

25¢

NOV.

BLACK MASK

DETECTIVE



FIVE O'CLOCK SHROUD

MANVILLE MOON NOVEL

by **RICHARD
DEMING**

**ALBERT SIMMONS
AND OTHERS**

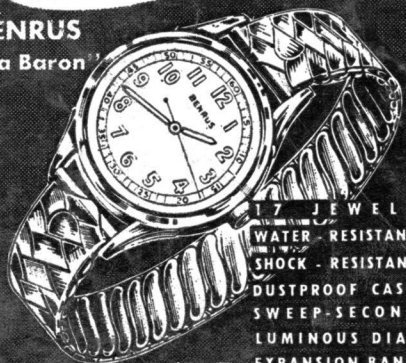
**HELL IS
WHAT YOU
MAKE IT**
by **ROBERT
TURNER**



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WE WILL SEND ANY ITEM YOU
CHOOSE FOR APPROVAL UNDER
OUR MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

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"Sea Baron"



17 JEWELS
WATER-RESISTANT
SHOCK-RESISTANT
DUSTPROOF CASE
SWEEP-SECOND
LUMINOUS DIAL
EXPANSION BAND
STAINLESS CASE
UNBREAKABLE
CRYSTAL

Q610

\$45

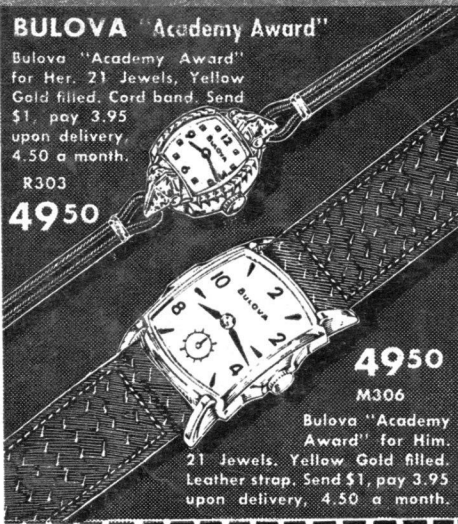
Send only \$1, pay 3.50 upon
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BULOVA "Academy Award"

Bulova "Academy Award"
for Her. 21 Jewels, Yellow
Gold filled. Cord band. Send
\$1, pay 3.95
upon delivery,
4.50 a month.

R303

4950



4950

M306

Bulova "Academy
Award" for Him.
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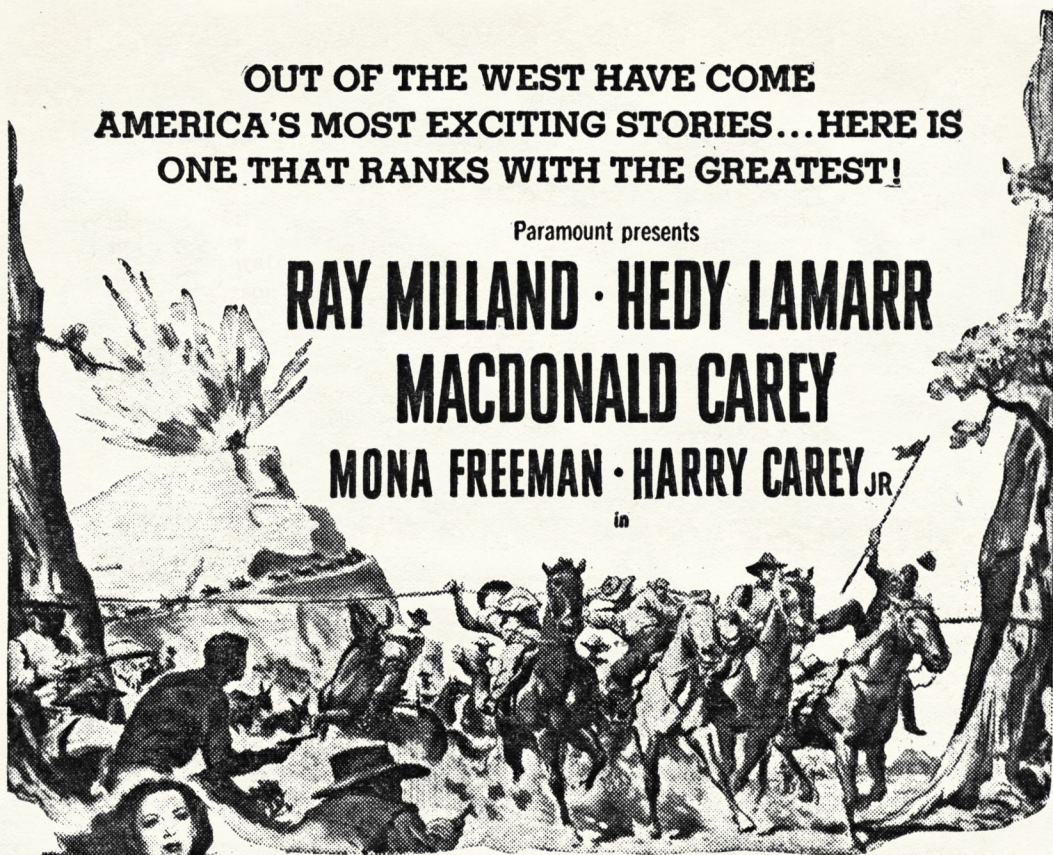
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Paramount presents

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A JOHN FARROW PRODUCTION

Color by TECHNICOLOR

Produced by MEL EPSTEIN

Directed by John Farrow

Screenplay by Jonathan Latimer

Story by Richard English



25¢

BLACK MASK

DETECTIVE




VOL. 35

NOVEMBER, 1950

NO. 2

DRAMATIC MANVILLE MOON NOVEL

- FIVE O'CLOCK SHROUD**.....Richard Deming 12
 Damning the torpedoes, Moon went full speed ahead—risking a total eclipse.

TWO EXCITING DETECTIVE NOVELETTES

- DISC-JOCKEY DIRGE**.....Albert Simmons 60
 Only the panic-stricken star knew she was heading for her last broadcast.
- OF TIME AND MURDER**.....Cornell Woolrich 96
 A big-city murder frame convinced the country kids—home was never like this!

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FOUR DYNAMIC CRIME SHORTS

- HELL IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT**.....Robert Turner 39
 Laurie was stuck with her heel of a husband—until murder did them part.
- DEAD-END FOR DELIA**.....William Campbell Gault 50
 His wife's brutal slayer was going scott free—over Kelley's dead body!
- DIE, GYPSY, DIE!**.....Richard E. Glendinning 76
 It wasn't in the cards for the little Gypsy sweetheart to know her own fate.
- MAYHEM PATROL**.....John Bender 85
 The eager rookie cop spelled trouble for the sarge—and death for Mr. Romeo.

FEATURES

- JAIL JOKERS**.....Harold Helfer 6
 Why policemen get gray—and violators pay.
- FAN FORUM**.....The Editor 10
 Your opportunity to see your comments in print.
- LIFTING THE JANUARY BLACK MASK**.....A Department 95
 Your introduction to "Scandal-Time Gal" by Dean Evans.
- PROVE IT!**.....Julius Long 124
 Confession to murder won't hang you.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE NOVEMBER 17TH

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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G. I. Bill gives you valuable training benefits. But time is running out. Act now to get N. R. I. training under G. I. Bill. Mail Coupon! Hurry!

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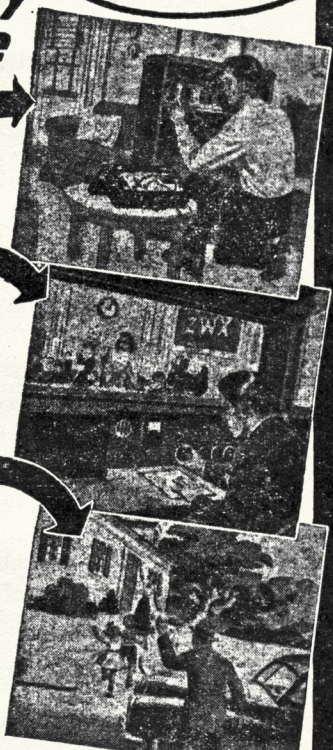
Many students make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time. The day you enroll I start sending you SPECIAL BOOKLETS to show you how to do this. Tester you build with parts I send helps you service sets. All equipment is yours to keep.

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Your next step is a good job installing and servicing Radio-Television sets or becoming boss of your own Radio-Television sales and service shop or getting a good job in a Broadcasting Station. Today there are over 81,000,000 home and auto Radios. 2700 Broadcasting Stations are on the air. Aviation and Police Radios, Micro-Wave Relay, Two-Way Radio are all expanding fields making more and better opportunities for servicing and communication technicians and FCC licensed operators.

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And think of the opportunities in Television! In 1949 almost 8,000,000 Television sets were sold. By 1954 authorities estimate 20,000,000 Television sets will be in use. 100 Television Stations are now operating, with experts predicting 1,000. Now is the time to get in line for success and a bright future in America's fast growing industry. Be a Radio-Television Technician.



I TRAINED THESE MEN



CHIEF ENGINEER, POLICE RADIO
"Soon after finishing the N.R.I. course, worked for servicing shop. Now I am Chief Engineer of two-way FM Police Radio Installations."—S. W. DINWIDDIE, Jacksonville, Illinois.



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"Before finishing course, I earned as much as \$10 a week in Radio servicing at home in spare time. Recommend N.R.I. to everyone interested in Radio."—S. J. PETRUFF, Miami, Fla.



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Keep your job while training at home. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS. Most had no previous experience; many no more than grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE—build valuable multiter for conducting tests; also practice servicing Radios or operating transmitters—experiment with circuits common to Radios and Television. You keep all equipment. Many students make \$5, \$10 a week extra fixing

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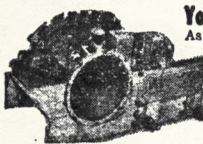
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Act Now! Send for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Coupon entitles you to actual lesson on Servicing; shows how you learn Radio-Television at home. You'll also receive my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." You'll read what my graduates are doing, earning; see photos of equipment you practice with at home. Send coupon in envelope or paste on postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OMS9, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C. Our 37th Year.

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Many N.R.I. trained men start their own Radio-Television, sales and service business without capital. Let me show you how you, too, can be your own boss, have a good income from your own shop.

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As part of my Servicing Course, you build this complete, powerful Radio Receiver that brings in local and distant stations. N.R.I. gives you ALL the Radio parts . . . speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, sockets, loop antenna, etc.

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Success
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These wonder books tell step by step HOW to make difficult repairs and adjustments, how to keep a car at maximum efficiency, including latest improvements in car design and operation. Engine troubles and how to correct them well covered.

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I would like to examine your 4-Volume Set of Auto Books. I will pay the delivery charges only, but if I choose I may return them express collect. If after 10 days' use I prefer to keep them, I will send you \$3 and pay the balance at the rate of only \$4 a month until \$24.80 has been paid. Please include consulting service as offered above.

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Address.....

City..... State.....

Please attach letter stating age, occupation, employer's name and address, and the name and address of at least one business man as reference. Men in service, also please give home address.



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● We would like to introduce another Carhartt innovation—Pants and Shirts-to-Match for warm weather wear. Attractively tailored, Natty in appearance, sanforized pre-shrunk and available in a choice selection of Chino Cloth, Sun Tan, Spruce Green Herringbone and Silver — all fast colors. You'll like 'em...just as millions of other men have enjoyed the quality fit, roominess, long wear and genuine economy built into Carhartt's champion line of work clothes and overalls. Ask for Carhartt's—and be comfortable on the job.

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THIS LABEL IS
YOUR PROTECTION



LOOK FOR IT

Carhartt
FOR 50 YEARS A FRIEND TO ORGANIZED LABOR

6

JAIL JOKERS

By HAROLD HELFER

Arrested for setting fire to his wife, a Bromley, England, man explained that he really wasn't attempting to murder her—it was just that "money matters" had him down.

* * *

Charged with speeding his junk wagon into the side of an auto, a Detroit peddler stated that his horse just couldn't help being in a hurry. "He always speeds to get home for supper," he explained.

* * *

When a Manchester, England, woman asked why she had slain another woman, she answered: "It never would have happened if I had had a smoke. I was irritable."

* * *

A man in Birmingham, Ala., arrested for burglary after he was found on the skylight of a building, told police he just liked to see people go by from that viewpoint.

* * *

Arrested in Pasadena, Calif., on a drunkenness charge, a lady explained she was just celebrating her recent release from jail after serving seven months for drunkenness.

(Please continue on page 8)



For Boys - Girls - Hunters - Campers -
Everybody!

THE MOST AMAZING SUN WATCH IN THE WORLD!

JUST LOOK
AT WHAT IT DOES!

TELZALL

9-in-1

THE
TIMEPIECE OF
ADVENTURE!

1. TELLS TIME
the truly scientific
sun dial way

2. WEATHER
FORECASTER
secretly concealed,
changes colors to
predict weather

3. GLOW-IN-THE-DARK
COMPASS
tells directions day
or night

4. STRAP
is durable plas-
tic 8" measure

5. 6-POWER
MAGNIFYING
and burning glass,
secretly concealed

6. WORLD'S SMALLEST
BALL POINT PEN
writes thousands of
words

7. SIGNALLING DEVICE
on the back watch

8. CONSTELLATIONS
Chart shows how to
find the North Star

9. MORSE CODE
engraved on the back

You'll be the envy of all your friends when you wear this sensational 9-way wonder—the amazing, patented new TELZALL SUN WATCH. It's the only watch of its kind in the world. This tickless time piece tells the sun time... nothing to go out of order.

The gracefully designed case of gleaming jeweler's bronze with durable red plastic 8" measuring strap looks like an expensive watch on your wrist. The weather forecaster and the magnifying and fire-starting glass are secretly concealed inside the case.

You'll marvel at the other fascinating features of this wonderful new invention. It may even save your life—with the Morse Code permanently engraved on the back, a glow-in-the-dark compass, signalling mirror, all right on your wrist in case of emergency! What fun, too, being able to predict the weather at a glance, measure objects, write with the world's smallest ball point pen, and locate the North Star and other constellations. Don't delay—rush your order today to be sure of prompt delivery.

SEND NO MONEY Wear the 9-in-1 Telzall Sun Watch on your wrist. See how perfectly it operates. If you don't agree it's worth many dollars more than the small cost, simply return within 10 days for full refund of purchase price.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE—ORDER TODAY

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Enterprises, Inc.

Amazing Value
\$1.98

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TELZALL, Dept. W-315
430 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill. **RUSH**

Gentlemen: Rush ☐ 9-in-1 Telzall Sun Watches described above—on your no-risk 10-day money-back guarantee offer. On delivery I will pay postman only \$1.98 cash plus C.O.D. postage, with the understanding that if I am not completely satisfied I may return within 10 days for full refund of purchase price.

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(please print)

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City..... Zone..... State.....

☐ I enclose \$1.98 for each—send the Telzall 9-in-1 Sun Watch all postage charges prepaid—on money-back guarantee.

"You ought to get a medal!"

says!

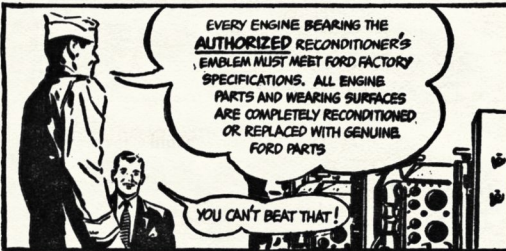
"NOT ME," FRED
COMES BACK.
"THE FORD-AUTHORIZED
RECONDITIONER
SHOULD GET IT."



I STOPPED TO TELL MY MECHANIC FRIEND, FRED, HOW FRISKY
MY FORD IS SINCE I GOT MY RECONDITIONED ENGINE.

SEE THAT EMBLEM? THAT'S WHY
YOUR FORD'S GOT SO MUCH PER.
IT'LL STAY THAT WAY TOO, FOR
THOUSANDS OF MILES TO COME!

THEN THAT'S THE
THING TO LOOK FOR
WHEN YOU'RE
BUYING A
RECONDITIONED
ENGINE!



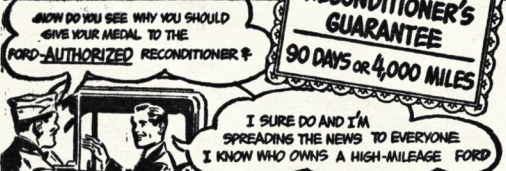
EVERY ENGINE BEARING THE
AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER'S
EMBLEM MUST MEET FORD FACTORY
SPECIFICATIONS. ALL ENGINE
PARTS AND WEARING SURFACES
ARE COMPLETELY RECONDITIONED
OR REPLACED WITH GENUINE
FORD PARTS

YOU CAN'T BEAT THAT!



ENGINE ACCESSORIES GET EXPERT
ATTENTION, TOO. HERE'S A DISTRIBUTOR
BEING TIMED WITH SPECIAL
PRECISION EQUIPMENT.

HE SHOWED ME A PILE OF
OTHER PHOTOS TAKEN
AT A FORD-AUTHORIZED
RECONDITIONER'S AND
BROTHER...THEY HAVE
SOME EQUIPMENT!



HOW DO YOU SEE WHY YOU SHOULD
GIVE YOUR MEDAL TO THE
FORD-AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER?



I SURE DO AND I'M
SPREADING THE NEWS TO EVERYONE.
I KNOW WHO OWNS A HIGH-MILEAGE FORD

AUTHORIZED
RECONDITIONED FORD ENGINES
AND ENGINE ACCESSORIES

(LOOK FOR THE AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER'S EMBLEM
ON THE RECONDITIONED FORD ENGINE YOU BUY)

8

HAROLD HELFER

(Continued from page 6)

A man in Newark, Ohio, arrested for carrying a concealed weapon, a butcher knife, stated that it was merely a keepsake, given to him by his grandmother.

* * *

Arrested by Meriden, Conn., police for driving 75 miles an hour, a motorist explained he was going at that speed because his passenger was a pastor and fearful his flock would leave if he didn't start services on time.

* * *

A Santa Monica, Calif., man told why he had attempted suicide: "I saw this billboard. Fine funeral for \$60. Why miss a bargain like that?"

* * *

Asked by police how many drinks he'd had after they found him by himself on a downtown street talking, waving his arm and shaking his finger, a Milwaukee man explained he was just practicing up on a speech.

* * *

A Montreal night watchman reported how it was that three bandits had been able to surprise him—he'd been deep in the reading of a crime magazine.

* * *

Arrested for attempting to break into a Washington, D.C., grocery store, a man explained he was merely trying to raise some money to pay his lawyer so the lawyer could keep him out of jail.

Build a Fine Business—FULL or SPARE TIME!

START RIGHT! DON'T INVEST A CENT FOR

BIG MONEY

WITH FAST SELLING

MASON JACKETS and COATS

**FREE
SELLING OUTFIT**

CASH PAY EVERY DAY WITH THIS DIRECT-FACTORY LINE!

Start your big business backed by this 47-year-old, million-dollar company. Make money from the first hour, taking orders for fast-selling, customer-satisfying outdoor garments! You just walk in, take your order, collect liberal advance profit, and go on to the next eager customer! You get **FREE SELLING OUTFIT**—everything you need to start cashing in on your first call.

The Garments Men WANT . . . and WILL BUY!



Smooth, gleaming, satin-twill defies winter blasts! Big, luxurious fur collar, **WATER CAN'T HURT IT!** Just ZIP-OFF Laskin Lamb collar for warm weather, makes two coats out of one! Easy to put collar on, take it off, with smooth-acting zipper.

WITH NYLON!*

Sturdy, handsome 33" long coat almost "wear-out proof" because it is 1/5 **NYLON!** Warm, snug Intercel quilted lining, knitted wrist bands, keep you warm on coldest days!

GENUINE HORSEHIDE LEATHER!

(At left) Sturdy, sensible, long-wearing, Genuine Horsehide Leather coats and jackets a "natural" for quick sales to outdoor workers—make big money on orders from Telephone men, Lumber workers, etc.



EASY SHOE ORDERS ADD MORE PROFITS FOR YOU!

Men want sensational new Slip-On, Slip-Off shoe—no laces to break, no wrinkled tongues! Finest leather and craftsmanship, smooth-as-a-glove fit. Over 150 other styles for men, women, in complete line that **LEADS THE FIELD!** Included in **FREE Outfit**—send today!

Velvet-eez AIR CUSHION

SELLS SHOES FAST!

You Just Say: "Feel that cushion!" and orders roll in! Everybody buys shoes—everybody wants the soothing foot-comfort of Exclusive Velvet-eez Air Cushion insoles—a cradle of tiny air bubbles from heel to toe! Tested Ten-second Demonstrator makes selling easy, famous Good Housekeeping Seal on Velvet-eez shoes helps you build confidence—clinch sales!



We SHOW You . . . HELP You!

You get Tested Selling Plans, sure-fire dope on What to Say, What to Do, to cash in right away! Big National Advertising program makes you and your Personal Fitting Service **KNOWN TO MILLIONS!**

SEND FOR YOUR FREE OUTFIT!

Best Selling season just ahead! Get into the Profit-Parade with this fast-selling line of quality garments and fine shoes! Send for **FREE SELLING OUTFIT—TODAY!**

RUSH COUPON TODAY!

**Mason Shoe Mfg. Co., Dept. M-687
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin**

RUSH me your FREE Selling Outfit, so I can get started selling your popular, wanted jacket and coats. Include Ten-Second Velvet-eez Air Cushion Insole Demonstrator, unique Zipper shoes, big line of shoe styles for men and women. Send everything FREE and PREPAID.

Name

Address

City & State

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.

Dept. M-687
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin



FAN FORUM

HI, FANS! Sometimes we get the feeling that a lot of people must think editors are psychic. Actually, we're no more occult than the fortune-teller in Glendinning's "Die, Gypsy, Die," who couldn't foresee her own death.

No, we're not mind-readers. We *want* to give you folks what you like, but it would be lots easier if more of you let us know your feelings. Comments are what keep a magazine on the beam, and a little constructive criticism doesn't hurt, either.

Enough said, eh?

Dear Editor:

In the September 1950 issue of **BLACK MASK**, I see you've brought back my favorite writer—R.M.F. Jones.

Now we're getting somewhere! Do you realize that this is the first story we've had from him since the September 1948 issue? Heaven forbid! Where's he been?

Regardless, don't ever let him get away from you again. His work is much too good for that. I rate him high as a detective writer, and his story, "Mum's the Corpse," seems to me to be an excellent example to back up this statement.

Keep his stuff coming, along with the other top work in **BLACK MASK**, and I'll always remain a faithful reader of your magazine.

10

As for a comment on the artwork, I'd like to say that the September 1950 cover gets my stamp of approval for being outstanding. It's really juicy! I think we should give up this business of having a series of black-covered magazines and then a series of white-covered magazines, etc., and have fun and splash a lot of color around each issue.

Do you get what I mean? Swell. I hope there isn't anybody offended by my outspoken piece.

Sincerely yours,
Marie R. Spencer
Hinton, W. Va.

EDITOR: Thanks very much for your comments, especially on our covers. As you've probably noticed, since the May 1950 issue we've been using colorful backgrounds and "splashing the color around," and we plan to continue this as long as our readers seem to like it.

Dear Editor:

I've just finished reading "Don't Kill, My Love" by Paul Kolton (in the September issue), and I want to tell you I think it's a swell story.

Kolton has a way of writing that really builds up suspense. The story was quite timely, too. Let's see a lot more of his stories.

I also liked Davis' story about the "Blonde Who Wouldn't Die." This was an especially good issue even for **BLACK MASK**—just another reason I make sure I get every copy.

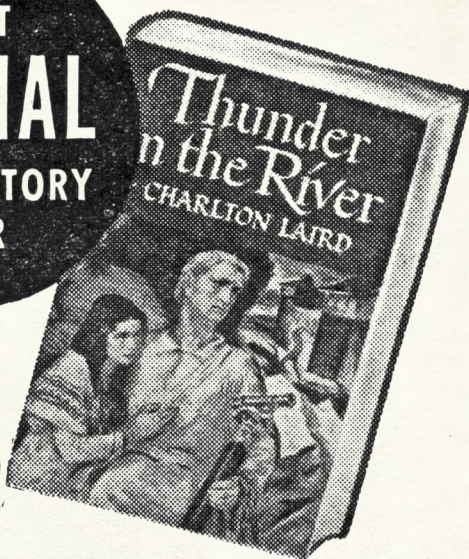
Sincerely,
P. Thomas Brown
Kansas City, Mo.

That's it for this month, readers. Keep your letters coming to **BLACK MASK DETECTIVE**, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, New York.

THE EDITOR



GREAT
SPECIAL
INTRODUCTORY
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\$1.00

YOUR CHOICE OF TWO GREAT BOOKS

CHESAPEAKE CAVALIER, a novel by Don Tracy
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FIVE O'CLOCK SHROUD

By
**RICHARD
DEMING**



CHAPTER ONE

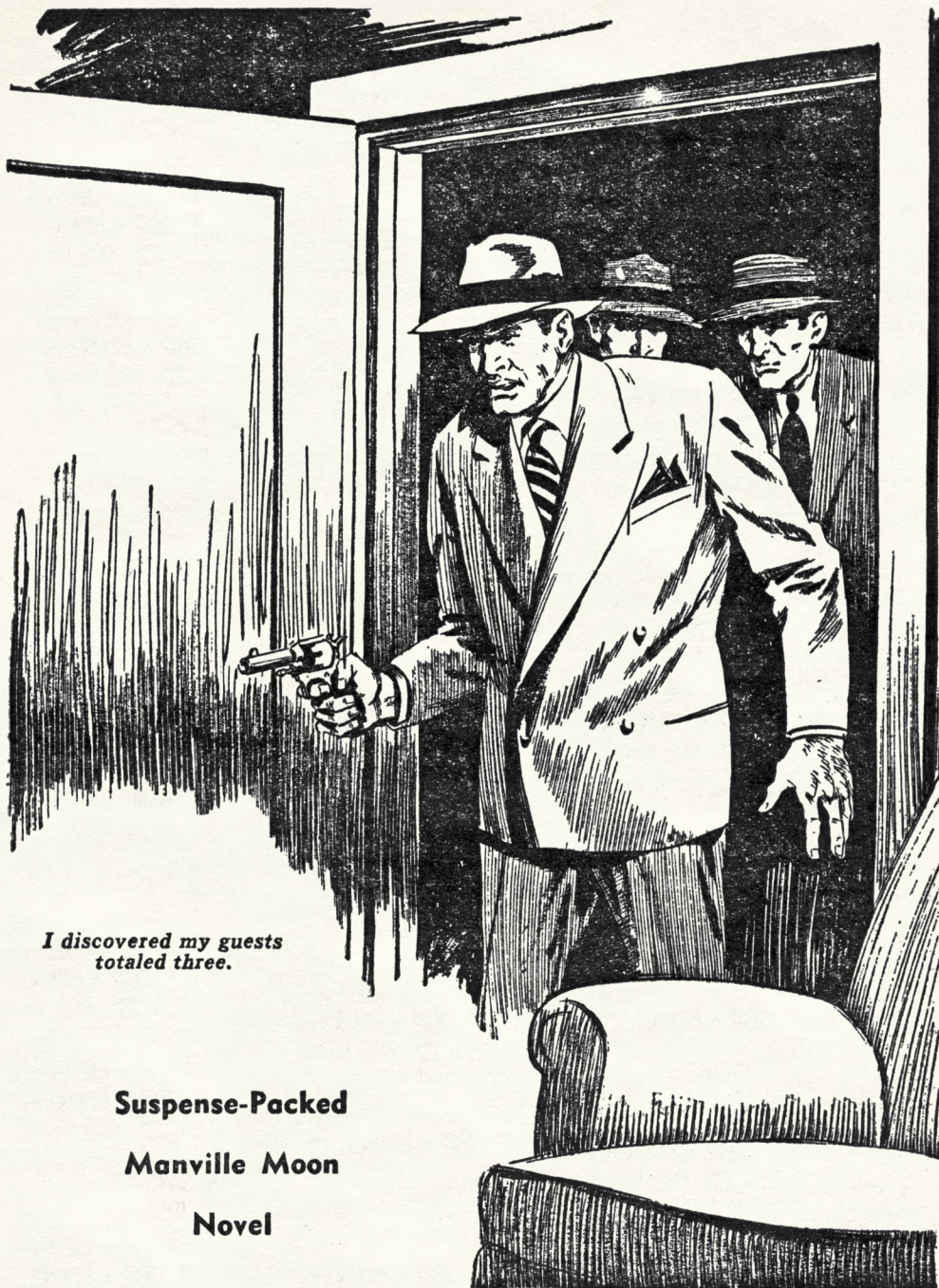
What Price Glory?

I WAS feeling pretty satisfied with myself. It isn't every day that a private detective gets to nip a crooked politician's career in the bud by exposing his crookedness. Nor every day that he makes a hundred dollars for three hours work.

But mostly I was feeling satisfied because my name wouldn't enter into it. My fat client, Raymond Margrove, would take all the credit—and also any of the gangland vengeance that was handed out. Normally in a case as big as the exposé of Gerald Ketterer, I



would have welcomed newspaper publicity, for it is equivalent to free advertising. But when the exposed crook heads a city-wide gambling syndicate reinforced by numerous goons who carry



*I discovered my guests
totaled three.*

Suspense-Packed

Manville Moon

Novel

**Goons were busting out all over, making Mr. Moon regret—
that he'd cracked a safe, kissed a blonde, and toppled
a gambling czar's throne!**

guns, I would just as soon remain incognito. Free advertising won't plug up a hole in your head when a mugg goes to work on you.

The story broke in an extra edition of the *Morning Blade* at midnight. Hailing a newsboy from a front room window of my apartment, I tossed him a coin. He folded a paper into a compact envelope and tossed to me in turn. Without a care in the world, I settled in an easy chair to read the account from start to finish.

Two inch headlines on the front page announced: REFORM MAYORALTY CANDIDATE EXPOSED AS GAMBLING HEAD. The story rated two columns plus a front page editorial. I read the news story first:

Late this evening the MORNING BLADE came into possession of documentary proof that Gerald Ketterer, candidate for mayor on the Reform ticket, is secretly the head of the same city-wide gambling syndicate he claims to be fighting. The proof is in the form of a detailed confession in Ketterer's own writing, describing the entire gambling setup, which includes 483 illegal horse-betting establishments, fifty-three house-run dice and card games and the locations of 1,528 slot machines throughout the entire city.

In a preface to the document, Ketterer states: "This book has been prepared by me as a form of life insurance, since the enterprises in which I am engaged involve contact with various individuals who would like to replace me, and are not above murder as a means of accomplishing their end. These individuals are aware of the existence of this book, and I have taken pains to inform them my secretary has instructions to destroy it in event of my death from natural causes or accident, but has been instructed to turn it over to the MORNING BLADE if there is any suspicious element connected with my death."

The document, which is in the form of a plain clothbound notebook, did not come to the MORNING BLADE as a result of Ketterer's death, however; and as far as this paper knows, the Reform candidate for mayor is still in perfect health. The manuscript was accidentally discovered by a private investigator named Manville Moon, who turned it over to the MORNING BLADE as soon as he realized its importance.

I STOPPED there to do a double take. And that is where I began to develop cares. Before finishing the item, I went into the bedroom, cleaned and loaded my P-38 and laid it on my bedside stand. Then I cursed the mental image of Raymond Margrove and returned to the paper.

Reporters were unable to reach Ketterer for a statement, as neither his bachelor apartment nor his office showed lights, and both telephones went unanswered. Miss Antoinette DeKalb, private secretary to Ketterer, was interviewed at her home at 324 Center St., but denied all knowledge of the document. However, she did admit after examining the preface that the handwriting was that of her employer.

The rest of the story was a biography of Gerald Ketterer.

The front-page editorial was one of those "We are deeply shocked to discover a viper in our bosom" things. I gathered that while the *Morning Blade* had innocently supported Gerald Ketterer for mayor, it was big enough to admit a mistake, and now wanted no part of him.

Reading it made me sleepy, so after checking the locks on both doors and making sure my P-38 had a shell in the chamber, I went to bed.

I was awakened at ten a.m. by another newsboy shouting, "Extra!"

Irritably I thought the *Blade* was certainly dragging its *extra* out, since the regular morning edition must have hit the street three hours before.

Rolling out of bed, I hopped to the bathroom on my left foot, my right leg consisting of a cork and aluminum contraption I don't bother to wear when asleep. After a shave and shower, I hopped back into the bedroom again, fished my leg from beneath the bed and strapped it on.

While waiting for coffee water to come to a boil on the stove, I switched on the shelf-model radio in my kitchen.

A musical program ended and the news came on.

"This is George Gross with the up-to-the-minute news," said the commentator. "At eight o'clock this morning mayoralty candidate Gerald Ketterer was discovered to have committed suicide as a result of the sensational disclosures made by the *Morning Blade* last night. The body was discovered by Miss Antoinette DeKalb, the dead man's secretary.

"Miss DeKalb had waited until the Rand Building, in which Ketterer maintained his office, opened at seven a.m.; then had obtained an extra key to Ketterer's apartment from her employer's desk, and arrived at the apartment about eight. The dead man was discovered in the bathroom, where he had slashed both wrists with a razor and bled to death.

The rest of the report was a rehash

of the exposé made by the *Blade*.

I was stirring my second cup of coffee when the phone rang. Carrying my cup with me, I went into the bedroom to answer it. It was Raymond Margrove.

"Hear the news?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "Just now on the radio." Then in a sour tone I added, "Thanks for the newspaper plug."

Apparently he caught the sour note. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Good publicity, wasn't it?"

"Sure. Every gambler in town will love me."

For a moment he was silent. "I hadn't thought of it like that," he said finally. "I thought I was doing you a favor."

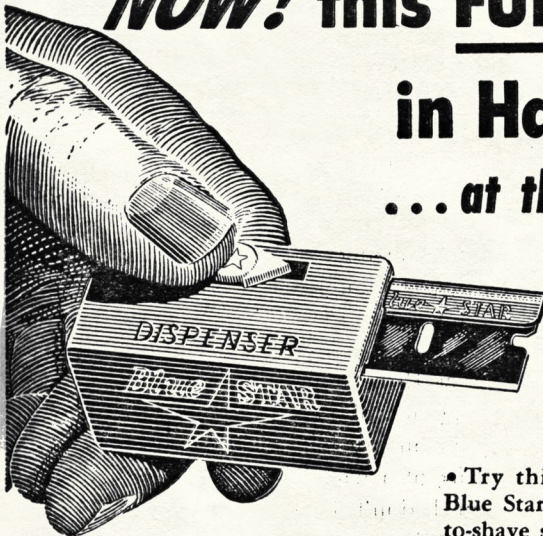
"Don't do me any more like that," I said shortly. "That crowd moves fast and plays rough. You didn't swallow that suicide story, did you?"

"What do you mean?"

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"Why should Ketterer commit suicide?" I asked. "And don't tell me because he couldn't become mayor and his racket was busted wide open. The most he could have gotten on a gambling rap is a five-hundred-dollar fine, and the guy had a fortune to pay it with. The syndicate rubbed him out for spilling the works."

HE WAS silent even longer this time, and I could hear his labored breathing as he thought things over.

"But it was obviously a suicide," he managed finally.

"Nuts," I said.

Suddenly his voice squeaked, "Do you think I might be in danger?"

"Not if you keep your mouth shut," I told him peevishly. "They'll be looking for a guy named Moon."

I hung up on him and took my coffee back to the kitchen to finish.

Twenty minutes later I was still sitting there smoking a cigar and trying to promote enough energy to wash the coffee pot when a polite cough came from the kitchen door.

I turned to observe a dapper young man of about twenty-five exposing even white teeth in a grin. He was carrying a .45 automatic.

"I'm sure I left the door locked," I said foolishly.

"I brought a friend who talks to locks," he explained pleasantly.

From behind him a long, sad-looking face peered over his shoulder and said querulously, "Cut the humor, Hank."

Without glancing around, Hank said, "Sure, Keys." Then he jiggled the gun at me and said, "On your feet, buddy."

"Nuts," I said without moving, "You won't let that thing go off in an apartment house with paper walls like this one. Incidentally, my name is Mister Moon."

His college-boy grin came back. "Don't bank on the thin walls. People always think it's a backfire, and I get a kick out of shooting this thing off."

His left fist clenched and he moved toward me casually. I kept my eye on the clenched fist, but I under-estimated him. Suddenly his gun snaked out and crashed alongside my head.

Half-stunned, I toppled sidewise off my chair, landing on all fours.

"Now get on your feet, *buddy*," he said in a quiet voice. When the room stopped reeling, I got on my feet. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

The Big Flim-Flam

THE first time I saw Raymond Margrove, the guy who got me in all this trouble, I didn't believe him possible.

I don't rent an office, since the only office work I do is interviewing clients, and renting space for that would be presumptuous for a private investigator with the few clients I get. I was sitting in my apartment listening to my bank account dwindle when he called.

He didn't bother to knock, possibly because it would have required so much energy to lift his fat arm above the door knob. The door just opened and a stomach came into the room.

It wasn't the biggest stomach I had ever seen, for once I saw a pregnant hippopotamus. But it was the biggest stomach I had ever seen outside of a tank of water.

"Have a seat," I invited, gesturing toward the other easy chair, then changing my mind and pointing at the sofa.

The sofa was a better fit. He sat in the exact center, entirely covering the middle cushion and using up part of the one on either side. He must have weighed four-hundred pounds.

For a few moments he simply sat and wheezed, his multiple chins quivering and his huge stomach shaking with each breath. I waited for him to recover from the stupendous exertion of having climbed eight steps to my flat.

"Pardon my not knocking," the fat man said when he had regained his strength. "Hope I'm in the right apartment. You're Manville Moon?"

I admitted the charge.

"You know who I am, of course."

I knew who he was. He was Raymond Margrove, the town Boy Scout. Specialist in good deeds. Every time a charity drive came along, Margrove's picture appeared in the paper as fun chairman. He was also president of the Chamber of Commerce, secretary of a service club, and a director of the Business Men's Association for Honest Government. In his spare time he eked out a living as president of the Margrove Business Equipment Company, Incorporated, which manufactured office safes and cash registers. He probably wasn't worth a cent over a million dollars. I knew who he was, but didn't particularly care for his assumption that I should.

"Never saw you before," I said.

He looked completely surprised and slightly nettled. "I am Raymond Margrove."

He waited expectantly until I said, "Never heard of you."

This time his expression was amazed. But slowly the amazement died to be replaced by a faint smile.

"You're putting me in my place, of course, Mr. Moon. I was warned you delight in deflating pomposity. And just yesterday my niece told me I had become a pompous old fool." Heavy lips lifted to change the faint smile into a grin.

I said, "Now I like you better. Have a drink?"

"Thanks. Plain water, please."

I moved to the sideboard, mixed two water highballs and handed him one. Then I lifted the lid of my cigar humidor and raised one eyebrow.

"No thanks," he said. "Doctor's orders." He hefted his glass slightly. "Peculiarly enough, he says a little of this occasionally is good for my heart."

As I set fire to my cigar, he dipped his hand in a side pocket, popped two chocolate creams into his mouth, munched them enjoyably and washed them down with a slug of his highball.

"Piece of candy?" he asked.

When I shook my head, he finally got around to his business.

"You are aware of the local mayoralty election coming up, I presume, Mr. Moon?"

I nodded.

"And the deliberate slander being circulated about the incumbent, Mayor John Cash."

I elevated another eyebrow. "Slander?"

"The newspaper innuendos that His Honor is somehow connected with the gambling rackets—or at best neglects his duty by permitting them to flourish."

"Is that slander?" I asked. "If you have time for a tour of the city, I'll show you five-hundred wide-open bookshops, fifty dice and card games, and a one-armed bandit in every tavern."

The fat man frowned, which pushed down the mass of fat beneath his jaw and produced another chin. "I am aware that the city is rife with gambling. However, I have reason to believe John Cash has no connection with it."

I shrugged. "The police here are square. You couldn't buy Chief George Chester with a million dollars. If the mayor gave orders, the cops would stop gambling in twenty-four hours. The only answer is, he hasn't given orders. Personally, I intend to vote for Gerald Ketterer."

He nodded agreeably, causing all his chins to quiver again. "Most people seem to favor the Reform Party candidate—and for the same reason you do. Until last night I intended to vote for Ketterer myself. In fact I have been instrumental in swinging him considerable support through the various civic organizations to which I belong. But last night I discovered there is a possibility that I and the rest of the public have been cleverly flim-flammed, and that Gerald Ketterer is an out-and-out criminal."

He pursed his thick lips, and I waited with both eyebrows raised.

"Last night," he went on, "Mayor Cash visited me secretly. He picked me because he felt I had sufficient influence to help him, if anyone could. After hearing his story, I decided influence was useless in a case such as this, and what we needed was an honest and discreet private investigator."

"That's me," I said modestly.

HE FIXED somewhat bulging eyes on my face and said slowly, "Mayor John Cash is literally being blackmailed by Gerald Ketterer into losing the election."

I asked, "How's that again?"

"Somehow Ketterer got hold of some pictures taken at a party Mayor Cash attended about five years ago. A year before he became mayor. They show the mayor with a—ah—lady of some notoriety. Politically he could probably weather the storm even if they were published, for they aren't actually damaging pictures. However, he was married at the time, and still is. He loves his wife deeply, and is sure she would leave him immediately if she saw the pictures. This is the hold Ketterer has over him. For three years Gerald Ketterer has forced John Cash to declare a hands-off policy on gambling,

on the threat of sending his wife the pictures."

I absorbed this along with the rest of my drink, leaned back and blew cigar smoke at the ceiling. "And now," I said thoughtfully, "Ketterer is using the same lever to make Cash stand still under the accusation of being tied to the gambling ring. Sounds like the Reform candidate himself is the big wheel behind the gamblers."

"Exactly my conclusion," Margrove said. "And also what John Cash believes. As the situation stands, there is no doubt Ketterer will be swept in on the Reform ticket. He will make a gesture at cleaning up gambling; then when public interest dies, all the gambling places will quietly open again, more firmly intrenched than ever."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"Two things. First I want you to recover those pictures. Second, I want you to find evidence that Gerald Ketterer is actually behind the gambling rackets."

"The second part sounds like a big order."

"It is," the fat man agreed. "But without it, the first is useless. Public sentiment is so in favor of Ketterer, only a complete exposé could turn it back to Cash at this point. And election is four days off. You'll have to work fast."

I eyed him quizzically. "Frankly, I don't think I could accomplish much in that time, but I'm willing to try. Incidentally, Mr. Margrove, just what is your interest in all this?"

"Public service," he said simply.

I nodded understandingly. The fat man was doing his good deed for the day. But while not as lofty as my client's, I have a few principles too, and I don't believe in by-passing them even when dealing with unselfish servants of the public.

I said, "I'll undertake the job with one understanding, Mr. Margrove. I make it a rule when I'm hired to recover anything used for the purpose of blackmail, that if I get my hands on it, I turn it over to the person being blackmailed, regardless of who hires me."

"I'll see that His Honor gets it," Margrove said.

I shook my head. "No sir. I hand it to the mayor personally. I know you are above suspicion and go to church every Sunday, but once I stole some letters from a blackmailer, turned them over to a friend of the person being blackmailed, and the friend went into the blackmail business."

He started to frown, then turned it into a chuckle. "All right, Mr. Moon. If it will make you feel better, I have no objection. I will, however, expect you to turn over to me any evidence you find connecting Gerald Ketterer to the gambling ring."

I rose and punched out my cigar. "It's a deal. And since time is short, I may as well start right now. You can make out a retainer check while I get my hat. Four days at twenty-five dollars a day comes to a hundred dollars."

When I returned from the bedroom, he was waving the check back and forth to dry it. As I thrust it in my wallet, he heaved to his feet and waddled toward the door. With his hand on the knob he turned back again.

"I know nothing of the detective business, Mr. Moon, and don't presume to tell you your own job, but I suppose you plan to search Gerald Ketterer's home and his office?"

"Possibly," I said in a non-committal tone, not feeling it necessary to confess illegal entry even to a client.

"Then I'll save you a little time. Ketterer is a bachelor and lives alone in suite 620 of the Plaza Apartments. His office is on the twelfth floor of the Rand

Building. The office closes at five p.m., so it would seem the best time to examine his apartment would be in the daytime, and the best time for the office between five and six, after which the elevators stop running.

I said, "You should have been a detective yourself."

"I just happen to know his habits," he said. "I do my investment business with Ketterer."

CHAPTER THREE

Crusader's Confession

REFUSING my fat client's offer of a ride in his chauffeur-driven car, I separated from him at the curb and walked to the public garage up the street where I kept the car the government had given me in exchange for my leg. It was an automatic drive specially equipped for left-legged driving, having the brake pedal left of the steering column instead of right.

I was nearly to the Plaza Apartments when I developed an intuitive feeling that I was being tailed. While waiting for a light to change, I glanced in the rearview mirror and caught sight of a blue coupe two cars back. I had not been watching for a tail, but subconsciously I was aware of having seen the same coupe in the mirror every time I looked.

When I drove into the Plaza's parking lot, the coupe went on by and I got a look at the driver. He had the square scrubbed-looking face and crew haircut of a college athlete, and looked to be about college age. I wondered why I was becoming jittery and imagining college boys were tailing me.

Since it was after four, I had no intention of trying to enter Ketterer's apartment that day and taking a chance he might knock off work early. I merely

wanted to case the place. I rode a self-service elevator to the sixth floor, located suite 620 and rode the elevator down again.

From a drug store across from the parking lot, I phoned Jackie Morgan at the bed-bug haven he called home.

My association with Jackie originated years before in a saloon brawl. Two drunken heavyweights had been using his hundred and twenty pound frame for a punching bag, and I reduced the odds by banging their heads together. My motive in interfering had been interest in fair play rather than concern for his welfare, for at the time I didn't even know him. But he never forgot it, and still considered his debt unpaid.

At sixty Jackie Morgan was a retired safe-cracker who had paid his debt to society with ten years of his life and now lived on an annuity left by a deceased brother. No police anywhere wanted him, but he got some kind of a kick out of maintaining contact with the underworld, and lived in a criminals' hide-out, where he seemed to be accepted as a harmless eccentric. I frequently called on his diversified talents, the most valuable of which was an almost supernatural ability with locks.

I told him to bring his kit and meet me at the magazine rack of the drug store in the Rand Building.

I couldn't find a parking place near the Rand Building, and finally left my car on a public lot two blocks away. As I walked past the drug store where I had told Jackie Morgan to meet me, I glanced through the window and saw he had not yet arrived. But I did see another familiar figure.

Coming out of a phone booth was the same square-headed college boy I had imagined was tailing me. As I watched, he left the store, climbed into the blue coupe parked at the curb and drove away. If he was tailing me, he

would have stuck around, I reasoned, and decided it was coincidence.

Across from the main entrance of the Rand Building I found a post to lean against from which I could both watch for Jackie to arrive and for Gerald Ketterer to leave. I had never met Ketterer, but since he had entered the mayoralty race his picture had been plastered on political posters all over town, and I felt sure I could spot him.

I started my vigil at twenty-five after four. At a quarter of five a taxi dropped three men at the entrance of the Rand Building. I knew all three casually, and if Gerald Ketterer really was king-pin of the gambling racket, these three must have been calling on him for a meeting of some kind, for they were the three biggest gamblers in town.

Dan Ironbaltz, the biggest of the three, both in size and underworld importance, ostensibly ran a high-class eatery called the Penguin Club. There was nothing on the police blotter about him, for I had had occasion to check, but it was common knowledge in the underworld that the Penguin Club was an expensive and profitless front, and the income which kept him in cars and champagne came from his job as straw-boss of the bookshops. He was a huge, ugly man with coarse features and heavy eyebrows which met over his nose to form one solid line. His arms were long and hairy, and hung motionless in front of him when he walked in his slightly thrust-forward position, so that he resembled nothing so much as a gorilla in hand-tailored clothes.

James Goodrich was the smallest of the three physically, but probably second in criminal importance. It was rumored that if you owned a tavern and wanted some extra revenue to help pay the rent, Goodrich could arrange to have a slot-machine installed if you guaranteed him half the take. It was

also rumored that if you installed a machine on your own hook, without Jimmy Goodrich's permission, cops called and took it away the first night. He was a little thin-faced man with a beak nose and an expression like a weasel with a stomach-ache.

Art Depledge was an average of both the other two. Of medium height and stocky build, he had the round, pleasant face of a grocery clerk—the sort of face you would instinctively trust. That is, unless you knew he was one of the sharpest card and dice men in town, and had accumulated a fortune through having people instinctively trust him. I had always thought he gambled strictly on his own, and had heard nothing to tie him to the numerous professional games spotting the town. But seeing him in the company of the other two straw-bosses, it didn't require genius to hazard the guess that he straw-bossed the dice and

card games held at the local night clubs.

THE trio entered the Rand Building together. At five minutes after five, a whole horde of office workers disgorged from the entrance, and in their center I spotted Gerald Ketterer. He was easy to spot, because he had a long, humorless face and wore his prematurely white hair long, like a Kentucky senator.

In the crowd on either side of him were Jimmy Goodrich and Art Depledge, and trailing immediately behind him was Dan Ironbaltz. Ketterer stepped to the curb to hail a cab just as little Jimmy Goodrich slapped him lightly on the back. When the Reform candidate for mayor turned toward him, Goodrich grasped his hand and wrung it warmly.

From across the street it seemed to me Ketterer showed no enthusiasm for the handshake. Almost immediately he



oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"SAM'S nice, but he'd be a lot nicer if he did something about that Dry Scalp! His hair is dull and unruly—and he has loose dandruff, too! I've got just the ticket for him—'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



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withdrew his hand, and when big Dan Ironbaltz and Art Depledge each clapped him familiarly on the shoulder, he glanced both ways along the street, apparently to see if anyone was noticing. I hardly blamed him, for it would certainly have not won him many votes for mayor to be seen in that trio's company.

At that moment a taxi pulled up, Ketterer entered it and drove off without even glancing back at the men who had bid him good-by so chummily.

The three gamblers managed to catch the next cab, and disappeared in the same direction taken by Ketterer.

Jackie Morgan had still not arrived at the drug store. Crossing the street, I pushed my way through the crowd still coming out of the building and entered one of the six elevators. It was an express piloted by a beautiful but expressionless blonde. Since everyone else was coming down, I had her to myself. But before I could work the conversation beyond the point of stating, "Twelfth floor, please," the elevator went "Whoosh!" and there we were.

"Service stops at six o'clock, sir," she said. Her voice was as expressionless as her face.

I said, "I'll try to be through by then."

The office of the reform candidate for mayor had *Gerald Ketterer, Investment Broker* printed on its stained glass door. I opened the door inward just in time to push it against a blonde not quite as pretty as the elevator operator, but with more expression. At the moment her expression was startled, for the door knocked her backward and she dropped her purse.

"Sorry," I said, removing my hat and stooping to recover the purse. "Clumsy of me."

She examined me thoroughly, starting with my face, estimating the breadth of my shoulders and moving her eyes slowly down to my feet. She couldn't

have been impressed by my face, so it must have been the shoulders that melted her.

"We're closed," she said in a soft voice suggesting she would have stayed open another hour had she known I was coming. "Did you want to see Mr. Ketterer?"

"Yes. I realize it's after office hours, but I'll only take a minute."

"He's gone home," she said. "If you'll tell me your business and leave your phone number and name, I'll see if I can arrange an appointment and phone you tomorrow." The way her full lips quirked at the corners, I got the impression that while we were on the subject of phone numbers, she would be glad to offer hers.

I held the door for her. "Never mind. I'll ring him at home this evening. It wasn't a business matter."

As she passed through the door, my thumb pushed back the spring bolt at the same time my forefinger locked it open. Then I pulled the door shut and we were both in the hall.

It was wasted effort, for she didn't depend on the night lock. Taking a key from her bag, she shot the main bolt home. We went down on the elevator together, neither speaking, but giving each other the eye and both liking what we saw. She was a cute enough kid to make me wish I had time to play, but unfortunately I had business to attend to. In front of the building we parted with mutual reluctance.

In the drug store at the corner of the Rand Building, I found that Jackie had finally arrived.

"What took you so long?" I asked.

"Hadda pick this up first," he said, hefting a leather briefcase. "I loaned it to a friend who's still in the profession."

In his neat gray suit and with his briefcase, the contents of which would have made a locksmith drool with envy,

Jackie looked like a dried-up insurance salesman. We caught the same elevator I had taken up before, but excited no comment from the operator.

When she let us out at twelve, she said in the same expressionless voice she had used before, "Service stops at six, sir."

Though the office door next to Ketterer's was open, no one was in the hall as we approached the door marked *Gerald Ketterer, Investment Broker*. Using a piece of spring steel no thicker than a coarse hair, it took Jackie about as long to open the door as it would have taken me with a key. I set the night lock and closed it again from inside.

With daylight saving the sun was still high, and lights were unnecessary. The office consisted of two rooms, a reception room and Ketterer's private office. I spent fifteen minutes on the reception room, finding nothing of interest.

The inner office contained a locked safe bearing a metal plate below the door inscribed, *Guaranteed Burglar-proof. . . Margrove Business Equipment Co., Inc.* I put Jackie to work on it while I went through the desk and file cabinet. Drawing a blank, I slammed the last drawer closed in disgust.

"Quiet!" Jackie said petulantly.

HE HAD on a stethoscope and was slowly turning the safe's combination dial. Although retired, Jackie still kept his fingers in practice, and modestly admitted to still being the best cracksmen in the country. I wouldn't know, because I wasn't acquainted with any other cracksmen, but he was a pleasure to watch.

Jackie straightened with a frown, drew a piece of fine sand-paper from his briefcase and set my teeth on edge by running his fingertips over it to make them sensitive. Then he went back to work.

Ten minutes later the safe which was

guaranteed burglar-proof swung open.

The safe contained four compartments, which I tackled one by one. The first held about two-hundred dollars in bills and seven checks totalling eight-thousand dollars, all clipped to a bank deposit slip dated the next day. The second compartment contained several hundred stock certificates and bonds, all of them declaring the owner to be Gerald Ketterer, and none of them negotiable. If they were worth anything, Ketterer seemed pretty well fixed financially.

The last two compartments contained file folders, which in turn contained private correspondence, confidential market reports, contracts with clients and other matters such as any business man might not wish to keep in an open file accessible to anyone who happened to be in the office.

Concealed behind the folders in the bottom compartment I found what I wanted.

The pictures were in a plain envelope, unsealed. There were three of them and they showed His Honor, Mayor John Cash, attired in a dinner jacket and obviously very drunk. A woman in a low-cut evening dress appeared with him in all three: once on his lap with an arm around his neck and the other hand holding a champagne glass. Once sitting on a sofa with his head in her lap, and once with both standing while he administered what seemed to be a lingering kiss.

Aside from making His Honor look rather ridiculous, the pictures didn't impress me as very hot stuff for blackmail—except for one thing. The woman was Anne "Bumpsie" Farrel, an ex-burlesque artist who had attained notoriety on three separate occasions by being named correspondent in divorce cases involving prominent men, each of which had ensconced her in what the papers delighted in calling "love nests."

I could understand how the mayor's wife might react strongly to Bumpsie.

Slipping the envelope in my pocket, I examined the other item concealed behind the file folders. It was a plain cloth-bound notebook of lined paper. On the first page was written a statement that began: "This book has been prepared by me as a form of life insurance, since the enterprises in which I am engaged involve contact with various individuals who would like to replace me, and are not above murder as a means of accomplishing their end. . . ."

It was signed: "Gerald Ketterer".

The remainder of the notebook was a detailed list of nearly five-hundred bookshops, with addresses and proprietors, fifty-some dice and card games, and the locations of what must have been fifteen-hundred slot machines, though I didn't bother to count. Every little-shot in the gambling rackets was listed by name, but nowhere was there mention of big Dan Ironbaltz, little Jimmy Goodrich or middle-sized Art Depledge.

We caught a down elevator at five minutes to six.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Cash-and-Carry Corpse

FROM the drug store where I had met Jackie Morgan, I phoned Raymond Margrove. An oriental servant who pronounced his "r"s like "l"s and wasn't at all sure his employer was home answered the phone, and we went through a long argument in pidgin English before I finally got to talk to my fat client. Then before I could say anything, Margrove began issuing instructions.

"I've been trying to reach you at your apartment," he said aggrievedly, apparently resentful that I wasn't on hand to pop out of the wall whenever he

pushed a button. "I'd like you to drop over right away."

"That was my idea," I told him. "I just phoned to make sure you were in."

Outside the drug store I parted with Jackie, who accepted the twenty I thrust on him only after I assured him it would go on my client's expense account. Although his small annuity was his total income, Jackie refused to accept pay for his unique services if he thought it was coming out of my own pocket.

Raymond Margrove lived in the most expensive section along Lindell Boulevard, and his house was one of the city's show places. It was of the modern school of architecture—eighteen rooms all on one floor, built mainly of plate glass and steel, so that it resembled a huge outdoor aquarium.

The oriental servant, who turned out to be a round-headed butler about five feet tall, but built like a wrestler, let me in. I followed him through a sitting room furnished with glittering tubular furniture and whose entire front wall was a sheet of heavy glass looking out on the front patio, through a game room containing a bar but no windows, the ceiling of this one being glass, and into a study with two glass walls and a skylight.

The butler said something that sounded like, "Mlistel Mlanville Mloon," bowed formally and removed himself by backing out of sight into the game room.

Raymond Margrove sat with a book in his lap in an easy chair twice the size of an ordinary chair. It was geometrically set to bisect the right angle formed by the two glass walls, its back to the corner in order to catch the best light. The fat man's slippered feet were on a footstool, and on an end table next to his chair was a nearly empty box of chocolates.

I glanced around the room, noted the two walls not glass were lined with hooks

which looked well-handled, but the built-in desk in the center of one wall had the display-window appearance of never having been used. I had my choice of two chrome and hard leather straight chairs, or the cushioned swivel chair which went with the desk, and was also specially designed for my client's bulk. I chose the latter.

"Will you have a drink?" Margrove asked.

"No thanks," I said, surprising myself, for it was perhaps the third drink I had ever refused. I laid it to the feeling of unease all the glittering modernism engendered in me.

"Piece of candy?"

I shook my head and watched while he popped two fat chocolates in his mouth at once.

"I called you over because I may be able to make your task easier," Margrove said. "It didn't occur to me this afternoon, but my company manufactured the safe Gerald Ketterer has in his office. I have the combination for you."

I said, "I won't need it," walked over and tossed the notebook in his lap.

He spent five minutes examining it, then raised his head and looked at me in amazement. "How—how the deuce did you get it out of the safe?"

"Who said it was in a safe?"

He thought about this, then admitted, "No one. Knowing he had a burglar-proof safe, I just assumed he'd keep im-

portant matters in it. Where *did* you find it?"

"In a gutter," I said, and when he just stared at me blankly, added, "Even though Ketterer isn't likely to complain to the police, I don't make a practice of going around admitting felonies. And if I did, you'd become an accessory. I found it in a gutter at Fourth and Walnut. Right next to the pictures the mayor wanted."

"I see," he said agreeably. "Then you have the pictures too?"

I nodded. "I'll drop them at the mayor's house when I leave here. You might phone and tell him to expect me."

He pressed a button set in the arm of his chair, and almost immediately the butler appeared.

"Phone His Honor, Mayor Cash," Margrove instructed. "Tell him to expect Manville Moon with that material he wanted in twenty minutes."

As the butler backed out, Margrove began to study the notebook in more detail. Ten minutes passed in silence, after which he snapped it shut and grinned at me happily.

"This is really much better than I expected, Mr. Moon. I don't know how to thank you."

"Try it with money," I suggested. "There was an expense item of twenty dollars."

He raised his eyebrows. "Yes?"

I shook my head. "You'll have to take

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my word for it. Again if I told you, you'd become an accessory."

Huge shoulders moving in a ponderous shrug, he grunted and strained for his wallet. Somehow he managed to find a twenty among the half-inch sheath of fifties and hundreds, and extended it to me. Apparently there was to be no bonus for rapid service.

"Thanks very much," I said politely, and bid him good night.

MAYOR JOHN CASH'S home was also on Lindell Boulevard, a scant block and a half from Margrove's. He lived in one of the old "Quality" homes, as the mansions built by rich men in the Nineties are called locally. It was a rambling but solid structure of three stories, old but in perfect condition, and as comfortable-looking as an old shoe.

Mayor John Cash himself came to the door. He was a suave, middle-aged man with distinguished iron-gray hair and a bland face which perpetually wore a slight smile.

"Mr. Moon?" he inquired, and when I nodded he held the door wide. "Come in. The servants are off tonight, but I've been awaiting your ring."

He led me into a study as comfortable as Raymond Margrove's had been hard and unyielding, pushed a wall panel which swivelled to expose a small bar, and offered me a drink.

Liking the atmosphere of this study better, I accepted.

When we were comfortably seated with our drinks, I pulled out the envelope and gave it to him. Quickly he checked the contents, then glanced at me with a slightly embarrassed expression.

"Did you see these?" he asked.

"Naturally," I said. "I had to make sure it was what I was looking for."

"Of course. Excuse the silly question."

Laying the pictures on a metal ash tray, he touched a match to them and watched them burn with a faint smile. He made no attempt to explain or apologize for his ridiculous appearance in the photographs, for which I admired him.

"Do I owe you anything, Mr. Moon?" he asked.

"I was retained by Margrove," I told him. "He paid me. Settle with him, if you wish."

Setting down my empty glass, I rose and told him I'd be running along. Courteously he held the door for me, followed me along the hall and opened the front door for me too.

But before I could pass through it, a woman entered. She was a tall willowy brunette in her early thirties, with more curves than a mountain highway and a full, sultry mouth. She was about three-quarters drunk.

"Hel-lo!" she trilled, steadying herself with one hand against my chest. She stared up into my face with wide-open invitation and asked, "Where'd you come from, you fascinating ugly man?"

"Elizabeth!" Mayor Cash said, attempting to take her arm.

Impatiently she shrugged him off. "What's your name, ugly man?"

Before answering I walked over to a hall mirror and studied the drooping eyelid and bent nose I once gathered from a set of brass knuckles. I don't think about my looks very much, but I guess I am ugly.

Turning back to her, I said, "Moon. Manville Moon. What's your name, ugly woman?"

She laughed fit to kill. When she finally got back her breath, she said, "You don't mean it, because you think I'm beautiful. But you really are ugly, isn't he, John? Ugly and strong. Just the way I like men. You staying to dinner, Mr. Ugly Moon?"

"No thanks," I said.

"Please, Elizabeth," said the mayor. "Mr. Moon was just leaving."

"Go away, spoil-sport," she said. Moving toward me, she steadied herself against my chest again. "Come back after dinner and we'll get ugly drunk together. My name is Elizabeth. Elizabeth Cash."

"Mrs.?"

"Pooh," she said. "Sure, Mrs. But who cares? We'll lock old spoil-sport in his study and you and I'll get ugly drunk."

"Sure," I said, sidling around her to the door. "Expect me about then, or maybe sooner unless I get held up. Nice to have met you both."

I got out the door and closed it in her face before she could stagger after me.

But I didn't return after dinner to get ugly drunk. I sat around my apartment until midnight waiting for the news to break, and at midnight I heard a newsboy calling, "Extra! Read all about it!"

THE tall, sad-faced gunman named Keys preceded us down the stairs.

I went second and Hank, the college boy, followed in trail position, his gun centered on my back through the cloth of his coat.

Instead of the traditional black sedan gangsters are supposed to use when taking people for rides, their car was the same blue coupe I had imagined was following me the day before.

I said, "This thing was tailing me yesterday before I did anything to make anybody mad. Any particular reason?"

"Get in," Hank said.

I sat in the middle between the door Keys, who drove, and Hank, who held the gun against my side. No one spoke while we drove leisurely across town, obeying all traffic rules. When we reached the city limits, Keys opened up to sixty.

As we rode along, I had been examin-

ing Key's profile, which struck me as vaguely familiar.

"Haven't I seen your picture on a poster somewhere?" I asked.

Immediately his sadness evaporated and he said proudly, "Two-thousand dollars reward." After a moment he added with a faint note of complaint, "Not dead or alive, though. Only alive."

"What are you wanted for?"

"Couple of bank jobs." His proud expression returned. "Nobody in the country can match me at opening a crib."

"You must never have heard of Jackie Morgan," I said.

"Morgan!" He almost ran off the road swinging to peer at me. When he straightened the car again, he said. "He don't count because he's retired." Without any conviction he added, "I top him anyway."

"Shut up and find a side road leading to the river," the young gunman on my right instructed.

Up to then I had hoped, without much confidence, they were taking me to be interviewed by whomever had replaced Gerald Ketterer as head of the gambling syndicate, or at most intended merely to mess me up a little.

I said, "I don't know anyone at the river."

"We'll introduce you to some fish," Hank told me dryly.

A mile farther on Keys turned left onto a dirt road.

"As long as I won't be able to tell anyone," I said. "Mind explaining who's paying you for this?"

"The City Improvement Association," Hank said. "They think you're an eyesore." He was quite a card.

I tried it another way. "It must be either Dan Ironbaltz, Jimmy Goodrich or Art Depledge. Which one steps into the king boss' shoes, now that he's dead?"

The young man looked at me curious-

ly. "What makes you think he's dead?"

That stopped me. I was still trying to figure it out when we passed the last farmhouse situated along the deserted road and caught a momentary glimpse of the river a half mile ahead.

"What kind of bullets do you use?" I asked Hank suddenly.

"Steel-jackets," he said, grinning into my face.

"Interesting. Because I'm going to make a break in a minute."

"What?" he asked, as though he hadn't quite understood what I said.

"I'll get knocked off," I explained, keeping my voice casual in spite of the tight feeling in my stomach. "But I'm going to get knocked off anyway. This way I'll at least have the satisfaction of lousing you up. A steel-jacket will go right through me and kill your driver, which at this speed will probably kill you too."

"Hey!" Keys said, slowing the car.

The pressure left my side as Hank shifted in his seat to half face me, swinging the automatic around so that the muzzle was a foot from my stomach.

"Thanks for calling my attention to it," he said with a grin.

"Don't mention it," I told him, suddenly smacking the heel of my right hand against the muzzle at the same time my left clamped over the slide.

I had learned that trick in Ranger training during the war, but never had a chance to use it before. I was as surprised as Hank that it actually worked. An automatic can't fire when pressure is applied to the muzzle and kept there.

Since the gun was still pointed at my stomach, Hank wasted a second trying to pull the trigger. Then he started a left toward my jaw, which put me at a disadvantage since both my hands were occupied.

Luckily Keys picked that instant to jam on the brakes, jolting the car to a

stop and killing the engine. The gunman lurched toward the windshield and his fist merely grazed my cheek.

Before he could swing again, I pushed my left hand outward until the gun pointed at Keys, and released the muzzle pressure. His finger must have been frozen on the trigger, for the gun blasted square into Key's stomach.

Then I brought my right elbow against Hank's jaw with such force that the back of his head shattered the door glass on that side.

HE WAS still unconscious and Keys was still dead when I parked the blue coupe in front of Police Headquarters twenty minutes later. However, while there was no danger of Keys strolling off, I didn't want to leave Hank alone even long enough for me to go inside for a cop, for I suspected if he awakened in the meantime he might remember he had an appointment somewhere else. Hefting him across my shoulders in a fireman's carry. I staggered up the steps.

Big George Chester, the chief of police, was leaning over Desk-Sergeant Danny Blake haranguing him about something. He straightened when he saw me.

"Hey, Moon!" he said. "We've been looking for you." He eyed my burden and asked, "What you got there?"

"Something for Homicide," I told him, starting to lurch past toward the office of Inspector Warren Day.

"Wait a minute!" He moved his huge bulk in front of me to block my way. "You're supposed to leave corpses at the scene of the crime."

"This is alive," I said. "And damned heavy. The corpse is in a blue coupe out front."

I tried to move around him, but he jabbed a forefinger the size of a sausage in my stomach. "Just a minute, Manny.

How come you turned that confession of Ketterer's over to a newspaper instead of to us?"

Chief George Chester had been in my outfit during the war, and I didn't have to be formal with him. I said, "I bring you a corpse and an unconscious gunman, and you yammer about a little thing like a gambling racket. Get out of my way before I give you the knee!"

He got out of my way, but called after me, "I still want an answer after whatever you got here is straightened out."

The office door of Inspector Warren Day, chief of Homicide, was open a crack. Shouldering it the rest of the way open, I staggered in.

Warren Day was dictating something to his right-hand man, Lieutenant Hannegan. He raised his skinny bald head to stare at me over his glasses, started to generate a ferocious scowl, but let it deteriorate into an expression of amazement. Both men watched silently as I gazed around for a suitable place to rest my burden, saw nothing but wooden chairs, and eased it to the floor.

"This is a gentleman named Hank," I explained. "He didn't tell me his last name. In attempting to shoot me, he accidentally bumped off his partner, whom I left outside. Killing an innocent bystander while attempting a felony is murder, isn't it?"

Day merely continued to stare at me. Finally he said, "When you come in this office, knock, damn you!"

It was nearly one p.m. when I entered Day's office, and all the nourishment I had taken that day was a pot of coffee. By the time Hank was revived and installed in a cell, Keys was shipped off to the morgue and I had explained things to the partial satisfaction of Chief Chester and Warren Day, it was after two.

"May I go home and get something to eat now?" I inquired.

"Sure," answered George Chester. "Soon as you explain why you turned that notebook over to the *Morning Blade* instead of to us."

"I didn't," I said wearily. "I gave it to the client who hired me to uncover it."

"Who's the client?"

"Raymond Margrove, the only guy in town fatter than you are."

The chief looked pained. "This seems to be in your department, Day," he said huffily. "Release Moon when you're through with him."

He strode out of the room and slammed the door, leaving me with the inspector and Hannegan.

"All right, Moon," Day said sourly. "Go home and fill your gut, if you got nothing to add."

"There is one more item," I said, suddenly remembering. "I asked Hank which one of the big three in gambling circles was taking over now that the big boss was dead, and he said, 'What makes you think he's dead?' Did Ketterer recover?"

The inspector glanced at Hannegan, who shook his head, never believing in opening his mouth when a gesture would do.

"You sure the corpse was Ketterer?" I asked.

Day glanced at Hannegan again, and got a nod this time. That settled it, because Hannegan doesn't even nod unless he's certain.

"Maybe you can work out of Hank what he meant," I suggested. "And if you can afford the time, I'd appreciate a word dropped into the ears of Ironbaltz, Goodrich and Depledge that you'd be grieved if anything happened to me."

"Why should I tell a lie?" Day asked coldly.

I rose and stretched. "That's why I never object to taxes. I know I have the full protection of the police department

if gangsters decide to bump me off. At least you might dig a little deeper into Gerald Ketterer's death."

"Why?"

"Because guys like Ketterer don't kill themselves when faced by a five-hundred-dollar fine. My hunch is he was rubbed out for blowing up the racket."

"Horsefeathers," Day said. "If the gambling crowd had done it, he'd have a bullet in him. They don't go in for subtlety. You're always having hunches."

"O.K.," I said, shrugging. "Keep it listed as a suicide. But if I commit suicide in the next few days, don't believe it. I've got a hundred dollars, only two-hundred-dollars' worth of bills, and a beautiful woman wants me to get ugly drunk with her. I have everything in the world to live for."

CHAPTER FIVE

Kiss A Little, Quiz A Little

UNLESS I have a client paying for my time, ordinarily I don't make a practice of poking my nose into police matters. But since the police apparently accepted Ketterer's death as suicide, and refused to see any connection between it and the attempt on me, I was forced to take *some* action in self-defense.

In my own mind I was sure Ketterer had been murdered by his three lieutenants, or at least on their order, and I decided my best defense would be to prove it and get them behind bars before they could get me.

Curiously, none of the three had been mentioned in Ketterer's confession, and actually there was no evidence aside from underworld talk that Dan Ironbaltz was overseer of the bookshops, Jimmy Goodrich managed the slot-machine racket, and Art Depledge ran the house-games.

And since all over town slot-machines and gambling equipment had disappeared the minute the *Morning Blade* exposé hit the streets, leaving the cops who began raiding a few hours later nothing to examine but empty rooms and slot-machineless taverns, there was little chance that any real evidence connecting the three with gambling could now be uncovered. I hardly blamed Warren Day for refusing to waste time questioning the trio.

But with me it was a matter of wanting to stay alive.

As soon as I got some food into myself, I looked up Antoinette DeKalb's address in the newspaper account of Ketterer's confession, and drove to 324 Center Street. It proved to be a four-family apartment in a middle-class neighborhood. According to her mailbox, Ketterer's secretary occupied the lower right flat.

I rang three times before the door opened a crack and the blonde secretary's voice inquired, "Are you a reporter?"

I said, "No. I'm a suitor."

The door opened another inch and a suspicious eye looked me over. The suspicion turned to a mixture of surprise and what I hoped was welcome. Apparently it was, for the door opened wide. She wore a green housecoat, carried a towel, and damp blonde hair was twisted in a loose knot above her ears, which made her look about sixteen.

"You're the man who hit me with a door," she accused. "How did you find where I live?"

"Love will find a way," I said non-committally. "May I come in?"

She stepped aside long enough for me to pass, then shut the door and leaned her back against it. "You caught me in the shower."

"A good thing, too," I told her. "Probably saved me from jail."

She frowned. "How's that?"

"With your grown-up makeup washed off, I can tell your real age. They put you in jail for playing with kids under eighteen."

"I'm twenty-four!" she said indignantly, but the indignation was all in her voice. Her eyes said she was pleased at the compliment. For a moment she examined me appraisingly, then she said, "I'm not sure I should have let you in. I don't even know you."

"Manny Moon," I said, bowing formally.

She grinned and dropped a mock curtsy. "Antoinette DeKalb. Toni for short. Sit down while I get some clothes on."

She moved past me and disappeared into a bedroom. I made a circuit of the living room, examining a set of prints on the wall, and was just preparing to sink into a soft chair when the bedroom door flew open again. Not two minutes had passed, and though she now wore a form-fitting green dress in place of the housecoat, her hair was still pinned up and her face free of makeup.

"Did you say Moon?" she demanded. "Manny Moon?"

"Yes," I said, abandoning plans to sit.

"Is that the same as Manville Moon?"

"That's my full name," I admitted.

Her full skirt swished as she strode over to me, planted a fist on each hip and thrust out a round jaw. The top of her head just came even with my chin, I noticed.

"You're the man in the newspaper!" she snapped. "The private detective who found that notebook!"

"Right," I snapped back, placing fists on my own hips and shoving my jaw out just as far as hers.

Thrusting her head upward until her nose was an inch from my own, she said bitterly, "You didn't come to see *me*."

You came to ask questions, just like the reporters."

"Not entirely," I said, imitating her bitter voice.

"Then what *do* you want?" she yelled.

"This," I said, dipping my face one inch and kissing her square on the lips.

WE STOOD there at least thirty seconds, our hands still balled against our hips, nothing touching but our mouths. I was conscious of the clean odor of soap and the fresh taste of her lips without makeup. At first they were firm and unyielding, but suddenly they turned soft.

Ordinary women put their arms around your neck when they get interested in a kiss. Toni was no ordinary woman. The first indication that she really enjoyed it was when she used my ears as handles. So help me, she did. She grabbed one in each fist and pressed my mouth so hard against hers, I started to lose balance, and prevented both of us from tumbling to the floor only by grabbing her around the waist. Just before my ears came off, she let me go.

Feeling the mere loss of a pair of ears was worth it, I reached for her again.

"No you don't," she said, pushing a hand at my chest. "You came to ask questions, so ask your questions."

"All right. Where did you learn that ear-hold?"

"I mean questions about Mr. Ketterer."

"The hell with Ketterer," I said. "Come here."

Pushing me off again, she stamped one foot. "You listen to me, Manny Moon! You came here to pump me about Mr. Ketterer, didn't you?"

"Well, partly," I admitted.

"Well, I won't have you kissing me while your mind is half on trying to pump information. You ask your questions, and maybe if I still feel like it

afterward, you can kiss me again—once.”

I considered this, found no flaws in the arrangement and asked without any particular interest, “When did Ketterer put that notebook in the safe?”

“What safe?”

I put one hand on each of her shoulders, looked down into her eyes and said, “His own.”

“Is that where you found it?” she asked indifferently, reaching up and touching one ear.

I gave her a reproachful shake. “You said you wanted to get this over with. It stated right in the confession you had instructions what to do with the notebook in case Ketterer died. How could you obey them if you didn’t know where it was?”

“I had no such instructions,” she said dreamily, raising her other hand to touch my other ear. “I never heard of the notebook until I read about it in the paper. For that matter, I didn’t even know the combination to Mr. Ketterer’s safe.”

“But you identified the notebook!”

She shook her head, and a hand closed over one of my ears. “I identified Mr. Ketterer’s handwriting. I never saw the notebook before, and it was as much a shock to me as everyone else that he headed a gambling syndicate.”

Even with my attention more on Toni’s lips than on my questions, and only half-listening to the answers, this roused some interest in me. “Listen,” I said. “The three biggest gamblers in town visited your boss at a quarter to five the day he committed suicide, and left his office with him. Didn’t you know who they were?”

A fist gripped my other ear. “You’re a terrible detective. Mr. Ketterer was dictating to me from three-thirty until he left at five that day. He never made appointments later than three. Any more questions?”

“One,” I said. “Why are we wasting

all this good time over a dead man?”

I still had my ears when I left the apartment, but I left most of my wits with Toni. Had any of the gentlemen who wished me dead encountered me between the time I left her and the time I reached the nearest tavern, where I stopped my head from spinning with a jolt of rye, it would have been a push-over. I doubt that they could have gotten me without anti-aircraft, however. I was too high in the air.

When I came back to earth, I made straight for headquarters to check on what had been gotten out of the young gunman who tried to kill me. There I learned nothing of interest except that the dead Keys had been a rather sloppy safe-cracker who specialized in nitroglycerine, and the young gunman, Hank, had refused to talk about anything at all.

As I passed the desk on the way out, I saw that Sergeant Danny Blake was booking a thin-faced little man who was still manacled to a policeman twice his size.

Blake looked up and called to me cheerily. “Look what we found living as big as you please at the Jefferson Hotel, Manny.”

I paused. “What?”

“Sammy Cutler. The hottest forger in the country.”

SUSPECTING that other gunmen employed by the gambling syndicate would lose little time trying to finish the job Hank and Keys had bungled, I observed the proper precautions. All afternoon I had kept one eye on the rear-view mirror while driving, and had kept under observation everyone within pistol range when afoot. Every muscle of my body was tensed for instant action, and I carefully kept my right hand out of my pocket and in the open, ready to dive at the P-38 under my arm.

I was rather glad to get home, where I could relax.

After locking the door from inside, I remembered the ease with which Keys had managed to pick the lock, and on the off-chance the syndicate had other lock experts on its payroll, I wedged a straight chair under the knob. Then I completely relaxed.

I relaxed too soon.

When I turned around, gorilla-like Dan Ironbaltz was regarding me sardonically from the hall doorway, the .38 revolver in his hand trained where my heart would have been had it not suddenly jumped to my throat.

He said quickly, "Turn around, Mr. Moon."

The voice from that hairy throat was incongruously bell-like, almost a clear tenor. It was polite, too, but the expression in his eyes was faintly eager, as though he almost wished I wouldn't obey.

When the expression began to turn to triumph, I turned about hurriedly, holding my hands shoulder high.

I may have imagined it, but it sounded as though he let out a sigh of disappointment. Then I heard him step heavily away from the hall door. Lighter footsteps followed behind his. A small hand groped beneath my arm from behind and slid my P-38 from its holster. The same hand patted my waist and

hips for other concealed weapons.

"He's clean," came the husky voice of little Jimmy Goodrich.

"You may face this way now, Mr. Moon," said Dan.

Facing around, I allowed my hands to drop. I discovered my guests totaled three, Art Depledge, the third member of the trio, now stood in the doorway where Dan Ironbaltz had been. His bland face was the picture of friendliness.

"You boys flatter me," I said. "With all the hoods you hire, how come I get personal attention?"

"This time we want it done right," Jimmy Goodrich said huskily.

"You can't get away with it," I said.

Dan Ironbaltz looked pained. "From you I expected better repartee, Mr. Moon. That line went out with the Rover Boys."

I said, "I meant it literally. If anything happens to me, Warren Day knows right where to look. Knock me off and he'll also reopen the Ketterer case, which he currently has tabbed as a suicide. I'm safer for you alive than dead."

From the hall door Art Depledge commented cheerily, "Unless there's no *corpus delicti*."

I felt the hair rise along the edge of my scalp. "Listen, can't you fellows take a joke? Just because I loused up your racket, so you had to rub put your boss,

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is no cause to get unreasonable. Lots of businessmen have setbacks, but just pitch in and start over. Why don't you take your profits and open up in some other town? Moscow, for instance."

Art Depledge emitted a genuinely amused horse-laugh, which made him look more like a good-natured grocery clerk than ever.

Modestly I said, "It wasn't that funny."

He stopped laughing to scowl at me. "I wasn't laughing at your bum humor, stupid. I was laughing because you think you loused up our racket. You've been helping us."

"Shut up!" Ironbaltz ordered. "You go first, Jimmy. Then you, Moon." He paused to bow ironically. "Mr. Moon, I mean. You follow me, Art."

So we held another procession down the stairs, across the curb and into a car. This time it was a regulation gangster's black sedan, however. I sat in the back between little Jimmy Goodrich and hairy Dan Ironbaltz, while Depledge drove.

CHAPTER SIX

²Eclipse of Manny Moon

BY THE assured way Dan held his gun, and by the faintly eager look still in his eyes, I knew it was hopeless to try anything such as I had pulled on young Hank. No one said a word while we drove across town to the waterfront, turned down an alley and pulled into the basement garage of a warehouse.

Jimmy got out of the car and Dan prodded me after him. All three of us waited while Art Depledge pulled shut the garage doors, then Dan motioned toward an open door at the rear of the garage, and emphasized the gesture by prodding me in the ribs with his pistol.

The door opened onto a set of cement stairs leading downward.

Again Jimmy went first, I followed, and Dan and Depledge brought up the rear. The stairs ended in a low, vault-like room with stone walls and no windows. The floor was concrete except for a circular section of iron about three feet wide in the center of the room, which on second examination proved to be an oversized manhole cover. Illumination was furnished by a lone bulb hanging from the ceiling.

The room was bare of furniture. Against one wall stood two galvanized scrub pails without handles, a larger bucket with the end of a long coil of rope tied to its handle, two wooden stakes and an overturned soap box on which lay a large bag labeled: *Plaster of Paris* —100 lbs.

"Stand over there," Dan ordered, pointing at the wall opposite this interesting equipment.

I leaned against the wall indicated, and watched as Jimmy and Art heaved open the manhole cover. Through the open hole came the murmur of sluggishly moving water just beneath.

Sweat was beginning to stand out on my brow, but I managed to keep my voice steady. "That the river?" I asked politely.

All three glanced at me, but no one said anything.

Art Depledge crossed to the large bucket attached to the rope, carried it to the hole and dropped it in. It disappeared with a gurgle, and he played out the coil of rope for what seemed an interminable length of time, but probably was only seconds. When it finally stopped sinking, he glanced at the remaining dozen feet of rope and said, "About twenty feet, I'd guess."

"Can't you remember the depth between killings?" I asked in a voice that surprised me by not cracking.

Again all three glanced at me.

"It changes," Depledge explained kindly. "Silt sifts in and out. I've seen it thirty feet, and I've seen it nearly to the cover. We'd look silly dropping you in two feet of water, wouldn't we?"

"I think two feet is a nice depth." I said. This time there was a slight crack in my voice.

Hand-over-hand, Art pulled the bucket up again. When it stood brim-full next to the hole, Jimmy brought over the two pails without handles, and carefully poured half the muddy water into each. Then together the two of them heaved the hundred-pound sack of plaster of Paris over to the pails, ripped it open and poured half into each. They used the wooden stakes to stir it into a thick solution, tossing both the stakes and the empty bag through the hole when they finished.

Art Depledge said, "You see, we leave no evidence at all. Must have been twenty or more go through this hole over the years. They are all buried under silt now."

"You talk too much," Dan Ironbaltz said in his bell-like tenor. Then to me, "Over here please, Mr. Moon."

I walked over to the hole and looked down. The water drifted by a scant two feet below it.

"Stand in the buckets," Dan said.

I looked at him in amazement. "Why should I do a silly thing like that?"

"Because I'll blow your head off if you don't." His voice was still polite.

I shrugged, but I doubt that my indifferent expression fooled anyone, for my face was beaded with sweat. "Blow away. What's the difference?"

"The difference is you live fifteen minutes longer while the stuff sets. Either way your feet go in it."

He began to raise the revolver, and I said, "All right. I'll take the fifteen minutes."

SLOWLY I raised my right foot and let it descend into one of the buckets. It made a squishing noise as the gray-white fluid rose half-way to my knee. Then quickly, as though wanting to get it over with, I raised the left foot, pretending to lose balance, and brought my heel down on the edge of the other bucket with my full weight behind it. The bucket tilted, teetered on the edge of the hole and plunked into the water with a dull splash.

My arms gyroscoped in a struggle to regain balance, and I would have followed head-first into the river had not Jimmy Goodrich grabbed my arm.

All three of them stared at me irritably.

Finally Depledge said, "One will hold him down just as well."

I felt a surge of hope. A lot of people know I have a false leg, but a lot of others don't. Apparently these three were in the latter group.

The big gorilla with the gun sank my hope. "We'll play it safe. Get upstairs and bring another bucket and a fifty pound sack of stuff."

"How much do you stock?" I asked.

"About ten sacks and a dozen buckets," Art told me. "But you won't get a chance to kick another overboard."

He and Jimmy went upstairs together. They were gone ten minutes, and by the time they had returned, drawn another pail of water from the river and mixed it with plaster of Paris, the mixture around my right foot had set.

This bucket they placed well away from the hole in the floor.

"Shove yourself over here," Dan suggested.

Turning as nearly toward the fresh bucket as I could with my right foot imprisoned, I scraped my bucket forward a half inch, then stopped and glanced at the doorway with an expression of pleased surprise.

"Why if it isn't Warren Day!" I said.

Involuntarily the heads of all three snapped toward the door. I gave my bucket a mighty shove, for an instant it hung in space, then both the bucket and I plunked under water like a dropped stone.

I had my trouser leg jerked up and was fumbling at the straps of my artificial leg before we hit bottom. The pressure grew unbearable. Down, down I sank. The water ground against my ears, tried to force open my mouth. Then almost gently the bucket touched bottom.

One strap I had loose by then, but I knew I would black out from the terrible pressure before I could release the other. Placing my left foot on top of the bucket, I shoved with all my strength.

The stump below my knee rasped loose from the encircling leather, leaving some skin inside the loop.

I rose vertically until decreased pressure lessened the pounding in my ears and the constriction in my chest, then turned and made three long underwater strokes downstream, again changed to a vertical direction, and popped to the surface an instant before my mouth opened involuntarily to gasp for air.

For a few moments I simply treaded water and recovered my breath. When I was again able to notice my surroundings, I discovered I was under a long concrete pier, upon which the rear of the warehouse was apparently set. A dozen feet away I could see the hole through which I had fallen.

I slipped out of my coat and remaining shoe and let them sink. Then skirting a concrete piling, I swam to the edge of the pier, dived and swam underwater around an outcropping twenty yards away. When I surfaced, I was hidden from the warehouse.

A hundred yards farther down-river the precipitous bank ended and I came into shallow water. I dragged myself out

of the river onto a trash-littered stretch of rocky beach containing nothing but a lone and deserted tarpaper shack.

I had to crawl all the way to Front Street, a distance of one short block from the river. There I found a section of two-by-four in the gutter, improvised a crutch and managed to make Second Street by a kind of staggering hop. Though it was barely after five o'clock, and not yet dark, not a soul was on the street, this section of the waterfront consisting largely of condemned warehouses.

At Second Street I found the loveliest taxi cab I have ever seen.

FOR REASONS known only to himself, the cabbie asked not a single question. When I fished a wet wallet from my hip pocket and handed him a sopping ten-dollar bill, he shrugged as though all his customers tipped like that, watched me labor toward the front door of my apartment house on the two-by-four, then drove off.

This time I checked the whole apartment before relaxing. Then I took a shower, affixed a couple of band-aids to the raw places on my stump, and dug from the back of my closet the temporary leg the Veterans Administration had furnished me while I waited for them to build the custom-made job. It was wood instead of cork and aluminum, much heavier and about a quarter-inch too short, but at least I could walk with a slight limp.

When I had dressed, downed a sandwich and two highballs and was settled with a cigar, I stared at the ceiling and figured everything out. Just like that.

Seeing no point in keeping the solution a secret, I phoned Warren Day at his home.

"I've got the whole answer to the Ketterer affair," I told him. "And it will curl your hair."

"What hair?" he asked sourly, "Listen, Moon. My day ends at five. And even if it was before five, I don't want to hear any more about Ketterer."

I said, "Would you be interested to know that since I saw you at five, Dan Ironbaltz, Jimmy Goodrich and Art Depledge did their damndest to kill me? Personally—not through hired guns."

For a moment there was silence. "All right. Let's have it."

"They dropped me in the river with one foot set in a bucket of plaster."

Again there was silence, this time longer. Finally he said in a bored tone, "You drowned, of course."

"This is no gag!" I yelled. "They picked my false leg. It's still on the river bottom."

Eventually he began to believe me. When I had recounted the whole story, he said, "I imagine they still think you're dead, and haven't taken to cover. I'll send out a call for them."

"Good," I said. "When you get them sewed up, drop by and I'll take you calling on the guy who had Ketterer murdered—the *real* head of the gambling syndicate."

"What's that?"

I said, "You'll find out when you get here," and hung up.

It was nine-thirty before my door buzzer sounded.

Not wanting to get caught off guard a third time in my own home, I called through the door, "Who's there?"

"Me," growled the voice of Lieutenant Hannegan, economizing on words as usual.

Opening the door, I found him alone.

"Where's Day?" I asked.

He jerked his head toward the street, turned and started down the stairs. Following behind, I found Warren Day in a squad car at the curb.

I said, "Round up the three would-be killers all right?"

"Yeah. They're thinking over their sins in separate cells." He eyed me sourly. "This better be good, Moon."

"It will be," I promised. To Hannegan I said, "Run us over to Lindell and Forest Place."

There was no conversation until we almost reached our destination. Then I said, "Second house from the corner."

Day studied the big old-fashioned building, recognition dawned in his eyes and he turned on me sputtering. "Ye gods! That's the mayor's house! What you trying to pull, Moon?"

"A killer out of the hat," I said, and started up the walk.

After a moment of hesitation Day followed, and Hannegan trailed him. This time a middle-aged maid answered the door.

"Inspector Warren Day of Homicide and party," I informed her.

"Did she kill somebody?" she asked, interested. "She's not home, sir."

"It's the mayor we want to see," I said.

The woman let us into the hall, went away and returned almost immediately.

"This way, please," she said, leading us to the same study where I had sat with His Honor once before.

We discovered that Mayor John Cash already had one visitor. Fat Raymond Margrove was wedged into an easy chair in one corner.

Mayor Cash rose with a welcoming smile. "Well, well, Inspector. This is a pleasure." Then he saw me and the smile froze on his lips.

I didn't waste any time. "Surprised to see me alive, Your Honor?" I asked.

He sat down, licked his lips and said in a queasy voice, "What do you mean?"

WITHOUT preamble I gave it to the whole group. "This is the end of the line, Mr. Mayor. Gerald Ketterer never was the

head of the gambling syndicate. He was just what he pretended to be: an honest man pledged to run the syndicate out of town. He would have too, and the syndicate took desperate measures to protect itself. It planted forged evidence that Ketterer headed the rackets, hired a private detective it figured wasn't smart enough to catch on to the phony setup to uncover the evidence, and arranged for Ketterer's 'suicide' when the news of his disgrace broke.

"It was a good forgery—good enough to fool Ketterer's secretary. I wouldn't be surprised if a little forger arrested this afternoon, and in the clink right now, was hired to do the job. He's one of the best in the country, but handwriting experts will blow it wide open when they put that notebook under a microscope." The mayor squeaked, "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Shut up," I said. "To make me swallow the story, phony blackmail evidence was rigged to make it seem you had been blackmailed by Ketterer into permitting the syndicate to operate. Actually posed just for use in the frame. And to make sure I would swallow the story, you had Ironbaltz, Goodrich and Depledge put on an act to convince me they were pals of Ketterer's. But I doubt that he had ever seen them before they all started shaking his hand in front of his office building.

"So what could the syndicate accomplish by this elaborate frame?" I asked, then answered myself. "It made your reelection a certainty, and under you it could begin to function again as soon as the heat died down. With Ketterer as mayor, it would have been out of business for good. The tip-off is that Ketterer's so-called confession listed only little-shots in the racket, and the three straw bosses weren't even mentioned."

As I talked, Mayor Cash's face had gradually turned green. Now he said in a

shaking voice, "It's all a lie! It's nothing but wild hypothesis."

I shook my head. "The posed pictures of you and Bumpsie Farrel give it away, Mr. Mayor. In the first place, you wouldn't have given a hoot in hades whether your wife saw them or not. Your wife is a lush who flirts with every man she meets, and you probably have more on her than she could get on you in a million years. In the second place, those pictures were supposed to have been taken five years ago. Last New Year's Eve I saw Bumpsie Farrel at *El Patio Club*, and she had on the same formal gown she wore in the pictures. Women like Bumpsie don't keep the same gown five years. The pictures were made since Ketterer was nominated for mayor."

"I can prove the whole thing is a lie," Mayor Cash said to the inspector in a trembling voice. "I have written proof right here in my desk."

He rose from his chair, ran to his desk and pulled open a drawer. When he spun around, a gun was gripped in his hand.

"Don't anyone make a move!" he snarled.

A shot cracked out, a hole appeared in the center of the mayor's forehead, and he pitched forward on his face.

All of us turned to stare at Raymond Margrove in amazement. The fat man looked down at the .25 caliber automatic in his hand, grunted and stuffed it back under his arm.

"I got a permit to carry this when Mr. Moon frightened me about gang vengeance," he explained apologetically.

"Good shooting," I said. "That deserves a handshake."

Crossing over to him, I held out my right hand. As he clasped it diffidently, I heaved his vast bulk to its feet, spun him around.

(Please continue on page 129)

Laurie was bound to her handsome heel of a husband
by a ring of guilt instead of gold . . .

*Roy was smiling. He'd never
looked more young and inno-
cent and charming.*



By ROBERT TURNER

HELL IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

SHE came out of the dream with perspiration cold all over her. Her heart was slugging against her ribs as though it would split. She lay there, stiff and cold, not moving,

listening for the city sounds, the hotel sounds of other nights when she'd awakened like this from the same nightmare. But tonight those sounds were missing. The night was quiet, heavy

with the silence, as only a country night can be. And she remembered. She was home. For the first time in seven years, she was home, sleeping again in the bed where she'd slept for eighteen years.

Pale moonlight flooded the room from the windows. She looked at the dim outline of the dresser, the chairs, the desk in the corner where she used to do her homework. Nothing had been changed. The folks had taken down the college pennants from the walls and the pictures of movie stars, but otherwise it was the same room. The old brass-ended bed even had the same lumpy mattress. Roy had complained about that tonight.

She shivered and raised up onto one elbow. She looked down on Roy's sleeping face, marveling at how young he looked.

Even in the bright sunlight, Roy Willis never looked more than twenty-five. Now, with the moonglow softening his features, he looked boyish. His long black lashes lay shadowy against his cheek. There wasn't a line in his face. His short-cropped unruly hair was tousled about his high forehead. If she ever told anybody that Roy was thirty-eight, they'd have laughed at her. If she told them that two nights ago she'd seen Roy kill a man in cold blood, they'd have shrieked with mirth. And if she told them how she and Roy made their money, all their money. . . .

"Roy?" they'd say. "Oh, no, not Roy Willis."

Not lovable, laughing, handsome Roy. Laurie, maybe. She always was a wild one. But not Roy!

She looked down on the man sleeping beside her like a baby. Roy, the miracle man, who could drink all night long and never get hung-over. Fabulous Roy who had broken all the commandments and just about every law there was, and still looked as naive as a choir

boy. She didn't get it. How could all that evilness not touch a man? It was crazy. It was like wallowing hip-deep through mud and coming out of it looking immaculate. It was super-human to be like that.

That was it, she decided. Roy wasn't human. He was actually the devil, himself.

Some of the details of the nightmare that had awakened her began to sift through her mind. And now, awake, she realized that this time it hadn't been that same recurring dream. Always before, the man Roy had killed had been faceless. The background had been nowhere in particular and there had been no ending to the dream; it had been just a fragment, without beginning, without end. But not tonight. That was because, tonight, it wasn't a dream really. It had been a subconscious review, photographically clear, of something that had actually happened. And they said that dreams didn't really come true.

Somewhere, far off, a hound dog bayed at the moon, a lonesome and eerie sound. Out in the yard a cat prowled, and the guinea hens perched in the trees set up their infernal racket. The old familiar night sounds that she'd known all her life up until seven years ago. But tonight they held terror. They seemed to sharpen that sense of ominous dread that had been building up in her for months.

She lay flat on the bed once more, staring at the wooden ceiling of the old farmhouse bedroom. The guinea hens quieted, and in the other room, Laurie heard the old man's snore. Across the hall, her kid sister, Gin, chattered school-girl stuff in her sleep. Then there was the complete, dead, country quiet again, and the pictures of the dream that had really happened slid once again across the screen of Laurie's brain.

MR. WOODWARD was this man's name. "Just call me Woody, baby." It was funny how they ran to types. This one was fat, bald and cherubic, with twinkling eyes and Santa Claus cheeks. The boisterous, fun-loving Rover boy type that Laurie hated, could never quite feel sorry for like some of the others.

Mr. Woodward ran true to form. He drank too much and he got loud, and later up in the hotel suite the going was rougher than usual. Laurie thought that Roy would never show up.

Roy always enjoyed the payoff scene with the "call-me-Woody" boys. They always looked like punctured balloons, Roy said. The huff-and-puff went out of them fast and they never gave any trouble.

Roy would come out of the other room, winding the film on the little motion picture camera. He'd grin at Laurie and say:

"That does it, baby. That washes you up. I've been trying to get the goods on you for weeks and tonight you tucked it right into the bag for me. That little romp with your playmate, here, run off on a screen before a judge, will show what a cheap, two-timing little heel you are."

To the man, Roy would say: "Sorry you're going to be dragged into this, fella, but maybe it'll be a lesson to you. Next time you want to make like Romeo, you'd better check first whether or not the gal's got a hubby who's after divorce evidence."

The old badger game brought up to date. Why not? Roy said. Why take a chance experimenting with a new gimmick when a tried-and-true old one worked so well? That was the trouble with most of the smart boys—they tried to get too fancy. They neglected the good, old-fashioned ingredients of a beautiful girl, a few drinks and a rich

old duffer with a late crop of wild oats to sow.

And Roy was right. It had worked like a charm for seven years. The sucker had a reputable business in Oshkosh or somewhere. He had a wife and a house full of kids back there. After a little negotiation he always decided to make it worth Roy's while to destroy the roll of film and give weeping Laurie another chance. Worth Roy's while to the tune of from \$500 up, depending on how big a butter-and-egg man the fall guy was.

There was never any boomerang to the thing. Laurie *was* Roy's wife. Sometimes if a victim were stubborn they'd follow the thing through. That was the beauty of it. Roy was prepared to go all the way. *What the hell*, he told Laurie. *If we have to, I can even go ahead and divorce you. We can always get married again.* But it never had to go that far.

But with this Woodward character the thing hadn't come off. Right from the moment Roy stepped out of the other room with the camera, Laurie had sensed that this was going to turn sour. Woodward didn't react right. He listened to Roy's speeches and he watched Laurie's crying act. And then he laughed.

"I've got news for you two con artists," he told them. "Big hotels in convention cities are my working grounds, too. Only I got a nice, clean, wholesome racket compared to yours. My dice and card games pick them just as clean but they don't leave any bad smell afterward. This job of yours stinks. I don't like it and I don't like you—either of you."

Laurie had stood there in her black satin negligee, her ash blonde hair disheveled, her makeup smeared, and she had gotten scared, really scared. Fearfully, she watched the grin freeze on

Roy's handsome and youthful face.

"I first spotted tall and sultry, here," Woodward nodded, at Laurie, "in Sea City. With the big buffoon in the ten gallon hat. Remember him? I watched her play. It was okay. Then I spotted you together next time, in Metropolis. And then here in this burg. I couldn't believe anybody was still working this mossy old racket.

"Look, mister," Roy said, "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't care who you are. All you are to me is a face in a film that's going to make a court see a divorce action my way. If you stop trying to be a wise guy, maybe it won't be necessary to drag you into it. But you'd better scram out of here fast before I change my mind!"

Woodward's fat face sneered. "You look," he said. "My name's not Woodward. I ain't in the pickle business out West like I told this doll. I don't have any wife or any kids. You haven't got anything to put on the squeeze with. You can show that film on the biggest screen in Times Square if you want to. It don't bother me."

Roy jerked his thumb toward the door. "Get out!" he said.

"Sure," the fat boy said. "But I'm going out richer than when I came in. My time is valuable. This is going to cost you two a grand. You know why? Because there's a convention going on here right now that should keep you two busy for a couple of weeks. But not if the house dick puts the evil eye on you. And if I write a letter to the hotel associations there won't be a spot in the country where you can operate. You know what I mean? One grand. Get it up." He pushed out his plump hand.

LAURIE thought Roy had lost his mind then. She saw him reach to the radio next to him and switch it on, turn up the volume. Hot

jazz swelled loudly through the room. He set down the expensive little motion picture camera.

The fat man was sharper than Laurie. He got it right away. Fear suddenly pulled his flabby features apart. He put out the palm of his hand, took a hesitant backward step.

"Now wait a minute, handsome," he shrilled over the din of the music. "Take it easy. Let's talk this over. We're both smart people."

Laurie didn't hear the rest. She was watching Roy reach for the small, twenty-five caliber revolver in his pocket, and she was standing there screaming, "No, Roy, no!"

Roy didn't waste any time. No hesitation, not a lost movement. He took out the .25 and fired it all in one motion. There was a spurting flash and a sharp report—hardly louder than an exploding paper bag above the blaring radio. There was a little smoke. There was the heavy thud of the fat man falling to the floor, and then there was just the sound of the music again. Dixieland jazz. Laurie knew she'd never be able to hear it again without living through that scene.

She and Roy stood there, staring at each other across the gun. And Roy was smiling. He'd never looked more young and innocent and charming. . . .

Next to her, on the lumpy, rickety bed where Laurie had slept since she was big enough to take out of a cradle, Roy Willis turned in his sleep and touched her. Laurie jumped as though a hot iron had seared her flesh. She rolled away and tumbled out of the bed. The floor was cool to her bare feet. She padded toward one of the big windows and stood there, looking out into the night.

The big yard was white with moon rays. She could see the mule shed clearly, and the smoke house. They looked

beautiful tonight. There was the fig tree she used to climb. There was the wood pile and the chopping block where, when she was ten and chopping kindling with a sharp axe, she had accidentally killed her pet mallard.

Two nights ago she'd remembered that incident. She'd looked down onto the face of the fat man, and his staring dead eyes had held the same expression of shock and surprise as the mallard's.

Roy had turned the radio off. He'd talked to her quietly. "I had to do it. That guy was dangerous."

"But they'll get you, Roy," she said. "You can't get away with this. You killed him. That's *murder*, Roy!"

He went over to her and flicked his finger stinging hard against her cheek. "Don't keep saying *you*, baby," he said. "Get that *we* in there. *We* killed him. You're in this right up to your cute ears. But don't worry about it. We've already gotten away with it. If anybody had heard the shot, they'd have been here banging on the door already. Nobody knows what's happened here except you and me."

"But when they find him here, Roy, they'll—"

"Not here," he cut in. He stooped and dug into the fat man's pockets. He brought out a room key with the big plastic tag attached to it. "Later, about four a.m. when everything's quiet, you

and I'll lug him down to his room. It's only two floors below. We'll use the service stairs. If nobody sees us, fine. If they do, we're just helping a drunk back to his room. You understand?"

THAT'S the way it worked out. Nobody saw them. The next morning when the chambermaid found the corpse, they were long gone. They were way down south of Mason-Dixon, in the land of corn pones, ham-hocks and turnip greens.

Laurie had fought it with everything she had. She thought about what would happen if the law did get on their trail. The shock and the shame of it would kill her folks.

Roy had laughed off that objection. "Safest place in the world! Who's going to look for city-boy Roy Willis on a tobacco farm deep in the Carolina red clay country?"

When she didn't answer, his voice sharpened, hacked at her: "All right," he said. "I'm your husband. They're my in-laws. I'll go there alone, then. What's the matter—you ashamed for me to meet your folks, to see the kind of place you came from?"

But it wasn't that she was ashamed of the place or the folks. That wasn't why she hadn't been back once in the seven years she'd been away. It was because of Roy. She knew Roy would



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turn on the charm and they'd fall for it, and then somehow, some way, Roy would figure an angle to use that worship for his own purposes. Roy wasn't happy about somebody liking him unless it paid off.

Then there would be the admiration for their expensive clothes, the ostrich-skin luggage and the expensive convertible. Questions would be asked about what Roy did, how he made so much money. He'd lie glibly through it all, but Laurie was afraid she'd be trapped.

She'd never been very good at lying to her folks. When they'd get her to one side and tell her what a wonderful guy Roy was and how lucky she was to have married such a fine man, Laurie was afraid she might not be able to stand it. She might break and blurt out the truth.

Those were the reasons she'd never gone back and why she didn't want to go back now. But when Roy said he'd go alone, she knew she was licked. He'd do it. Once again she'd lost to Roy. She had always lost, right from the beginning. Nobody bucked Roy Willis and got away with it.

Laurie began to feel suffocated, closed in by the walls of the bedroom. There was no air in the room. Roy had a phobia about sleeping in a room with an open window. Outside, through the glass, Laurie could see a night breeze rustling the leaves of the crepe myrtle and pecan trees. She suddenly had to get out there, feel the cool of the night on her feverish skin, freshen her lungs with the clean sweet air.

She turned and padded across the room to the door, eased it open, stepped out into the hall. She paused by the open door of her sister's room. The kid was sleeping quietly now.

It was funny how she thought of Gin as a kid. She wasn't really, anymore. She was seventeen but she was grownup.

The long, gangly legs had filled out and taken on beautiful lines. Gin had really bloomed in seven years. When Laurie and Roy had arrived early this morning and Laurie had been unpacking, Gin had insisted on trying on one of Laurie's gowns. In that gown, with the freshness of youth shining from her, Gin was so beautiful it hurt to look at her.

Roy had let out a long, low whistle. "Hey," he'd said. "Look at this kid! She's a killer! Maybe I married the wrong sister, eh?"

Gin had gotten flustered and fled from the room. Roy had looked at Laurie and laughed.

Laurie had known what he meant. Sometimes, lately, she'd catch him studying her with narrowed eyes. He'd say: "What's happening to you, Toots? You're losing something." He'd shake his head, impatient, a little puzzled. "You'd better do something about it, baby. Once that extra zip is gone, you won't be worth a damn to me. These fat rich old suckers don't want floozies. Hell, floozies are a penny a peck."

HE WASN'T telling Laurie anything she didn't know. The seven years might have passed right over Roy but they'd hit her hard, left their indelible mark. Little touches around the eyes and the mouth, more in the expression than in the features themselves. Some would say that she'd taken on an air of worldliness, but Laurie knew that nothing had been added. It was like Roy had said—something had been lost.

It frightened her. In the smart clubs and hotel cafes that she and Roy worked, Laurie had seen other woman not much older than herself who were dulled completely, who in desperation were trying to recapture that lost something with too much paint and too much jewelry and too loud laughter. But it was all

false flash and you could see through it.

What Roy meant was that when she got like that he'd take off.

The thought had panicked her at first. Evil grew on you; you became used to it, depended on it. She knew no other life. What would she do without Roy? How would she live? Then she'd gotten used to the idea and it was only the uncertainty of when it would happen that bothered her. The world didn't end for women suddenly without husbands. She'd go on. She'd take care of herself somehow, maybe divorce Roy and try to start over, maybe marry again.

Now, though, the business of the fat man had changed all that. She was saddled with Roy for life, and he with her. She was the witness to his crime, the one who shared his guilt, and he'd have to stick with her.

Maybe it was a good thing, too. From the way Roy had looked at Gin today, Laurie knew that he wished he could swap her for the younger version. Turn her in for the 1950 model. And if it weren't for the murder, Laurie knew that Roy would have no qualms about getting Gin to run off with him. A young hayseed like Gin, all full of wild, romantic notions, would be a set-up for Roy's fast, smooth talk—just as Laurie had been when she met him. But he would never try it the way things were.

Laurie moved away from the doorway of her sister's room to the front door of the house. She unhooked the screen catch and stepped out onto the porch. She stood there, breathing deeply of the night's sweetness. The soft hum of cicadas and tree toads was everywhere, muted, soothing.

After a few moments, Laurie moved off of the porch toward the driveway where the convertible was parked. Roy always carried a spare pack of cigarettes

in the dashboard compartment. She would sit in the open front seat of the car and have a smoke and then go back inside to try to get some sleep. Maybe at the same time she could figure some way to get them away from the farm.

Roy had sworn to her that they'd only stay here a few days. But tonight before going to bed Roy had said: "You've got nice folks, honey. And this is a nice old stash, quiet, isolated. Maybe we ought to stretch out this vacation, hole up here for a month, give that fat-boy business a real chance to cool off before we try to operate again."

Panic had leaped inside of her like a live thing. She remembered the tough time she'd had answering some of her mother's questions. She remembered how Roy had taken young Gin out for a ride in the convertible "just to show her how smooth it rides," and how flushed and excited the kid had been when they got back. Since then Gin had talked about nothing but what a wonderful man Roy was and how she envied Laurie and how sick she was of the farm and farmer's sons and this whole neck of the woods.

Maybe Roy wouldn't be dumb enough to run off with Gin, but he'd sure put a lot of silly notions in the kid's head if they were here very long. They couldn't stay here. She had to figure some way to get Roy away from here before he hurt somebody.

On the broad front seat of the convertible, she flicked on the dash lights, snapped open the glove compartment. She fished through a litter of maps and old gasoline and service station receipts, found an unopened package of cigarettes. She opened the pack, stuck a cigarette in her mouth and lit it. She inhaled deeply and tossed the cigarettes back into the compartment, and then something caught her eye. She held her breath as she pulled out a crumpled

wad of handkerchief covered with lipstick smears.

It was a big handkerchief, she saw. The fine linen told her that it was one of Roy's, and his initial in the corner removed all doubt. Held close to the dash light, the bright orange color of the lipstick told Laurie that it had come from Gin's young mouth.

She sat there stunned for a moment, twisting the soiled handkerchief between her clenched fists. The ride this afternoon. The way Gin looked when they came back. Roy's decision to stay here at least a month. It told the whole rotten story. Roy had moved fast. Snap-judgment, cocksure Roy. Move-right-in Roy.

SHE heard, then, the soft sound of the screen door shutting. There was the whisper of footsteps across the grass and somebody loomed in the dark beside the car.

The door opened and Roy shoved into the seat beside her. He had put on a pair of slacks over his pajamas. He wore shoes but no socks. He was carrying a small armful of clothes which he set down on the seat between them. He didn't look as though he'd just awakened. Roy never did. His eyes were clear, his whole handsome face alert looking.

"You're making an insomniac out of me too, baby," he said, chuckling. "You see how I love you? You get up out of bed and I wake up, too. I got to come looking for you."

Laurie closed her hand over the handkerchief. She stared at him, trying to hide the loathing in her eyes. She looked at his mouth and thought about that mouth kissing Gin, telling Gin things—lying, hypnotic things that made a girl forget everything else.

She said, "Why did you bring some of my clothes out here?" She pushed her

hand through the little pile of clothing. There was a pair of slacks and a sweater and a pair of slippers.

"For you to put on, silly," he said. "Get into them, Laurie. We're going to take a little ride."

Something cold seemed to slither through her stomach. "Are you crazy, Roy? At this time of night?"

"Sure, Laurie. Why not? We'll find a juke joint open somewhere on the highway. We'll have a couple of bottles of beer and talk a little. I want to talk to you. I don't like the way you've been acting lately. I want to thrash things out."

"What things? Why can't we talk right here?"

He gestured toward the house. "Do you want to wake your family? Get those clothes on, take the car out of gear and release the handbrake. We can roll out of the driveway and down the road a little before you start the motor."

She looked fearfully toward the house. He was right. A lot of talk might awaken one of them in there. She couldn't stand that now.

And they did have something to talk about, something that Roy wasn't expecting. She would straighten him out on the situation with Gin fast, before it had a chance to go any farther. She'd tell him that if he went near the kid again, she'd go to the police and tell them about the fat man and the hell with what happened to little Laurie.

Automatically she slipped into the slacks, pulled the sweater over her pajamas. She eased the car back the slight slope of the driveway, got it onto the dirt road and rolled down a few yards away from the house before she gunned the motor.

She drove in silence along the red clay road until they reached a narrow, rickety wooden bridge that crossed a small creek. Some boards were loose in the

middle of the bridge, and Laurie slowed the car so they wouldn't hit the bridge at too high speed. But about fifty feet from the bridge, Roy suddenly reached out and switched off the ignition. He grabbed the handbrake and eased it up slowly but steadily, stopping the car close to the bridge. At the same time he put one hand on the wheel, forcing the car to the side of the road.

"Why are we stopping here?" Laurie's voice sounded shrill.

"This is where we're going to talk," Roy said. "I don't think we want any beer."

Frozenly, she watched Roy open the glove compartment, run his hand through it, bring it out empty. He grinned at her, showing all of his beautiful, even white teeth.

"Your sister is a beautiful kid," he said gently. "You don't think that if I cared about you finding that handkerchief, I'd have put it in the compartment, do you?"

She called him a name, the worst she could think of. It didn't bother Roy. His smile didn't change.

"She hit me like a load of brick, Laurie. I made up my mind about her this afternoon. She's young, just dumb enough to be pliable, just smart enough to grab at what she wants."

"No, Roy!" The words seemed to choke in the back of her throat. "You're not going to do it, Roy. You're going to leave her alone—or you're going to face the law about what happened in the hotel. I swear to that, Roy."

He ignored the threat. "Gin talked a lot this afternoon. We parked for awhile by this bridge and she told me about this creek. You go swimming here on hot summer days. Good swimming, too. The water runs fast, and it's deep, cold and deep. Very deep, Laurie."

She edged along the seat away from him, her eyes on him, fascinated. She

touched the door and her hand fumbled for the handle, shaking, panicky. Before her fingers found it, Roy reached across her and grabbed her wrist. With his other he grabbed her hair. He slammed her head forward with all of his might against the metal of the dashboard.

There was an explosion of flashing lights in Laurie's eyes. She started to scream but she didn't make it. Roy's fingers tangled in her hair, whacked her head forward again.

This time the dazzling lights were fewer. Thoughts skittered through her brain like frightened chipmunks. Roy was way ahead of her. It would be a terrible tragedy. An accident. The car plunging off of the creek bridge. Everybody would feel sorry for poor Roy. They'd insist that he stay on at the farm and after a proper length of time he and Gin. . . .

Dimly she became aware of Roy's voice. "All rigged nicely, Laurie. Remember the night in Sea City when you woke up and left me a thoughtful little note saying that you'd gone out to get some cigarettes? I saved that note, Laurie. There was no date on it. They'll find it—"

Her head was slammed against the dashboard again, and pain burst like a rocket inside her skull. Then all the flashing lights went out. The darkness was thick and wet, syrupy. . . .

A FEW miles above the road the creek was swelled by freshets and cold springs. The water was icy. It shocked Laurie back to consciousness in a matter of seconds. Her lungs were bursting for air and she instinctively tried to swim toward the surface. She couldn't move. One foot was caught in something and her ankle was torn with pain.

She reached down and felt the floor-

board of the car. She fumbled down to her ankle and found that it was pinned beneath the brake pedal. She wrenched at the pedal but it didn't budge. Nothing happened. She thought: *The hell with it. What's the use? They say drowning isn't so bad. . . .*

Then water got into her mouth and she started to choke. Panic swept her and instinct took hold. Hardly realizing it, Laurie jerked her ankle with every bit of strength in her. She felt herself twist free in the swirling water.

The current twisted and pulled at her as she fought to the surface. She broke through into the air and gulped it in. She reached up and caught hold of rough wood. The only sound was the roar of the racing creek water and everything was inky black all around her. She realized that she had come up to the surface under the bridge.

For long moments she clung to the supporting beam of the bridge. Then she eased herself along, hand over hand, to the sandy shore beneath the bridge. She sprawled there, her legs still in the icy water, too weak to crawl any farther. She lay there, listening, but heard nothing above the noise of the torrent. She stayed without moving for what seemed like hours and then stiffly pulled herself to her feet, moved along the narrow strip of sand until she was out from under the bridge.

The moon was still bright and in its pale illumination she could see the jagged ends of the wrecked bridge railing where Roy had plunged the car through it. There was no sign of Roy. The bridge and the road were empty. Laurie found the path that led down to the edge of the water and painfully hobbled back up onto the road.

It was about three miles back to the house and it took Laurie about three hours to make it. It seemed longer. Several times she had to sit down and

rest before she fell. The wet clothes clung to her, and the night breeze blowing through them set her to shivering. Her head throbbed as though it was split down the middle and her foot was swollen to double its size, but somehow she kept going. She made it just as milky streaks of dawn were beginning to filter through the night sky.

There were lights on in the big kitchen in the back of the house. She didn't know whether Roy had awakened the folks or whether her father had just got up early. He often arose at dawn. It didn't matter much which it was. Laurie knew what she was going to do.

The front screen door was still on the latch, and she managed to drag herself inside and shut it without making too much noise. Their bedroom door was open and she pushed into the room, saw that it was empty. She fumbled through the compartments of Roy's suitcase and found the little .25 caliber revolver. She checked the chambers and then started toward the lights in the kitchen.

She stood quietly in the doorway for a second, the light hurting her eyes. She had forgotten how she must look, with her stringy hair and her half-wet clothes and dried blood and river-silt all over her face, until her mother accidentally glanced toward the doorway and saw her standing there. Her mother's eyes went round with horror.

There were three of them in the kitchen. Laurie's mother in her faded wrapper, her hair up in metal curlers. Her father already in overalls, his tired, weathered face still sleepy looking. And Roy. Roy had taken off his slacks and shoes and was in his pajamas as though he'd just gotten up. He had his back to the door. He was saying:

"I know something's wrong, Pop. It's been nearly two hours since I awakened and found her gone and this note be-

side the bed. I don't know; maybe if Laurie wasn't such a rotten driver there'd be nothing to worry about. But I think we ought to go out and check. Even if she's got a flat tire or motor trouble—"

Her mother's scream chopped off his words. The old woman speared her finger toward the door and the two men spun around.

Laurie pointed the .25 at Roy. She said through puffy lips: "You slipped up, Roy. For once you slipped up. You—didn't quite kill me."

"Oh, lord-a-mighty, honey, what happened?" Laurie's father cried.

"Ask him," Laurie said. "Ask Roy. He tried to kill me."

"She's hurt!" Roy broke in. "She's had an accident, got hurt in the head. Pop, get that gun away from her before she hurts somebody!"

LAURIE shook her head. She felt very tired. She spoke slowly, blurredly, not to anybody in particular. "I'm not crazy. Don't let him try to sell you that I'm crazy. There wasn't even any wreck." Simply, plainly, she went on to tell them what had happened.

She was halfway through when Roy started toward her. She stopped, gripped her gun tighter.

"Stay away, Roy! I don't want to shoot you. I don't want it that way but I'll do it if you don't keep away from me. It's all over, Roy. Everything's all over." She suddenly realized that her voice had given way on her. She was only whispering. Then it cleared and she shouted: "Roy, do you hear me? Roy!"

Her vision swam but she saw his blurred figure rushing toward her and she felt her finger tighten on the trigger of the gun. Then for one terrible second her eyes cleared and she saw that

Roy was almost upon her. She saw emotion on that handsome face of his for the first time—fear, rage, desperation.

She didn't know that the .25 had been fired until she saw three black holes appear in the front of Roy's silk pajama tops. She watched his hand clutch at the holes, covering them, and then she seemed to hear the sound of the shots.

Roy looked toward her as he fell and she saw that suddenly he was no longer good looking, nor young. His face was twisted and ugly, and all that was inside of him was there on the surface. It was a terrible thing to see. She remembered Roy laughing about a movie called *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and saying that no such thing could happen. And now it was happening to Roy.

Then the lights began to dim. For the second time that night, Laurie Willis found herself falling into smothering darkness. . . .

When she came out of it, she was in her sister's bed. Gin was there, with her mother and father. They were all sitting around the bed. The sheets felt cool and crisp and clean. She felt her head and it was wrapped in thick bandages. Her mother was holding her hand and telling her that everything was going to be all right.

The doctor had come and gone, and the sheriff too. Laurie's father told her that technically she was under arrest and would have to appear at the inquest, but it was just a formality. Laurie figured that was probably so, her family being what it was around these parts and the law being what it was, and with the story she had to tell. That bothered her, though. Just how much of that story should she tell? Then her father spoke up.

"Why did he do it, Laurie?" he asked

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DEAD-END FOR DELIA



By **WILLIAM
CAMPBELL GAULT**

*He said harshly, "You could
have saved her life."*

THE only light in the alley came from the high, open windows of the faded dancehall bordering its east length. From these same windows the clean melody of a tenor sax cut through the murky air of the alley. There was nothing else around that was clean.

The warehouse running the west border of the alley was of grimy red brick, the alley itself littered with paper and

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Cops, like surgeons, should stay away from family cases — but Pat knew he alone could even the score for his murdered Delia.

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trash, cans and bottles. It was a dead-end alley, no longer used.

The beat officer was at its mouth, keeping the small crowd back, and now the police ambulance came from the west, its siren dying in a slow wail.

The beat officer said, "Better swing out and back in. Sergeant Kelley with you?"

"No. Why?" The driver was frowning.

"It's his wife," the beat officer said. "She really got worked over."

"Dead?"

"Just died, two minutes ago. How she lived that long is a wonder."

The driver shook his head, and swung out to back into the mouth of the alley.

From the west again, a red light swung back and forth, and the scream of a high speed siren pierced the night. The prowling car was making time. It cut over to the wrong side of the street and skidded for fifteen feet before stopping at the curb.

The man opposite the driver had the door open before the car came to rest, and he was approaching the beat patrolman while the driver killed the motor.

"Barnes? I'm Kelley. My wife—?"

"Dead, Sergeant. Two minutes ago."

Sergeant Kelley was a tall man with a thin, lined face and dark brown eyes. He stood there a moment, saying nothing, thinking of Delia, only half hearing the trumpet that was now taking a ride at Dreamland, the Home of Name Bands.

Delia, who was only twenty-three to his thirty-seven, Delia who loved to dance, Delia of the fair hair and sharp tongue—was now dead. And that was her dirge, that trumpet taking a ride.

He shook his head and felt the trembling start in his hands. He took a step toward the other end of the alley, and the patrolman put a hand on his arm.

"Sergeant, I wouldn't. It's nothing to see. Unless you're a Homicide man, it's nothing you'd— Sergeant, don't."

Sergeant Kelley shook off the hand and continued down the alley.

Dick Callender of Homicide was talking to the M.E. He turned at the sound of Kelley's footsteps.

Dick said, "It's nothing to see, Pat."

Pat Kelley didn't answer him. There was enough light from the dance hall for him to see the bloody face of his wife and the matted hair above it. He hadn't seen her for four months.

Then he looked at Callender. "She say anything, Dick?"

"Just—Tell Pat I'm sorry. Tell Pat Lois will know. Make sense to you; the second sentence, I mean?"

"None," Pat lied. The band was playing a waltz, now.

Callender said, "We'll give it a lot of time. Homicide will shoot the works on this one."

Pat looked at him and used his title, now. "I want a transfer, Lieutenant. To Homicide." His voice was very quiet. "You can fix it."

A piece of dirty newspaper fluttered by, stirred by the night breeze. The white-coated men were laying the stretcher alongside the body.

Callender said, "We've got a lot of good men in Homicide, Pat." He didn't say, *And we want our suspects brought in alive.*

But Pat could guess he was thinking it. He said, "She left me, four months ago. I'm not going to go crazy on it, but I'd like the transfer."

"We'll see, Pat." The lieutenant put a hand on his shoulder. "Come on. I'll ride back to headquarters with you."

THEY went in the lieutenant's wagon. About halfway there, Pat said, "It could have been one of those—pick-up deals, some mugg out

of nowhere who'll go back to where he came from." Shame burned in him, but he had to get the words out.

Callender didn't look at him. "I've got Adams and Prokowski checking the dancehall. They're hard workers, good men."

Pat said nothing.

Callender went on, quietly, "There must be some angle you've got on it. Your wife must have thought you knew this—this Lois, or she wouldn't have mentioned it. She didn't have enough words left to waste any of them on some trivial matter."

"My wife knew a lot of people I didn't," Pat said. "My statement will include everything I know, Lieutenant. Have her sent to the Boone Mortuary on Seventh Street, will you? I'll talk to her mother tonight."

"She—was living with her mother, Pat?"

"No. I don't know where she's been living these past four months. But it wasn't with her mother. I wish to God it had been, now."

They made the rest of the trip in silence.

It was a little before midnight when Sergeant Pat Kelley, of the pawn shop and hotel detail, climbed the worn stairs of the four-story building on Vine. The place was quiet; these were working people and they got to bed early.

Mrs. Revolt lived on the third floor, in two rooms overlooking the littered back yard and the parking lot beyond. Pat knocked and waited.

There was the sound of a turning key, and then Mrs. Revolt opened the door. Her lined, weary face was composed, but her eyes quickened in sudden alarm at the sight of Pat.

"Pat, what is it?"

"I'd better come in," he said. "It's Delia, Mrs. Revolt. Something's happened. . . ."

She pulled her wrapper tightly around her, as though to stiffen her body against his words. "Come in, come in. But what—? Pat, she's not—it's not—"

He came into the dimly lighted room with the rumpled studio couch, the gate-leg table with the brass lamp, the worn wicker chairs, the faded, dull brown rug. In this room, Delia Revolt had grown from an infant to the beauty of the block. In this room, Papa Revolt had died, and Pat had courted the Revolt miracle.

"Sit down, Mrs. Revolt," Pat said now.

She sat down in the wicker rocker. "She's dead, I know. She's dead. My Delia, oh Lord, she's dead." She rocked, then, back and forth, her eyes closed, her lips moving, no decipherable words coming out.

Pat sat on the wicker lounge. "She was found in an—she was found near the Dreamland dancehall. She's dead. There'll be detectives coming to see you; other detectives, Mrs. Revolt."

Her eyes opened, and she stopped rocking. "Murdered—Delia? It wasn't an accident? Murdered—Delia?"

He nodded. Her eyes closed again, and a strangled sound came from her tight throat, and she toppled sideways in the chair.

Pat got to her before she hit the floor. He put her on the studio couch, and was waiting with a glass of water when her eyes opened again.

Her voice was a whisper. "How did it happen?"

"She was hit with something blunt, concussion. Nobody knows anything else. But there's something I wanted you to know."

Fear in her eyes, now. She said nothing.

"Before she died, Delia mentioned a name. It was Lois. I told the officer in charge the name meant nothing to me.

I told him I didn't know any Lois."

The frightened eyes moved around Pat's face. "Why did you say that?"

"Because they're going after this one. She's a cop's wife and they won't be pulling any punches. This man in charge, Callender, can be awful rough. I'd rather talk to Lois, myself."

"But why should they bother Lois?"

"Delia mentioned the name, before she died. They're not going to overlook anything and they're not going to be polite."

"All right, Pat. I had a feeling, when you knocked, something had happened. I've had a feeling about Delia, for years. You can go now; I'll be all right. I'll want to be alone."

She was under control, now, this woman who'd met many a tragedy, who'd just met her biggest one. The fortitude born of the countless minor tragedies was carrying her through this one.

PAT went from there to Sycamore. He was off duty, and driving his own car. On Sycamore, near Seventh, he parked in front of an old, red brick apartment building.

In the small lobby, he pressed the button next to the card which read: *Miss Lois Weldon.*

Her voice sounded metallic through the wall speaker. "Who's there?"

"It's Pat, Lois. Something has happened."

He was at the door when it buzzed.

She was waiting in her lighted doorway when he got off the self-service elevator on the fourth floor. She was wearing a maroon flannel robe piped in white, and no make-up. Her dark, soft hair was piled high on her head.

Her voice was quiet. "What's happened?"

"Delia's been murdered."

She flinched and put one hand on the

door frame for support. "Pat, when—how—?"

"Tonight. In the alley next to the Dreamland ballroom. Slugged to death. She didn't die right away. She mentioned your name before she died."

"My name? Come in, Pat." Her voice was shaky.

There wasn't much that could be done about the apartment's arrangement, but color and taste had done their best with its appearance. Pat sat on a love seat, near the pseudo-fireplace.

Lois stood. "Now, what did she say?"

Pat frowned. "She said, 'Tell Pat I'm sorry. Tell Pat Lois will know.' She told that to Lieutenant Callender of Homicide, before she died. He asked me who Lois was, and I told him I didn't know."

"Why?"

"I was trying to protect you. It might have been dumb. But they're going to be rough in this case."

She sat down in a chair close by, staring at him. "I saw Delia two days ago, Thursday afternoon. She told me then that she was sorry she'd left you. Could it have been that, Pat?"

"It could have been. Yes, that's probably what she meant. What else did she tell you?"

"N-nothing. She was very vague. She'd—been drinking, Pat."

"Drinking? That's a new one for her. Was she working?"

"I didn't get that impression. She didn't tell me where she was living, either. Do you know?"

Pat shook his head, staring at the floor. The three of them had grown up in the same block on Vine, though they weren't of an age. Delia had been twenty-three, and Lois was—let's see, she was thirty and the fairly well paid secretary to a vice president of a text publishing firm. When Pat was twenty-two and freshly in uniform, he'd been

Lois' hero, who'd been fifteen. At thirty-three, in another kind of uniform, U. S. Army, he'd been Delia's hero, and she'd been nineteen.

At the moment, he was an old man, and nobody's hero.

Lois said, "I guess you need a drink." She rose. "Don't try to think tonight, Pat. It won't be any good."

"I was without her for four months," he said, mostly to himself. "I got through that. I don't know about this. I don't seem to have any feelings at all. It's like I'm dead."

Her back was to him. "I know. That the way I felt four years ago." She poured a stiff jolt of rye in the bottom of a tumbler.

"Four years ago?" He was only half listening.

"When you married her." She had no expression on her face as she walked over to him. Her hand was steady, holding out the drink.

He looked up to meet her gaze. "Lois, what are you—?"

"I just wanted you to know," she said, "and now. I'm glad you didn't tell that officer you knew me. That's a gesture I can hang on to. It will warm me, this winter."

"Lois—" he protested.

"Drink your drink," she said quietly. "Bottoms up."

He stared at her, and at the glass. He lifted it high and drained it. He could feel its warmth, and then he started to tremble.

"You're one of those black Irishman," Lois said softly, "who can go all to hell over something like this. And wind up in the gutter. Or examine yourself a little better and decide she was a girl headed for doom from the day of her birth and all you really loved was her beauty."

"Stop talking, Lois. You're all worked up. I'd kill anybody else who talked

like that, but I know you loved her, too?"

"Who didn't love her? She was the most beautiful thing alive. But she was a kid, and she'd never be anything else. Even now you can see that, can't you?"

Pat stared at his empty glass, and rose.

"Thanks for the drink," he said, and walked to the door. There he paused, faced her. "It was probably a silly gesture, covering you. There'll be a million people who can tell them who Lois is. I'm sorry I got you up."

"Pat," she said, but he was through the door.

He caught a glimpse of her as he stepped into the elevator. She was like a statue, both hands on the door frame, watching him wordlessly. . . .

THE Chief called him in, next morning. He was a big man and a blunt one. He said, "Callender tells me you want a transfer to Homicide for the time being."

Pat nodded. "Yes, sir."

"How is it you didn't tell Callender about this Lois Weldon last night? A half dozen people have told him about her since."

"I wasn't thinking last night, sir."

The Chief nodded. "You're too close to it, Sergeant. For anybody else, that would be withholding evidence. I'm overlooking it. But I'm denying your request for a temporary transfer to Homicide."

Pat stared at him, saying nothing.

The Chief stared back at him. "You'll want a few days leave."

"Maybe more." He omitted the "sir."

The Chief frowned and looked at his desk top. His eyes came up, again. "I don't like to hammer at you at a time like this. But why *more*? Were you planning to work on this outside of the department?"

Pat nodded.

"If I gave you a direct order not to, that would be insubordination, Sergeant."

Pat said nothing.

The Chief said, "Those are my orders."

Pat took out his wallet and unpinned the badge. He laid it on the Chief's desk. "This isn't easy, sir, after fifteen years." He stood up, momentarily realizing what a damn fool speech that had been.

"You're being dramatic," the Chief said evenly. "The thing that makes a good officer is impartiality. Last night you tried to cover a friend. In your present mood, you might go gunning on a half-baked lead and do a lot of damage. This department isn't run that way. But it's your decision, Sergeant." He picked up the badge.

Pat started for the door, and the Chief's voice stopped him. "It would be smart to stay out of Lieutenant Calender's way."

Pat went out without answering. He stood there, in the main hall of Headquarters, feeling like a stranger for the first time in fifteen years. It was then he remembered Lois saying, *You're one of those black Irishmen who can go all to hell. . . .*

He wasn't that complicated, whether she knew it or not. His wife had been killed and it was a personal business with him. His job for fifteen years had been to protect the soft from violence and fraud and chicanery, and this time it was closer to home. Only a fool would expect him to continue checking pawn shops; he hadn't thought the Chief was a fool. But then, it wasn't the Chief's wife.

Detective Prokowski came along the hall and stopped at the sight of Pat.

Pat asked, "What did you find out at Dreamland last night, Steve?"

Prowkowski licked his lower lip, frowning.

"Orders, Steve?" Pat asked quietly. "From the lieutenant?"

Prokowski didn't answer that. "Did your transfer go through?"

"No. I've left the force. Don't you want to talk about Dreamland? I won't remind you how long we've known each other."

"Keep your voice down," Prokowski said. "I'll see you at Irv's, at one-thirty."

"Sure. Thanks, Steve."

Irv's wasn't a cops' hangout; Prokowski was a Middle Westerner, originally, and a perfectionist regarding the proper temperature of draught beer. Irv had it at the proper temperature.

It was a hot day, for fall, and the beer was cool enough to sweat the glass without being cold enough to chill the stomach. Pat drank a couple of glasses, waiting for Steve.

Steve came in at a quarter to two and Irv had a glass waiting for him by the time he reached the bar.

HE WAS a big man, Steve Prokowski, and sweating like a college crew man right now. "Nothing," he said wearily. "Lots of guys danced with her. Nothing there. Shoe clerks and CPA's and punk kids. There was a guy they called Helgy. That name mean anything to you, Pat?"

Pat lied with a shake of the head. "This Helgy something special?"

"Danced with her a lot. Took her home. Brought her a couple of times. The way it is, I guess, if you really like to dance there's only one place to do it where you've got the room and the right music. That's a place like Dreamland."

"I mean you can't catalogue a guy because he goes to a public dancehall, any more than you can catalogue people because you saw them in Grand Central

Station. All kinds of people like to dance. This Helgy drove a smooth car, a convertible. That's nightclub stuff, right? But he liked to dance, and the story is, he really could."

Steve finished his beer and Irv brought another. Steve said casually, "Now, what do you know, Pat?"

"I'm out of a job. I don't know anything beyond that. The Chief acted on Callender's recommendation, I suppose?"

"I don't know. The lieutenant doesn't always confide in me. What can you do alone, Pat?"

"It wasn't my idea to work alone." Pat climbed off his stool and put a dollar on the bar. "Out of that, Irv, all of them." He put a hand on Steve's shoulder. "Thanks for coming in."

"You're welcome. Thanks for the beer. I still work for the department, remember, Pat."

"I didn't forget it for a minute."

He could feel Steve's eyes on him in the mirror as he walked out.

Once at breakfast, Delia had been reading the paper and she'd said, "Well, imagine that!"

"I'll try," he'd said. "Imagine what?"

"This boy I used to dance with at Dreamland, this Joe Helgeson. He's a composer, it says here. He likes to dance, and always has, and he knows very little about music, but he's composed. And he must be rich. Helgy, we always called him."

"You should have married him," Pat told her, "so you could have your breakfast in bed."

"There's always time," she told him. "But right now I'm happy with you."

After that, Pat had been conscious of the name. He saw it on sheet music, and it disturbed him. He heard Delia talk to friends about the composer she knew, Helgy, as though that was her world.

He swung his coupe away from the curb and headed toward the Drive. He

knew the building; Delia had pointed it out to him once.

It was about eleven stories high with terrace apartments overlooking the bay. Helgy had one of the terrace apartments.

There was a clerk in the quiet lobby, too, and his glance said Pat should have used the service entrance.

Pat said, "Would you phone Mr. Helgeson and tell him Delia Kelley's husband would like very much to talk to him?"

The clerk studied him for a moment before picking up the phone.

He looked surprised when he said, "Mr. Helgeson will see you, sir."

The elevator went up quickly and quietly, and Pat stepped out onto the lush, sculptured carpeting of the top floor. There was a man waiting for him there, a thin man with blond hair in a crew cut, and alert blue eyes.

"Sergeant Kelley?"

Pat nodded.

"I've—been reading the papers. It's—I really don't know what to say, Sergeant."

"I don't either," Pat said, "except to ask you what you might know about it."

THEY were walking along the hall, now. They came to the entry hall of the apartment, and Helgeson closed the door behind them. There he faced Pat honestly.

"I've seen her a few times, Sergeant, since she—she left you. There was nothing, well, nothing wrong about it."

"That part doesn't matter," Pat said. "I'm not looking for the men who flirted with her. I'm looking for the man who killed her."

They went into a low, long living room with a beamed ceiling, with floor-length windows facing on the terrace. Helgeson sat in a chair near the huge, bleached mahogany piano.

"I can't help you with that," he said.

"I danced with her, at Dreamland. I don't know what attraction the place had for me, except it was the only magic I knew as a kid. I never probed myself for any reasons. She was—a wonderful dancer. I didn't think of her beyond that. That sounds phony, I know, but—" His voice died.

"I'm surprised the Homicide section hasn't sent a man to see you, or have they? You said you'd been reading about it."

"Homicide? No. Why should they?"

"You're pretty well known, and they have your nickname."

"I'm not known down there, not generally. Not as the composer. I'm just another punk, just Helgy, down there. A rather aging punk." He stared at Pat. "But if you know, they know."

Pat shook his head. "I've left the force. I asked to be assigned to this case and was refused."

"Oh," Helgeson rubbed his forehead frowningly. "She told me, when she phoned to break a date yesterday, that she was going back to you. I thought—"

"Yesterday?" Pat interrupted. "She told you *that*, yesterday?"

Helgeson nodded, studying Pat quietly.

Pat could see the pulse in his wrist and he had a passing moment of giddiness. "Where was she living?"

"The Empire Court, over on Hudson."

"Working, was she?"

"I don't think so. She never mentioned it, if she was. She was kind of reticent about all that."

Pat looked at Helgeson levelly. "Was she—living alone?"

Helgeson took a deep breath. "I don't know. I never went in, over there. She was always ready when I called for her." He seemed pale and his voice was unsteady.

Pat felt resentment moving through him, but he couldn't hate them all. Everybody had loved Delia.

He said quietly, "There's nothing

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you know? She must have mentioned some names, or what she was doing. What the hell did you talk about?"

"We didn't talk much. We danced, that's all. Sergeant, believe me, if I could help I would." His voice was ragged. "If you knew how much I—wanted to help." He shook his head. "There isn't anything I know, not a damned thing."

"All right. I can believe that. If there's anything you hear, or happen to remember, *anything at all*, phone me." He gave him the number.

He went from there to the Empire Court, on Hudson. It was a fairly modern, U-shaped building of gray stone, set back on a deep lot. There was a department car among the cars at the curb.

The name in the lobby read: *Delia Revolt*. Pat pressed the button and the door buzzed.

It was on the second floor and he walked up. There were some technical men dusting for prints, and there was Lieutenant Callender, his back to the doorway, standing in the middle of the living room.

He turned and saw Pat. His face showed nothing.

"Anything?" Pat asked him.

"Look, Pat, for the love of—"

"You look," Pat said. "She was my wife. You got a wife, Lieutenant?"

"I'm married to my second, now." He shook his big head and ran a hand through his hair. "The Chief said you'd resigned."

"That's right."

"You've been a cop for fifteen years. You're acting like a rookie."

"I've only been a husband for four years, Lieutenant. I'm not getting in your way."

"We'll probably get a million prints, all but the right ones. We found a dressing robe we're checking, and some

pajamas. The lieutenant's eyes looked away. "I'll talk to the Chief, Pat. I'll see that you get your job back."

"I don't want it back—yet. Thanks, anyway, Lieutenant." He kept seeing Delia in the room and somebody else, some formless, faceless somebody, and the giddiness came again and he knew he wouldn't have the stomach to look in any of the other rooms.

HE TURNED his back on the lieutenant and went down the steps to the lobby and out into the hot, bright day. They were right about it, of course. A cop shouldn't be on a family case any more than a surgeon should. Emotion was no asset in this business.

He sat in the car for minutes, trying to get back to reality, trying to forget that cozy apartment and the lieutenant's words. The brightness of the day seemed to put a sharp outline on things, to give them a sense of unreality, like a lighted stage setting.

He heard last night's trumpet again, and started the motor.

The alley was bright, now, but no cleaner. The voices of the freight handlers on the street side of the warehouse were drowned by the racket of the huge trucks bumping past. He walked to the alley's dead end and saw, for the first time, the door that led from the dance-hall, a fire exit.

It was open, now, and he could see some men in there, sprinkling the floor with some granulated stuff. There was the sound of a huge rotary brush polisher, but it was outside his line of vision.

He went in through the open door, along a wide hall that flanked the west edge of the bandstand. The men looked at him curiously as he stood there, imagining what it must have been

last night. He could almost hear the music and see the dim lights and the crowded floor.

Along this edge, the floor was raised and there were seats up here, for the speculative males, looking over the field, discussing the old favorites and the new finds, wondering what happened to this transient queen and that one. Some had married and not retired.

One of the workers called over, "Looking for the boss, mister?"

"That's right."

"Won't be in this afternoon. The joint's been full of cops and he went out to get some fresh air."

"Okay." Pat turned and went out.

It was nearly five, now. He turned the car in a U-turn and headed for Borden. He parked on a lot near Borden and Sixth, and walked the two blocks to Curtes-Husted, Publishers.

Lois was busily typing when he opened the door to the outer office. She looked up at his entrance, and her face seemed to come alive, suddenly.

"Pat!" She got up and came over to the railing.

"I was pretty rough, last night. I thought a drink and dinner might take us back to where we were. Part way, anyway."

"It will, it will. Oh, Pat, if you knew what last night—" She put a hand on his on top of the railing.

The door to Pat's right opened, and a man stood there. He had a masculine, virile face and iron-gray hair. He said, "You can go any time, Lois. I guess Mr. Curtes won't be back."

"Thank you, Mr. Husted," she said. "I'll be going in a minute."

He smiled, and closed the door.

"My boss, the VP," she whispered. "Isn't he handsome?"

"I suppose." Pat could feel her hand trembling.

She said quietly, "You're better, aren't you. You're coming out of it."

"I'm better," he said. "This whole case is one blind alley."

"Delia knew a lot of men—of people. I'll be with you in a minute."

They went to the *Lamp Post*, an unpretentious restaurant nearby.

They had a martini each, and Lois told him. "Their spare ribs are the best in town."

He ordered the spare ribs.

She seemed animated. She said, "It's going to be all right. It's going to take some time, and then you're going to be really happy, Pat. I'm going to see that you're happy."

He ordered another pair of drinks, and they finished those before the ribs came. They went from the *Lamp Post* to a spot on the west side, and Pat tried very hard to get drunk. But it didn't work; the alcohol didn't touch him.

They went back to Lois' place. He sat with her in the car in front of her apartment.

"Come on up," she said. "I'll make some coffee."

He shook his head. "I know Husted was paying for that apartment Delia was living in. I've known it for two months, Lois. And you did, too, didn't you?"

Her silence was his answer.

"You probably thought Husted killed her, and yet you've told the police nothing. Delia probably told you yesterday or the day before that she was coming back to me. But you didn't tell me that. Was it yesterday you saw her?"

"The day before. I didn't want her to come back, Pat. And I didn't tell you about my boss because he's got a family, because he's a fundamentally decent man."

(Please continue on page 127)

DISC-JOCKEY



By ALBERT SIMMONS



CHAPTER ONE

Mike Fright

KAY WINTERS walked up to the microphone as if she were afraid of it, deathly afraid. The engineer, all but hidden behind a panel of flashing red-and-green-colored lights, suddenly stopped playing with a couple of dozen little knobs and dials and held up three stiff fingers.

"Three minutes, Kay," he warned and pointed at the clock high on the wall of the lounge.

She nodded as if she weren't sure and glanced nervously at its neon-lighted face, her strangely-dilated eyes almost revealing the all-consuming fear that she felt sweep over her.



DIRGE



She searched their faces frantically. Who was it? Which one was the killer?



The darling of the airwaves was the glamorous platter-chatter blonde — until someone tried to rig her into a fast sign-off.

Dramatic Crime-Adventure Novelette

For two years she'd been doing this. Every night at midnight for two years she had sat behind that same microphone in the Shell-Aire Cocktail Lounge, and every night when the man at the controls said "Three minutes, Kay," she'd felt those same cruel little pinchings of fright gnawing viciously at her insides.

Usually she'd swallow hard and try to make the muscles of her stomach good and tight, and then when she heard her familiar theme music on the turntable and the engineer opened up her mike, she'd say:

"Happy midnight, everybody. This is Kay Winters, your girl disc-jockey. . . ."

That's when the mike fright always went away. But tonight she knew it wouldn't. Because tonight it wasn't mike fright. The cold fear that was stabbing deep into her quivering insides was murder—cold, calculated, murder. And Kay Winters knew that she was to be its victim. . . .

Charlie Walp, the program producer, leaned down from the platform and took her small hands in his.

"Easy does it, doll," droned his smooth voice oiled by the years on Broadway.

As she went up the two steep steps that were the difference between performer and audience, Charlie's fingers touched the soft fur of his reddish-brown mustache and there was a surprised look on his tired face.

"Like ice, your hands. What's it, doll? You got that mike fright again?"

"Still," she said, and she tried a nervous little laugh that didn't quite come off. "I'll be all right, Charlie."

"Sure, sure." He patted the soft whiteness of her bare shoulder, his palm moist and spongy; then he turned and walked away.

Kay shivered. He mustn't know; no-

body must know about her fear.

She slid in behind the microphone and sat down at the hideous gold thing that was Nat Peters' idea of a "classy" desk. Nat was the owner of the Shell-Aire and he'd had the gilded monstrosity especially made for her opening. Kay had wanted to throw it out the first time she'd seen it, but it was a present from Nat and she couldn't hurt his feelings that way, so she kept it and hated it. For two years she had hated it.

The engineer adjusted the headphones on his ears, touched a button, and the turntable started to spin with the sound of her recorded theme music. As a soft white spotlight hit her, the nervous jabbering at the tables on the floor slowed down and came to a halt. Then there was just the clinking of glasses and her theme. By the time Charlie threw her the *On Air* cue with his finger, they were listening intently and watching expectantly. The waiters stopped what they were doing and watched. Everybody watched.

In the rear of the room a white-jacketed bartender, his mouth partly open, leaned his portly middle against the black and gold wood of the bar. He paused momentarily, the filled shaker he held stiffly reflecting hundreds of bright facets of light from its frosted chromium surface.

"Happy midnight, everybody," Kay's warm vibrant voice said into the mike and they all smiled at her. "This is Kay Winters, your girl disc-jockey, speaking to you from the beautiful lounge of the Shell-Aire Restaurant."

IT WAS just like always then, with them sitting there in the subdued informal lights of their table-lamps watching the blonde beauty of young Kay Winters doing her nightly stint as if she weren't going to die . . . as if she

didn't *know for sure* she was going to die!

In between records someone sent a note up to the desk and she read it cautiously. She was afraid of notes now. As long as she lived she would be afraid of notes. She put her fear back in her throat and said:

"Thanks for the nice things you say about me, Joe Greene." She glanced quickly at the piece of paper she held in her hand as if she couldn't quite remember what it said. "A benefit at the Hippodrome Wednesday? I'll be glad to, Joe." Her smile was sweet and sure. She hadn't missed a benefit yet. She wondered if she would have to miss this one. . . .

She looked past the mike into the dozens of staring eyes, and she felt her throat closing up again. Why had she accepted that Wednesday charity date as if she expected to be there? Didn't she know she couldn't make it—would never make anything again?

Suddenly she wanted to scream—she knew she was going to scream. She tried to but she couldn't. Her voice—where was her voice? What had happened to her voice?

They were looking at her, then, all of them down there on the floor; they were looking at her, staring at her. Her friends, her well-wishers, the regulars who came just to hear her, the transients . . . and, of course the killer!

She searched their faces frantically. Who was it? For heaven's sake, which one was the killer? The pink and white blobs at the tables had eyes; they all had eyes, and they were watching her curiously. Why didn't she say something?

She could make out Sue sitting there. She was smiling as if to reassure her. Go ahead, Kay, go on, you'll be all right, go on! Why was Sue grinning like that? Why?

Good old Sue. Not every gal was lucky enough to have a manager like Sue Grinnell. She remembered way back two years ago when they had started together. Two long years ago. Two years. . . .

* * *

"Look, Mr. Peters," Sue had said. "This is something different, believe me."

"So what's different? A plain ordinary disc-jockey?"

He sounded only mildly interested and Kay was scared. She'd already quit her job as the only woman announcer on the small 250-watt station up in the Bronx. Sue had done that to her. She had told her that there was no future in being a gal announcer. It had meant coffee and cake to the beautiful blonde for six months, so Kay had been skeptical.

"Have you a better idea?" she asked.

The redhead had—and that's why Kay was sitting there in Nat Peters' office, scared because he didn't sound as coked up as he should have been over Sue's idea.

Sue Grinnell slapped the desk as if she were sore at it.

"A *girl* disc-jockey, Mr. Peters, from a restaurant every night. *Your* restaurant, Mr. Peters. It's new. It's never been done before. It'll be the talk of New York."

THE pudgy restaurateur rubbed the tip of his bulbous nose with his broad thumb. "So what'll it cost?" he asked cautiously.

Kay felt the muscles in the pit of her stomach do a strip tease and she wanted to yell that she'd work for peanuts, but she said nothing. Sue was doing the talking. Only Sue didn't ap-

pear to hear what Nat Peters said.

"We'll pack them in, Mr. Peters."

"Yeah?"

"We'll get the after-theater crowd and make it a habit. It'll be like dope, Mr. Peters. They won't be able to stay away. Kay Winters will make your restaurant a meeting place for all of Broadway."

"So, how much?"

Sue leaned back in the large red leather chair as though she'd just finished a heavy meal. The huge chair looked two sizes too big for her—so did her grin.

"Well?" prodded Peters anxiously.

"Line charges, Mr. Peters," she told him.

Kay licked her dry lips and he echoed, "Line charges?"

"And a percentage of the increased business," Sue finished casually.

He got up and took a Havana out of a walnut humidor on his desk. The click of the cigar lighter was a loud noise in the vacuum of their hopes.

"Okay," he snapped with a fat smile. "We do it!"

Kay went in on a six-weeks' tryout, and by the end of three months she was the toast of Broadway and the talk of show business. Nat Peters walked around the crowded Shell-Aire Lounge as if he'd struck oil, which indeed he had, and by the end of six months nobody seemed to remember whose idea it was.

Nobody except Kay. She never forgot that it was Sue Grinnell who'd conceived it; Sue Grinnell who'd sold it, and Sue Grinnell who guided her always. From that first moment of success in Nat Peters' office, Sue and Kay were partners, fifty-fifty partners.

The offers for personal appearances all over the country poured in like a flooding river, but there was always Sue standing there shaking her head.

"You're not ready for that, hon, not quite yet."

"What are we waiting for?" Kay would ask anxiously.

Sue always laughed and said, "You're not ready, hon, not yet."

Then the stars started dropping in. The little ones at first, then those who counted. Pretty soon there was a famous crooner dropping in to kibitz on the air with Kay almost every night, and after a while, it was Sue who got her to see that it wasn't the things she said that mattered—it was the records she played. That was when Kay realized the power she could wield with her little microphone. She was a little afraid of it. But not Sue.

"Be smart, hon," she used to say. "Play it smart, real smart."

Whenever a new show opened up and Kay liked it and said so on the air, it was assured of a long run, but if she panned it, it would fold in a few weeks. Yes, Kay Winters had really arrived. She wasn't at all sure that she enjoyed it.

"You're big time, Kay. Go on and milk it; milk it for all it's worth." That was Sue.

But Kay Winters' heart was too soft. You had to hurt people, step all over them. She almost quit once. That was when young Don Davis had a chance to get on the Governor's staff in Albany and asked her to go along. Of course, she didn't really need Sue to point out the difference between love in a cottage and the life of Kay Winters, glamour-girl disc-jockey—but it helped. What would she do without Sue?

Don was assistant D.A. now, and he dropped in quite frequently. When he did she wasn't sure any more whether she had been right in not going to Albany with him—in caring for him less than the adoration of the nightly crowd at the Shell-Aire.

CHAPTER TWO

Tune in for Murder

THEY were looking at her now down on the floor, looking at her, staring at her. She searched their faces frantically. Who was it? *Who was it?*

She could make out Sue sitting there smiling at her reassuringly. Good old Sue. Not every gal was lucky enough to have a manager like Sue Grinnell!

Nat Peters leaned against the black and gold wood of the bar and watched. He stood there with a vague feeling that perhaps he should count the house, the dozens of heads in front of him, around him, all straining to catch a glimpse of the blonde disc-jockey. But Nat was used to the crowds now. After two years he was used to the nightly swarm of Kay Winters' admirers. He smiled appraisingly and there was a nice warm feeling inside of him.

A voice behind him said, "What a mob!"

"Yeah," he agreed happily as he glanced over his shoulder at the portly bartender.

"Like New Year's Eve, Mr. Peters. Every night like New Year's Eve."

Big Nat laughed in a pleased way. "That's good, Ed. New Year's Eve, huh?" He said it slowly as if he were

tasting it, and he laughed again like a man well satisfied with himself and his accomplishments.

Ed, the bartender, leaned closer. "Can I fix you something, Mr. Peters?"

"Naw, I got troubles here." He patted his round middle tenderly with a fat right paw.

Ed nodded his bald head and thrust his lower lip out knowingly.

"I see what you mean, Mr. Peters," he said.

"You can fix *me* something, Ed," chimed in another voice, moving next to the fat restaurateur. "There's nothing wrong with my innards."

"Sure. What do you drink, mister?"

Nat looked at the tall man with the broad shoulders, clear eyes and dark, wavy hair.

"That ain't just 'mister', Ed," he corrected. "That's Mr. Don Davis, the D.A.'s brightest young assistant."

"Thanks for the build-up, Nat."

"Give him bourbon, Ed—the good bourbon."

The bartender snapped his fingers in the air and went to work.

Nat nodded toward Kay Winters up on the platform.

"That's a gal, huh, that's a real gal." There was a big wide grin on his chubby face, but his lids were slits through which the hard gun-barrels of his eyes glistened.



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Don turned with his back to the spotlighted platform and picked up the shot glass as fast as the bartender set it down. He swallowed noiselessly and then touched his lips with the back of his forefinger.

"Good bourbon, Nat," he said but he was thinking about Kay.

These days he was always thinking about Kay. Why the hell did the D.A. send him to Shell-Aire? Of all places, Shell-Aire!

He spun the glass to the white-aproned Ed and tapped Peters on the arm.

"Let's go somewhere, Nat. I want to talk to you."

Nat turned slowly as though it were an effort, and there was worry peeking from behind his even smile.

"What's the matter, kid? Is it Kay again? You still got the romance troubles? Well, I ain't no cupid, kid."

Don punched the bar and bit his lip. "This is business, Nat—your kind of business."

"And yours?" It was like a red light flashing.

"Yeah," Don gritted, his teeth showing white. "My business, too." He crooked his fingers around Peters' elbow. "Yours and mine, Nat."

The restaurant man's eyes were opaque pools of surprise.

"You mean it's official—D.A. stuff?" There was disbelief in his manner and a scared twist to his mouth.

Don nodded at him. "D.A. stuff," he said. "Coming?"

Nat Peters started to laugh but somehow it had the flat sound of a cracked dish. "C'mon," he muttered jerkily. "We go to the office, okay?"

DON DAVIS followed Peters' fat shape around the outer fringe of tables to a door marked *Private*. While Nat was keying the

door, Don glanced backwards to where Kay was sitting, the microphone cupped tightly in her hand. She was staring at him with a strained expression on her face, her lovely blue eyes sending out signals that he should have recognized. But he turned away and followed Nat Peters.

The assistant D.A. didn't see anything except Nat Peters' broad back as he followed him inside the large, lavishly furnished room that served as office for the owner of the Shell-Aire Cocktail Lounge and Restaurant.

Don sat down across the desk from Peters and watched him push a polished walnut humidor towards him. He shook his head and waited for the restaurant man to light up. Peters didn't seem to be in any hurry as he slowly expelled a dense cloud of blue smoke toward the ceiling, his fingers drumming noisily on the desk top.

"I should call my lawyer, maybe?" he asked.

Don hunched his shoulders, plainly showing his annoyance at the restaurant owner's casual manner.

Peters noticed the tight lines around his mouth and barked, "You should tell me, young fellow. You should tell me what it is that's official."

"You've been reading about the investigation on Patello?"

The fat man shrugged. "Who hasn't?"

Nat Peters was right. All New York was reading about it. Vince Patello, numbers man, gambling czar and slot-machine king, was gangland's number one pin-up boy and the D.A.'s target for the month. It was suspected that his immunity in court was due to his closeness to someone high up in the political machine. Rumor said it was a judge. But what the newspapers needed was proof—the D.A. needed proof.

"How come you and Patello are like this?" Don crossed two fingers.

Peters grinned. "Me? I'm friends with everybody son." Don looked disgusted and Nat went on. "In my business, it's got to be that way. So what's wrong with it?"

Davis ignored his question and asked one of his own. "How long have you known Judge Manson?"

Nat's face got white then, except for two small red spots high on his cheek bones.

"You, too, huh?" he muttered. "Some skunk outside the machine starts the word around, then the crucifixion begins. What the hell's the matter with you guys? The D.A. believe everything he hears, or is it just because he's going to run for Senator?"

"That's a long speech, Nat?"

Peters eased his sweating back against the cool firmness of the leather chair. His palms were wet, too.

"Yeah," he agreed, "a long speech for me."

"But you meant it, huh?"

"I meant it, yeah."

The D.A.'s top assistant picked up doggedly where he'd left off.

"You and the judge were kids together, weren't you, Nat?"

"Everybody knows that." He spoke angrily. "That ain't news. We were kids together, boys together, and men together. So what? I'm in the restaurant business and he's a judge. Everybody knows that. He's a good judge, too."

"Yeah."

Nat's face split open in a big grin. "Then you don't think that—"

"When did the judge and Patello meet here last? What night?"

The fat man's hand came down heavily on the desk.

"Get out!"

Don got up. "If that's the way you want it."

The stout man at the desk didn't

move. Only his eyes—and his tongue.

"Trick questions I don't like. From now on if you got to ask, bring around a little paper and I'll bring my lawyer. No more for-free answers. Get out!"

The assistant D.A. turned and walked towards the door. Nat Peters still didn't move. The door came open in Don's hand and the carefree sounds from outside slithered into the tense atmosphere of the room.

"What side are you on, Nat?"

Peters straightened up and relighted his long Havana.

"My own," he said in an unusually soft tone of voice. "Strictly my own."

Nat waited five minutes after Davis left, then picked up the phone and dialed a number. A few minutes later the restaurant-owner opened the door of his office and walked out into the subdued noise of the lounge.

KAY WINTERS was still holding court up on the platform, interviewing a famous zither player. Next she would play his record and then would come more talk. Suddenly Nat Peters felt hot and tired, his throat parched. He went over to the bar.

"Gimme a drink, Ed."

"But I thought your stomach—"

Nat's eyes flashed and so did his heavy fist as he brought it down hard on the bartender's finger tips.

"I said, gimme a drink!"

Ed needed the job and he sucked in his fingers like a baby, a frightened look in his watery eyes.

"Sure, Mr. Peters, sure," he squeaked obediently. "Coming right up."

Nat leaned against the bar again and surveyed his domain. The assistant District Attorney was still there, sitting at a table close to where the blonde disc-jockey was broadcasting. He was alone and looked it, and Nat noticed that Kay

Winters could hardly keep her eyes off him.

The bartender set Nat's drink down on the bar and he picked it up and went over to where Sue Grinnell was sitting. She glanced up at his fat bulk but hardly saw him. She too, had noticed the way Kay was looking at Don, and it disturbed her.

Nat sat down and bobbed his head at the blonde attraction.

"That thing still going on with them?" When there was no answer he commented brusquely, "He'll get her yet—he sure will."

Sue's fingers were bloodless sticks under the table, her eyes cold and set.

"You're wrong," she said in a tight voice that didn't fit her. "That will never be." Her voice got too loud, "Never!"

Nat's loose jowls shook gently as his massive head jerked up in unexpected surprise at her tone.

"So how come you hate the guy?" His voice sounded calm but he looked like a man who had just heard some good news.

Sue blinked in the blinding glare of his searching gaze.

"I . . . I don't," she said with unconvincing slowness. "It's just that . . . well . . . "she's too good for him."

"Nuts," grunted Nat Peters coarsely. "You still afraid your meal ticket will get married and leave you?"

She almost slapped his face. Instead, she forced herself to pull back on the check reins as she murmured quietly, "Aren't you?"

"Huh?"

"You, too, Mr. Peters. She's *your* meal ticket, too."

He looked annoyed and upset.

"So how come she squawks to the D.A.?" he retaliated. "Huh? Can you answer me that?"

Sue couldn't because suddenly all the

breath had gone out of her and there was a pasty color to her face that made her look very unhealthy.

"What do you mean?" she whispered nervously.

"Listen kid, for the mistakes we make we got to pay—only Vince Patello pays off in a very funny way."

"I—I don't understand."

"No?" He seemed almost gentle in the way he handled her. "For what your gal Kay saw in my office she's been paid—five hundred extra bucks a week's she's been paid." He shook his head from side to side. "Uh-uh, Patello won't like this at all."

There was a lop-sided grin on Sue's white face. "You're crazy," she muttered. "Kay would never do a thing like that. She couldn't!"

"No?" he stabbed at her.

"How could she?" She was looking past him. "She—" Her jaws snapped shut like a steel trap, the pasty color spreading to her lips. "I don't believe it," was all that came out of her.

Nat Peters looked glum. "She don't believe it," he mocked. "So how come he knows enough to ask me questions about the judge?" He was looking straight at the assistant D.A. "That one ain't working on rumor. He acts like a guy who knows something, has maybe a secret witness."

She put a firm hand on his fat forearm. "Look, Mr. Peters," she told him slowly. "When Kay walked in on you and the judge and Patello, you all started scurrying around like a room full of mice. But I told you then that she wouldn't talk and I'm telling you now."

"Okay," he admitted testily. "For five hundred a week she hasn't talked. I just wonder how much it would take to make her open to the D.A."

Sue spouted angrily, "The D.A. hasn't got that kind of money."

Nat took another look at Don's broad

shoulders and remarked, "Maybe it doesn't take money, huh?" He rocked nervously in his chair. "All they need is a witness who saw the judge together with Patello, and believe me they can take it from there."

"And *you* believe *me*, Mr. Peters. Kay won't talk. I promise you she won't."

Big Nat Peters chewed hard on his inner lip. He was thinking about Vince Patello.

"Kay won't say a thing, Mr. Peters," he heard Sue Grinnell saying, and thinking about Vince Patello, Nat was inclined to believe she was right.

CHAPTER THREE

Talkie—No Walkie

IT WAS just like always, the people sitting there in the subdued informal light from the many table lamps, watching the blonde disc-jockey doing her nightly stint as if she weren't going to die. As if she didn't know she was going to die. . . .

She kept looking at Don Davis; she couldn't take her eyes off him. There was something almost hypnotic in the way he sat there alone, a small silver cigarette case twirling nervously in his hands, the gaze of his clear brown eyes doing something to the pit of her stomach. Why was he staring like that?

Her chit-chat into the mike was a mechanical thing. She hardly knew what she was saying. Suddenly, she looked down, her eyes tired. Where had the people gone? Where had everybody gone?

She half started to her feet. There was a dull throbbing pain in her head. She saw Don then, saw only Don. Don looking at her, staring at her. . . . She knew suddenly that there was something she should remember.

We're meant for each other, he had told her once. You and me, Kay. There will never be anybody else for you, never. I won't let there be. . . .

She stood up slowly, her long limbs fledgling things, untried, the marrow oozing out in a steady stream. Not Don—not him! Don't let it be him!

She took two steps toward the edge of the platform, her hands fluttering like a bird with a broken wing. A roar of sibilant sounds came at her from below. They were whispering, everybody was whispering. Then she heard a sharp voice at her shoulder. It belonged to Charlie Walp, the program producer.

"What's wrong, doll? You don't look so good."

"Play some records," she managed to say. "Please, please, I feel sick."

He started to protest but her white face cut him short.

"Sure, baby. Take it easy for a while, huh?"

She saw him signal something over his shoulder as he moved away. He helped her down those two steps, and there were many anxious faces. See, they loved her, they all loved her. All of them—except one.

Nat Peters was jabbering at her and so was Sue, but it was Don's strong arm around her waist. The way he was looking at her, she was sure he couldn't hurt her. He just couldn't!

"What is it, hon?" said her manager. "What's the matter? Tell Sue."

She buzzed around, her red mouth tumbling out words and her white hands stroking nervously at Kay's pale face.

"Get her to the dressing room," said Sue, pointing to the rear of the lounge. "I've got something to do." And then she was gone, making furious signs at Charlie Walp up on the platform.

Nat Peters went back to the table and sat down. There was a curious

smile on his lips and a row of confused lines around his deep-set eyes. He hardly noticed Don Davis, his arm still tightly around Kay's soft waist, helping her through the door in the rear of the lounge that was reserved for Kay's own private dressing room.

Sue didn't notice either. She was too busy talking earnestly with young Jack Cummings, radio's newest crooning sensation. Of course he would fill in for Kay. Why not? Didn't she plug his records?

That accomplished, Sue stood for a moment listening to the singer explain into the mike that it was a pleasure to take over a while for the beautiful blonde disc-jockey. Sue thought of everything.

She kept glancing over her shoulder; there was no sign of Don and it annoyed her. Why hadn't he come out? She got up and hurried across the lounge. When she opened the door and walked in, Don still had his arm around Kay and he was kissing her. There was tender happiness in her lovely face.

"Excuse me!" There was deep sarcasm in Sue's brittle voice. "Don't tell me you fluffed off just for that!"

"Sue!" Kay sounded shocked.

"How do you feel, now?" the red-headed manager asked, and it was only with an effort that she kept her tone even.

"Sue, darling," Kay breathed. "We're going to be married. At last, we're going to be married!"

Don grinned and hugged her to him. "Yeah, you'll have to find yourself someone else to manage, Sue. Kay is quitting."

THE piece of ice inside Sue broke off into sharp-pointed splinters. She wanted to cry out in protest but she couldn't. How could she tell Kay Winters that she mustn't marry

him, that she wouldn't let her marry him? Kay would never understand.

She went over and took Kay by the hand, slowly drawing her away from Don over to the couch. As they sat down she began to talk about the peculiar expression on Kay's face out there in the lounge, out there at the microphone, and finally she asked directly, "What were you afraid of, Kay? What happened?"

There was no answer but Kay's stricken face brought terror back into that small, stuffy room.

"What were you afraid of?" Sue kept insisting. "Tell me, hon, I want to help you. I've always helped you."

"Oh, Sue, I want to forget it!" Kay said. "I had almost forgotten it—here with Don." She turned to him, beseechingly, "Who would want to kill me? Why would anyone want to kill me?"

Don crossed the room and his strong hands took the blonde firmly by the shoulders. "What's this all about, Kay?" he asked with tense gruffness. He felt her move nervously in his grip and his voice softened caressingly. "Tell me, Kay. You can trust me."

"Can she? Can she really trust you?" said Sue.

Don straightened up quickly, the red anger glowing in his cheeks like two hot coals. Slowly his hands knotted into tight fists. "Just what do you mean by that, Sue?" he demanded.

"As if you didn't know!" she shot back at him. "As if—"

"Oh, stop it—stop it, both of you!" Kay broke in frantically. "This is a nightmare. It's crazy—I'm crazy—to let myself go to pieces this way over a—a—note." She spoke the word with obvious effort, and having said it she covered her eyes with her hand and sobbed quietly.

Sue was beside her instantly, making soft clucking noises. But it was the as-

sistant District Attorney's voice she obeyed when she showed them the note—a crumpled piece of paper she took from her purse.

It was a crude thing, the letters cut out from a newspaper and carefully pasted together. It read:

**YOUR LAST BROADCAST—
TONIGHT YOU DIE!**

Don held it in front of him, his hand running over the texture of the paper. He acted as if it were something very valuable and at the same time very dangerous.

"When did you get this?" he snapped. "And why didn't you report it to the police?"

Kay started to answer his question but there was an interruption. Sue was laughing softly.

"What's so funny!" Don barked

"It's a gag," Sue cried. "Don't you see?" She turned to Kay, her arms extended in emphasis. "One of the boys is playing a joke on you.

Her voice was tinged with relief but her eyes bore a worried expression. The tip of Don's tongue darted in and out over his lips.

Kay had stopped sobbing by then, and was staring with wide red-rimmed eyes at her manager, her mouth open in shocked surprise.

"But who would do that to me, Sue? Who?"

"Yes," Don echoed. "Who?"

The only answer was a vague shrug of Sue's lovely shoulders.

"What I want to know is why a gag?" Don asked pointedly. "What makes you think this note is a joke? Obviously Kay doesn't. Why do you?"

"But it must be," she told him. "Who would want to kill—?" She left it hanging.

"Did anything like this ever happen before, Kay?"

KAY shook her head slowly from side to side, and Sue looked startled. For the first time she looked startled. She hardly heard the soft tapping on the door. It was Kay who said, "Come in."

Nat Peters looked at them as if he expected something to happen, but wasn't sure just what.

"You all right, Kay?"

She stood up without answering and walked over to the dressing table, her straight back sagging slightly.

"She's all right, Mr. Peters," Sue muttered quickly.

"You don't say it so good."

"I'm just fine, Mr. Peters," Kay chimed in, looking at him over the top of her compact.

"You going back on?" he asked, and when she nodded her head, the owner of the lounge looked pleased.

"No," snapped Don. "To hell with the 'show must go on' routine! I don't want you out there." He walked over and stood behind her, one hand resting on her white shoulder.

She shifted uncomfortably. "Let me alone, Don," she said, and there were stones in her voice.

He let his fingers slide from her. "I don't want you out there," he repeated softly, but it was an ill-disguised warning.

Kay turned away from him. "I'll be there in a few minutes, Mr. Peters," she said quietly.

"Kay!"

"I must, Don, don't you see? Those people out there, they paid to—"

"To hell with them. I'm telling you, Kay, I won't be responsible."

"So what are you now, an M.D., too?" Peters jibed sarcastically. "What's this all about?"

"Maybe you'd better not, Kay," Sue mumbled. "Maybe Don's right."

"Look," broke in Peters, "if you ain't

feeling so good, you don't have to finish up. I'm no Simon Legree, you know, kid.

Kay smiled. "I know, Mr. Peters. You're nice, but I'll be all right."

Her eyes sought Don's and she had an uneasy feeling that there were too many things left unsaid.

Sue stood up as if she were on wires. "And now if you gentlemen will excuse us. . . ."

"Sure, sure," chattered Peters. "Coming, Davis?"

Don grunted at the restaurant owner and went over and took Kay's hand in his palm.

Peters hurried out as if he hadn't seen and Sue busied herself with something on the couch.

"Okay," he said, "if you must." He grinned at her and got back a weak smile.

"I must, Don, believe me."

He shook his head as if he didn't understand. "Just look at that same table, Kay. I'll be there—and don't worry." He glanced narrowly at Sue. "It's probably just like she says, anyway—some zany character's idea of a gag."

But as he went out of the room, he knew that he had never sounded more unconvincing in his life. The small piece of white paper was a heavy object in his coat pocket. He had lied—he had wanted to lie. The threat to kill Kay Winters was no gag. After all, who should know it better than he—the assistant District Attorney?

For an hour and a half he sat there and wondered at the peculiar code of show business that made them go on as if nothing had happened. There was no doubt about it, Kay was scared. But she was wonderful; she'd never been better. As he listened to the finish of her show, the only tell-tale sign of the terrible fear that gripped at her white throat was a tightening around her small mouth.

As the sound of her theme music filled the lounge of the Shell-Aire Restaurant, Sue went over and sat down next to him. She sighed deeply and it spelled out relief.

"It's over."

He looked at her as if she were a hostile witness.

"What makes you think it's over?"

"What?"

"These things are never over," he rasped coldly and his chair scraped as he got up to greet Kay.

"Take me home, Don," she murmured. "Please, please." All the life had suddenly gone out of her and she looked wan. "You don't mind, Sue?"

Sue shrugged but it was Nat Peters who spoke as he suddenly appeared from behind them.

"Before you go, Kay, baby, can you give me a minute?"

She wilted. "Oh, Mr. Peters!"

"Let it go until tomorrow, can't you?" said Sue. "She's tired and so am I." Kay's red-headed manager sounded annoyed.

Nat took the disc-jockey firmly by the arm. "It won't take long," he insisted.

"All right," said Kay. "Just a minute though. I'm really dead." She didn't appear to notice what she had said but Don did. He noticed it very much.

He started forward with them as they turned to go, but the restaurant man growled, "Sorry, Davis, this is business."

"Oh," he said and abruptly sat down.

Kay fingered his shoulder. "Wait," she murmured, "I'll be right back," and moved off with Nat and Sue.

Just before they went into Nat Peters' private office she glanced over her shoulder at where the assistant District Attorney was sitting. He was watching her, his keen brown eyes burning. She was almost glad when the door closed

behind the three of them. There was something about the way Don was looking at her. . . .

She heard Sue's whispered voice croak, "Patello!" and her own blue orbs caught fire.

CHAPTER FOUR

Last Broadcast

VINCE PATELLO had stepped from behind the closet and now stood between them and the closed door. His steel-gray suit matched the color of his cold eyes, and the knife-like crease pressed in his trousers was as sharp as the thin line that served as his mouth.

"Which one of you dames has the big yapper?"

"Take it easy, Vince," said Nat.

"Shut up, fat boy," he growled.

Nat Peters shut up and Kay got up, and that left just Sue sitting there staring into space.

"Where are you going, doll-face?" Patello shot through his teeth.

Kay ignored him and walked toward the door until Patello reached out. Grabbing her by the arm, he man-handled her to the chair she'd just vacated. She sat down heavily as the flat of his hand shoved roughly into her.

She grunted and Peters said again, "Take it easy, Vince."

The gambling czar whirled on him. "Take it easy? Take it easy? Are you nuts?" He was sweating profusely all over his furrowed brow. "If these dames talk, I'm done, get it? Done!" He walked toward Kay, his fists doubled up like mallets.

"Tell them, Kay," screamed Sue, her voice breaking wide open in fright. "Tell them you won't say anything!"

There was a blank look on the disc-jockey's face.

"I don't understand. What do you mean, Sue?"

Vince Patello laughed, only it didn't sound very pleasant. "Is this dame kidding?"

There was a wise look on Peters' face. "Wait a minute, Vince, hold it."

"For how long?"

"Listen, Kay," said the restaurant owner. "That time you walked in and saw Vince and me closeted with Judge Manson—remember?"

"Sure, she remembers," broke in the racketeer.

Kay nodded. "I remember. But your business is yours and mine is mine. I told Sue to tell you that then."

"What?"

"You've done a lot for me, Mr. Peters. I owed you something."

"Then why did you tell Don?" blurted out Sue in a high-pitched voice.

Kay looked surprised. "But I didn't. You know that, Sue. Why would I tell Don?"

"Yeah!" It was a suspicious grunt that Vince Patello emitted from his open mouth.

"She's going to marry him," screamed Sue. "That's why, that's why!"

"Sue! What are you saying?"

The gangster went over and slapped Kay hard across the face. She staggered backward, her shaking hand fingering her stinging cheek.

"So that's it. That's good enough for me." He slapped her again and she sank down to her knees, her shaking hands covering her face.

Sue was mumbling, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it, I didn't mean it."

"Wait a minute," barked Nat Peters. "This thing ain't right, Vince. There's a stink in this somewhere."

"Yeah," snarled the racketeer, "but not for long."

"Look," reasoned Peters, "why would

a gal throw away five hundred a week? Five hundred a week for eight months to shut her mouth; then all of a sudden—" He was thinking furiously.

Kay was looking at her red-headed manager as if she were seeing her for the first time.

"You couldn't, Sue," she cried. "Sue, you couldn't—you didn't!"

"**I** GOT it," suddenly wheezed fat Nat Peters, sitting down heavily in his huge chair. "Now I got it, Vince. You got the wrong one, Vince. It's the redhead who's been taking the dough—and for nothing. You hear, Vince? You've been paying off—ain't that a laugh—and for nothing!"

"What?" he roared.

"Yeah, you been paying five hundred a week to Kay to shut her mouth, only she ain't been gettin' it and she ain't been talkin' either."

The gangster looked livid. "You mean the redhead's been taking me? For five hundred a week, she's been taking me? Why you lousy little—"

He rolled up to her on the balls of his feet, his fingers clawing into the softness of her beautiful red hair. She groaned as he yanked her to her feet. Then holding her in front of him like a puppet on a string, he smashed her back and forth across the mouth.

Kay tore at him furiously. "Stop it!" she cried. "You'll kill her. Leave her alone!"

She hit out at him until he had to let go of the redhead and turn his attention to warding off the determined attack of the infuriated blonde.

Nat Peters interfered, then, his huge bulk pinning the gangster against the door.

"Cut it out, you fool," he said between his teeth. "Enough's enough."

"Shut up, Peters!"

"No, no, you'll spoil everything."

"Nobody can take Vince Patello for a sucker!" He struggled to get away from the big hands that held him. "Get away, you fat slob," the gangster spat out, and his hand went into his coat pocket and came out with a gun.

The owner of the Shell-Aire Restaurant felt the hard muzzle of the thirty-eight boring into the wide expanse of his middle.

"For the last time, Peters, get away!" the gangster sang out. "Get away!"

Sue saw the gun, too, and she screamed at Kay to run. In three strides the two girls were at the rear door, Sue pulling desperately at the latch. Vince Patello saw them and tried to push Nat's bulk away from him.

"You're a fool, Vince," Nat Peters was saying when the gun went off. "You're—a—fool. . . ."

The two girls were outside running frantically in a dark alley when the fat man slowly slid down the long legs of the king of the gambling rackets and fell moaning at his feet.

Vince Patello jumped over the body and rushed for the alley, as behind him came the thundering sound of frightened people hammering furiously on Nat Peters' office door.

At the far end of the narrow blackened alley, Kay Winters was grinding madly on the starter button of her car.

"Hurry, hurry," moaned Sue.

Kay's foot jabbed at the accelerator three times before the motor caught. As she shifted gears and sped around the corner, three shots cracked out in the quiet of the deserted alleyway. There were running footsteps, pounding footsteps, and then silence.

Inside Nat Peters' office, the body of the restaurant owner was a crumpled thing without life. Outside, sprawled face down on the cobble-stones of the alleyway was Vince Patello, a limp, life-

less hand still reaching for a thirty-eight on the ground beside him.

A small electric sign was flashing intermittently over his body—*EXIT—EXIT*—while at the foot of the long, dark alley stood Don Davis, a forty-five automatic in his hand, and a queer, almost desperate look on his set features. . . .

THEY sat up there in the darkened car on the dirt road high above the drive. The night hung silently around them like a heavy velvet curtain. Occasionally a distant automobile winked its lights at them as it passed by without seeing them.

They hadn't talked. They hadn't spoken since Kay had driven up there and braked to a gentle stop, facing the silver ribbon of the river far below them.

It was Sue who finally spoke. "Say something, anything—but at least speak to me."

Kay looked at her red-headed manager without seeming to see her. It was as though she were talking to the river.

"I don't understand. I just don't understand."

"Maybe you don't want to."

Kay shook her head sadly. "No, that isn't it, Sue. I want to, believe me. But . . . Sue, how could you do a thing like that!" It ripped away from her like a sharp pain.

"Why? Since when is an extra five hundred a week hard to take? What do you want now, half of it?"

"Sue!"

"It's fifty-fifty, isn't it? Well, isn't it?"

"If it was money you wanted, why didn't you ask me? What's mine is yours. You knew that, Sue."

"I hate you!" the redhead screamed suddenly. "I'm glad I can say it at last. I hate you—I hate you!"

It was like a heavy fist pounding into

the pit of her stomach. Suddenly Kay felt ill. She reached for the ignition switch but Sue's hand stopped her. It was cold, clammy. Kay felt the tiny rivulets of perspiration running down her own back. She leaned against the nylon seat cover; it was very hard to breathe.

"For two years I've worked and slaved for you," ranted the redhead. "For what? It's you they talk about—the great Kay Winters, the wonderful Kay Winters. What about me? What do they say about me?"

"Sue, for heaven's sake, Sue!"

The redhead was laughing now, peals of high-pitched, uncontrolled laughter.

"The great Kay Winters, huh? Well, what will they say now!"

She ripped open her pocketbook and there was something in her hand—something that showed hard and black and ugly. . . . Its cold muzzle pointed right at the disc-jockey.

"Sue! Oh no!"

Sue was still laughing. "I hope you suffered tonight. I meant it to be that way."

"No, don't do it, Sue. Please don't do it!"

"I sent that note, Kay. But I'm not going to kill you." Sue chuckled violently. "It's Vince Patello; *he's* going to do it. Vince Patello will do it." She laughed out loud then, her head bobbing like a cork. But her hand was steady; it was almost too steady. "He killed Nat Peters tonight, and he'll kill you. When they find you, I'll swear that he did it. I'll swear that he did it."

"Sue, Sue." Kay's voice was quiet, gentle, like the soothing sound of running water high in the mountains. "You're sick. Let me help you—"

"No! You're going to die! Drive. Go on, drive!"

Sue didn't want to do it there. There

(Please continue on page 126)

DIE, GYPSY, DIE!



*"Yesterday I went to
Sonya's. I found her
— dead."*

Death had struck faster than the pretty fortune-teller's cards could predict—and still faster would be the fierce Gypsy vengeance Lieutenant Daniels had to prevent.



LIEUTENANT OSCAR DANIELS of Homicide knew better than to tell the driver to take the squad car down the side street. Inside of five minutes, the hoodlum kids in that neighborhood—and how so many Gypsy families could crowd into one

**By RICHARD E.
GLENDINNING**

city block was beyond Daniels' understanding—would have the car stripped of everything portable. And if the driver raised his voice in protest, he'd be stripped along with the car.

"Pull up here, Pete," Daniels said. "I'll walk in."

"Thank the good Lord," Pete said, drawing a deep sigh of relief. "I remember one time—"

"Save it," said Daniels, getting out of the car. "I'll be back in ten minutes." He walked to the corner and stopped long enough to savor a last moment of comparative quiet. Then, his feet moving reluctantly, he rounded the corner.

The noise and confusion cuffed his ears instantly, and he wondered if his pay was worth all this. The trip into the Gypsy settlement on the lower east side was senseless in any case. Getting a Gypsy to talk to a policeman about a crime was like asking the Sphinx to say something about Antony and Cleopatra.

But, Daniels thought, looking down the street, somewhere in this warren there was a young man named Michael, and Daniels wanted him for murder. This was no case of petty thievery which could be settled quickly and quietly by King Georg, the head of his Gypsy tribe. The king, who functioned almost like a ward boss for his people, could square many things. Murder was something else again.

Daniels pushed through the swarm of kids who blocked the sidewalk. Ignoring the jeers and taunts of the adults who leaned from every window and choked every front step, he walked on to the house in the middle of the block where King Georg, his wife and six kids lived. The royal family's palatial quarters consisted of a single room on the third floor. Daniels took the rickety steps two at a time, anxious to get

the interview started and done with.

The king himself answered Daniels' knock. He was an affable man with a huge stomach, sloping shoulders and a drooping mustache. He wore gaudy earrings, patched and faded trousers and a plaid shirt, but he seldom wore shoes because his feet, allergic to exercise in any form, were always giving him trouble.

"Come in, Lieutenant," King Georg said, bowing stiffly. "We are honored."

"Sure, Georg," Daniels said. He stepped in and nodded to the king's chunky, fortune-telling wife. Three of the king's kids were in the room but they suddenly vanished as if by magic, and Daniels knew that everyone on the street would soon be informed that a cop was calling upon the king.

The king offered Daniels a glass of fiery-looking wine, but the detective, who had been here before, waved it away.

"Who would do this thing to Sonya?" King Georg asked, mopping his swarthy brow with a red handkerchief the size of a crib sheet. "Such a brutal thing."

"You know who did it," Daniels said, watching the king's dark eyes.

"Not a Gypsy," said the king.

"Michael."

"Not Michael."

"He and Sonya were going to get married."

"Michael is a fine boy."

Daniels laughed. "He never worked a day in his life. He and his family have been on relief for years."

"He loved Sonya."

DANIELS came close to the king and frowned down at him. "Sonya called off the wedding. She threw him over." He read the surprise in the king's eyes. The police weren't supposed to know about the broken en-

gagement. "You people are too emotional, Georg."

"Why don't you ask Michael about it?" the king said, staring up at a corner of the ceiling.

"You know damned well why I don't. You're hiding him out."

"How could one man hide from all the fine policemen in this great city?"

"Listen," Daniels snapped, "if every cop in town crowded around him at the same time, Michael would not only get away clean but he'd pick every pocket on his way out."

King Georg beamed proudly but Daniels straightened his face with a stony glare.

"This isn't a joke," said Daniels. "A girl, Sonya, one of your own people, was beaten to death with a length of pipe. Her murderer knew her routine, knew what time she closed up her mitt-reading shop and came in just as she was closing for the night. When her body was found by the cop on the beat, she had forty bucks on her."

"Such a lot of money," murmured King Georg. "But why must Michael be—"

"Because," Daniels interrupted, "robbery wasn't the motive. For another thing, Michael was seen leaving the place."

"No!" the king protested. "He wasn't up there."

"You asked him and he told you no, but he lied. He was seen by Gus Raynor, the cop on the beat, the same one who found Sonya." Daniels thumped the king's chest. "I want Michael."

King Georg stared down at the dirty floor for a moment, then looked up at Daniels. "How did Raynor know it was Michael?"

"He'd seen the boy before, knew who he was. Then, last night about five-forty, he saw Michael hurrying up the steps of the shop. A little later, Ray-

nor came along and saw the door opened down there. He went in and found Sonya."

"And he saw no one but Michael leave the place?"

"Only Michael. Raynor comes on duty at four. Between then and five-forty Michael was the only one around there."

The king went to the window and looked down at the street. When he turned back to Daniels, his eyes were sad. "Gypsies are not like other people. They may lie to others but they never lie among themselves. Michael has said that he was not in Sonya's store yesterday. Your policeman says he was. Who do I believe?"

"I leave that up to you," Daniels said quietly, knowing that the king would have to solve it in his own way. "I know which I believe. I'll tell you something else. If you can believe the policeman, then you must also believe Michael is a murderer."

"I can see that," said the king.

"I still want Michael. If you don't bring him to me within twenty-four hours, I'll come in here with a squad of men and I'll rip this street apart."

"And if, as you say, Michael has lied to me," said King Georg, "you won't find him on this street. Look first at the river's edge."

"Bring him in," Daniels ordered.

King Georg shrugged his shoulders non-committally. "His first reward will be expulsion from the tribe—*Mahrimé*. After that, who knows?"

The king smiled suddenly. "But if I decide he *isn't* lying, it will be hard to find him in this city. Your twenty-four hours may pass, and then an endless row of days."

Daniels walked to the door and flung it open. "I want Michael for murder. If I don't get him, I'll hound you to death. Your people will be arrested for

vagrancy and fraud, your women for fortune-telling, your children for truancy and delinquency. I'll get enough on every mother's son of you to keep you in jail for a long time, and it'll happen so fast you won't have time to steal a gallon of gas to get out of town."

The king bowed graciously. "We have been plagued by experts before, Lieutenant."

"Twenty-four hours," Daniels warned. He slammed the door and stormed down the stairs to the street.

When he got back to the squad car, Daniels was still fuming with rage.

Pete turned in his seat and grinned. "What's the matter, Lieutenant? They lift your badge?"

"Very funny," Daniels grouched. "Let's get uptown. I want another look at that shop." He knew the Gypsies, knew they were constitutionally opposed to believing anything a policeman said, but if he could find some supporting evidence that Michael had been in Sonya's store late on the afternoon she was killed, King Georg would be forced to accept Raynor's identification.

THE store, a narrow and poorly ventilated room, was in the basement of a drab building on a side street. Three steps led down to it from the sidewalk. To the right of the door was a dusty, flyblown window which was protected by iron bars. A little light, barely enough to see by, filtered through the dirty pane and showed up the dinginess of the place.

A cheap imitation Persian rug, perhaps a vivid red in its heyday but now a muddy brown and worn down to its burlap backing, covered the floor at the front half of the store. Two chairs and a sagging sofa, all wicker and all painted black, were placed without plan on the rug.

This was the waiting room, Daniels knew. The mitt-reading and the reading of the *Tarok*—the special Gypsy cards—went on in back, behind the ugly, faded curtain which divided the room in half.

He stood a moment near the door, then crossed the room to a wicker table against the wall. A glass bowl, half filled with tiny balls of paper, stood on the table, and Daniels reached into the bowl to pick out a ball. He unrolled it slowly, then smiled grimly as he read the number 8 on the slip of paper.

"Lucky number," he told himself. The customer came in, fumbled around for his lucky number and crossed Sonya's palm with two-bits in silver. No more than twenty-five cents if the price scale on the sign in the window meant anything. Sonya gave bargain rates. A half dollar for a palm reading, a half dollar for a look at the cards.

But the balls of paper in the bowl were covered with a layer of dust. Business must have been slow in the lucky number department.

Daniels heard the shuffle of feet on the steps and he turned toward the door. A big, burly man in a blue uniform came into the room.

Gus Raynor, the cop on the beat. Raynor had been pounding sidewalks for twelve years, thanks to a surly, fiery disposition which kept him at continual loggerheads with his higher-ups, and he carried his bitterness with him as he trudged his daily rounds.

"That you, Lieutenant?" Raynor asked, peering into the gloom.

"Come on in, Gus, I'm trying to get the feel of this place."

"Filthy hole," said Raynor. He stepped toward the lieutenant. "Been in back yet?"

"I was just headed there."

Raynor took out his flashlight and led the way to the rear. He put the

beam on a red-covered table where a deck of cards lay. "Do you think she saw her future?"

"I hope not," said Daniels. "Where did you find her?"

Raynor put the light on the floor. "Right there, next to the chair. I figure she was sitting at the table—her chair backs up to the curtain—when she got it. Then she fell to the right and—"

"You're positive you saw only one man come in here?"

"Just this Michael."

"How can you be sure it was him?"

"He came around all the time to see her and I always kept an eye on him. I don't trust any of these Gyps, but him especially."

"You came on duty at four and saw Michael about five-forty. Were you watching this place all that time in between?"

Raynor coughed fitfully to cover his confusion. "Well—yeah. I mean, no, not exactly. Maybe I went around the block a couple of times."

"So someone else could have been in here while you were gone?"

"Listen, Lieutenant," Raynor said in a rasping voice, "don't try to mix me up. Sure, somebody else could have come in. But I saw Michael leave. No more than two minutes later I came by and saw the front door opened. Sonya was usually closed up for the night by that time so I thought something was funny."

"You came in then and found her?"

Raynor nodded. "And she was bleeding like a stuck pig. She couldn't have been slugged more than a couple of minutes before."

"All right, Raynor," Daniels said, "but Michael says he wasn't here."

"He's a liar! I saw him."

"Can you prove it?"

"Good Lord, Lieutenant!" Raynor

bellowed, shaking his head in bull-like anger. "Since when does a cop have to prove he saw something?"

"You never had much dealing with Gypsy thinking," said Daniels.

HE LEFT the store and started across the sidewalk to the car, but suddenly he swerved and walked down the street to a small grocery store which was wedged in between two old brownstones.

The storekeeper, a small, weary woman in her middle fifties, was sitting on a stool behind the counter.

"Good evening," Daniels said. He showed her his badge.

"About that fortune teller, eh?" the woman asked, her eyes sparkling with curiosity. "Too bad."

"Her place looked dusty," Daniels said, taking a box of crackers from the counter. He gave the woman a dime. "Did she do much business?"

"Not much. I always wondered how she paid her rent."

"She didn't."

"I figured that. Oh, I'd see people go in every once in a while. Not many, though."

"I guess women go in pretty heavy for that stuff," Daniels said idly.

"They eat it up. But most of *her* customers were men." The woman tried to put a leer in her voice.

"Men? Well, well."

"Sure, mostly men. Then there was this young Gypsy fellow. He came around a lot. Michael, I think his name was."

"She was going to marry him," Daniels said indifferently, "but they called it off." He laughed. "So I guess Michael wasn't around much lately."

"He was, too," the woman snapped. "He was in there the afternoon she was killed. Yesterday afternoon. I was arranging vegetables in the window and

saw him running out of the place."

That, thought Daniels, settled that. Hiding his quickening interest, he said, "About what time?"

"Five-thirty, I'd say."

"Uh-huh. Did you see anyone else?"

"None after Michael—except Raynor, of course."

Something in her tone of voice brought Daniels' senses instantly alert. "What about before?"

"Just that man—the one who goes in every day. I asked Sonya once whether he was buggy. You know, getting his palm read all the time. She laughed and told me he came in every day for his lucky number. Every day without fail he pops in—five-thirty exactly—and stays a minute, then he's right back out again."

Daniels fumbled a cracker and dropped it on the floor. "Can you describe him?"

"Short and thin. Never wears a hat but his suits must run him over a hundred dollars. Thick blond hair and a sharp nose. Oh, he wears glasses."

"A Gypsy?"

"Not this one. He's a high-stepper, he is."

"Thanks for the help," Daniels said, walking briskly toward the door.

"Crackers are fifteen."

Daniels went back, gave her a nickel and left.

"Back to headquarters," he told Pete as he climbed into the car. He was tired, hadn't slept for more than twenty-four hours, and he rested his head against the seat.

Pete shook him away. "Hey, Lieutenant, come out of it."

Knuckling his eyes, Daniels crawled out of the car and dragged his feet up the stairs to his office. There was a note on his desk and he picked it up listlessly to read it. Suddenly he straightened in his chair.

King Georg phoned, the note read. Said the boy was lying. You can have him in twenty-four hours. You'd know where.

Daniels groaned. First, there would be a *romano-kris*; and, at the tribal court, Michael would be booted out of the tribe. After that, with no family loyalty or ties to protect him, he would really get the business. Daniels could see it now; the fancy knife work, the design carved into Michael's olive skin. Later, the knife would press deeper still—and Michael, wanted by the police for murder, would become just another name on the list at the Missing Persons Bureau, never to come to trial.

DANIELS stared blankly at his hands for a moment, then snatched up his hat and dashed out of the office and down to the basement. Pete was still there in the garage and Daniels shouted to him.

"Roll it out, son. King Georg's."

Pete asked no questions. He had the car in gear and was on his way out of the garage before Daniels could get the door closed.

"I'm a chump," Daniels muttered. "This Michael kid."

"Do we pull him in?"

"If that's the only way we can save him. I hope to heaven we're not too late."

"Save him?" Pete asked in amazement.

Daniels nodded grimly. If the kid were to die, the responsibility for his death would rest squarely on Daniels' shoulders. Hadn't he encouraged the king to find the boy guilty of lying to his own tribe? And hadn't he been the one to tell the king that if Michael were guilty of lying it stood to reason he was also guilty of murdering one of his own people?

Above the wail of the siren, Daniels

shouted, "Did you ever hear of a Gypsy turning away from any money lying around loose? They work on the theory that if it isn't nailed down it's anybody's property. But Sonya was found with forty dollars. Michael would have taken it if he had killed her."

To Daniels' mind, that meant the boy walked into the store and found her already dead. Terrified, he had rushed out of the place with no stops for looting. And another thing—now that the money had come into the picture, where had Sonya gotten forty dollars? At her rates, that would have meant a minimum of eighty customers, but the lady in the grocery store had said Sonya's customers were few and far between.

And last, but by no means least, Gypsies were artists with the shiv. Then why a piece of pipe as the murder weapon? The nearest thing at hand? Daniels doubted that. A knife was always closer for a Gypsy.

Brakes and tires screaming, Pete swung the car into King Georg's street and headed down the middle, scattering the cursing, fist-waving kids in all directions. He slammed to a stop and Daniels leaped out, butting his way across the crowded sidewalk. Hands tried to stop him as he mounted the steps but he shook them off like bothersome flies. Voices yelped at his heels, and other voices shouted a warning to someone up above him.

A man stepped in front of Daniels on the second landing, but Daniels, swinging wildly, rocked him back on his heels and drove him against the wall. Then Daniels ran on up the stairs.

He came to King Georg's door and pounded on it. He heard a furtive movement inside but no one answered his rap. Moving back a bit, he hurled his hundred and eighty pounds at the frail door. It gave with a noisy wrench

of metal hinges, spilling the detective into the room. He straightened quickly and looked around.

King Georg, arms folded across his chest, stood like a statue near the window, his black eyes blazing at Daniels. "We will handle this in our own way," said the king harshly. His eyes moved to a cot in the corner.

Daniels strode to the cot and looked down into Michael's face. The boy's mouth had been battered to a raw gash, his nose was twisted sharply to the left, both his eyes were like eggplants, but there was no indication that a knife had been used on him—yet. The knife was next.

"Who did this to him?" Daniels asked.

The king laughed. "A taxi hit him."

"He's innocent," Daniels said.

"He lied to me. He—"

"I know what he said," Daniels interrupted, "and it's a fact he was at her store, but he didn't kill her. Michael," Daniels said, leaning over the boy. "She was dead when you got there, wasn't she?"

The boy nodded.

"And you know who killed her, don't you?"

The young man's eyes opened slowly to slits and, in a hoarse voice, he muttered, "No! No!"

Daniels let it pass for the moment. "Why did you and Sonya break up? I want the truth!"

"I—I met another g-girl."

"You're lying!" Daniels snapped.

"Let me talk to him," said King Georg. He moved forward, his eyes hard.

Michael rose halfway from the cot, then fell back again. "The gambling," he whispered. "I would collect the money down here and take it to Sonya's store. She had a bowl. I would put the money in the bowl. Someone

would come there later to collect it."

"Sonya wasn't in on it?" asked Daniels.

Michael shook his head. "When she found out, she was through with me. The day before yesterday she told me to give her what money I had collected. Taking bets from my people, you understand? She said she would confront the man with the money when he came for it. She said she would turn it over to the policeman on her street and make the policeman arrest this man."

Michael was having trouble talking through his battered mouth and Daniels knew he wouldn't be able to speak much longer. Hastily he said, "You know who killed her. You know this man's name."

"No, I know nothing!" Michael moaned. "Yesterday, I went to Sonya's. I was worried. I thought the man might hurt her. I found her dead."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know."

"You lie!" King Georg snapped. His fingers dug sharply into Michael's arm. "Tell the truth, or—"

"But I don't know. I never talked to him. I would leave the money at the same time every day, then leave. He would watch me from somewhere—I don't know where—and pick up the money when I was gone. But yesterday, he came early. Only Sonya had talked to him—and she's dead."

The king spat in disgust in the boy's face. "Stinking liar."

"No," Daniels said, turning away from Michael. "I think he's told us all he knows. Why not? He wants to live. You'll kill him if he lied."

"He'd be better dead." The king's rage gave way to remorse. "If he has told us all he knows, Sonya's murderer goes free."

Daniels shook his head. "The bowl is still in her store. There should be

fingerprints to be seen all over it."

"Why are you waiting here, then?" King Georg demanded.

Daniels smiled mirthlessly. "You sure howl for action when your gang's in the clear, don't you?"

"Why else have a king?" King Georg replied.

IN THE squad car once again, Daniels stared gloomily out the window at the pageant of New York's blinking, garish lights as Pete sped north. Somewhere in this great city there walked a man who had murdered an unimportant Gypsy girl; her death had meant no more to him than the swatting of a mosquito.

"Pete," Daniels muttered, grinding his fist into his palm, "you give a man a little money, promise him more, and you can buy his soul."

"This guy who clunked the girl?"

Daniels grunted and lapsed into a thoughtful silence, coming out of it only when the car stopped in front of the store. He got out of the car and walked to the head of the steps. "Hey, Pete," he called back, "you haven't eaten yet."

"Neither have you."

"There's a one-arm around the corner. Go get yourself a cup of coffee and a sinker. I'll meet you there."

"Right, Lieutenant."

Pete drove away and Daniels went quietly down the steps. He unlocked the door and slipped into the dark store. By the light of his pocket flash, he found the bowl on the table. Wrapping it carefully in his coat, he started out again. Then, at the sound of footsteps on the sidewalk above, he turned away from the door and moved cautiously toward the rear of the store.

Feet were scraping on the steps now. Daniels eased his gun from its holster and waited in the dark.

"Who's in there?" a voice called

"Raynor?" Daniels asked.

"Come out with your hands up."

It was Raynor, all right. "It's Lieutenant Daniels."

"Oh." The relief was obvious in Raynor's gasp. "I thought maybe—"

"Maybe what?" asked Daniels, moving forward. "The murderer returning to the scene of the crime?"

Daniels and Raynor left the store together and Daniels locked the door. They climbed the steps and crossed the sidewalk and Daniels carefully set the bowl down on the curb.

"What's that?" Raynor asked.

"Sonya's bowl," Daniels said, straightening. "It should be covered with the murderer's prints."

"Michael's?"

"No, Raynor, not Michael's. You tried hard on that one, Raynor, but you missed. Michael didn't kill the girl."

"Who did?"

"That's what I'm asking you."

"What's the gag, Lieutenant?"

"I don't care about the guy who killed the girl. We'll get him. It's you I'm thinking about now."

Raynor's eyes narrowed and he stepped back a pace. "You're nuts."

"How much protection money were they paying you to close your eyes every time the banker came around to pick up the dough? And don't tell me you didn't see him when he came every day. You saw Michael well enough."

"Daniels, you're a—"

"And how much did you get for selling a kid's life? Nice honest cop, you are. You'd let the boy go to the chair just because some hoodlum bought your soul for a bag of peanuts."

"I never saw anybody else leave the—"

"Maybe not. Maybe not yesterday—but how many dollars does it take to buy a cinder for the eye? All right, Raynor, what's his name?"

"I've been pounding a beat for twelve years, twelve lousy years, and it took me almost that long to find out how to make it worthwhile. You won't stop it now."

"Don't try it," Daniels said softly, watching Raynor's right hand. "All I need is an excuse."

Raynor's hands came up to his chest. "There's enough in it for both of us, Daniels. More than enough. What's one no-good Gypsy anyway? He could take the rap."

Daniels listened thoughtfully, nodding his head. "Michael's a petty thief," he admitted. "He's got a record. The D.A. could get a conviction without half trying."

"Sure. So what do you say?"

"All right," Daniels said tartly, "I'll— No, wait a minute, how do I know we'll get paid off?"

Raynor laughed raucously. "These guys are big. Benny Nerri."

"Nerri! Well, in that case . . . Shake on it." Daniels stepped toward Raynor, his right hand out. Raynor reached to take it and Daniels hit the cop across the ear with a looping left. Raynor went down and Daniels kicked him in the ribs. Glaring down at Raynor, he said, "Never trust an honest cop."

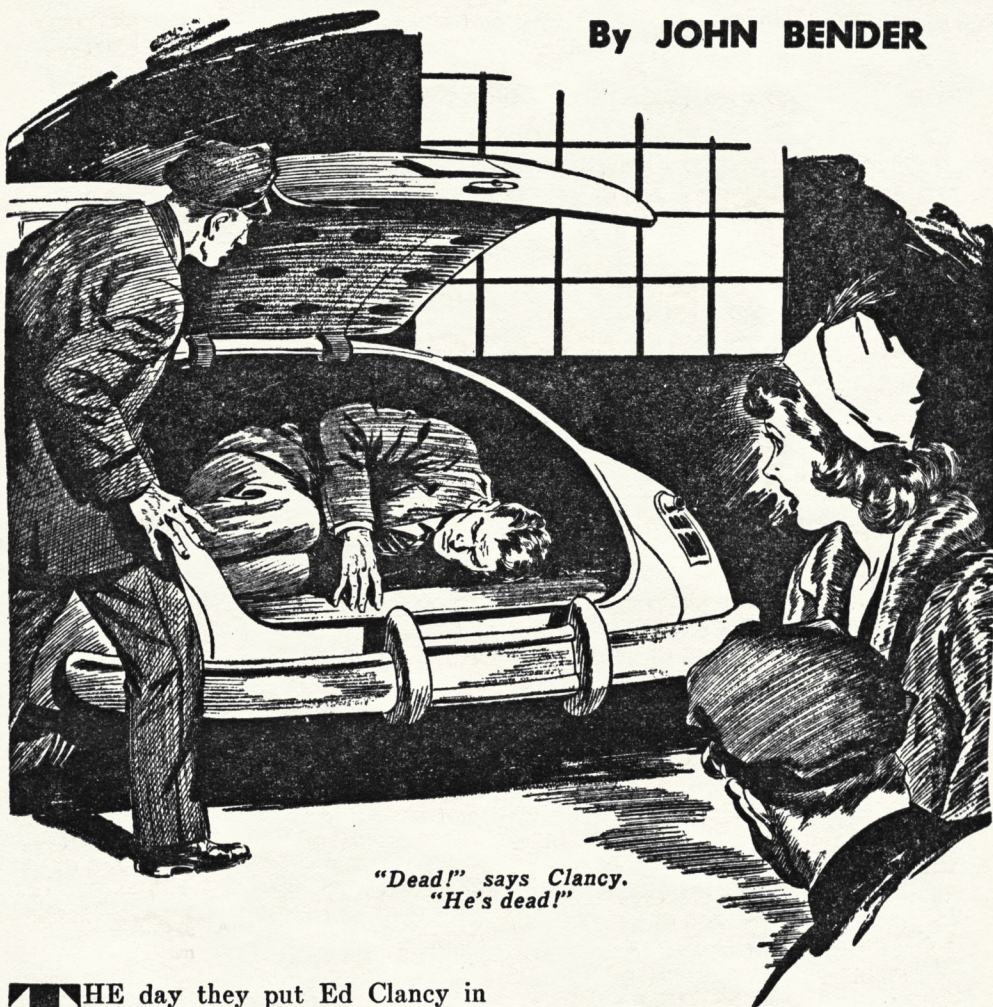
Down on the lower East Side, Daniels thought, a Gypsy was being kicked out of his group—*Mahrimé*, the Gypsies called it—not because he had killed one of his own people but because his lying had almost protected her killer. And here, on a midtown sidewalk, lay a man whose crime had been infinitely worse than either the youth's or the killer's. What was the *Mahrimé* for Raynor's breed?

With a feeling of loathing in his heart, Daniels fingered the butt of his gun and wondered what he could do to make Raynor try to run away.

Five hundred smackers flew out of Sergeant Fagan's
prowl-car window — all because an eager rookie
tagged along on the . . .

MAYHEM PATROL

By JOHN BENDER



*"Dead!" says Clancy.
"He's dead!"*

THE day they put Ed Clancy in the patrol car with me is the day I should of took my sick leave. He is a nice-looking, fresh-faced sort of cookie, but right from the start I can see that he is a wrongo for yours truly, Sergeant Tim Fagan, and it is the most uncomfortable week of my life

I spend with this brand-new cop Ed Clancy.

Most of the time I am thinking how I can get rid of him and team up with one of the old-timers like myself, who is not above looking in on a bar or two

for a quick one or dogging it a bit now and then. But this Clancy is fresh out of the patrolmen school and eager as a hound dog on a hot smell, and there is no relaxing with him, not even one little bit.

We are cruising down Pennoyer Street, me and Clancy, the last night of our tour together, when I get the horn on my left and the big green convertible cuts in front of our police car. It is Big Bobo, the bookie, at the wheel and I wonder what is up, since he is not that kind of reckless driver for nothing. He is at all times a very careful citizen, and I have even known him to swallow instead of spit should there be a bluecoat in the neighborhood.

"Of all the nerve!" says Officer Clancy, as I pull in to the curb in front of the parked convertible. "You see that, Sarge. You get a load of that? You see the way he cuts right in front of us, no hand signal? I ought to give him a ticket."

"Just to prove you know how to write?" I ask. This kid Clancy is just itching to use his charge book, all right, a one-man FBI. I tell him to sit still and put his ticket book away. Part of the reason Chief Monaghan assigns him to my car is to wise him up, to show him the ropes, but I got a feeling that this is impossible.

"You just sit here, Eager Beaver," I tell him, "and make sure nobody steals the buggy. I'll talk to the guy."

I GO over to the convertible, wondering what is on Big Bobo's mind besides the fifty-dollar panama. I steer quite a bundle of trade his direction the past ten, twelve years since he got me appointed to the force, but I cannot recall that I owe his book anything much these days. I been a little lucky lately; the nags run good for me. Maybe I'm into him a half a yard, but

nothing substantial to speak about, you understand. He's not a guy to put the pressure on for that much, the dough he turns over.

"Well, Fagan," he says, "good to see you. Hop in."

This boat is six grands' worth of solid comfort, big, smooth—just like Bobo. He's wearing a hand-tailored piece of cloth my month's pay couldn't touch. His pudgy, smooth-shaven face comes out the top of his silk shirt like he's pulled his belt too tight and squeezed himself up into the panama.

"New car, ain't it, Bobo?"

"Thirteen miles on her, is all." He nods his cigar at the speedometer. "Present for Susie."

"She catch you kissin' the maid?"

He is pained. "Tim, you know I don't look at no dame but Susie."

This is true. He got a dozen dolls running around half-naked in his Chromos Club six nights a week and he could take his pick, any time he wants. But he treats them all like sisters, what I understand.

Susie Schlemmer is the one he picks, two years ago, right out of the hat check, and she takes him for the big fall. City Hall wedding, by the mayor, no less, who makes a nice, simple speech about marriage—no reform talk tacked on, either. Then Bobo takes his bride to Europe, all over France and Switzerland, real cultural—though I hear he stops in at Monte Carlo and picks up a little bundle, several times more than what the trip costs him.

"Tim," Bobo says, "this convertible is for Susie, the way I said. We are in a little strain, you see. I think the car will make some points for me." He grunts. We cruise around the block. "Right now, to make everything copasetic, I got the need of a little favor and you are the fellow can do it for me."

I sit quiet, my hat off, letting the

breeze dust my overheated bald spot.

"It's worth five C's to me," Big Bobo says. "Plus we clean up the rest of the tab you're into me."

Now Big Bobo Barsted is not the kind of guy who goes around separating himself from the folding coin, can he help it. Even for his ever-loving Susie.

"Legal?" I say.

He laughs. "Getting dainty, Tim? I seen the day half a grand gets you real busy, no questions asked."

"I'm a sergeant now."

"So this is legal, Tim."

I settle back on the cushions. "What's the pitch?"

"Very simple. There is this scumbo, name of Larry Melody. You know him?"

"The guy who dances in your club?"

"The same," says Bobo. "Well, he and my wife Susie—they been seeing too much of each other lately. I don't like it. Now I got the fix in at Headquarters to have Melody's entertainer's license revoked, but I want you to personally escort him out of town for me. Tonight. Right to the Nevada state line."

"That's all? For five notes, this is not a very great deal of work, Bobo."

He coughs, very polite. "I want you should make sure he gets the point to stay over the state line, Tim. Now, I don't say you got to break his neck or anything, but if you was to rearrange his nose a little. . . ."

"Unpretty him some, you mean."

"Y'understand, I could just hire a muscle, but I want to get a good job done, and this is right down your street. Besides, you got the police car. It is very important that you got the police car because you can give him a little trip in it and nobody takes a second look."

A real thinker, this Bobo. "No trouble at all, Bobo."

We make a turn and there is my police car parked where we left it. Clancy is out at the curb, walking up and down, waiting for me. I get out and Bobo takes the green convertible away from there and I go over to the patrol car.

"What's up?" Clancy says.

"Nothin'. Absolutely nothing'. Just talkin' to an old friend. D'you mind?"

"What did he want? Did you tell him he is not supposed to cut in like that?" Clancy shoots the questions like he is studying to be the next D.A.

I climb in behind the wheel and do my best not to pay any attention to him. But he's as jumpy as a brand-new father at the christening and he comes around to my side of the car and stands there, his hands on his hips, his jaw sticking out like a shovel.

"Is it—is it trouble, Sarge?"

"The guy wanted to know if the dew is goin' to hurt the tomato patch. C'mon, Sherlock, get in the car."

So he shrugs. "Okay," he says, "you know what you're doing," and he slams the car door.

THAT is when the stars fall down and the drum and bugle corps goes off inside my skull. For a minute there it is like all the hangovers I've ever had, all put together—only it is not my skull that hurts; it is my arm, my working arm, my left one. It is just like somebody chops with an axe across my fingers.

"Sarge! I'm sorry!"

It is Clancy telling how terrible he feels, catching my hand in the car door like this. *He* feels terrible! My left hand is puffing balloon-size already, a big red crease throbbing across the back of it.

"You dumb baboon!" I manage. "You—"

He slides me over on the seat. "I'll

take you to Doc Spensil, Sarge. Gosh, you don't know how sorry I am."

Well, it is a break for me, all right. Not a compound fracture of the dingus whatchamacallis, says Doc Spensil, the department surgeon, but it is a bone bust just the same, and I gotta stay off my hands, he tells me.

Of all the times to get a bust hand! I wonder if I can beat the rap if I put a couple of .38 slugs in that bird-brain Ed Clancy.

Doc is not too much put out when Clancy rings his door bell this time of night and he shoots me right into his front parlor office and tells Clancy to go back and wait in the patrol car.

After he looks the mitt over he says, "We'll just slap her in a little old cast, Tim, and I'll send the report in to Monaghan. He'll take you off the car patrol for a while." He hunts through the pile of Racing Forms on his desk until he pulls out a medical report sheet. "Want me to write you up for limited duty?"

"Hell, no!"

With my good flipper I grab the sheet. I am thinking of them five hundred iron men of Bobo's and how I can sure make them go to work for yours truly. But I can't do no beat-up job for him, my hand in a cast and all, not if I want to make it a good piece of work. A one-hand deal means I got to handcuff this Larry Melody to a tree or something to give him his clumps, which is not the way I like to do it. A good beating is a two-hand proposition, way I see it, and I know Big Bobo has faith in my work, else he doesn't hand out this job to me in the first place. Ed Clancy, I think, you dog, you!

"Look, Doc, suppose you just forget all about this here little accident. Suppose you don't tell the Chief nothin'. If anybody—especially Monaghan—

should happen to ask you did you treat Jim Fagan the other night, why you don't know a blasted thing about it."

"But Tim—"

"I got my reasons, Doc, y'understand. Ain't no skin off you, now, is it?"

"Well," he says, pulling at his lip. "But what about that playmate of yours, that Clancy?"

"I'll take care of that jerk. He won't peep." I hold out my hand. "Can't you just sorta slap some plaster of paris on the mitt and let it go at that?"

"Well, Tim—"

I know the tone of voice. So I promise him twenty-five bucks come payday if he'll just do the necessary repairs and keep his official trap shut. I also tip him to a hot one that is running tomorrow and he does the business on my hand so it don't look like I'm carrying nothing bigger than a grapefruit when the fist is all wrapped up.

Outside, I tell Clancy to keep the seat warm for a little while longer and I go down the block a little way to a little ginmill that I know where I grab a quick medicinal bracer, and then I use the phone booth and a couple of numbers I got in a special inside pocket.

I try Eddie the Carrot's horse parlor first, because that is where Big Bobo sometimes opens his satchel at this time of the night, but I draw a blank; Eddie ain't seen my boy. It is the same with Mother Mary's novelty shop and with old Preacher Kelley's Super-Salvation Shelter; neither joint has got a line on him today, though the Preacher tells me, between pulls at his bottle of musky, that he expects the big boy one time or another, maybe tonight. These are honest hand-book havens that Bobo has right in his pocket and they are on my own list, too, for a touch now and again when I give them the word that the raids are heading in their direction so they should put the chalk

boards away and imitate the business they are supposed to be in.

IT OCCURS to me that maybe Bobo will be at his own place, so I try his apartment and sure enough there is the voice I'm looking for.

"What's up, Tim?"

"Well, it's about tonight, Bobo. There's a little hitch."

And I tell him all about the accident to my hand, doing a little more swearing than I thought I would when it comes to mentioning that no-good Ed Clancy's name.

Finally, Bobo says, "Tim, you disappoint me. I been counting on this job."

"Yeah, Bobo, sure. There's a chance I can get it done for you tomorrow night. I finish my penance with this Clancy character tonight and Vincente and me are working together for the next couple days. Vince is one of the old-timers, one of my boys. If I cut him in for a bunch of iron men, he'll be glad to play punching bag with Larry Melody."

"Well, Tim, I don't know—"

"Results guaranteed, Bobo," I say, talking fast. I don't want that five hundred going into some cheap hood's pocket. "This Vincente does a job I'd be proud of myself. And, remember, all official—with the police car and everything, no trouble for anybody." I laugh. "Except maybe Larry."

"Well," Bobo says again. Then: "Oh-oh. Got to hang up, Tim. That's probably Susie at the door."

"What about our deal?"

"Okay, okay. But no later than tomorrow night."

I tell him check, and I am feeling a little better when I go out to the patrol car and Ed Clancy. But not so much better that I am looking forward to the rest of the shift with this baboon, espe-

cially when I begin to realize that with an automobile in his hands this Clancy character is armed with a dangerous weapon. I'm running a sweat by the time we go no more than three, four blocks, the way he lead-foots it along, cutting in and out of traffic like these trucks and trolley cars are made out of cardboard.

I kill the big contented smile on his kisser by telling him to turn down a side street and park it by the curb.

"Wassamatter, Sarge?"

"Wassamatter? When you bring me down to the Doc's, I am so blind with pain I don't see how bad you drive. Now I got my senses back, it comes to me you don't know what for about handlin' this buggy, or any other buggy! You ever drive before?"

"Well, a little, back in the Army."

"Cars?"

"Er—tanks. And some half-tracks."

"You got a license?"

"No, but I like to drive."

"Well, ain't that dandy! Just dandy!"

He shrugs and starts to let out the clutch but I reach down and turn off the ignition. "Hold it, Junior. We can listen to the radio just as well without risking my neck with your drivin'. We got to midnight—so let's just park."

"But—"

"That's an order!"

It is possible that Monaghan just might give me a qualified driver, if I report in with the bust hand and a partner who can't drive legal. For a few minutes I get hot with the prospects of getting Vincente or maybe Callahan to finish out the shift with me, and being able to do the job for Big Bobo tonight after all. But on second thought I realize that Monaghan is probably gonna get noseey about the busted flipper and maybe suspicious if I don't synchronize the thing right with Doc Spensil, who's liable to get all mixed up

about the deal if the Chief checks with him.

There's nothing much I can do but sweat the shift out here with Clancy, and hope that I can duck the Chief long enough for assignments tomorrow. Clancy is as fidgety, sitting there beside me, as a hen on a hot griddle. Finally, about an hour later, when our call letters come in over the set, he almost leaves the seat.

"Sarge—that's us!"

"Two four Fagan," comes the voice from Headquarters, "Fourteenth and Sammis . . . an all-night parking garage . . . a rumpus . . . PB there . . ."

I listen for the repeat while Clancy puts the address down in his book, then I take the mike:

"Two four Fagan . . . check and out."

"I know the place they mean," Clancy says, putting some life under the hood of the police buggy. "That's Delaney's beat."

THE PB is code for "check with the patrolman on beat," and this we got to do, no two ways about it, now that the call is on the records official. Well, I have been in worse trouble than I am in tonight, but I cannot recall same off hand.

"Take it away, G-Man," I tell Clancy and we bang away from the curb like we been hitched to a rocket. Somehow I do not mind this jerk's driving so much any more. In fact, I am hoping that maybe we will run into something nice and solid on the way, like a brick fence, say, that will give me a good solid explanation for this hand of mine. Because, sure as my name is Tim Fagan, if this is a legitimate beef and I got to make a report of same, I am going to be in one hell of a fix for not reporting this busted handle of mine earlier. And I do not see any way I can learn to write right-handed in the next twenty minutes

or so, to sign the report. So there is just the hope that Clancy runs this bus into something or that we draw a blank at the garage. Way I see it, it is much better if there is not enough wrong at the garage for us to have to write up a report.

But it doesn't look like I'm going to have any luck at all, first look I get at the crowd around the Acme Garage when we pull up. Clancy puts his foot on the siren and takes us right through the mob into the building before he pulls up.

"Where's the policeman?" I ask one of the faces there, and some gee jerks a thumb toward the ramp that winds around and leads upstairs.

I guess Clancy figures he is back in that there tank warfare of his—the way he almost knocks over the guy and goes lickety-split up that ramp like it was a cross-country highway.

Zoom! Zoom!

We're just missing the walls, going around the narrow corners, and Clancy gets the siren going again, blowing it for all it's worth, and we are the horse marines coming to the rescue, that's for sure.

Finally, up on the sixth-floor level, there is Delaney standing in the middle of the ramp, waving us to a stop. He is almost getting his uniform pressed right on him, as Clancy has a little trouble with the brake.

When the boat stops rocking, I get out and Delaney hauls himself up out of the puddle of oil and dirt that he's thrown himself into.

He gives Clancy a dirty look and says like this: "What the hell are you trying to do—kill me?"

"We heard you had trouble," Clancy says, hopping out with his gun in one hand and his notebook in the other, brave and ready as they come.

Well, it would be nice to see Ed Clancy

get a good bust in the mouth that cannot be traced directly back to myself, but I don't do nothing to promote a fight, as much as I would like to. I just tell Delaney that we got the tingle from Headquarters and what the hell is up?

He brushes off his cap and points with it down toward the back of the garage. "Dame's screaming her head off downstairs, little while ago. Says these jerkimers here won't give her the car that her husband parked in the joint a little earlier."

We are walking down toward the back of the place with him and he gives us some more:

"She says her hubby put the car in here—a brand new convertible—and she's got the parking receipt for it, but the attendant claims the car ain't in the place. So they get into quite a hassle and pretty soon it is a very noisy bit of business, yakety-yak, when I am walking by outside."

"Okay, okay. D'you find the car?"

"Sure," Delaney says. "They got it up here all the time. Me and the dame come up and find it. This joker got the car all jacked up and he's pulling the guts out of the new motor and putting back a lot of spare nuts and bolts he's got hanging around since Henry Ford is a small boy."

There is the car now, just like Delaney says, jacked up with the new tires off of it and some recaps ready to go back on. You never see a more open swindle. I guess there is some money to be made in trading off special motor parts like this, all right, though it is a racket that never occurs to me before.

The attendant is a shifty-eyed little gezabo that Delaney's got handcuffed to the front bumper, where there are a bundle of motor parts laying all over the floor.

But I don't pay much attention to the garage guy or anything else, for that

matter, except the very slick doll wrapped in a mink coat who is standing there beside the green convertible, tapping one dainty little foot like she ain't got all night to hang around.

"Well," she says to us, real put out, "are you going to make this fellow put my automobile together?"

"Wow!" says Ed Clancy, looking her over like she is a two grades promotion and a month off with pay. "Now this is the kind of customer I like to get, Sarge!"

Me, I don't feel the same way, at all, at all. Big Bobo's wife, Susie, always is a good-looking dish, especially when her green eyes light up because she got a mad on. And she has got a good mad on right now.

"Officer," she says, turning the big smile on Ed Clancy, "I do not have all night to spend in idle chatter. Would you be good enough to help me get my automobile out of here?"

WELL, Clancy falls all over himself, trying to give the good-looking Susie the impression that he knows what he is doing.

I tell Delaney to uncouple the garage character, who is a fellow by the name of Hankering Harry Hannover, which is a name he gets for hankering after other people's property. I remember him from some police line-ups in the past. This is a lad who has been juggled before on a number of occasions; he is a very glue-fingered gent that people are always giving their stuff to, if you hear him right.

"Honest, Sarge," he tells me, "I'm just doin' a tune-up on the car, which is what I think the boss tells me to do. You can't clamp a guy for trying to do a service for one of the customers, now, can you?"

He is looking around like he might

try out for the track team any minute, but I do not think he is so foolish as to try to go with the leg.

"How long will it take to put this heap back the way you find it?"

"Ten, fifteen minutes."

"And for you to blow but good—like to another state?"

"Er—right afterward. Immediate, I would say."

"You're not going to let him go, Sarge?" Delaney chimes in.

I ignore him and ask Mrs. Big Bobo Barsted if she will be satisfied to get her automobile back in one satisfactory-working piece and no fuss in the police courts. Clancy is frowning like I am asking her to poison somebody's dish of tea, but Susie, having been wed up with Big Bobo for some time now, has adopted some of his feeling about never tangling with the law, can she help it.

"Why—why, I guess that would be all right, Sergeant. Just so long as the car is in good condition."

"It will be in the pink. If it ain't, this light-fingered cookie here will go down into the hole we save for special characters and nobody ever hears of him again because we lose the key. Y'understand, Harry?"

"I getcha, Sarge. I getcha. You folks don't worry about this little old car, now. I'll have it tickin' like a clock in a couple minutes."

So he gets to work on it right away, and I tell Delaney everything will be okay and he can run on back to his beat, and that's the good fellow. I keep my eye on Hankering Harry and Ed Clancy takes his cap off and settles down to some real jawing with Mrs. Big Bobo and as soon as Delaney leaves I begin to feel a little better about the whole thing, because it looks for sure like we can forget about reporting this car deal once the car is fixed.

By my watch, it's only thirty minutes

to midnight and there is not much more that can happen before we put the police car away and call it a day.

Well, that is what I am thinking then, at about half-past eleven. But it ain't five minutes more before the whole thing blows up higher than an atom bomb, right in my kisser.

And the way it all happens is like this. Hankering Harry is banging away on the motor there and Mrs. Big Bobo is chewing the fat with Clancy when all of a sudden Clancy nods at her and goes over to the green convertible.

"No trouble at all," Clancy says, walking around Hankering Harry, looking for something.

"What're you after, G-man?" I ask.

"A clean cloth, Sarge. Mrs. Barsted got some oil and dirt on her shoes." He checks around some more and then he gets an idea. "Maybe there's some clean rags in the trunk."

So he wants to make some time with the dish, that's his own lookout. But I am remembering how Big Bobo is a jealous man and what he recommends that I do to Larry Melody for making a play for this here Susie and I chuckle to myself thinking that maybe my wise-boy Ed Clancy is asking for a mouthful of fist, as well, if anything comes of this. Not that I will be able to do the job myself, a brother officer and all that, but—

"Holy cow, Sarge!"

This is Ed Clancy, his mouth wide open and his eyes popping out like hard-boiled eggs.

"Look at this, Sarge!"

He's holding up the trunk door of the green convertible with one hand and pointing inside with the other. Susie and me get over there just about the same time, and she lets out a scream that will tear the ears off a brass monkey. Then she goes all rubbery, sprawling in a bundle of mink on the floor.

Me, I don't feel much good either. Because in the trunk compartment of Big Bobo Barsted's brand new green convertible is the young man who goes by the name of Larry Melody. Who went by the name of Larry Melody, that is. All curled up in there, snug as a bug in a rug.

"Dead!" says Clancy. "He's dead!"

Well, wouldn't you know Clancy would come up with something like this?

IT IS several weeks later when I see Big Bobo Barsted for what, it turns out, is the last time. I am taking a drag on a butt outside of Headquarters, before I go in this day to start my shift on the radio.

To me, this Bobo Barsted is five hundred fish down the drain, or over the dam by now, and though I got no love for Ed Clancy, I do not have no sympathy for Big Bobo Barsted, either. Bobo had the chance to get the job done right for him, but could he wait like a smart man shoulda? No, he had to go louse it all up, himself.

And louse me up, too, not only with

the five hundred I don't get. You see, after that night when Ed Clancy finds Larry in the back of Bobo's car, the Chief takes me off of car patrol with the bust hand and puts me here in Headquarters, on the mike calls. Which is a job I can do fine, but there ain't the extra dough I could always pick up on the outside work.

This day that I am talking about, when I see Bobo for the last time, is the day that they are taking Big Bobo Barsted over to the court for his trial. I think the judge will lay it into him for the full count, what with they've been trying to tie into Bobo for a long time now, and it will be the big chop. We use the noose in this state for murderers in the first degree, and that is the rap they get Bobo for, on the Larry Melody kill.

Of course, he don't even have the long odds going for him. He is in tighter than a plumber's joint on a leaky pipe, and all the money he got ain't going to do him any good. No sir, not one little bit. It is a fact that Big Bobo Barsted puts the lump on Larry Melody's head that is the fatal clout.

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He does this right after I call and tell him Ed Clancy busts my working hand in the car door; in fact, the person at Big Bobo's door, that day I call him, is not the little woman as he thinks but it is Larry Melody himself in person, and he comes to put the whole thing up to Big Bobo—how he loves Susie and Susie loves him and what the hell is Big Bobo gonna do about giving her a divorce, you can't stand in the way of true love and so forth.

So what Bobo does is see a couple shades of red and reach for the nearest object, which happens to be one half of a pair of naked lady bookends which Susie gives him for a wedding present, and this he lays alongside Larry Melody's right ear, where it makes quite a mess, and leaves Big Bobo with a fresh corpse on his hands.

After a while, Bobo carts the body downstairs and puts it in the trunk of his car, because by now he has a hot idea. He takes the car over to the Acme Garage and leaves it and Larry there, and then he has a talk with Susie and tells her yes, he thought it over, she can have the divorce and marry that Larry fellow after all; he's not the one to stand in their way. It is Susie's plan to go to Reno, which Bobo says is quite the right idea, why don't she just take the car, and no hard feelings, and drive to Nevada that very night.

What Bobo figures is that somewhere in Nevada, in a couple of days, say, that convertible is gonna smell real ripe and Susie is gonna have one hell of a surprise when she opens the trunk—plus one hell of a lot of trouble explaining said corpse to the cops in Nevada. Only he never figures on a gezabo in the Acme Garage who is got a private racket of making old cars out of brand new ones.

And, just like me, he certainly never

figures on a guy named Ed Clancy, who is a jinx of a cop if there ever is one. Why, if Clancy doesn't try to find a shoe rag for Susie, this whole thing might go any number of ways. . . .

Well, like I say, this day I see Big Bobo for the last time I am having a smoke out in back of Headquarters. And on the way inside who do I run into—no one but my dear old friend Ed Clancy.

Now, I do not see much of Clancy lately, which is strictly all right with me because after this Larry Melody case, Chief Monaghan thinks that Clancy is the real white-haired wonder boy of the force—don't ask me why—and he puts Clancy in for plainclothes duty and gives him the eight-to-four shift, days, which is nice work if and when you can get it.

"Hiya, Sarge," he says to me. "How's it going?"

So I give him the time of day. A guy with his kind of luck, you can't be too careful how you treat him. He is liable to end up as the Chief of Police any day now.

"Nice-looking suit you got there," I tell him. "You're all spiffed up like you got a heavy date."

He grins. "Well it is pretty heavy, Sarge. You remember that Mrs. Barsted? She decides not to go to Reno after all, for that divorce. Looks like the State is going to make her a widow pretty soon now, hey?" He polishes his nails on the lapel. "She don't have a lot of friends in town, you know, and she's got that nice new car. So she's going to give me some driving lessons."

Well, now that is the way it turns out. And I'll bet you Big Bobo the bookie is one surprised gent if he ever hears about this big, dumb cop Clancy riding around in that fine present he gives to Susie Barsted.

LIFTING THE JANUARY

BLACK MASK



In the little jewelry store were shamus Barron, a beautiful blonde stranger and the old watchmaker. Then a jittery stick-up man walked in—and blasted down the watchmaker in cold blood.



Desperate, the blonde came to Barron for help. The stick-up man had stolen the brooch she was pawning to pay off a blackmailer—and the blonde, it seemed was State Senator John Hurd's wife!



Somebody beat Barron to the blackmailer—a killer with a grisly sense of humor. But Barron had the last laugh, for it was he who found Sarah Hurd's fatal letter in the blackmailer's mailbox.



When two hopped-up thugs moved in, Barron knew that letter could be fatal for him too. . . . You'll find Dean Evan's complete story—"Scandal-Time Gal"—in the January issue, out November 17th.

CHAPTER ONE



SHE happened to look down there, at the sidewalk in front of her rooming house, and he was still hanging around, that young fellow who had brought her home. As though he didn't know where to go, was afraid to go back to wherever it was he belonged.

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It was their last chance to go home, that six o'clock bus — which gave the small-town boy and girl just four short hours . . . to wriggle off a homicide hook.



**Exciting
Detective
Novelette**

OF TIME AND MURDER

By CORNELL WOOLRICH



The man said, with the calm voice of murder: "All right, give me the gun. I'll use it."

It got her sore. She thought maybe it was on her account he was hanging around like that. She threw open the window and called down: "Why don't you go home? What're you waiting for?"

He looked up at her and didn't seem to know what to say. Then suddenly a white-roofed patrol car slithered around the corner down at the lower end of the street and started up that way. It wasn't going anywhere in particular, just cruising; you could tell by its lackadaisical gait. He gave that nervous start again, as he had when coming home with her before, as he had when he'd ducked into her own doorway and taken cover.

First she was going to hail the patrol car and have them investigate and tell him to move on. Afterwards, she was glad she didn't. All her life she was glad she didn't. It coasted by, and its occupants didn't even glance over at the house. Then it turned the upper corner and disappeared again.

She stood there in the open window, waiting for him to come out again. He didn't. He stayed out of sight inside there some place. Well, he wasn't going to get away with that. She wasn't going to have him lurking in the hall down there all night. She crossed the room, threw open the door, went out to the head of the dimly lit stairs and peered down the well.

She saw him down there. He was sitting disconsolately on the stairs, halfway between the ground floor and the first landing. She saw him run his fingers through his hair a couple of times, as though some deep-seated predicament was gnawing at him.

THAT influenced her a little, softened her original idea of a raucous tirade. "Hey, you down there!" she called. "I want to talk to you a minute! Come up here!"

He sprang to his feet, cleared the intervening three-and-a-half flights in an almost noiseless sprint that showed how welcome the idea of sanctuary was.

She waited until he'd joined her in the upper hall, then returned to her room. "Better come inside a minute, so we won't be heard. I've got some coffee on the stove. You can have a cup with me." And then as he took off his hat and closed the room door on the two of them, she warned: "But keep your thinking clear. This is no invitation to a two o'clock date!"

"I know," he said gratefully, edging down beside the table where she'd been writing her letter. "Anyone can tell just by looking at you—"

"You'd be surprised how many near-sighted bozos there are." She picked up the little tin pot to pour from it, and the heat made the envelope she'd addressed to her mother stick to the bottom of it. He freed it, glanced at it as he was about to put it aside. Then he sort of hitched, as though a drop of the hot liquid she was pouring had splattered him.

"Glen Falls, Iowa? Is that where you're from?"

"Yeah, why?"

"That's where I'm from, too! That's my home town! I only came away six months ago—"

She wasn't believing him right away. She put down the pot, stared at him searchingly. "What street did you live on there?"

He didn't have to stop to think twice. "Anderson Avenue, between Pine and Oak, the second house down from—" He stopped short, scrutinizing the aghast look on her face. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, my gosh! D'you know where I lived? On Emmet Road! That's the street behind yours. Our two houses must have been practically back-to-

back. How is it we never knew one another back there?"

"We only moved in after my dad died, a little over two years ago."

"I'd come here to the city by that time," she said.

"But right now, my folks must already know your folks back there—back-fence neighbors."

They spoke about it, their hometown, for a while, in low voices, eyes dreamily lidded. The Paramount clock, riding the night sky there outside the window, seemed very far away. They could almost hear the steeple bell of the little white church down by the square toll the hour, instead. "Do you remember the Elite Movie, down on Main Street?"

"And Pop Gregory's candy store?"

"Folks saying good morning to you from across the street, even if they'd never set eyes on you before in their life. Morning glories on the porch lattices—"

"And look at us now." Her head dropped into her folded arms on the tabletop.

He watched the shaking of her shoulders a while. Then when she'd looked up again, trying to smile, trying to pretend her eyes weren't wet, he asked: "Why don't you go back?"

"Because I didn't make good. They think I'm in a big Broadway production. I've tried to go back, over and over. I've priced the fare. I've inquired until I know the bus schedule by heart. There's only one through bus a day and it leaves at six in the morning. The evening one, you have to stop overnight in Chicago. And overnight you lose your nerve."

She stopped. "I've never had the courage to face them all and admit that I'm a flop. Once I even got as far as the terminal, bag all packed, and then I backed out. The city has a half-nelson on me. The city's bad; it gets you down. Maybe the reason I wasn't able to give it the slip was because I was all alone. Maybe

if I had some one going back home with me, someone to grab me by the arm when I tried to back out, I wouldn't weaken."

HIS face tightened up. "I wish I'd met you yesterday." He drew an imaginary boundary line across the table with the edge of his hand. She knew what he meant. He'd done something he shouldn't, since yesterday, and now he couldn't go back.

She waited a long time, then finally she said, in a husky voice: "They're after you, aren't they?"

"They will be, by about nine or ten in the morning." He started to tell her about it, maybe because she was from his hometown and he had to tell someone. She was the girl next door, the one he would have told his troubles to if they were both still back home. "My name's Bowder—Frank Bowder."

"I'm Carol Warren," she said.

He fumbled in the lining of his coat, unpinned a slit that looked as though it had been made purposely. He worked slim sheaves of rubber-banded currency free through it, with probing fingers. Large bills, twenties and fifties and even some hundreds. It took him some time. He'd evened them out around the hem of his coat so their bulk wouldn't betray him. When he had them all spread out on the table, there was fourteen hundred and eighty dollars there.

"I had a job as an electrician's helper until a couple months ago, then I lost it. When I saw that I couldn't get another right away, I should have gone back home while I still had the fare. Or written them for money. But I was like you, I guess; I hated to admit I was licked. One of the places my boss and I had been called in to do repair work was a swanky private house over on East Seventieth.

"Someone must have left their front-

door latch key lying around loose while we were in there working, and it got mixed up with my kit. I carried it out with me by mistake. I meant to drop around the next day and return it to them, but I was on the jump from seven in the morning until late at night, and first thing, I forgot it.

"Then I was laid off, and my money all went, and—well, yesterday I got out my kit and looked it over, thinking maybe I could get something on it at a hock shop. And I saw the key and I remembered where it had come from. So I went back there with it. All that was in my mind was that maybe they'd give me a little work to do, even if it was only tightening a lamp socket.

"I kept ringing away, and no one answered. I started to leave—and how I wish I'd gone home again—and then a delivery boy, who saw me turning away from the door, told me they'd all gone to their country place for the summer the week before. They hadn't boarded up the house yet, because the oldest son had stayed behind to finish up some business; he was supposed to follow them a week later.

"I walked around the block with the key in my pocket, and I kept fighting the idea. I even tried to drop the key into a rubbish can, to overcome the temptation. But I weakened and went back and picked it up again. I hadn't eaten right for two weeks, and I hadn't eaten anything for a whole day. I'd seen the wall safe in there when my boss and I were doing the job—in fact, that was what we'd been wiring up—and I knew by the looks of the house and by the things that were said that it had plenty in it at all times.

"So I came back around the corner, and I rang the bell one last time. The son who had stayed in town was obviously not home. I used the key and I went in. It was my first attempt at any-

thing like that, but it was easy, because my boss and I had worked around that very safe. I didn't have to fiddle with the combination or anything. I chopped a hole through the plaster in the room behind—the bath—big enough to dislodge one of the wooden panels lining the safe and squeeze the cash box out backwards. It was an old-fashioned safe; only the lid and the frame were steel. The lining that the cash box fitted into was wood."

HE INDICATED the money on the table ruefully. "I only took the cash; fifteen hundred even.

I left the jewelry and the securities they had in it. I cleaned the chipped plaster up off the floor, and I put the cash box back. I spread out the shower curtain a little, so that it covered the hole. He'll discover it by about nine or ten in the morning, when he swings the curtain around him to take his bath. And probably the errand boy'll remember seeing some fellow ringing the doorbell there earlier in the evening. I didn't try to run out of town because—"

He shrugged hopelessly. "If they're going to get you, they'll get you." He sat there staring down at the floor with a puzzled, defeated smile showing dimly on his face.

Something about that got to her. The boy next door, she thought poignantly. He came here to do big things, to lick the town, but now instead, the town had licked him. Back home his folks probably read his letters across the back fence to her folks, bragged about how good he was doing. And her folks read her letters and bragged back. He shouldn't end up like this, hunted up and down the streets, never knowing when a hand was going to fall on his shoulder from behind and the accusing voice start speaking.

CHAPTER TWO



"Listen," she said, hitching her chair forward. "I've got a proposition for you. What d'you say we both go back where we belong, get our second wind, give ourselves another chance? Both get on that six o'clock bus that I was never able to make alone."

"They'd only be waiting to grab me when I get off at the other end, and I'd drag you into it."

"Not if nothing's missing, if nothing's been taken out. Have you still got the key?"

He felt in his pocket. "Yeah."

She riffled the money together, thrust it into his hand. "How much have you blown already?"

"Twenty bucks. After I had it, I found out I didn't know what to do with it. A five-buck meal, and fifteen dollars' worth of dance checks up at your place—"

She jumped up, ran over to the cot, half-dismantled it, thrust her hand into a gap along the seam, brought something out. "Here's the twenty bucks to complete the amount you originally took. You can pay me back after we get home and you're working again. And I've still got enough left to take care of both our bus tickets. You can pay me that back, too."

"I can't let you get tangled up in it like this—"

She put on her best dancehall armor, sliced her hand at him. "I'm doing the talking, and I don't want to hear any argument. You got in once. You can get in twice—to put back what you took out the first time. A summer bachelor, living alone like that in the city without his family—there's an even chance he's stepping out somewhere, won't get back till three-thirty or even four." She hurried over to the window, squinted out at the Paramount clock in the near distance. "Hurry up, you've still got time. . . ."

THEY came down the rickety stairs one behind the other, he in the lead with her battered, latched valise in his hand. It didn't weigh much. It had hardly anything in it—just busted hopes. They came out into the slumbering early-morning street and started hurriedly toward the nearest corner, huddled close together, footsteps echoing hollowly in the before-dawn stillness.

"Good-by, Manhattan," he heard her whisper.

At the corner he stopped, put down the valise a second. "You better go down and wait for me at the bus terminal, while I go over alone about—the other thing."

She tightened her grip on his arm, as if afraid of losing him. "No, if we separate we're licked. The city'll get its dirty work in. I'll think: 'Can I trust him?' You'll think: 'Can I trust her?' We're staying together. I'm going right over there with you. I'll wait outside while you go in."

"Suppose he's gotten home by now? You're likely to be picked up for complicity."

"That's a chance we'll have to take. We're taking it together. Catch a cab; the longer we wait to get it back in that safe, the riskier it gets."

"On your money?"

She smiled benevolently. "This reformation is on me."

They sat side by side in the taxi, streaking cross-town through the park, and he squeezed her hand. "Gee, I'm glad I met you tonight, Carol."

They got out two blocks from their destination, in order not to reveal it to the driver. They covered the remaining distance on foot, one of his long strides to two of hers, turned into East Seventieth from Fifth Avenue, came to a stop again in the sheltering shadows just beyond the corner.

"It's on this side, just past the second street light down there," he said guardedly, looking all around to make sure they weren't observed. "Don't come any nearer than this, just in case. Wait here with your valise. I'll be back in no time."

"Don't take any chances. If you see any lights, if it looks like he's gotten back already, don't go all the way in—just drop the money inside the door. Let him pick it up in the morning."

He gave his hat brim a tug, moved away from her down the silent street. She watched him go. It was an old-fashioned residence with a high stoop. She saw him glance cautiously around, then turn aside, go up the steps to the entrance. He opened the outer glass doors and went in.

As soon as he had, she picked up her valise and moved after him. She wanted to stay as near him as she could. When she had reached the house, she continued on past it, in order not to draw attention by loitering in front of it.

The vestibule behind the glassed doors showed empty by the reflected street light as she glanced in on her way by. He'd gone in. But suppose the one member of the family who had stayed behind was asleep in there right now? Suppose he woke up, discovered Frank?

She was trying her best to be calm, but her heart was beating unavoidably faster as she sauntered along the sidewalk so slowly, so aimlessly. It was still breaking and entering, even to return the money. Maybe Frank should have mailed it back, instead of coming back

in person with it. They hadn't thought of that; she wished they had, now.

A FIGURE suddenly materialized at the lower corner ahead, on the opposite side from her. It was just barely visible beyond the building line, standing with its back to her. A patrolman on tour. She whisked quickly down into the shelter of one of the shadowed areaways at hand, valise and all. It would have looked too suspicious to be seen loitering there on the sidewalk at such an hour, with a piece of luggage in her hand.

If he came up this way—if Frank should come out while he was still down there. . . . Metal clinked faintly as the policeman opened a call-box to report in. Even the blurred sound of his voice reached her in the still night air. The box clashed shut again. She could hear the scrape of his step crossing over, then it faded.

She peered out, and he'd gone on past along the avenue, was out of sight. She drew a deep breath, stepped up onto the sidewalk again. She turned back the other way, eyeing the inscrutable house front apprehensively as she neared it. What was taking him so long in there? What had gone wrong?

Just as she reached the stoop a second time, the vestibule doors parted noiselessly and he came out. He stood there looking down at her as though he didn't see her. He started down the steps uncertainly, and broke the short descent twice to stop and look behind him at the doorway he'd just left. He was almost staggering, and when he stood before her at last, his face looked white and taut even in the gloom.

"What's the matter? What're you looking so frightened about?" she whispered hoarsely.

He kept staring blankly in a sort of dazed incomprehension. "He's dead.

He's lying in there—and he's dead."

She gave a shuddering intake of breath. "Who—the son?"

"I guess so. I never saw him before." He passed his hand across his brow.

She made a move toward the bottom-most step, as if to go up.

"No, don't you go in there! Stay out of there!" He gripped her roughly, tried to turn her around. "Hurry up, get out of here! I shouldn't have let you come. Get your own ticket, climb on the bus, and forget you ever saw me." She struggled passively against his hold. "Carol, will you listen to me? Get out of here before they—"

He pushed her to start her on her way. She only swerved, came in closer. "I only want to know one thing. I only want you to tell me one thing. It wasn't you, was it—the first time?"

"No, I only took the money. He wasn't there. I didn't see him at all. He must have come back since. Carol, you've got to believe me. I swear by—the little town we both want to go back to; I swear by the trust that people have in one another there; I give you my word of honor, as we do at home, and you know what that means."

She smiled sadly up at him in the semi-darkness. "I know you didn't, Frank. I should have known without asking. The boy next door, *he'd* never kill anyone."

"I can't go back home now. I'm finished. They'll think I did it. They'd only be waiting to get me at the other end, when I got there. And I'd rather have it happen here than there, where everyone knows me."

"The city, the city," she breathed vindictively. She drew herself up defiantly beside him. "We're not licked yet. The deadline still holds good. We still have until daylight. They haven't found him yet, or the place'd be full of policemen by this time. No one knows; only us—

and whoever did it. Come on, we're going back in there and see if we can figure this thing out. We've got to. It's our only hope. We're fighting for our happiness, Frank; we're fighting for our lives. And we have until six o'clock to win out."

They started up the stoop of the house where a man lay dead. A church belfry somewhere around in the dark bonged the hour.

CHAPTER THREE



THE misappropriated key shook a little as he fitted it into the door for the third time that night. They went in. The door receded behind them into a blurred grayish square that was the glass panel set into it.

"He's in the back, on the floor above," he whispered. "I don't want to light any lights in the front. They might be seen from outside."

She could sense rather than see him reaching toward his pocket for something. "No, don't light any matches, either," she cautioned. "You lead the way. I'll follow with my hand on your sleeve."

She set down the valise close against the baseboard of the wall, where she could find it again readily. They toiled forward in a sort of swimming darkness that was almost liquid, it was so dense.

"Step," he whispered.

She raised her foot, pawed, found the foremost step with it. The rest of the stairs, followed in automatic succession, were no trouble at all. The stairs creaked once or twice under them in the stealthy silence. She wondered if anyone else

was in the house, anyone still alive. For all they knew, someone might be. Many a nocturnal murder isn't discovered until the following day.

"Turn," he whispered.

His arm swung away, to the left. She kept contact, wheeled her body after it. The stairs had flattened out into a landing. She felt his sleeve go up again, after the brief level space. She found the new flight of steps. Finally they, too, had leveled off. They were in the upstairs hall now.

"Turn," he breathed.

She felt herself go over a wooden door sill, slightly raised. His sleeve stopped. She stopped beside it. He reached behind her and did something, and she felt a slight current of air as a door closed in back of them.

"Get your eyes ready, here go the lights," he warned.

She squinted protectively. They flashed on with unbearable brilliance after the long pilgrimage in the dark.

The dead man was the most conspicuous thing in the room.

It was a sort of library or den, by the looks of it. One doorway led into a bedroom, the other, at a spaced distance from it, into a bath. Frank left her to go into the former and draw the heavy, sheltering drapes together over the windows, to keep the light from showing through at the rear of the house.

He didn't bother with the bath, so it evidently had no outside window. She stood there staring down in grim fascination until he'd rejoined her. She'd never seen anyone dead before.

THE man was about thirty-five or so, lying face upward. Even in death he was still immaculately attired in evening clothes, the starched shirt bosom scarcely rumpled at all, the flower in his buttonhole still in place. Only the jacket had sprung open with

his backward fall, and a small reddish-black swirl was revealed, marring the expanse of white pique vest.

She had drawn slowly near, crouched down by him, as if drawn by an irresistible compulsion. "Can you tell what—it was done by?" she asked with bated breath.

He saw her arch her hand timidly above the wound, fingers spread as if trying to undo the vest buttons without coming into contact with it.

"Here, I'll do that for you," he said quickly. "It looks partly burnt. It must have been a gun." He undid the buttons, then an inner layer, and peered through without letting her see. He nodded. "Yeah, bullet wound."

"Then we can be sure there's no one else in the house right now, or they would have heard it happen."

He was scanning the room. "Must have taken the gun out with them; there's no sign of one around."

"What's their name—the people who live in this house?"

"Gadsby."

"This is the son, you said?"

"The older one; there's another, still a student, away at college somewhere. Then there's the mother, well-known society woman, and a couple of debutante sisters. Gadsby senior's dead."

"If we could get at the motive—was anything taken out of the safe, when you went back to it the second time?"

"I don't know. After I'd stumbled over him, I tossed the money back in without stopping to look."

"You said there was some jewelry in it. Let's make sure, shall we?"

They went into the bathroom. He had hacked a square opening through the plaster, behind where the safe was, large enough to pass the cash box through. The lining of the safe was not steel but only wood paneling. He had removed the rear section of this first, then brought

out the box. He did this now a second time and they examined its contents.

"Everything's still there," he murmured. "Nothing's been taken out since I—"

He was ashamed now, she could see. As dangerous a situation as they were in, his face still had time to color at the recollection of his theft. That was all to the good; that was the way the boy next door should feel about a thing like that.

They put it back, turned away. Just as he was about to poke the light out, she glanced behind them into the expensive built-in tub. There was a little piece of paper lying in the bottom of it, a little piece of light-blue paper that looked strangely out of place there.

"What's that?" She went back, leaned over and picked it up. It was a check. Some one's personal check. It was made out to Stephen Gadsby for twelve thousand five hundred dollars. It was endorsed by Stephen Gadsby. It was signed by Arthur Holmes. It was stamped, in damning letters diagonally across the face of it: *Returned—No Funds*.

They exchanged a look. "How'd a thing like that get down in there?" she puzzled.

"It must have been in the cash box, and when I pulled the box out through here, it slipped out into the tub without my noticing it."

"Then maybe this Holmes came around here tonight to see Gadsby, either to make good on it, or to ask him to delay prosecution until he'd raised the money. Gadsby couldn't find it when he went to look for it. Holmes thought he was trying to put something over on him. They got into an argument about it, and he shot him."

"Then, in a way, I'm still responsible for his death."

"Forget that. He didn't have to kill him, even if he did think he was holding

out the check on him. Have you—looked him over yet?" she asked in a hesitant voice.

He knew what she meant; had he searched him. "No. I didn't even see him until my foot caught against something. I got out fast."

She conquered her repulsion, knelt down by the motionless form. "Come on, help me go through his pockets."

HE DROPPED down on the opposite side. They resembled, grotesquely, two overgrown kids playing with their pails in the sand. He didn't say anything, but she could tell by his face he was thinking they didn't have a chance—not in the time left to them.

She reached out across what lay between them, gripped his arm, shook it imploringly. "We *can* figure this out, Frank, we *can*! If we think we can't, if we start saying we can't, then we *never* will!"

A clock on the book shelf behind them went *tick-tock, tick-tock* mockingly. So fast, so remorselessly. They both kept from turning to look at it by sheer will-power alone.

"Take out everything," she breathed, "no matter what it is."

They made a sort of audible inventory as they went along. "Cigarette case, given to him by somebody with the initial B. Two ticket stubs from the show at the Winter Garden. I wonder who went with him?"

"Business cards. Wait a minute. Holmes was his broker; one of these is his."

"That's funny. Clients usually give checks to their brokers, not the other way around. And a bad one at that."

"Maybe Holmes misappropriated some securities that Gadsby had entrusted to him, and then Gadsby demanded an accounting sooner than he'd

expected, so he tried to gain time by foisting a worthless check on him. When that bounced back and Gadsby threatened to have him arrested—"

"There's motive enough there for Holmes to have shot him," she agreed. "But we don't even know for sure that Holmes was here tonight."

"Somebody was." He pitched his thumb toward the opposite side of the room, where a low occasional table was placed in a position accessible to two chairs. "See the two glasses, with tan rings around the bottom? See the two cigar butts in a tray, pointed toward each other?" He went over, took a closer look. "They were having an argument, too. One smoker in particular was laboring under some strong emotion; one of the butts is chewed to ribbons."

She resumed the inventory. "Here's his wallet. With a snapshot of himself and a girl in riding togs."

He scanned it. "She's in the bedroom, too, in a silver frame. Signed Barbara."

"Then she didn't do it. If she had, she wouldn't still be in the bedroom in a silver frame. That's common sense."

"That cleans his pockets. And we're still no further than before."

"At least we got two names out of thin air. Holmes and Barbara."

"What's that?"

They both jumped violently. They were so keyed up, the sound confused them. It seemed to come from two places at once; faintly from the floor below, and a little clearer from somewhere near at hand, both synchronized.

FRANK identified it first. "It's a telephone fitted with one of these muted bells." He went toward the bedroom entrance, looked in. "There's an extension in here, ringing in time with the one below. Somebody that doesn't know what's happened is trying to get him. I'm—I'm going to take a chance

and answer." He started into the other room.

She flashed after him. Her hand found his wrist, tightened around it, ice-cold. "Don't! We're not supposed to be here. You'll bring the police down on us!"

"And if I don't answer, that'll be an even quicker giveaway. He *is* supposed to be here, but he's not supposed to be dead. I'll have to pretend I'm he. Maybe I can get away with it."

"But suppose it's someone that knows his voice?"

"I'll try to make mine sound sleepy, faint, as if I just woke up." He poised his hand above it, ready. "Stand here by me. And keep your fingers crossed for all you're worth!"

He lifted it as gingerly as if it were charged with high-voltage electricity. "Hello," he said with somnolent indistinctness.

Her heart was pounding. He listened a minute. Then he hitched his head toward the dresser, for her benefit. She knew what he meant. This was Barbara now, the girl in the silver frame. And Barbara must know Gadsby pretty well, to ring up at such an hour and have her photo in his bedroom.

His face was white with strain, and she could see a pulse at the base of his throat flickering. He let the caller do most of the talking. He grunted and mouthed little blurred half-words at intervals, to show that he was still listening. "Mmm—yeah—um-hum."

Once she heard him say, "I just wanted to tease you," holding his face as far away from the mouthpiece as he could while yet hoping to remain audible. And at the end he said: "Guess I am kind of sleepy, at that. Call you first thing t'morrow."

Then he hung up with a swift thrust of his hand and sort of wavered there, wiping the sweat out of his eyes.

"Whew! That was horrible!" He

grimaced. "Making love to a dead man's girl, with him lying stark dead in the very next room!" He drew the back of his hand across his mouth remorsefully. "They were engaged," he said. "She was his fiancée. At least, she'll have one last good night's sleep before her heart breaks. . . ."

"Did you manage to find out anything?"

"About that?" He motioned toward the next room. "How could I? She doesn't know herself yet. She left him at about half-past two or so. She was out with him all evening, and they had a quarrel just before she left him. The call was to try to patch it up with him. She couldn't sleep, she said, until they'd made up again."

"Could you gather what the quarrel was about?"

"Yes. She thought she was rehashing the whole thing with *him*, the way people do, and in that way I got the drift of it. He took her to the Winter Garden, and then afterwards to the Club la Conga. While they were in there, she thought she caught one of the hostesses, a tall redhead, trying to signal to him behind her back. She paid no attention at first.

"Then a few minutes later she was sure she detected the waiter palming a note in his hand. She accused him of flirting, and he insisted he didn't know the redhead, had never seen her before in his life. He also denied that ~~he~~ he'd just received a note from her. And that started their quarrel. He seemed ill at ease, in a hurry to leave, after that. He saw her to her door, and they parted on the outs."

"If we could only see what was in that note. If we only knew what he did with it!"

"Tore it up into little pieces, I suppose."

"No, that would be admitting he *had*

gotten one, and he didn't want her to know it."

"We've turned out all his pockets and it's not in any of them."

SHE tapped the curve of her lower lip thoughtfully. "Frank, you're a man. Just suppose you were sitting at a table with a girl you were engaged to, and got a note from a stranger you didn't want her to see. What would you be likely to do with it? Answer quick now, without taking too long to think it out."

"Reach down under the tablecloth and shove it in my shoe, most likely."

She turned and went out into the other room without a word. By the time he had followed, she was crouched down by the still form in there, her back toward him, wrenching at one of its extremities. Something thudded. Then she wrenched a second time. She didn't say anything. She straightened and turned toward him, smoothing a crumpled little slip of paper. She handed it to him when she'd finished reading it. It said:

Mr. Gadsby, I understand? You don't know me, but your younger brother Tommy does—considerably so. I would like to speak to you in private, at your home, after you have taken the young lady home. You better find time to see me or it'll be just too bad.

It was unsigned, of course.

He creased his face disappointedly. "Not much in that. The mere fact that he received the note and tucked it in his shoe doesn't prove she actually did show up here."

"She was here, you can count on that," Carol let him know with a confident nod of her head.

"How do you know?"

"Anyone that would compose such a defiant note and have it smuggled into the hand of a prominent, well-to-do man

whom she didn't even know, under the very nose of the girl he was engaged to marry, wouldn't let herself be stopped from calling around to see him once she'd made up her mind to do it!"

"That still doesn't prove she shot him. I think it was Holmes; he had a defalcation of twelve thousand five hundred dollars to cover up."

"Well, we've got to know, or that'll make it you—and neither one of them! We have about sixty-five minutes left. You take Holmes, and I'll take her. It's a toss-up between them."

"But you don't even know her name, or where to find her!"

"We know where she works now, and we know she's a tall redhead. They can't *all* be tall redheads down at the La Conga Club."

"The place'll be closing by now."

"The people that can be really helpful will still be around—waiters, scrub-women, washroom attendant. I'll trace her from there if I have to go over the hairbrushes in the dressing-room one by one for stray red hairs!"

"I thought you said we should stick together in this?"

She was already out at the head of the darkened stairs. "There isn't time now any more! Here's how it is. We have these two possibilities now, a man and a woman who both came here tonight—at separate times. One of them's innocent, one of them killed him. The thing is which? We haven't time for the trial-and-error system; we can't follow them up one at a time.

"We only have an hour. One of us is sure to be on a wild-goose chase, but the other one won't be. You take the man. I'll take the woman. If he turns out to be the guilty one, you've got to find some way of getting him back here with you, to face the music. If she does, then I'll have to."

"An unarmed girl like you, with just

your bare hands? You don't know what you're likely to come up against!"

"We haven't any time to be afraid; we'll simply have to use our wits. We'll meet back here no later than a quarter to six. We'll have to, if we want to make that six o'clock bus."

As they parted in the darkness just inside the front door, to slip out into the street one at a time, the last thing she said, in a pleading whisper, was: "Frank, if you should get back first, before I do—wait for me. Don't leave me behind. I want to go home tonight!"

CHAPTER FOUR



THE hotel, when she had finally located it, had every earmark of one of those shady places catering to card sharps, confidence men, and other fly-by-nights. It held no terrors for her, though; she had met its type of denizen on the dance floor nearly every night for years past. She went up to the desk with the assurance of one who doesn't expect to be turned away, asked breezily: "What room is Rose in? You know, Rose Beacon?"

The drink-sodden clerk regarded her doubtfully. "Is she expecting you?"

She flung the back of her hand at him familiarly. "Never mind the company manners. She only just left me a little while ago. I dropped by to tell her something I just remembered I forgot to tell her. What's the matter, is it a secret?"

He grinned, relaxed. "Four-oh-nine, sugar."

A Cleveland-administration elevator took her up four floors. The sleepy boy

wanted to wait, evidently to see if she was admitted or not at this ungodly hour.

"That's all right," she assured him breezily as she stepped off the car, "I'll be there quite some time."

The power of suggestion is a great thing. Just because she had said so, he closed the door and took the car down again.

She didn't feel breezy as she walked along the dusty, poorly lighted corridor. Her thoughts were churning while her feet carried her toward the imminent showdown.

"How am I going to get in? Even if I do, how am I going to know; how am I going to find out if she did it? And if she did, how am I going to get her back there, all the way up to East Seventieth, without causing a big commotion, dragging the police into it, involving Frank worse than he is already, getting the two of us held on suspicion for days and weeks on end?"

She didn't know any of those things. She only knew she was going ahead.

The door numbers were stepping up on her—07, 08, 09. This was it, facing the corridor at right angles, forming a dead end. It looked so harmless, so impersonal—and yet behind it lurked her whole future destiny, in a shape unseen.

Suddenly, just as she came to a stop, a voice spoke on the other side of it. A woman's voice.


"He says my girl-friend's on her way up." The treacherous clerk must have phoned up, anyway, after she'd left the desk. "There's no friends of mine in town. I ain't even told nobody where I'm stopping. I'm gonna see what this is."

The door swept open before Carol had time to do anything, or even to think what to do, and they stood looking at each other eye to eye, this unknown woman and she. She got a snapshot of

a hard, enameled face, a breath of alcohol on the lips, hostile wariness in the remorseless eyes. The wariness became a challenge.

"Wait a minute, who are *you*? Did you tell them you know me, downstairs? What's the angle?"

She must have taken a puff of a cigarette just before she opened the door, and had been holding it until now. Smoke suddenly appeared in two malevolent columns. She looked like Satan. She looked like some one it was good to stay away from. She was still willing to have it that way herself—so far. Her arm flexed, to swing the door closed in the girl's face.

AROL only knew she had to get in, even if it was to her own destruction. She knew she didn't have a chance. She knew this woman wasn't even alone in there; she'd just overheard her addressing some one as she neared the door. A crushing sense of failure, of having bungled the thing up, came over her. But that door had to stay open.

"We don't know each other personally," she said, borrowing her husky dance-hall voice, "but we've got a friend in common, so that makes it even. I'm talking about Mr. Stephen Gadsby."

A white flash of consternation came over the Beacon woman's face. But she might have reacted that same way, Carol realized, even if she'd just been up there trying to blackmail him and then walked out again.

Until now, on a strip of wall visible just behind her, there had been a vague outline-shadow discernible. It now moved very subtly, slipped off, disappeared—as though whatever was causing it had withdrawn, was secreting itself.

The woman's eyes flicked briefly in that offside direction, came back again,

as though she had just received some signal. She said tautly, and with an undertone of menace: "Suppose you come in a minute, and let's hear what's on your mind." She widened the door. It wasn't done hospitably, but commandingly, as though she were saying: Either come in yourself or I'll reach out and haul you in.

Carol Warren thought: *Here I go! Hope I get out of here alive.*

She walked slowly past the woman into a tawdry, smoke-stenched room. Behind her the door clamped back into its frame with an air of ominous finality; a key ticked off once against the lock, a second time as it was extracted from the keyhole.

A battle had begun, in which her only weapons were her wits, her nerve, and the feminine intuition that even a little chain-dancer is never without. She knew that every veiled glance she cast around her, every slightest move she made, must be made to count, because there would be no quarter given, no second chances.

The room was empty, apparently. A door, presumably to a bath, was already firmly closed when her eyes first found it, but the knob had just stopped turning, hadn't quite fallen still yet. If it appeared that she didn't know too much, the door would stay that way, wouldn't open again. But if she turned out to know too much—Therein lay her cue—how to find out just what there was to know here, and what too much of it was. That door would tell her.

For the rest, drawers in the shabby bureau were out at narrow, uneven lengths, as though they had recently been emptied. A Gladstone bag stood on the floor at the foot of the bed. The bag was full, ready for removal. A number of objects were strewn about on top of the bureau, as though one or both of the occupants had returned in some

turmoil, flung them down on entering. There was a woman's handbag, a pair of gloves, a crumpled handkerchief. The handbag had been left yawning open, as though the agitated hand that had plunged into it in search of something had been too nervous to close it again.

The Beacon woman sidled in after her, surreptitiously ground something out under her toe; then a moment later, as she turned to face Carol, was holding a half-consumed cigarette in her hand again. Carol pretended she hadn't noticed it smoking away on the edge of the table; the way a man will often leave a cigarette, a woman never. It really was superfluous. That flexing of the doorknob just now had been enough to tell her all she needed to know.

THE woman drew out a chair, so that its back was to the closed door. "Help yourself to a seat." Even if Carol had wanted to sit somewhere else, she made it the only one available by taking the other one herself. She lowered herself into it as though she were on coiled springs ready to be released at any moment. "What'd you say your name was again?"

"I didn't say, but you can put me down for Carol Miller."

"So you know a guy named Gadsby, do you? Tell me, sister, you been over to see him lately?"

Carol said with crafty negligence: "Yeah, I just came from there now."

The Beacon woman was tautening up inwardly. You could tell it on the outside quite easily, though. Her eyes strayed to some point over and beyond Carol's shoulder, as if in desperate search of further guidance. Carol carefully avoided following them with her own.

"How'd you find him?"

"Dead," said Carol quietly.

The Beacon woman didn't show the

right type of surprise; it was surprise, all right, but it was a malevolent surprise, not a startled one. She didn't answer right away. She evidently wanted to confer with the recent shadow on the wall. Or it did with her. A brief spurt of water from a faucet behind the closed door, turned on, then off again, was the signal to this effect.

"Seuse me a sec," she said, getting up. "I musta forgotten to tighten the tap in there."

She slipped in without opening the door very widely. She closed it for a moment after her, so the visitor couldn't look in.

She had given Carol her chance. Her chance to find whatever there was to find, if there was anything. It was only good for thirty seconds. And it wouldn't come again.

She only had time to go for one thing. She made it the open handbag on the dresser. It was the obvious place. More than that, it was the only accessible one. The bureau drawers were presumably empty by now. The Gladstone bag was almost certainly locked.

She reared from her chair, darted across the intervening space, put her hand in. Outright evidence she knew she couldn't expect. That would be asking too much. But something—anything.

And there was nothing. Lipstick, powder, the usual junk. Paper crackled against her probing fingers from one of the side pockets. She drew it hastily out, opened, scanned it. An unpaid hotel bill for \$17.89. A man would have left it there. It had no connection with what she was here after.

Some inexplicable instinct cried out to her: *Hang onto it. It might come in handy.* She flung herself back into her original seat again, did something to one of her stockings, and it was gone.

An instant later the door reopened and the Beacon woman came out again,

her instructions set. She sat down, locked her glance with Carol's, evidently to keep Carol's attention from wandering. "What'd you do, go there to Gadsby's alone?"

Carol gave her a knowing look. "Sure, you don't suppose I brought my grandmother, do you?"

"Well, uh, was there a big mob, lots of cops and excitement? That how you knew he was dead?"

Carol was answering these questions on instinct alone. Until they came out, she didn't know herself how they were going to come. It was like walking a tightrope—without a balancing pole and with no net under you.

"No, no one knew it yet. I was the first one found him, I guess. See, I had a key to the house. I went in and all the lights were out. I thought maybe he hadn't got home yet, so I'd wait for him. I went up, and there he was, plugged."

Rose Beacon moistened her lips. "So then I suppose you beat it out and holstered blue murder?"

"I beat it out, all right, but I didn't tell a soul. Think I wanted to get mixed up in it? I put the lights out, locked the doors, and left the place just the way it was."

SHE had a slight sense of motion behind her. The air may have stirred a little. Or something creaked. There was no time to turn her head. She just had time to think: *The door has opened behind me! That shows they did it. I've hit the right spot!*

That wasn't going to do her any good now.

Rose Beacon had just asked her one more question; a question she really no longer needed to have answered. "How does your coming here tie into it?"

There was no need for her to worry

about the answer; it wasn't expected of her. Something thick and muffling whipped around her face from behind—a Turkish towel folded into a bandage. She reared up, and one hand was seized by the wrist, drawn behind her. The Beacon women jumped in, secured the other. They were brought together, tied cruelly with long, knotted strips of something, perhaps another towel.

She couldn't breathe for a moment; the towel covered her whole face. The horrible thought that she was to be smothered to death then and there occurred to her—but she realized dimly they wouldn't have tied her hands if that had been their purpose. A rough hand fumbled with the towel, lowered it a little, freeing her eyes and nostrils, tied it tightly at the back of her head.

The Beacon woman was still in front of her, talking to someone unseen behind her. "Keep it quiet now; you can hear everything through these walls." She went over to the phone.

A man's voice growled from across Carol's shoulder: "Be careful what you're doing."

"I just want to find out what we're up against. She may be some kind of a stooge, for all we know." She picked up the phone. "Hello, desk? Tell the party that came with my girl-friend he don't need to wait any more. She's staying up here a while. You'll probably find him hanging around outside on the sidewalk." She waited a while, spoke again. "No one out there, eh? Well, he probably got tired waiting and left."

She hung up, turned with a leer to the unseen man holding the writhing girl in his grasp. "It's okay, Joe. She came here alone, the little fool!"

The man's voice said: "Get her feet—them high heels are barking my shins."

The Beacon woman brought out additional lengths of toweling knotted in

strips—he'd evidently been occupied in producing them while he was confined in the bath room—knelt down, whipped them dexterously in and around Carol's ankles. Carol became a helpless sheaf, tied at both ends.

"What's the play now?" Rose asked.

Her accomplice said: "Don't you figure we ought to—" He didn't finish it. Carol's blood ran cold. He said it as calmly as though they were talking about closing a window or putting out a light.

The Beacon woman answered ruefully: "That's begging for it, Joe. They are gonna know we were in this room." She got a sudden inspiration. "Hey, how about the window? Four floors ought to be enough. The three of us get drinking, see, and she had a little acci—"

"No good. We gotta move fast. We'd get hooked here for hours, answering all kinds of police questions. We don't wanta make their acquaintance that familiarly."

Rose Beacon raked a distracted hand through her hair. "Why the hell did you have to give him the one-two, anyway? I only went down to the front door and let you in so you could throw a scare into him, get him to pay off. And then you sign off on him!"

"I couldn't help it. I only pointed it at him to keep him from calling the police like he was threatening to. He grabbed at it. You saw what happened. What should I do, let him take it away from me? What's the good of talking about it now? The damage is done. It's this twist we gotta think about now."

HE MOVED out from behind Carol for the first time, crossed the room, flung open a closet door. She got her first good look at him. He looked like the kind of sewer rat who would frame up a gin marriage between

his partner in crime and a wealthy young scion, in hopes of collecting blackmail for years afterwards.

"All right," he was saying. "We'll truss her up in here. At least we'll get a head-start out of it. And if she chirps and we get hauled in, they got nothing on us. We can always say she did it."

They dragged her into the closet between them like a sack of potatoes. There was a clothes bar running across it at shoulder-height. They tied a sort of halter to her under her arms, of thick sheet and pillow-case strips, wound it around this, left her dangling with her bound feet just inches short of the floor.

"That way she won't be able to thump them, attract anyone's attention."

They closed the door on her. A sudden pall of darkness obliterated everything. She could still hear them through it for a moment or two more, making their last-minute preparations for departure.

"Got the bag?"

"Hey, I'm missing that hotel bill. We gotta pay up before we can get out here. It musta fallen on the floor some place around here."

"Never mind looking for it now; let it go. They can make out a new one for us at the desk."

"What'll we say about her? They seen her come up here."

"All right, she got tanked and we left her here to sleep it off. Hang up a *Don't Disturb* on the door. That'll keep 'em out longer."

The outside door closed and they were gone.

She dangled there in the dark, unable even to swing her feet back and try to strike the rear wall of the closet with them; it hurt her already aching, out-of-joint shoulders too much.

They'd never make that bus now. Poor Frank would wait there for her at the Gadsby house, with the dead man to keep him company, until broad day-

light came and someone happened on him there, and they arrested him for it. And that would be the end; he'd never be able to clear himself.

After all, Rose and her partner hadn't left anything half as incriminating over there as that broken wall safe he was responsible for. She could accuse them all she wanted to afterwards, when she was released herself, but it wouldn't do much good.

Precious minutes ticking by. It must be all of 5:30 now. In another ten minutes at the latest she and Frank should have been starting for the bus terminal. What a fat chance now. She'd be here all day probably.

They might have known the city would outsmart them. It always did. Just a small-town boy and a small-town girl—what chance did they have? He'd go up the river to the electric chair. And she'd turn into a tough chain-dancer in a treadmill, without a heart, without a soul, without even a dream any more. Precious minutes ticking by, that couldn't be stopped, couldn't be called back again. . . .

THE outside door suddenly opened furtively. Someone had come in again. For a minute wild hopes flashed through her mind. The hotel clerk, his suspicions aroused? Maybe even Frank himself, who had had time to find out by now that Holmes wasn't the guilty party? Then a voice spoke guardedly, and her hopes were dashed, turned into freezing horror.

"I shoulda thought of that sooner, before we got all the way downstairs." It was Rose Beacon's voice. They'd come back again—maybe to finish her off then and there, right on the spot. "There musta been something there that tipped her off. It's a cinch she didn't pull my name and address out of a hat."

The closet door swung out and blind-

ing light spilled over her, rendering her eyes useless for a moment. She was aware of herself being lowered from the clothes bar, dragged out into the room between the two of them. One of them lowered the towel gag sufficiently so that she could speak. She glimpsed Rose's hand poised threateningly toward her lips, fingers knotted.

"Now if you try to scream, I'll let you have one!"

She couldn't scream, even if she'd wanted to. All she could do was pant and sag exhaustedly against the man who was holding her, overcome by the excruciating strain of the position she'd been in.

"Now quick, no stalling," Rose went on. "What was it over there at Gadsby's place that tipped you off I knew him? How'd you know where to find me?"

Carol answered in a muffled but unhesitant voice: "You dropped a hotel bill out of your handbag to the floor. It was lying near him—"

"She's lying; I could swear I saw it when I got back here."

"No," Carol panted. "It was over there; seventeen dollars and eighty-nine cents."

"Did you bring it with you?" the man asked, giving her a merciless shake.

"No. I left it lying there right where it was."

"Don't take her word for it; search her handbag," he ordered. "If she picked it up in here, she's still got it."

The woman did, quickly and thoroughly. "She hasn't got it."

"Then we'll have to go back there and get it! We can't leave it lying around. It's as good as a visiting card." This time it was toward Rose he backed his hand. "You dopey idiot! Why weren't you more careful?"

"I took it out to show it to him for a build-up, to show him how I needed money; that was before he got tough

about it. It's better this way, don't you get it, Joe? We'll take her with us when we go back, and then we'll—"she hitched her head at Carol with unmistakable meaning—"do it there. Fix it to look like she did it to him, and then bumped herself off. That way we're in the clear."

"How'll we get her past the desk?"

"She's pie-eyed—that's what we told him just now when we came down without her, ain't it? We're helping her home. Leave her hands tied the way they are, just loosen her feet." She took off her own coat, slung it loosely around Carol's shoulders, covering the unnatural rigidity of her arms.

The man brought out something from one of his pockets, slipped a hand underneath the enshrouding coat, ground something round and hard into her spine. "If you let out a peep, this goes off into you. And don't think I'm kidding!"

She knew he wasn't. But the point was, why should she cry out on her way through the lobby below or outside in the street, when she was getting them to go back to the murder house and face their crime? The only difference was, now they had the upper hand, and it would probably end in her own death.

"Keep your head down," Rose Beacon cautioned viciously, and got a grip at the back of her neck in addition to the gun muzzle her partner was holding centered against her backbone, forcing her to bend it downward. She made it look as though she was supporting her. In place of the towel gag she solicitously held a handkerchief pressed to Carol's mouth with her other hand, as though she were on the verge of being ill.

They swayed out through the lobby with her. "She'll be all right as soon as we get some black coffee into her," Rose called out cheerfully to the clerk. He snickered understandingly.

(Please continue on page 116)

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(Continued from page 114)

THEY evidently had a car of their own. They maneuvered her down the street to where it had been waiting in readiness for their own getaway, squeezed her into the front seat between the two of them. Rose took over the gun, kept it prodded into her side. Joe took the wheel.

Carol sat there docilely, made no move to resist. She wanted them to get there unhindered as much as they wanted to themselves.

They braked two or three doors down from the Gadsby house, in the before-dawn desolation of the street. They couldn't leave the car at the corner, as Frank and she had the taxi, because they had her to convey. Joe cut the ignition, watchfully scanned the dark, lifeless house for a minute.

"Still good for another quick trip in and out," he commented finally.

Her heart was pounding wildly as they hauled her out to the sidewalk, led her over to it with quick looks around to make sure no one was in sight, hustled her up the stoop into the concealment of the vestibule.

"Made it," Rose breathed relievedly.

He tried the door cautiously, and it fell back before them.

"I must have left it that way when I scooted out," Carol said quickly.

Did that mean Frank had gotten back yet? But if he had, there was no light showing to indicate it. Maybe it had actually been that way ever since she and Frank had left the last time. Or maybe someone else had found their way in.

They thrust her inside between them. She'd played the game through to the end. And this was the end, now. Once they closed this door on her, every second was going to count. If Frank came back even five minutes from now, he'd be too late; he'd find her there—

like Gadsby was. And if he came back now, it would only mean the two of them, instead of just one. They were armed and he wasn't.

The darkness inside the house was as impenetrable as ever. Rose said the same thing Carol herself had the time before:

"Don't light the lights until we get up there."

He lit a match instead; dwarfed it in the depths of his two hands to an orange-red pinpoint. He led the way with it. Carol came at his heels, her hands still bound, coat still loose around her shoulders, prodded on by the gun. The Beacon woman came last. The silence around them was overpowering.

Suppose Frank was waiting up there in the room, with the lights out? Suppose he heard them, came forward now, saying, "Carol, is that you?" She would be bringing death on him. And if he wasn't up there, then she had brought death on herself.

What was the difference either way? It was too late now; they'd missed the bus. The city was the real victor.

The opening to the death room loomed black and empty before them in the tiny rays of Joe's match. He whipped it out and for a moment there was nothing. Then he lit the room lights, and they shoved her in there with the dead man. Into the emptiness where there was no Frank to offer help.

Joe said: "All right, now hurry up and get it. Let's do what we have to, and get out of here fast!"

Rose Beacon scanned the floor, turned on Carol menacingly. "Well, where is it? I don't see it. Where'd you find it?" She was still holding the gun in her hand.

The man said, with the calm voice of murder: "All right, give me the gun; I'll use it. No one heard the shot the first time; no one'll hear it this time,

either." He raised the gun, steadied it on Carol in readiness.

It took a second or two, but her thoughts took hours. Frank wasn't here. He wasn't in the house. He hadn't got back yet. She was going to die now. The clock said—

CHAPTER FIVE



THAT was the last thing she saw. She closed her eyes as she turned back to face the winged steel death. Gadsby was lying over to her left. Joe was standing midway between her and the unlighted bedroom door, with his back to it. Rose was crouched somewhere behind her, still in quest of the errant hotel bill, looking under tables and behind chairs. Carol closed her eyes and waited.

The roar of the gun, when it came, was louder than she'd thought it would be. The pain was less—there wasn't any. Her eyelids sprang open, and the gun, still tracing a smoky line through the air, was zig-zagging crazily upward in Joe's hand. Another hand had his collared by the wrist, was hoisting it from behind. And the crook of an arm was wrapped around his neck, elbow pointing toward her.

Joe's face was contorted, suffused with red, in the throes of the struggle. And another face behind his, glimpsed briefly over his shoulder, was equally contorted, equally blood-darkened. But not too much so as to be recognizable. The boy next door, fighting for the two of them—the way the boy next door should.

Rose flashed by her from the rear, an



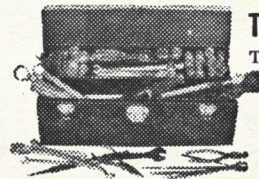
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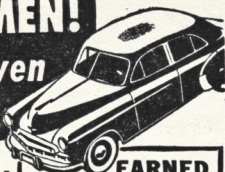
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118 CORNELL WOOLRICH

and iron she'd snatched from before the fireplace upraised high above her head. But a small-town girl can be as quick as a city girl. Carol's hands were tied; she couldn't reach out and grab her. She slithered one leg out until it was almost calf-low to the floor, deftly spoked it between the two scampering feet.

Rose went down face-first in a rocking-horse fall, and the andiron went looping harmlessly through the air. Carol flung herself down across her, knelt on her with both knees at once, pinning her flat. Every time Rose tried to squirm free and throw her off, Carol brought up one knee and slammed it down again with redoubled force.

Meanwhile the two men had toppled over to the floor. Joe was on top, but facing the wrong way. Frank still had the half-nelson around his neck from underneath, and was still choking off the gun-hand at the wrist. They suddenly rolled over. Frank let go the half-nelson, drew back that arm, shot it forward again against the side of his head. He had to do it a second time, and then he stood up and brought the gun up with him.

"I'll be right with you, Carol," he said. He stood watchfully over Joe for a second. Joe twitched a little, raised a dazed hand to the side of his head, but stayed flat.

Frank picked up something from Gadsby's desk, came around behind her, sawed her hands free. Both of them were still breathing too fast to talk.

"I saw them bringing you in, from one of the front windows on this floor. Something about the way you were walking told me they had a gun on you. I backed up into the bedroom and laid low."

She wasn't wasting any time; she was already taking her own severed

bonds, reknitting them and fastening Rose's wrists with them.

"Do that to him, too," she suggested.

FRANK came back with sheets and pillow cases from the bedroom, went to work. "I'd only gotten back a minute before, myself," he told her. "Holmes didn't do it. He *was* here earlier tonight and he was in hot water about that check, just like we figured; but I could tell by the way he acted he'd left Gadsby still alive. He nearly went crazy with fear when I told him Gadsby was dead; he thought Gadsby still had his bad check and he'd be accused of it." He stood up, surveyed their handiwork. "No need to gag them."

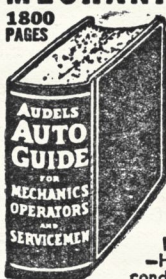
"Well, there they are," she agreed, "but it's too late to do us any good now." She pointed. "Two past six."

"Let's try for it, anyway. It *will* be too late if we just stand here." He caught her by the hand, pulled her out after him. I'll use the downstairs phone; it's nearer to the door." He waited until she'd retrieved the valise she'd stood against the wall the first time they came in, opened the front door, and poised herself for flight out in the vestibule.

"Ready?" he called. He picked up the phone. "Get on your mark! Get set! . . . Hello, gimme the police. You'll find Stephen Gadsby murdered on the second floor of his house." He gave the number on East 70th Street. "It was done by the two people that you'll find tied up in the room with him. Oh—and you'll find the gun they used under the doormat in the vestibule. No, this isn't a rib. Never mind who I am—" He flung the instrument away from him without even bothering to rehook it. "Go!" he shouted to her.

She went flying out through the glass doors, scampering down the stoop, made

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for their captives' car, and jumped in. He came dashing out after her a moment later, slammed the car door after him, and swerved it out into the middle of the road.

They'd hardly rounded the corner when they could hear the keen of the approaching cruise-car coming up from the other direction. They went tearing down Madison Avenue, almost empty of traffic at that hour. There weren't any stop lights on yet.

"We'll never make it, Frank."

The buildings kept shooting up taller ahead of them all the time. The sky kept getting lighter in the east. At 59th he shot across town to Seventh, took that the rest of the way down to the Thirties. Broadway came racing diagonally across their path.

"Frank, look! The clock on the Paramount says only five-to-six now!"

Another razor-edge turn that lifted the two outside wheels clear, and they were in Thirty-fourth. And there it was, under way already, the bus they were supposed to have taken. It must have just cleared the terminal ramp as they got there.

He sent the lighter car winging after it. They overtook it just as it reached Tenth, slowed to make its turn. He made a wider, outside turn, cut in ahead lengthwise, and came to a shuddering stop that effectively blocked it.

Its brake screamed. The driver swore at them—in pantomime and also with his horn. They jumped out, ran back to it, pounded on the glass inset of the door. "Glen Falls? Let us in, let us in! We're going your way! Don't leave us behind!"

ANYONE with a heart would have taken them on. And the driver evidently used something to pump his blood with.

Carol went reeling down the aisle,

found a vacant double seat near the back. A moment later Frank had dropped down beside her, their barricading car removed from the right-of-way and their fares paid.

When she'd got her breath back, she said in an undertone: "I wonder if we'll be able to make what we did stick? Do you think those two back there will be able to wrangle out of it? There wasn't very much motive for the police to see."

"There is now—back there in Stephen Gadsby's inside coat pocket, where I put it so they'd be sure to find it the first thing. A six-page confessional letter from the younger brother, Tommy, was delivered at the house special delivery while I was waiting there for you.

"I just had time to read it before those two showed up with you. The kid brother made a clean breast of everything in it, hoping to forewarn the elder Gadsby not to come across if the Beacon woman tried to put her hooks in him. He'd been roped into a gin marriage with her; she was an entertainer at a roadhouse near his college."

"She'd called on this former vaudeville partner of hers from the city and he'd impersonated the justice of peace at the mock ceremony. They bled the kid for all they could, until Stephen Gadsby cut his funds. Then the kid caught sight of the partner hanging around the roadhouse one day, and tumbled to the frame that had been worked on him.

"They saw the game was up at the end, so they lit out fast. They figured their dodge might be good for one more 'painless extraction' at this end, before Jimmy could warn his brother. Unluckily for himself, Gadsby wasn't the type that bluffed easy. Instead of getting frightened, he got sore."

"I know" Carol said. "I heard Rose discuss that part of it with her partner. Gadsby told her to go to hell, so she

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jumped down to the door and let her accomplice into the house, like a fool, thinking that would cow him. Instead, it enmeshed them in a murder."

Frank took something out of his pocket, showed it to her. Her face paled at the sight of so much money. For a minute she thought—

"No, don't be frightened," he reassured her. "It's honest this time. It was given to me. I had that bad check of Holmes' with me when I went over there to see him, you know. Holmes hadn't meant to do it. He'd just been caught short, and he'd raised the money to cover it even by the time he went over to see Gadsby last night. Only he could not square it because Gadsby couldn't find the check at the time. It had dropped out of the cash box when I broke into the safe the first time.

"Anyway, I let him have the check back; it would only have gotten him mixed up in the murder. He made out a new one right under my eyes and mailed it back to Gadsby; the estate can cash it, of course. And he was so grateful and relieved at getting out of the mess, he made me a present of two hundred.

"He insisted on my taking it. He said he had a fellow feeling for me, because we'd both been guilty of mistakes last night that might have led to serious consequences—me breaking into that safe and he with his bad check—but we'd both been given another chance, and we'd probably learned our lessons. I'd told him about us, how badly we wanted to get back home."

She wasn't listening any more. Her head dropped to his shoulder, rocked there gently in time with the motion of the bus. Her eyes dropped blissfully closed. "We're going home," she thought drowsily. "Me and the boy next door, we're going home at last."

THE END

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* * *

Taken into custody for turning in a false alarm, a Seventh Avenue man told Manhattan police that four months ago his wife walked out on him, leaving him to care for the four kids and he turned in the alarm to get arrested so he could have a little peace.

* * *

Seized by officers for setting fire to a \$40,000 milling plant in Downey, Calif., a nine-year-old boy explained he merely wanted to keep warm.

* * *

Brought into court for keeping a horse in his room, a man in London told the judge how it was: "I was lonely."

* * *

Lost in the forest they are traditionally supposed to know so well, twenty-five Indians explained to the people in Durant, Okla.: They had gotten lost because they had relied on a white man to lead them back from a wiener roast.

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PROVE IT!

By JULIUS LONG

CONFESSION to murder won't hang you—if there's no corroborating proof of your crime. This principle of law has long been a fundamental one, but recently the Supreme Court of Indiana stretched its construction to an interesting limit.

Suppose that you walked into the police station, signed a confession that you had murdered a girl, told the police in the confession where they might find parts of her buried body, and said that you yourself buried them there. Suppose the police investigated, found the girl had actually disappeared, dug for the buried parts of her body at the spot you indicated in your confession and found bones and a skull. Suppose the police also found proof that you signed the girl's name to a letter after her disappearance and that you took property from her home.

Supposing all that, wouldn't you think you had a one-way ticket to the hot seat?

Yet the facts, which are those of the Indiana case, were held by the Supreme Court of that state to be insufficient corroborative evidence to support the defendant's confession! The defendant is a free man today!

Far be it from us to criticize the decision of the high court or to cast a shadow on the reputation of the defendant. What may at first blush appear to be a miscarriage of justice may well be

an example of the forces of democratic justice at work.

Now let us examine the set of facts we have presented in the light of this rule. Do they offer clear proof of the commission of murder independent of the confession? Well, weren't the bones and skull found where the confession said they would be, where the confessor said he had buried them? Didn't he sign his name to a letter after the girl's disappearance? Didn't he take property from the girl's home?

Damning proof, we concede, but not, on close analysis, clear. Apart from the confession, such circumstances do not prove the crime of murder. They prove merely that bones were found where the confessor thought they would be, that he did take property from her home.

But, you are thinking, how about those bones and skull being where the guy said he planted them? Surely that wasn't coincidence. That's enough for me!

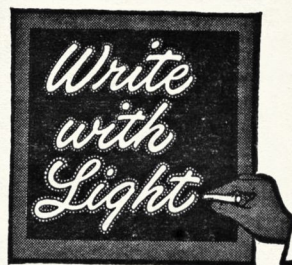
But is it enough for you, any more than it was for the Supreme Court of the State of Indiana? Suppose a psychopathic case accidentally uncovered a skull and bones, suppose he knew of the disappearance of a girl, suppose he took property from her home, signed her name to a letter and brooded over her disappearance until the skull and bones suggested to his crazed mind that he had killed her.

Far-fetched? Ask any homicide detective how many people go to even more extreme limits to hang themselves.

Where the government is of the people, it is the people who enjoy protection. In America the courts are working for you, the individual, and even if you walk in with a confession you won't be convicted—not unless you can prove it!

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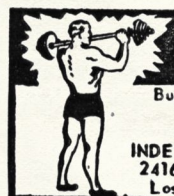
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(Continued from page 75)

was still time—time. . . . Time for what, Kay didn't know, but she realized that her only chance lay in complete obedience.

She started the car and drove down by the river and then along the Parkway. Faster and faster she went, with Sue sitting next to her like a cold, marble statue urging her on to do something she didn't want to.

The redhead was laughing again, the frightening sound of it bubbling from her lips in a deadly spray, and Kay took her last desperate chance. She pressed her foot to the board, and as the car hurtled forward like a live thing, she jammed on the brake with all the strength she had in her supple young body.

The tires screamed in agony as they wore themselves out on the hard concrete roadway. Kay felt the steering wheel ram into the softness of her body. There was a loud cracking sound as Sue's head hit the dashboard with terrible force. The gun went off, spitting red flame into the redhead's middle, and Kay felt the car lurch to one side. Her ears were filled with noise and her eyes with light, flashing, blinding light. And then there was blackness—nothing but the complete blackness of unconsciousness. . . .

* * *

It was several months later, when Kay was out of the hospital, that Don Davis was asked again to go to Albany. This time he took Kay with him as his bride. He took her because she wanted to go and because they never could get her in front of a microphone again. There was something about Mike fright that got her.

THE END

(Continued from page 59)

"You didn't want her to come back. Because of me?" Pat's voice was hoarse. "You poor damned fool, you don't know me, do you? No matter what she was, Lois, I'll be married to her the rest of my life. But you were the one who could have told me she was coming back. You could have saved her life."

"Pat—"

"Get out, Lois. Get out—quick!"

She scrambled out.

The liquor was getting to him a little, now. He finished the note, there on his dinette table, and then went to unlock the front door. Then he called headquarters, gave them the message, and went to pick up the note. He read:

Lieutenant Callender:

I wanted to work with Homicide because I thought it would be safer that way. I could see how close you boys were getting. But it doesn't matter now, because I've no desire to escape you. I killed my wife with a wrecking bar which you'll find in the luggage deck of my car. I couldn't stand the thought of her loving anyone else and I wasn't man enough to rid myself of her. The checking I've done today reveals to me I would probably have escaped detection. I make this confession of my own free will.

Sergeant Patrick Kelley.

He waited then, .38 in hand. He waited until he heard the wail of the siren, and a little longer. He waited until he heard the tires screeching outside.

Then he put the muzzle of his .38 to the soft roof of his mouth, and pulled the trigger.

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128 HELL IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

(Continued from page 49)

gently. "Why did he try to kill you? For insurance, was it? Did he have a lot on you?"

For a moment she didn't answer. There *was* some insurance on her. Not too much. About ten thousand, but with double indemnity. And she could cook up some yarn about Roy being in a financial jam. That would probably do it. That way the family wouldn't have to know the rest of the sordid details of her life with Roy. They had been hurt and shocked enough as it was.

"Yes," she said finally. "I guess it was for the insurance. I don't know what else it could be."

She forced herself to look at Gin's tight and horrified young face. She didn't think they'd ever have to worry about Gin anymore. This little affair had completely deglamorized the big sister who had run off to the big city and married a rich and handsome man. Now some local boy would soon be getting himself a sensible young wife. So there was something good had come of this.

Laurie closed her eyes and let her head fall back against the soft pillow. "I—I'm tired now," she said. "I want to sleep. I'll talk to you again in the morning."

She listened to them tiptoeing out of the room. There alone in the big white bed, she suddenly felt very small and young again, and thankful for a family and a home. It was the way she used to feel as a kid after a bad sickness. When the crisis was over and she knew she was going to get well, only more so.

Seven years was a long time to be sick. But it was all over now. The disease had burned itself out, and she was going to get well. . . .

(Continued from page 38)

"You might have saved the effort though," I growled in his ear. "I hadn't finished my story. John Cash was only one of your hired stooges."

"Hey!" Warren Day said, opening his mouth for the first time.

I waited until Hannegan had cuffs on the fat man.

Then I told him, "Ketterer's confession was planted in his safe, but the syndicate's lock expert was a nitro-man and couldn't have opened that safe without blowing it apart. Margrove had manufactured the safe and had its combination on file. He had the stuff planted, then obligingly passed the combination on to me so I could find it easily."

"Another thing pinning it on him is that the minute he hired me, the syndicate had a tail on me, and it was the tail phoning him a report that I was watching the Rand Building that gave him the idea of rushing the three straw-bosses over there to convince me Ketterer was the real boss."

"But the clincher is that the gang was out to get me even after I had unknowingly done them a favor. I thought they were after revenge because I exposed the gambling racket, but actually they wanted to shut me up because I knew Ketterer wasn't a suicide and were afraid I'd expose the whole frameup."

It took forty-eight hours to get a confession out of Margrove, but when it finally came he spilled everything, including the fact that he personally manipulated the razor while Dan Ironbaltz held Ketterer's legs and Jimmy Goodrich and Art Depledge each held an arm.

As a reward for my part in the affair, the state attorney sent me a pass to the executions, but I couldn't get there. I was busy that evening getting my ears fixed out of shape.

THE END

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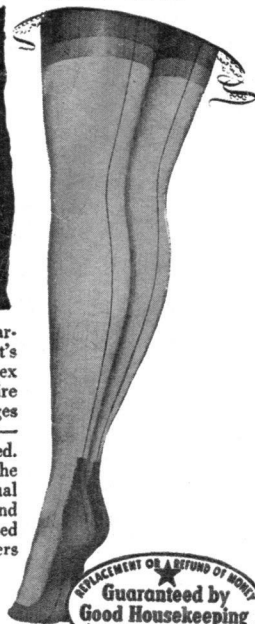
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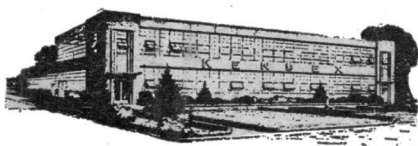


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