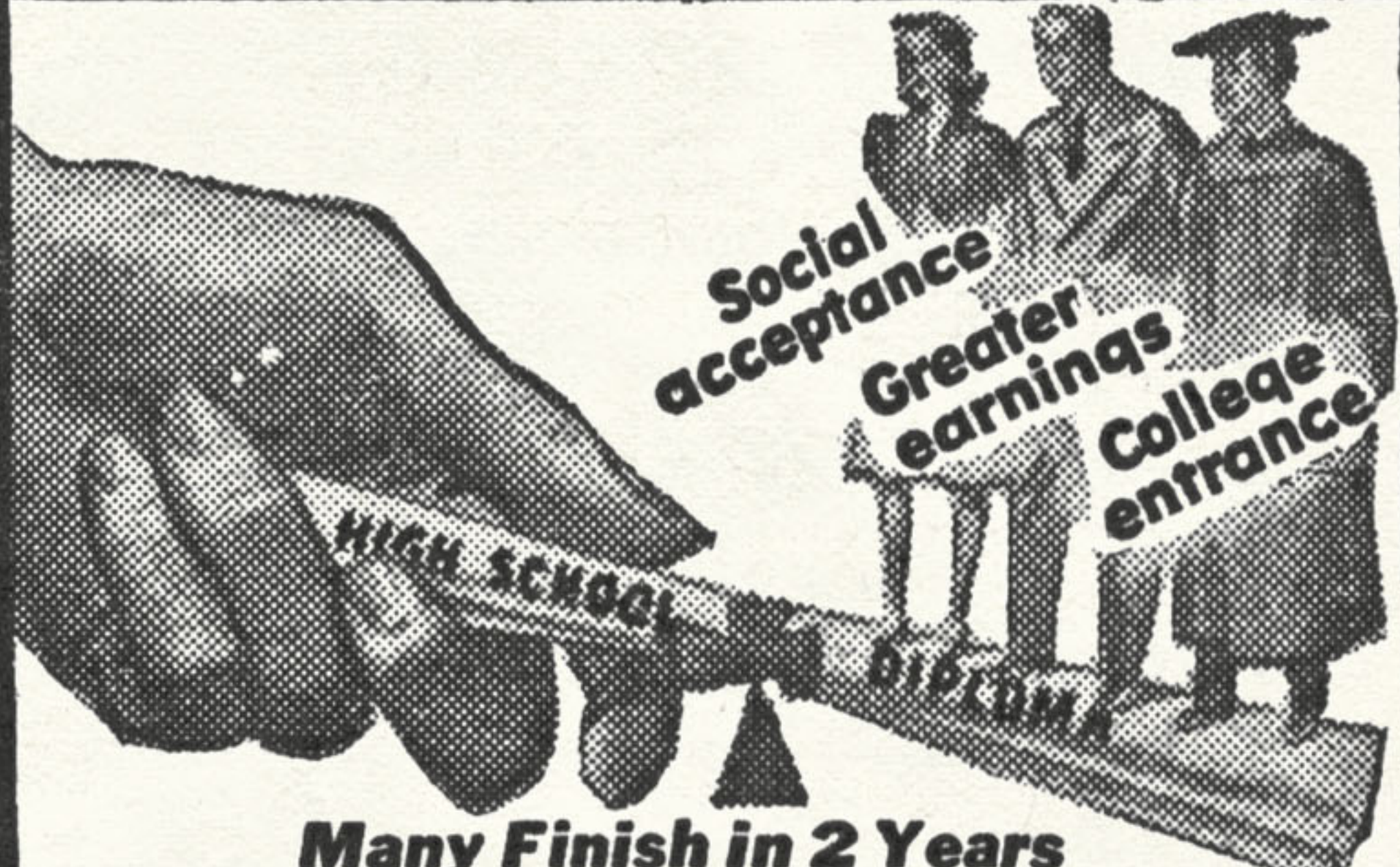
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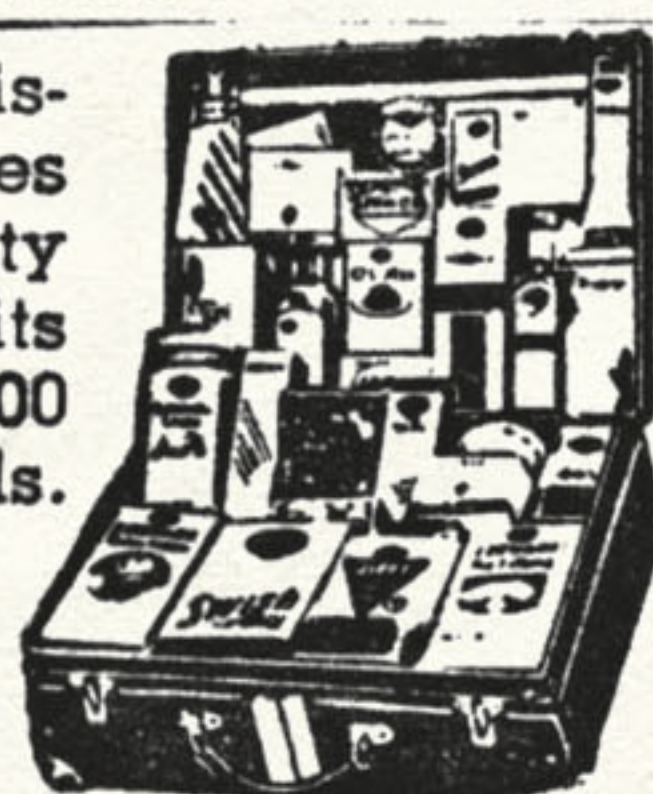
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Wyatt Blassingame

the key made jittery noises as I groped for the lock. I turned the key and backed away.

There was absolutely no sound from beyond that door now. There was no sound in the whole house. Not even the sound of breathing.

The doorknob began to turn. It moved very slowly. With a kind of infinite furious patience it turned a little at a time. There was a sudden, loud click as the latch turned free.

The door swung open and the corpse walked out into the room.

It was Ben Steiner. He wore the same white suit he had worn the night before, but the front of it now was the dark brown-black of dried blood. The bullet hole was directly over the heart. His hands hung rigid at his sides, and he looked at me with open, blank, dead eyes. I have seen men electrocuted at the state prison. I've seen them when the mask was taken off. That look on the face of the dead can't be copied and you don't have to look twice to recognize it. Ben Steiner was dead—and he was walking.

Nancy Howell must have tried to scream and the terror in her throat stopped her. She made a kind of choking gasp. Her gun was pointed straight at Steiner and her finger was white around the trigger, frozen there.

I don't think I ever really saw the Bishop back of Ben Steiner although he spread out a couple of inches on each side. But I heard him yell: "Ai God, Eddie! Grab her gun! Don't stand there all night! Grab her gun!"

I was still too numb to move. I heard him and I knew what he said, but for at least two seconds I just stood and gaped. And in those two seconds Nancy Howell swung her gun to cover my stomach.

The front door crashed open with a noise as loud as a cannon. Nancy Howell jumped, and fired—and the bullet made a hole in my coat. Then she was swinging away from me toward the door and she fired once as she swung, hitting nothing but the wall.

Mrs. Good was standing in the open doorway and yelling at me: "Grab her, stupid!"

And finally I moved.

I grabbed her before she could shoot again.

She stopped struggling instantly. She dropped the gun and turned, and I released her and she went over and sat down on the sofa. She sat there and looked at us and didn't say a word. She pushed the blond hair back from her face and just sat there and stared at us.

Mrs. Good was leaning against the doorsill, mopping her face with a handkerchief that was already soaking wet with perspiration. She was panting out names, one after another, without even commas between them, and I gathered that she was referring to me and the Bishop, tracing our ancestry back through generations of various kinds of livestock. Finally she paused for a breath.

The Bishop beamed at her. "You're in rare form indeed tonight, Mrs. Good!"

She said: "You—you—" She shook her head and took a long breath. "It's a good thing I decided to get some live news in my social septic-tank for once and drove out here."

The Bishop chuckled. "You came because you wanted to see if I was really making any profit out of your information about Miss Howell's morals. You were jealous."

"Of who?" Mrs. Good snapped. "Not of you, you bald-headed old ——."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Final Motive



LIEUTENANT BROWDER, the Bishop, Mrs. Good, and I were in Nancy Howell's kitchen. Miss Howell had departed with a couple of plainclothesmen. At the sink the Bis-

hop poured two fingers of whiskey into a glass, added an equal amount of water, and with one swallow consumed everything but the glass.

I said: "Give me a drink, Bishop. I still feel a little shaky."

"You're slowing down, Eddie. The only reason I take you around with me is to do the crude work. And now you're slowing down. You must be getting old."

Browder cleared his throat and looked important and said: "I think I have all the details, but I'd like to know exactly how you figure this thing, Mr. Atticus."

"I can tell you how he figured it," Mrs. Good said. "He figured it because I told him."

"The lieutenant is interested in the slower, more sordid method of reason, rather than feminine intuition," the Bishop said. And to Browder, "I figure she was probably at Ralph McDonald's office early last night, with Ralph, before the brawl at the Red and Black. I figure they quarreled and he said definitely he wasn't going to marry her."

"That's what I explained to you," Mrs. Good said.

I asked the Bishop if he thought that was the reason Nancy Howell had killed McDonald.

"That's one of them. Outraged womanhood. A lot of women have shot men who tried to jilt them."

"She had ten thousand other reasons," Mrs. Good said, "that she got out of Ralph McDonald's safe. She damn well knew about that money before she shot him."

"She had already stolen it when she shot him," the Bishop said. "She probably knew the combination to his safe, since she's often visited him at his office. And she needed the money. She was flat broke—which didn't matter if she was going to marry Ralph. But she'd always lived as a lady and she meant to keep on living as a lady. One of South City's fairest examples of young womanhood"—Mrs. Good made a snort-

ing noise—"wasn't going to be reduced to poverty and doing her own house work—not if simply shooting a guy would keep her from it. The ten thousand would keep her two years, if she was careful. And by that time she'd have picked up some other man with plenty of money and have him headed down the aisle toward matrimony. But she would need a year to work in, if she was going to have any choice. And she had to live comfortably."

"If she had simply stolen the money," Browder said, "Mr. McDonald would have known who took it. So she had to get him out of the way."

"Figure it that way if you want to," the Bishop said. "I think she shot him because he turned her down."

"But she didn't seem to be much in love with him," I objected.

"Who the hell said she was? She was in love with herself, like most women—God bless 'em! Ralph was going to soil her reputation, make her a publicly discarded woman. So she let him have it."

BROWDER hemmed a couple of times and brought himself to a difficult admission. "I was almost certain of my killer, Mr. Atticus, but I have to thank you for discovering the gun, and the long glove she wore to prevent the paraffin test showing positive on her hand. I hadn't been able to find any prints on the edge of the roof where the killer was supposed to have hung and dropped into the yard below. The only deep print in the earth such as a man would have made by jumping or falling was the one Eddie made."

"Ai God! You should have heard him yowl! And you can thank Eddie for her using that glove. She read one of his articles in the paper about your methods. That's where she got her idea."

"It's all clear enough now," I said. "But I wonder why somebody didn't think of it at the time, why somebody didn't search her. She must have had that gun and glove on her person all the time."

Browder looked shocked. The Bishop said: "You're nuts. Of course she had 'em on her, and you know where she was carrying 'em. Or you should know."

Mrs. Good said: "At my age, Eddie, do I have to show you?"

"All the searching of that kind done in South City," the Bishop said, "is purely unofficial. There are no police women in this town. And imagine a cop, imagine our good Lieutenant Browder here, searching the secret regions of one of the fairest flowers of young womanhood in South City."

Browder got swiftly to another subject. "All my checking indicates that Mr. Ben Steiner was in or near the hallway down which the murderer was supposed to have escaped. He must have suspected from the first that Miss Howell was guilty. I believe that he went from the Red and Black Club to McDonald's office, and there found Miss Howell's handkerchief, which showed she'd been there since the money was brought to that office in the afternoon. Then, I believe, he brought the handkerchief here to Miss Howell."

"Yep," the Bishop said. "I'll bet she thought his was the face she saw outside the window. She could never be certain it was the monkey—and whoever it was knew she had killed Ralph. When he brought the handkerchief to her she was certain. I've got an idea Steiner was in love with the gal. I don't believe he would have turned her over to the cops. But anyway, she made certain. She potted the guy. That's one way to be sure they stay quiet."

"It must have been almost morning by the time he got here," I said.

"It was morning, or by the time they talked and she potted him it was morning. That's why she had to keep the corpse in the house until tonight. She couldn't go riding through town in daylight with a corpse. While you had her down at headquarters I came back to look for the gun—I sent the maid home—but all I found was poor Ben. So I thought if she had shot Ben once I

might get her to produce the gun and shoot him again."

"The key to that closet was in the drawer with the gun," I said. "How'd you get in there?"

"Did you ever see a house where half the closets wouldn't open with the same key? Soon as I found that one was locked I got the key out of another and looked inside. And there he was."



AFTER another drink we went outside and Browder looked up at the house. It was dark here and I couldn't see the lieutenant's face clearly. He said:

"The way things have turned out I'm not going to take any official action, but it is strictly illegal to break into the office of a man who has just been murdered."

The Bishop said: "Nuts, Lieutenant. And good-night. Eddie'll give you a big spread in the paper tomorrow."

Mrs. Good's car was parked just behind the Bishop's. We walked back with her and the Bishop handed her in. I asked the two of them what they thought would be done with Nancy Howell.

"Why she'll give the money back," the Bishop said, "and swear she was just keeping it for Ralph. And she'll say she shot him because she had to defend her honor, and cook up the same kind of yarn about Ben. I wouldn't bet the case will ever come to trial. Folks will discuss it only with their friends and nobody will remember that the city commissioner gave a party in a gambling house."

"One other thing, Bishop. 'When did you first know she was guilty?'"

"Ai God! I knew all the time. But you think I was going to tell anybody last night and let the *Journal* get the whole story? What kind of a newspaper man do you think I am?"

"A stinker," Mrs. Good said, starting the motor. "And you are also one of the world's goddamndest liars."

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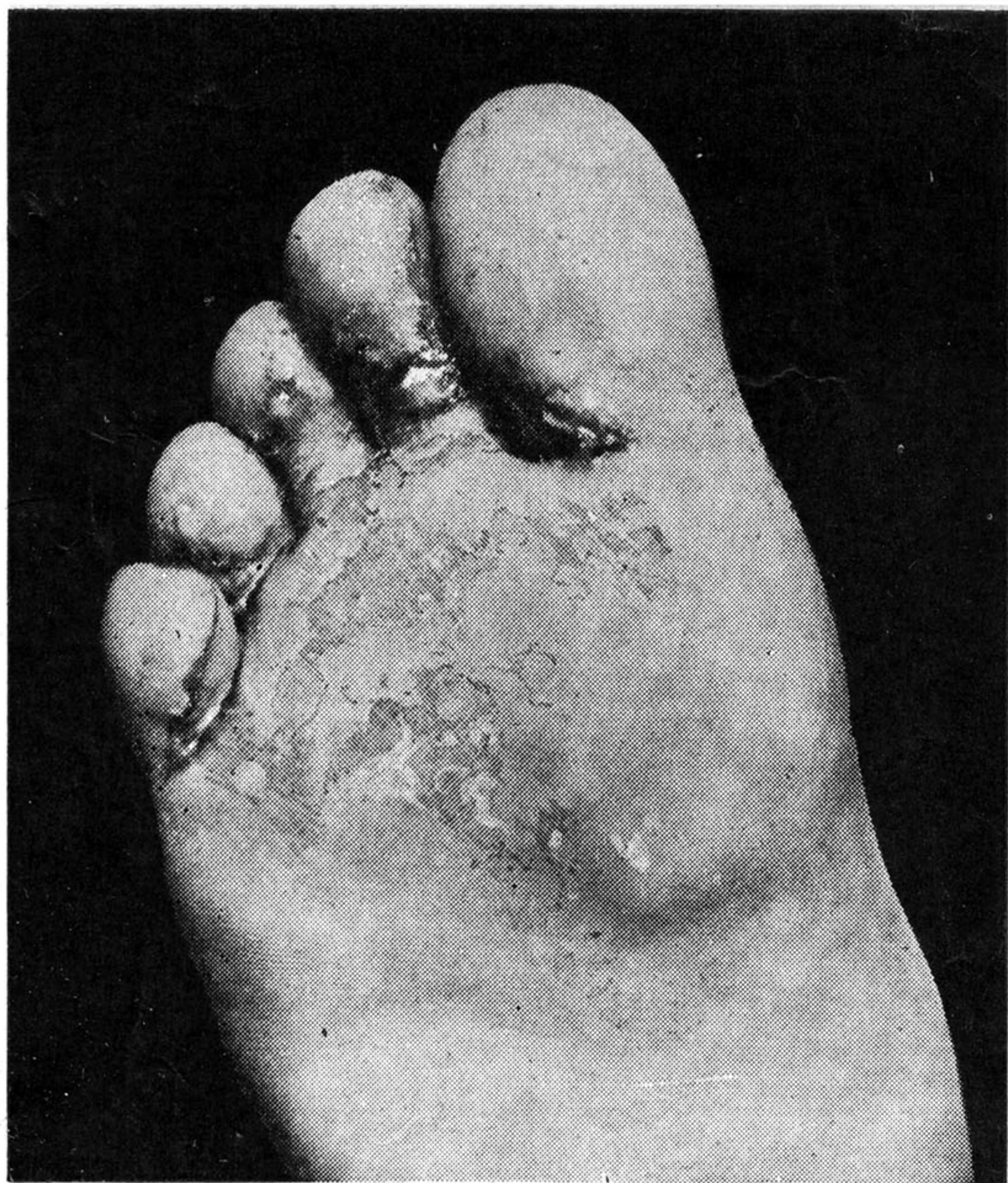
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*In the next cell at night
I've heard the continual gnashing of
Gregg's teeth,
Heard hatred from his belly gush out
In vile curses against both God and man.*

*I saw him in the day—
I saw his eye,
Haunted by the wild stare
Of the jungle jaguar.*

*Heartless,
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Hard—
Gregg finally stretched rope
For the murder of a guard.*





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