

10¢

# CRACK

MAY

# DETECTIVE

**BODY,  
BODY,  
WHO'S  
GOT  
THE  
BODY?**

By **CLIFF  
CAMPBELL**

TRAINS  
STORIES

**A CLEAN NOSE**

By **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

**FRONT PAGE GUY**

by **ARTHUR MANN**

A  
DOUBLE-ACTION  
MAGAZINE



*The Most Daring Offer Ever Made!*

**Richly Grained GOLD STAMPED Simulated Leather  
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and Pocket-size MATCHING MINIATURE**



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GGJ

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# 10¢ **CRACK** **DETECTIVE** STORIES

**VOLUME 5**   ★ ★ ★   **MAY, 1944**   ★ ★ ★   **NUMBER 3**

## **SUSPENSE-RIDDEN MYSTERY NOVEL**

### **BODY, BODY, WHO'S GOT THE BODY? . . . . . By Cliff Campbell 10**

It was a perfect frame. The radios were blaring away with descriptions of the blonde daughter of Jaycee Moon, reported missing; there was a blonde corpse, answering these descriptions in Simeon Cross' apartment. Only he'd never seen the girl before, dead or alive. But the payoff in grim irony came when after going through hell to rid himself of the body, he found himself in an equally mad scramble to get it back!

## **TWO POWERFUL NOVELETS**

### **FRONT PAGE GUY . . . . . By Arthur Mann 35**

It wasn't enough that Clay Murdock suddenly found himself in St. Louis, when he thought he was in Chicago, but he couldn't remember any instructions from his paper as to what he should do there. Then a scrap of conversation led him onto the Pleasure Queen for the biggest story he'd ever tackled!

### **A CLEAN NOSE . . . . . By Frederick C. Painton 66**

"You're young, and bright, and full of ideals, Rookie. But ask any of the men who have been around; it doesn't pay to cross up political bosses. If you report a gambling house more than twice, and nothing's done about it—take a hint. Keep your nose clean, or you'll find yourself broken, busted—or worse!"

## **SHORT STORIES**

### **MURDER WORE A SEALSKIN COAT . . . . . By Jay Karth 47**

Death stalked silently as the fingers of cold at this lonely radio station, for somewhere here was the long-lost map to a fabulous forgotten treasure!

### **DEATH COMES WALKING . . . . . By Henry G. Hornlein 58**

They called himself "Terrible Terry" and Terry Donovan lived up to his dark reputation the night he went out into the fog to find the man who'd crippled him and slain his sweetheart's father!

*Robert W. Lowndes, Editor*

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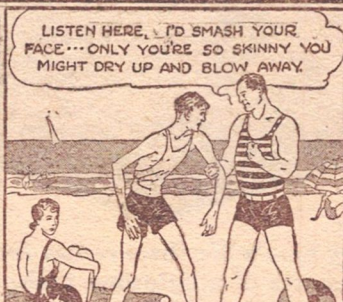
HOW JOE'S BODY  
BROUGHT HIM

# FAME INSTEAD OF SHAME

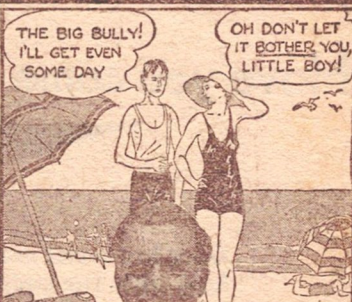


HEY! QUIT KICKING THAT SAND IN OUR FACES!

THAT MAN IS THE WORST NUISANCE ON THE BEACH



LISTEN HERE, I'D SMASH YOUR FACE... ONLY YOU'RE SO SKINNY YOU MIGHT DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY.

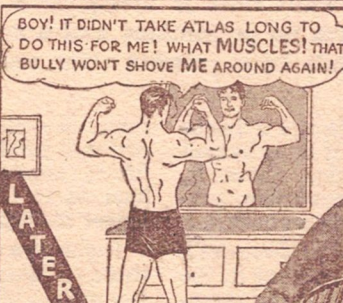


THE BIG BULLY! I'LL GET EVEN SOME DAY

OH DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU, LITTLE BOY!



DARN IT! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING A SCARECROW! CHARLES ATLAS SAYS HE CAN GIVE ME A REAL BODY. ALL RIGHT! I'LL GAMBLE A STAMP AND GET HIS FREE BOOK!



BOY! IT DIDN'T TAKE ATLAS LONG TO DO THIS FOR ME! WHAT MUSCLES! THAT BULLY WON'T SHOVE ME AROUND AGAIN!

LATER



WHAT! YOU HERE AGAIN? HERE'S SOMETHING I OWE YOU!



OH, JOE! YOU ARE A REAL MAN AFTER ALL!

HERO OF THE BEACH

GOSH! WHAT A BUILD

HE'S ALREADY FAMOUS FOR IT!

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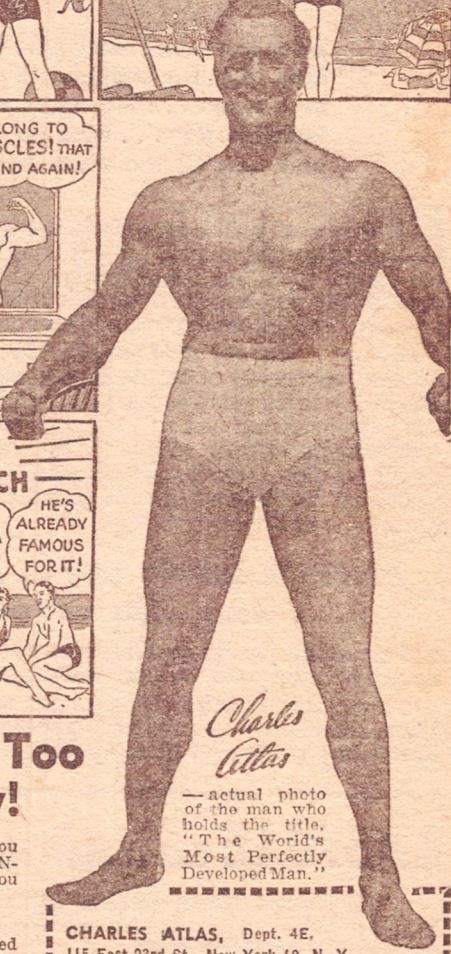
Using "Dynamic Tension" only 15 minutes a day, in the privacy of your own room, you quickly begin to put on muscle, increase your chest measurements, broaden your back, fill out your arms and legs. Before you know it, this easy,

NATURAL method will make you a finer specimen of REAL MANHOOD than you ever dreamed you could be! You'll be a New Man!

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Thousands of fellows have used my marvelous system. Read what they say—see how they looked before and after—in my book, "Everlasting Health And Strength."

Send NOW for this book—FREE. It tells all about "Dynamic Tension," shows you actual photos of men I've turned from puny weaklings into Atlas Champions. It tells how I can do the same for YOU. Don't put it off! Address me personally: Charles Atlas, Dept. 4E, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.



Charles Atlas

—actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 4E, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

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Check here if under 16 for Booklet A



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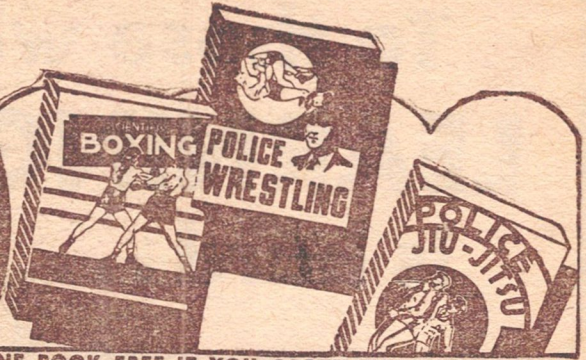
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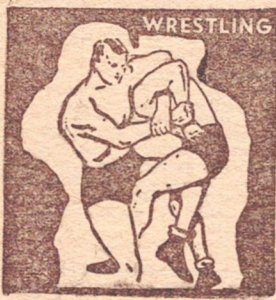
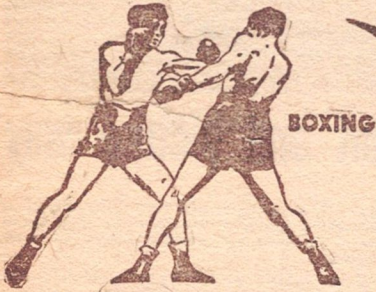
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"I learned more from your course than many of my friends who studied under private teachers have for years. The fact that I've already taken 2 courses and am now enrolling for a third should speak for itself."

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(Do you have instrument . . . . .)

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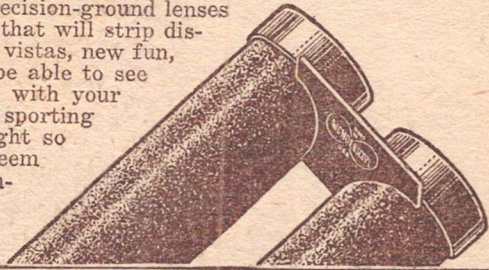
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## Two Real Telescopes in one-

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**Brings Far Away Objects Clearly Close to Your Eye**

Now, at last, you can see everything you want to see even if it is thousands of feet away. The scientific, precision-ground lenses of the Wonderscope are like magic eyes that will strip distance of its mysteries and bring you new vistas, new fun, and new thrills. Just imagine, you will be able to see clearly 10 times as far as you now can with your naked eye. Men, women, houses, planes, sporting events, animals, and birds, will be brought so clearly to your eyes that they will seem almost close enough to touch. The Wonderscope is brand new, and available to you now at an unbelievably low price.



**BOTH EXTEND  
TO 16 INCHES  
LONG**



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Send my WONDERSCOPE. I will pay postman \$1.98 plus postage and C.O.D. charges on delivery. If within 10 days I am not completely satisfied with my WONDERSCOPE set, I will return it to you and my money will be immediately refunded.

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NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY & ZONE ..... STATE .....



# BODY, BODY, WHO'S ★★ GOT THE BODY? ★★

*Missing — one blonde corpse! Cause of death: lead poisoning. Description: pert-faced, willowy, svelte; resembles vanished daughter of Jaycee Moon, boss politician; clothes on cadaver jibe with apparel Miss Moon was known to be wearing at time of disappearance. When last seen, corpse was swathed in man's raincoat. Will finder please return to Simeon Cross, investigator?*

**By Cliff Campbell**

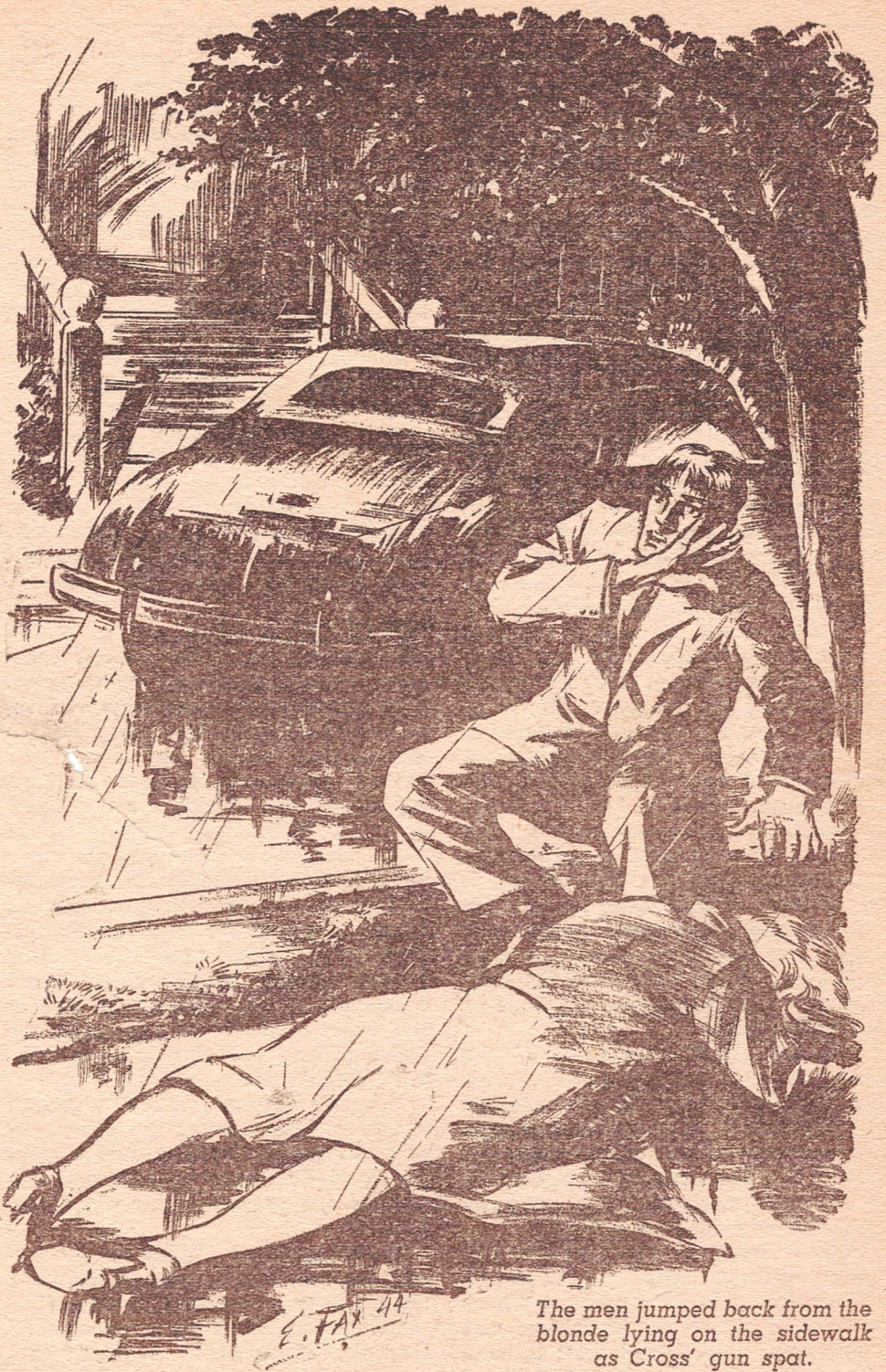
A Sure-Fire  
Mystery  
Novel



## CHAPTER I

**T**HE radio was going like the hammers of Hell. His key in the apartment door, Cross froze; he





*The men jumped back from the blonde lying on the sidewalk as Cross' gun spat.*

didn't remember leaving that radio on. In fact, he distinctly recalled turning it off as he answered Jaycee

Moon's phone call that had taken him out. Rain water sluiced from his trench coat and made a little



puddle about his feet. He stirred his black brogues fastidiously, jabbed a thumb against the door buzzer and held it there. His right hand went into the slash pocket of the trench coat and stayed there and a snout edged up under the fabric. Then he eased the unlocked door open slowly and gently with one knee.

With the buzzer snarling away, he hoped to give the illusion that he was a caller instead of the tenant, and still outside. He got into the small cube of foyer hall, dim in the drear light of the rainshot day. His maroon-and-white striped dressing gown was flung over a chair there. He couldn't remember leaving that there, either. Then he had slipped the door closed silently and taken a step. Glass cracked and crunched under his foot through the blare of the swing band on the radio.

Peering down, he saw a segment of the water tumbler by the baseboard. The pungent odor of spilled gin reached his nostrils. His mustached upper lip curled in distaste as he swore lazily. That frizzy-haired service maid had evidently had herself a time. She'd had all the signs of a hangover when she came in. He was sure of it when he noted the lipstick-smear tip of a cigaret stub in an ashtray in the living room. He cut off the rampaging radio and caught the scent of a musky perfume in the air. Then he sighted the cold stub of cigar perched on a corner of the coffee table.

"So our little Cinderella of the Dustcloth had her boy friend in for the festivities, too. If he's touched my Scotch—" He was just pulling his hand out of the pocket with the gun in it. Then his face went blank and he was motionless yet somehow hair-trigger poised for action.

A foot from the cigar on the carcass walnut coffee table was a crumpled cocktail napkin. There were some red flecks on it, wet and glistening. Blood, he knew; Simeon Cross had seen enough spilled blood to recognize it.

He had taken two strides toward the stains when the phone rang. He froze, thinking fast. Nobody had

seen him come in. Jaycee, driving him back from the luncheon engagement in the plain black sedan he often used, had snapped an ejaculation at the corner, then straightened out the car and gone on to the quiet street behind the apartment. "That was a press car down in front of your place, Cross. Looks as if some smart reporter got a tip." Cross' eyes were pretty sharp but he had failed to see the press car.

Anyway, he had come in by the rear, passing the empty, rain-drenched tennis courts back there, into the heavily-foliaged garden behind the apartment. Nobody at an upper window could have seen him under the screen of leaves. Then down through a service entrance and up in the self-operating elevator. Nobody could have seen him. He—

**T**HE phone continued to jangle imperatively. He caught himself. It was ridiculous; plain nerves. This empty assignment with nothing to do—like playing tag with ghosts—was getting under his skin. The broken glass—the stained cocktail napkin—it was obvious: a cut hand, no more. This dirty stinking racket made you see corpses every time you got a glimpse of blood. He shed himself of the wet trench coat and his fedora, brushed the lapel of his Oxford gray suit, straightened his breast pocket handkerchief, and sauntered to the phone. It was in the short hallway giving onto the bedroom and the tiny kitchen. He put "Hello" into it.

"Captain Gerhardy, 28th Precinct speaking," the man at the other end said raspingly. "We've had a complaint of disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace in your place, Mr. Cross!"

Cross chuckled. "Just got in myself, captain. But it seems I did have some guests in my absence and—"

"Can't you think up a better alibi than that lousy one?" Gerhardy said wearily from the other end. "You want me to send a coupla boys over there to cool you off, huh? And you gotta stop that dame screaming, too! Is she getting killed?"



"Guess it must've been her singing," Cross said wearily. He could imagine the kind of voice that bleached blond of a maid had. "Sorry."

"Say, Cross, you haven't got a corpse up there, have you? They said she sounded like a dame being half kilt!"

"No corpses," said Cross. "I don't believe in hoarding, thanks. Especially bodies, captain. The place will be as quiet as a morgue—take my word for it." He was going to wish his tongue were cut out in a few minutes for that word, "morgue." He cradled the phone and pushed open the bedroom door en route to the kitchen for a drink. He froze in his tracks, gaze locked on the bed.

A woman lay on his bed. She modelled nylons as well as anybody he had ever seen, and he could see very well with her sleek black cocktail frock pulled high up on her thighs. Cross stuck his head in further and checked. Blonde, willowy, yet with a figure that lived up to the svelte legs. A pert face from the profile couched on the pillow, and asleep.

Simeon Cross drew back, smoothed down his coat, fixed his tie, and ran a hand over his sleek prematurely grayshot hair. He was just under medium size, bland and hollow-faced, with a very flat body. He had ink-black eyes roofed by thatches of eyebrows like bars. Altogether he looked slightly annoyed now. He preened his slice of precise mustache and rapped sharply on the bedroom door.

"Time to leave, madam," he called. "The joint is closing!" No answer. He looked in again; the blonde hadn't stirred.

He bounced his knuckles on the wood harder. "Lady, you've got to get out of here fast! Your husband's at the front door!" He called it louder. Still no response.

Cross marched into the room and to the bed. He noticed the Venetian blinds were down. He took a shoulder firmly and shook. He said, "Babe, the house is pinched! The cops're busting down the door! Now—" Then the body jerked stiffly under

his grip. The face came up. Tawny black-fringed bulbs of eyes, standing out from the head, stared up glassily at him.

Then he saw a small hole just under the breast of her frock. Encrusted ruby ringed it. It was a bullet hole and she was dead as hell. And he'd said he didn't have a corpse in the place.

That body belonged to the maid. Simeon Cross wanted no part of it. People who played around with corpses too often got hooked up with murder. He ran his eyes over her sadly. She was very young and beautiful to have died like that. Somewhere off in the rain a police car siren wailed; he didn't connect it with himself.

"Head off that maid first," he told himself. He fired up a cigaret with carelessly swift motions, tongued it to a berth in the corner of his mouth. He got to the house phone in the kitchen quickly, without seeming to hurry, and called the superintendent's office. While he waited, he slipped a bottle of beer from the ice box and half-filled a glass. He reached up to his shelf of liquor supplies and brought down the Scotch. He slugged it in half of the remainder of the glass, then glanced back at the shelf. The gin bottle of his stock was there, seal unbroken. Yet, there was the spilled gin outside. . .

**H**HE DID a double take and then the superintendent was on the wire. "That maid who did my place—" Cross started.

The superintendent was all apologies. They would have another service maid up to do his place as soon as possible. His regular maid had been summoned home by illness in the family.

"Drag that by slowly again, will you?" Cross said languidly.

The super did. She had just started on the apartment when the message came. The super knew because he went up to deliver it himself. The girl had left immediately.

"Was she alone here?"

"Why, sure, Mr. Crossly." Cross had registered under that name as a



cover-up. "You'd just left yourself. You were back shortly but she had already left, you must have noticed. Is there anything wrong?"

"Think nothing of it. Perhaps it's all a mirage." He hung up and picked up the Boilermaker he had concocted. In two gulps he had put it away and he hardly felt it. Nasty little icicles were playing tick-tack-toe along his spine. He smelled it right away. Somebody had planted a corpse and all the attendant accessories of murder on him.

He was in a strange city, practically unknown, playing possum right in the midst of a no-holds-barred, no-quarter-asked, political dogfight. And Jaycee had warned him if he got in a jam, he, Jaycee would have to wash his hands of him, and claim no connection. That was part of the agreement. Now somebody had gotten him all dressed up to take the rap for a nice little homicide. And the copers were already sniffing around.

He had to unload that corpse damned fast. He stepped over and threw up the kitchen window. The fire escape passed it. But, peering out in the dim rainy afternoon, he saw the rectangles of electric light glow from two windows above and from two below. To try to pass either pair with a cadaver in his arms was too much of a risk. He started to pull in his head.

A radio at another open window in the court in the rear of the building crackled away with a news program. A local station, his mind automatically checked, as he caught an item. The stentorian voice of the announcer sharpened with excitement.

"A special flash has just come in," he quickened. "It has just been reported to the police that Donna Moon, daughter of J. C. Moon, boss of one of the city's most powerful political machines, has been missing since yesterday afternoon. Within the last hour, Miss Moon's car has been located on an abandoned logging trail off the River Road north of the city. The car was half overturned in the ditch. Police say from the appearance of the crumpled out-

side fender the driver had apparently been forced off the road by another car. Violence is feared. Her father told reporters that, as yet, he has received no demands for ransom. . ."

Though he had a hot chunk of business on his own hands, Cross hesitated before he closed the window. Donna Moon was the daughter of the man who had hired him. A description of the girl followed.

Tall, slim, blond; Cross' thoughts went to the corpse on his bed. "Miss Moon was a devoted student of the dance and had a brief professional career in New York night clubs as well as giving performances in charity benefits in this city," the announcer said.

CROSS' lips flattened thinly and he sucked fresh air between them. Unconsciously he had checked it when he saw the girl on the bed was dead. The shapely but well-muscled legs were those of a dancer.

"Miss Moon, when last seen, wore a black afternoon frock from—" The announcer mentioned the name of a smart Madison Avenue shop. "Her jewelry consisted of a square-cut emerald ring on her right hand. She carried a small black antelope bag. . ."

Cross put down the window and marched back determinedly into the bedroom. He worked gingerly and turned back the neck of her dress to get at the label. There was no question. He stepped back, ash from the cigaret he seemed to have forgotten was in his mouth dribbling down over his vest. The label read: "Madame—, New York and Southampton." He walked around to the far side of the bed where one of her long arms dangled. There was no ring on the hand. But when he plucked at the chenille bedspread, the square-cut emerald ring was revealed beneath the fringe. He picked it up, pocketed it.

There was no question of it. It was a frame, a plant. Somebody was trying to hang a dead body around his neck.



## CHAPTER II

**H**E GOT back to the living room fast and started to pick up the phone. The obvious thing to do was to get Jaycee on the wire and have him right over. A guilty killer didn't invite his victim's father over for a private pre-view of the corpse on his own premises. His hand paused on the receiver. Poking out from the tray beside it was the yellow rectangle of a telegram envelope that he had failed to notice before.

A glance showed that it had been forwarded from his Chicago office. He slit the envelope. It had been sent from here, Matson City. The message went: "Beg to inform you Mr. Halbot not interested in your alleged claims to secret information regarding political situation here. We absolutely refuse to pay your travelling expenses here. If you possess concrete evidence advise you to see district attorney or me if necessary. But this does not constitute engagement of your professional services. Ben Lockes."

Cross smoothed out the yellow sheet with a tension-stiffened hand. Halbot was the opposition mayoralty candidate running against Jaycee Moon's machine. Lockes was his campaign manager. But he, Simeon Cross, had never contacted either in any way to offer his services.

He turned and with a flip of his tongue sent his cigaret spinning into the fireplace. This thing was building fast. He started to tear it then remembered the original would be on file at the office where sent. The house phone made its prolonged *pinging* sound and Cross feet came back down to the floor on the second *ping*. He had his hand on his back pocket where he usually carried the stubby automatic.

Before he answered the call he procured it from the pocket of his trench coat. It was one of the hall boys on the wire. "Mr. Cross, some dicks just came in and are headed for your place! Better get things cleaned up fast!"

The blood-speckled cocktail nap-

kin was the first thing that caught his eye as he came back. There was one thing that hit him. The picture of murder being constructed around him was almost too perfect. He snatched up the napkin and put it in his inner breast pocket. The girl's black suede bag as described on the radio was revealed beneath it. He grabbed for that. It plunked back to the table heavily.

"She must pack a lipstick like a blackjack," he muttered and flipped the bag open. It wasn't a lipstick. It winked back at him evilly, a gleaming little black .32. The gun she had been killed with, he figured, thinking of the size of the bullet hole in her dress. It was all so damned perfect.

"She did everything but sign the register as she came in," he drawled, casually secreting the gun in a fold of the wall side of the drape flanking the window. It was too late to notify the police that he had a nice fresh corpse on the premises; he had told that Gerhardy nothing was wrong. And he wasn't going to be found with Jaycee Moon's dead daughter around his neck.

He stopped dead. What in blazes was he going to do with the body? The thought made him so cold he wished he had doubled up on the Boilermaker. He had one foot in the bedroom when the door buzzer began to sputter harshly. There was something about the way a flatfoot rang a bell. They third-degreed it.

**T**HERE was only one thing to do. He was supposed to have been chucking a wild little party. Okay. As casually as a window dresser working on a dummy, he went to the bed and worked the black frock partly off one shoulder of the dead girl, looped the spread over her so it looked as if she were in bed, sleeping off a souse. He rumbled the sleek blond hair, cut in a page-boy bob, took one of her black toeless shoes and skidded it onto the dressing table so it perched cockeyedly across an overturned bottle of shaving lotion.

The buzzer snarled with angry im-



patience as he hopped into the kitchen. When he came back with the bottle of Scotch, his coat was off, a shoe gone, his sleek hair rumpled. Lipstick from the tube in the bag, that he put in the breadbox, was splashed on one cheek. He reeked of Scotch. And he hurriedly splashed some around the bedroom so it smelled like a corner of a distillery, then set the bottle in plain sight on the bedside table after putting the lamp drunkenly on its side.

The door buzzer sounded on the verge of explosion. There was pounding too.

"Feel like a ham actor in a charnel house," Cross popped as he headed for the door with a drunken weave. He had more than a hunch the act was going to be a flop. Whoever was trying to hook him was pulling the strings fast. These coppers hadn't come up about a blackout violation.

There was a rasping metal-on-metal sound from the foyer. The buzzer had given up. Cops got very tough when impatient.

Something plunked into the kitchen wall and a few bits of plaster jetted out in a little cloud from the spot. Cross caught it from the corner of his dark eye as he stepped into the living room. There was the flat slap of a shot after it. He whirled and got into the kitchen in time to see the door giving onto the service stairs swinging ajar. He slapped a hand to his back pocket for the automatic, then remembered he had balanced it inside his hat. The hat was hooked over one of the wall bracket lights in the living room.

Somebody in the foyer hall barked, "Cross! Cross, come out before we blast the place!"

**H**E grabbed the service entrance door and pulled it wide. The draft from the stairs swirled the acrid odor of gunpowder in at him. Three steps down a brunette girl in a Camel tie-around and a head handkerchief crouched. She turned a terror-twisted oval of olive face his way.

"Let me in, please," she said huskily. "Somebody is shooting at me."

She walked up past Cross before he could move.

His reflexes caught up in a flash though. He was getting desperate and she would make a nice stage prop. Two women together in a man's apartment looked a lot more innocuous than one. He grabbed her, stripped her of the Camel coat with surprising strength for his slight figure as she started a gesture of protest.

"Look, there's been a party. You've been here all the time—for a couple of hours maybe! Catch?"

She nodded. She had big light-blue eyes, very round. They swept him coolly. "Yes, Mr. Cross."

He shoved his Boilermaker glass into her hand, then took her gently and kissed her very hard flush on the mouth. Hard enough to smear her lipstick so it gave her a loose leer. He remembered that lipstick; it tasted like jungle flowers might have smelled, heady and lush.

Halfway through the living room the coppers met him, three plain-clothes men wheeling from the foyer behind three police positives. The lead one, a big bony man with muddy eyes flashed his shield and said:

"Dockery of Homicide, Cross! Somebody phoned in a report you killed a dame up here. . . . Tsk, tsk! Where's the body?"

"Killed? Killed?" Cross snorted drunkenly. "My dear man, somebody just tried to put a bullet into me! In the kitchen!" He led them out and showed them the bullet hole in the wall.

The three of them, busting the door wide in their rush, slammed out and up and down the service stairway.

**N**OW to get the blonde's body out of the picture. But before he turned away he spotted the toe of the black-and-white saddle shoe beneath the bottom of the swung-back door. So that was where the brunette was. He had no time for her then.

In the bedroom he swathed the dead body in the chenille bedspread and hoisted it in his arms. He ran



into the living room with it and out through the jimmied front door into the hall. A few yards down was the incinerator-chute cubicle. He got into it and deposited the body gently in a corner. He piled the bedspread over it in its sitting position so that it might have been a pile of almost anything.

He was back in the living room lighting a cigaret when Docker tramped back in. Docker's shoes squeaked. "There was nobody on those stairs," Docker said heavily, taking in the room. "But there was some fresh mud a couple of flights down. Get a look at the guy who popped at you?"

Simeon Cross shook his head. "No idea, captain."

Docker sneered down his long nose. He sniffed around as if he had walked in on a sample of Sodom and Gomorrah combined. One of his men came out of the bedroom, wiping his mouth. Cross knew his Scotch was running low. He let himself lurch into a chair.

"Hey, you had a dame here," Docker remembered his mission. "We checked with the local precinct after we got the report at headquarters. She was heard screaming by neighbors. Where is she, Cross—if she's still breathing?"

Cross got up and led the way to the kitchen. "You can understand the little lady being shy, gentlemen. And you can see she's quite alive. Corpses don't stand up." He pointed to the open door of the service entrance, raising his voice. The saddle shoes showing under it did a little dance step and a low-throated giggle followed.

"When do I get a drink, Crossy?" she cooed. "Baby's awful damn dry, Crossy!"

Docker pulled down his black Homburg and cocked a weary eye at Cross. "Probably Baby's papa slipped up here and took a blast at you, Crossy! If I was you, I'd get this dame outa here as fast as you can."

Simeon Cross nodded in hearty agreement. "Don't worry. I can read signs, captain. I won't be able to get the—the lady off the premises

fast enough to suit me, and permanently." He was thinking of the corpse.

Docker and his boys went out finally. He watched them get on the automatic elevator and sink from sight, waited until he timed the buzz of it to the main floor. He swooped down to the cubicle and again picked up the bedspread-swathed blond corpse. He rushed her back to the apartment and closed the door with the sprung lock. The brunette wasn't in sight.

**T**HE rain-rifled day was drawing to a close and darkness like a wet wall had started to cloak the windows. He put the blonde in a chair with its back toward the hall to the kitchen and the bedroom, took a deep breath and turned on the radio en route to the kitchen. It was dim in there but he could see the brunette's Camel coat thrown over the chair. He started to rearrange his clothes.

"All right, Toots. You can come out from behind the door. The big bad coppers have gone. Help yourself to a drink if you wish, but you better stay there. There's a girl in the living room who doesn't want to be seen," he said.

He worked with an easy but efficient swiftness, tidying up the bedroom. He gave it a fast search for any other possessions of the dead girl and combed his hair and removed the lipstick splotches. From the bedroom he commanded a view of the kitchen door. The brunette did not emerge from it.

Returning to the front of the apartment, he meditated a moment, then got a raincoat from the closet. Wrapping the dead girl in it he re-propped her in the chair and put a fresh-lit cigaret in the ash tray beside her.

He raised his voice and said irritably, "All right, all right, sweetheart! I'll get you a fresh drink!" He went out to the kitchen. "All right, miss. You and I have a little talk due." He pulled the string of the kitchen light as he waited for her to appear. The Camel coat was



still draped over the chair. But when he glanced under the door, there were no saddle shoes.

He yanked the door away from the wall. There was just empty space back there. She had gone. The damp prints of her wet sport shoes were still visible on the gray-painted concrete of the service stairs. They led down. But when he went out and listened, there was dead silence.

Cross wasted no time in a wild chase. She'd had plenty of time to get clear; leaving the Camel coat behind had been a clever ruse. So long as it had been in sight he had taken it for granted she was there. She'd probably been gone when he returned from the incinerator cubicle with the body. He shrugged. The bird had flown, and he had to get that other dame off the premises in a hurry. She was a hot corpse.

He turned back into the kitchen, then halted, sharp eyes focussing. In the side of the metal door frame where the hinges were set was a fresh-dug small hole. Very round. Round as only a bullet could cut metal. He thrust his head closer and saw the tip of the slug buried in it.

### CHAPTER III

**S**IMEON CROSS got the hell off that spot as if it scorched his shoe soles. He double-locked the door when he closed it and hot-footed it in, got his automatic from the hat hooked on the electric wall sconce. When he got back into the kitchen he let his breath out.

There had been two shots, he realized. They must have been fired simultaneously so that they had sounded as one. Two shots fired from two different spots; he got it. Moving stiffly with shock, he opened the icebox and got out some beer and made up another Boilermaker. He put it down and throttled that one-foot-in-the-grave feeling.

This job had begun to size up as something different. At first, it just seemed as if somebody wanted to tie him in with a corpse—but hard. Usually somebody had ideas about

making a corpse out of him. But now he knew it was coming true to pattern. He whipped around and took the girl's Camel coat.

The pockets were empty, but on the lip of one was a small black smudge. One whiff and he knew: a smudge of burnt gunpowder. The very cool petite brunette with the lips redolent of jungle blossoms had taken a pot shot at him as he had passed the kitchen doorway. And somebody, at the same moment, had slapped lead at her from the service at the same instant.

Nothing tied in to Simeon Cross. He preened his sliver of black mustache with jerky angry motions. "Life was so dull at the drive-in," he hummed to the tune on the radio. "Please be gentle with the electrodes, warden. I've got a sensitive skin. . . . Roof's the only way out."

He lit up a cigaret after donning his trench coat, took a casual check on the hall from his door. Then he brought the self-service elevator up, whisked back inside, and toted the dead blonde out into it. He pushed the top floor button and unscrewed the bulb in the cab ceiling, dousing it in darkness. When the cab halted at the top, he eased out, saw nobody was in sight in that wing. There was a fragile tinkle of glass on the imitation marble floor. Cross landed lightly as a cat after having leaped high and shattered the ceiling bulb with a swipe of his hat.

Less than sixty seconds later he emerged onto the roof from the fire-proof steel door at the head of the stairs. Gusty rain slapped him in the face. He moved swiftly and purposefully down toward the west end of the building, as calmly as if he were moving a sack of potatoes over to a neighbor's. But he knew his chances were extremely thin of getting down the fire escape there.

**L**UCK turned to his side for the moment. The wind rose and the steel door leading down to the west wing rear flapped loosely. Somebody had neglected to hook it from the inside. He went down there and summoned that elevator. He rode it



down to the basement with his morgue cargo. A few yards and he was at the steps that gave onto the rear courtyard. Across it were the line of individual garages of the apartment.

But the odds were still stacked against him. That forenoon when he had gone out to keep the luncheon appointment with Jaycee Moon the convertible he had rented had refused to start.

"It starts now—or I'm on my way to becoming a car thief," he muttered. He left the blonde in the shadow of an ash can and darted through the rain-sliced blackness to his garage. He jammed an ignition key into the maroon convert and tromped on the starter. Without a second's hesitation the motor purred into life. He wondered if he were dreaming.

When he swung out of the driveway he held his breath waiting for Docker of Homicide or one of his boys to halt him. Nothing happened. He made two turns, not even a pair of headlights was following him. He reached over and gently pushed the dead blonde up straight. He had her outside arm hooked through the leather loop of the door there so she looked as if she dozed sitting up, head against the window.

Further downtown on the outskirts of the business section of the mid-state little city, he drew up at the corner of a quiet street. There was a drugstore on one corner, a lunch counter across the way from it. He chose the drugstore. Closeting himself in a phone booth inside it, he rang Jaycee Moon's home up on the Heights. This was going to be tough to give with. "Hello, Moon. Say, I got your daughter in my car. She's kind of dead."

A servant answered at the other end and said Moon wasn't in. Cross said, "Tell him Mr. Rommel is calling." That was the code name they had decided on in an emergency. It meant that danger threatened Jaycee, that Cross had dug up something.

There was a slight pause at the other end. The servant's voice came over again. "Mr. Moon isn't in," he

reported. "He won't be back tonight, Mr. Rommel."

Cross slammed down the receiver. That meant he had to cart the corpse all the way through the city up to the Heights. And anything could happen en route. He stepped from the booth.

"You Mr. Cross?" the clerk called from behind the counter. "Well, I got a call here for you. The lady says it's a matter of life and death."

Cross edged a hand into the slit pocket of his trench coat where the automatic nestled. How could anybody have known he was there? He walked back behind the counter and into the prescription department. A woman's voice, heavily muffled to disguise itself, spoke to him on the wall instrument.

"Mr. Simeon Cross?" she said. "Donna Moon was at the bar of The Bistro late yesterday afternoon before she disappeared. I thought you might be interested." Then there was the click of a receiver being hung up.

LEAVING the drug store by the side entrance, he crossed the street and sized up his car carefully. No flatfoots seemed to be snooping around. Across in the white-walled lunch counter a girl sat fitting a hot dog into her mouth. He walked over to his convert as the roar of a hard-driven car came from the cross street. His imagination brought the smell of jungle flowers to his senses. Then he had it. Frangipani!

He recalled it from the time he was down in the West Indies on that French island. They had a tree down there with a blossom that smelled like that, and that was what that brunette's lipstick had smelled like. He was over at the curb side of the convert. Through the partially lowered door window he saw the white splotch of a handbill that had been dropped inside. It said: "Vote for Clean Government! Cast Your Ballot for Lucas Halbot, the Reform Candidate!" Simeon Cross smirked. Nice reform candidate he was with a character like Nicky Dochene backing him. Jaycee had told him about



Dochene and his backing of the alleged clean-government candidate.

He blinked. The Bistro, Matson City's outstanding smart night spot, was owned by Nicky Dochene.

Then Cross blinked again. The handbill inside was laying on the leather of the seat—not on the dead blonde's lap. He ripped at the door handle and it turned so easily he almost fell against the fender. But he had locked that door after installing the corpse back at the apartment garage.

He opened it and stuck his head in. The corpse had not slumped down against the back of the seat. The dead blonde wasn't there any more.

Simon Cross eeled under the wheel and lit a cigaret with unsteady hands. He should have been very relieved. That body in his apartment had been practically a command invitation to the electric chair. Somebody, little Miss Frangipani, had just missed him with her popgun over that corpse. Now he was rid of it, hands washed clean of it. Somebody had snatched it from his unloving arms.

But instead of feeling free, Cross was mad. Something he couldn't understand always made him mad. And he couldn't understand why anybody wanted a dead girl's body. What he described as his "nasty stubborn mule" streak rose up and started to get him sore. It was the bane of his life. Without it he might have gone along being a nice successful business man. But it made him crazy with restlessness until he had the answer to a thing like that.

He tromped on the starter and wheeled the convert aimlessly around the corner. "Miss Donna Moon was in The Bistro before she disappeared . . . And somebody 'steals her dead body . . ." he mused, a haggard look stamped on his face in the concentration of the moment. The hollows under his eyes got deeper.

**T**HEN he had it. The corpse wasn't Donna Moon. Nobody carted a dead woman around and planted her in an apartment with

everything but her name and address tattooed on her forehead. Not unless they wanted somebody to think she was somebody she wasn't. For she wasn't Donna Moon. That somebody had tried too hard to make her seem to be with all her accoutrements parked in the joint.

He headed for The Bistro. He had already checked the place shortly after his arrival in Matson City. After all, when a man like Dochene, proprietor of the top spot of the city's night life, risen from a racketeer background of the old bootlegger days, threw in with a reform candidate who held a threat over Jaycee Moon's head—well, the situation was interesting to say the least.

When he had interviewed Moon in his Chicago office, the latter hadn't seemed certain about fearing for his own life or what. He simply feared violence. And—

Ahead up the rain-glazed black pavement, Cross saw a sedan backing away from a tree at a corner. The tire marks in the wet showed that the car had skidded in taking the turn too fast. The livid gash in the trunk of the tree was mute evidence to where the car had sideswiped it. Then there was the blasting roar of the motor like he had heard before. And the damaged car bolted off straight ahead.

Cross just wrenched the steering wheel in time. Another sedan leaped from a side street and turned sharply on two wheels in front of him, almost clipping him. It raced down the road after the first car. Straightening out, temper flaring, Cross started after the second one.

It was all over quickly. The second car closed on the damaged one in a matter of seconds, drew slightly ahead, and then cut in savagely. The first car was forced to the curb, jumping it and careening against a tree as metal crashed on metal. Vague figures spewed from the first car.

Cross cut his headlights, whipped the convert up to the corner below the accident. He was out and moving up through the shadows with his car parked out of sight around the



corner. A livid spear of flame sliced the rainy night up ahead and a man's short scream came close on top of the report. The guns licked the wet black in response to the first.

**C**LOSING in, Cross glimpsed a man with glasses drop as a gun spat from over the fender of the first car. Two figures darted into an alley. And then the wind parted the foliage around a street light. Yellow glow got through and played over a prone figure on the sidewalk. It might have been a man. Then he recognized his raincoat and the blonde hair flung out from the end of it. It was his corpse.

He ran faster, hunched. His own gun splashed muzzle froth twice as he hugged some wet weeds. The man who had bent to pick up the dead girl leaped backward. Cross darted to a tree trunk and edged ahead. He wanted that corpse badly now. It would be the clue to what had happened to Donna Moon. It had already come to him that Jaycee's enemies had struck at him through his daughter. And whoever had planted the would-be Donna Moon in his apartment wanted to throw them off the track as to the whereabouts of the real Donna.

"And hang some dirty laundry around my neck," he added mentally as he crept closer. A gun winked evilly at him twice from the darkness beyond the street lamp. He scooted into the doorway of a boarded-up building. Worked along the dripping wall from there. Water from a mud puddle splashed up and soaked Cross' trouser leg. It came from a puddle he had already passed. His head whipped around just in time to catch the descending gun barrel up over one ear. He felt himself going down, bumping off the wall.

#### CHAPTER IV.

**H**IS gray snapbrim hat had blunted the impact of the blow considerably. He realized that as he pawed up from his knees. He shook his ringing head

and saw the gleam of his gun out on the sidewalk. He clawed for it and looked up in time to see the red tail-light of the first car blinking in the rain as it fled away up the road. And the blonde, raincoat-wrapped corpse was gone from the sidewalk.

The second car, that had been forced up the curb, was very still. Nobody was around it either, he saw as he lurched nearer. Then it came to him that the ringing sound in his head was the whine of the sirens of fast-approaching police cars. It didn't take him long to make tracks back to his own convert. He couldn't say to the cops, "Boys, I was just taking a strange corpse for a ride when somebody swiped her and when I got up here—"

Luck was with him again. He rolled the convert up the side street on which he had parked. And the closing-in prowls cars were coming from either end of the road at right angles where the accident had been staged. Cross wove his car in a zig-zag course and emerged into the brighter district uptown from the theatre zone. He understood the outline of what had happened. The blonde corpse had been in the first car. It had been removed in the second pursuing car that had rammed the first to get possession of the corpse.

"For a girl who's as frigid as a morgue slab," Cross told himself, "that blonde sure is popular!" He found a chophouse. The men's room was down a flight of stairs which suited his purpose very nicely. He hurtled against the door at the bottom and then walked in on the attendant with a tale of having slipped on the damp stairs. It explained the condition of his head.

The attendant worked on him assiduously with ice packs. Fortunately his scalp hadn't been cut and there was no blood, just the lump. After a while, sleek hair carefully plastered back in place, he went upstairs and ordered dinner after knocking off three Boilermakers. The waiter stared at him as if he were a miracle man.



CROSS back-checked as he ate swiftly. Jaycee Moon had seemed a thoroughly upset man when he called at Cross' Chicago office. It had been after hours and Cross was alone with him. The Matson City political boss had kept shooting glances doorward as if fearing an attack from the rear.

"I came here after regular business hours, Mr. Cross," Moon had led off, "hoping I mightn't be noticed so much at this hour." Then he had gone into a brief resume of the political situation back home with the mayoralty elections coming off. He had been given to understand by certain unknown parties behind the reform candidate that it would be healthiest for him to as good as withdraw from the race. He was to give no more than token support to his machine man or something very unpleasant would happen. Something quite violent.

It was a strange threat to emanate from a reform party, but Moon explained that Dochene, ex-racketeer, was backing Halbot, the reform candidate. Almost anything could be expected. He even had newspaper clippings to prove that Dochene was backing Halbot.

"There's five thousand cool—plus expenses—in this job for you, Cross." The assignment was somewhat vague. Moon could hire bodyguards a-plenty. Simeon Cross was to come to Matson, a small city booming with a few war plants, and scout around, try to find out what was going on underground. As a stranger he would not be watched.

Just to cover him up thoroughly, Moon had arranged for him to take an apartment at the Chelsea Arms. "I own the building, Cross, so nobody'll be checking up on you there. If you can get the goods on this Dochene and hook it up with Halbot—"

The five thousand broke any doubts in Cross' mind. He had come to Matson City, put up at the Chelsea Arms, and been snooping around for a week. Now, Jaycee's daughter was missing, and somebody had a corpse masquerading as her.

"Somebody who knows why I'm here," he told the roast beef. He had been in town a day short of a week. He reviewed the steps since he had walked into his apartment. That forenoon Jaycee had phoned him in a great dither. Had to see him right away. Lunch. That was when Cross' car refused to start. He had taken a cab to the quiet second-class restaurant to meet the machine boss.

It had been a drawn-out luncheon with Jaycee topping it off with a string of highballs. He seemed very nervous and yet had nothing concrete to say. Then Cross had returned home, being dropped off in the street behind by Jaycee Moon.

FIRST had been the call from that Gerhardy, the precinct captain. Then the fact that his maid had been in the apartment only a matter of minutes which didn't check with the signs of a party. Then the discovery of the body. Next little Frangipani chucking a bullet at him, and then the arrival of the flatfeet. Afterward the discovery of the telegram in answer to a message he had never sent.

His right hand went white-knuckled around his fork. The superintendent's words came back to him. "—you were back shortly but she (the maid) had already left," the super had said. But Cross hadn't returned shortly. He had been hours at that sterile luncheon with Jaycee. It had been somebody impersonating him who returned the person who delivered the blonde body to his apartment.

He gulped the rest of his coffee and paid the check. Outside he bought an edition of the next morning's tabloid. The page three heading was: "Moon Declares No Chance of Him Abandoning Election Campaign—Will Carry on Despite Disappearance of Daughter."

About to light his cigaret, he froze till the match burned down to his fingers, snapping him out of it. Jaycee had known his daughter hadn't been home the night before when he lunched with him. Yet he had said nothing about it.



Cross' mustached mouth got an ugly twist. Something smelled very rotten. He got in the car and headed out for the Heights, the smart residential section above the town. He had no trouble locating Moon's white mansion; he had checked on that, too, when he arrived in town. He swung into the drive and snapped down the safety on his automatic before he left the car. Whoever was working on him knew plenty, and they were working fast.

A man answered the door and said Moon was not at home. Cross used the "Mr. Rommel" again, added, "I know something about his daughter."

The man hesitated, half turned. That was all Cross needed. He was against him with the snout of the gun in his pocket against the man's side. No words were necessary after the first surprised sputter.

They went down a hall into the north wing. Cross leaned by the quaking man and shoved open the door of a study. He was very mad; it looked as if Jaycee had pulled a double cross on him. He hadn't been in to his phone call as "Mr. Rommel." And the servant had orders to say the same thing now.

Moon, a squat plump man in his fifties with a benign face like a Buddha mask looked up from a desk. When he recognized Cross, he grabbed at a hat and coat on a nearby chair and tried to pull them to the floor. Cross sauntered in, spinning the automatic by the trigger guard.

**H**E BESTRODE a straight chair by the side of the desk, motioning the servant over to the other side. Moon smiled wearily. "It's all right, Henry," he said to the man. "Mr. —Mr. Rommel is a friend of mine."

The servant left. Moon gestured to put the gun away. "Certainly you have nothing to fear from me, Cross," he said in his rumbling voice.

"Maybe," Cross purred. "Only I don't like the double cross, Jaycee. I phoned before and you weren't in about an hour ago."

Moon scowled, then pointed to the hat and coat he had tried to hide.

They were literally rain-dimpled. "Is that proof enough?"

Cross combed his mustache with the nose of the automatic. Moon was in command of the situation now. He asked Cross what the important news was. Cross decided to shoot the works. Jaycee Moon had been out all right. But why had he tried to hide the hat and coat when he, Cross, just entered?

Cross put his other hand in his suit pocket, then brought up the emerald ring found beside the blonde corpse and rolled it thoughtfully in his palm. It was a square-cut emerald such as Donna Moon was supposed to be wearing when she vanished. "Jaycee, you knew your daughter was gone when you lunched with me today. But you didn't say anything about it to me."

The political boss put a big splayed hand over his mouth and massaged his jaw thoughtfully. He nodded finally. "That's right, Cross. I hadn't notified the police either. I still had hopes. Yesterday my girl said something about visiting her divorced mother. She lives over in Crampton, about a hundred miles from here. I thought she had spent the night there."

Cross shook his head, curling his lips in disgust. "No good, Jaycee." He rolled the ring faster on his palm. "You hired me because you've had threats—threats of violence. Yet your daughter doesn't come home—"

"All right, Cross. Maybe this is some kind of blackmail—or opens the door to it. My—my daughter is a psychopathic case. Not exactly insane, of course. But she is subject to periods of manic depression. She forgets who she is and will stray around for a brief period. I didn't want to give the alarm—to anybody—until I was certain she really had disappeared... By the way, that's a nice ring you've got there, only the stone happens to be an imitation. I—I'm quite an expert on jewelry."

**A**LL his theories were shot to blazes. Cross realized that as he drove back into the heart of the city, working toward The Bistro.



Moon was in the clear all right. And Simeon Cross felt like a full-fledged heel for having blackjacked that admission about his daughter out of Jaycee. The fact that the square-cut emerald was a phoney finished the demolition job.

Anybody who had robbed the real Donna Moon wouldn't have bothered placing a fake stone near her supposed body. As he drove by the marquee of The Bistro, Simeon Cross felt very foolish. The black cocktail frock: well, lots of girls wore those, even ones with the label of a smart New York shop on them. They could be picked up at charity bazaars and thrift shops. Plenty of girls were blonde, and Donna Moon wasn't the only girl in town who had gone in for dancing. The whole thing fell apart like a castle of cards.

He found a place to park his car a couple of blocks away and walked back to Nicky Dochene's place. Yet somebody had tried to plant a corpse on him. There was no getting away from that, or a corpse that some other parties were damned interested in getting their hands on.

And the only lead he had was cockeyed. A woman's voice on the phone that said Donna Moon had been in The Bistro before she disappeared. He glanced up at the sparkling marquee. It advertised Sonny Derby's orchestra plus a rumba outfit. Also a girl billed as "The Gilded Nude." He saluted the mammoth doorman and entered. A dyed blonde hat check pirate relieved him of his outer garments, sneering in a very refined manner at the trench coat.

It was the usually chromium-and-plate-glass cocktail emporium done in a decorous manner. A bar flanked one side of the foyer. Through velvet drapes he could see the main room and the dance floor. An impersonator was doing Eleanor Roosevelt at the moment contemplating a trip to Mars.

At the bar, Cross poured down a couple of Boilermakers and patently ogled the blonde with the fat man on his right. The bartender came over and tapped his arm. "You looking for somebody, mister?"

Cross congratulated himself on his

histrionic ability and nodded sadly. "Yeah, brother, and I'm about twenty-four hours late. Had a date with this blonde dish I'd picked up. I was supposed to meet her in here yesterday afternoon for a cocktail. Got held up."

"You expect a dame to wait overnight for you?"

Cross shrugged and toyed with the tenner before him. "Nope. But this is a tough one to miss out on. She was a blonde, very slim and not hard to take. All I knew was her first name—Donna. Brother, if I could just get a tip on her—or where to find her—" He flipped the ten-spot. "She must've come in here yesterday afternoon and—"

The barman's eyes got a vague poached-egg look. He shook his head. "No dames in here yesterday afternoon," he said bluntly. "This room was closed off. We was redecorating for the new season." He moved off down the counter.

CROSS left a half-filled glass, steered his way toward the men's room. Behind some side tables, he switched his course and worked over to the entrance to the now darkened main room. The "Gilded Nude" was staging her act, a weaving serpentine dance to a slow African beat by the band. She was gilt-painted from head to foot and looked absolutely naked, but Cross detected the almost invisible brassiere and panties under the paint. He had a cockeyed feeling there was something familiar about her.

"You can't carry those Boilermakers, fella," he told himself. The idea was insane. A narrow, black mask covered the upper part of her face so he knew there was no way he could recognize her.

The tempo of the music slowed seductively. The petite dancer was dropping into a crouch, undulating muscles weaving beneath her flesh. Then a drunk swayed out from the ringside tables, approaching her from behind. The next moment he had bent around her and twisted up her face for a kiss.

In a mere matter of seconds, the



waiters had the intoxicated patron and were hustling him out. There was little disorder. The patron was laughing as he tongued at the lipstick smudging his mouth. The girl, rocked off balance, was sinking into a crouch again at the finale. Then, as the drunk drew abreast of Cross, he decided he wanted an encore and tried to tear away. He was knocked against Cross, face striking the latter on the cheek. The next moment, they had the ejected one out in the foyer.

Cross put up his hand to his cheek. It came down with the scarlet smear of lipstick from the drunk's mouth. An unforgettable odor drifted up to Cross' nose. Frangipani! Then he knew why he thought there was something familiar about the gilded dancer. She was the girl he had kissed in his kitchen. He leaped forward as she retreated from the floor, bowing to the applause.

A waiter got in his path, then a captain, asking what table he was at. The slight Simeon Cross bowled them both over with astonishing force. He flew by a pillar, angled past the corner of the band platform. A lumpy-faced man stepped into sight and grabbed at him. Cross dodged. The lumpy-faced one threw a punch. Cross blocked it in mid-air and was by and lunging into the curtained corridor that led back to the dressing rooms.

"Frangipani! Frangipani!" he called sharply. "Please wait! I—" In the sliver of light coming from an ajar door he saw the gilded dancer turn. Then a man hurtled out of a cross hallway and bounced a heavy punch off the side of Cross' head. He reeled but darted in even as he hauled for his gun. He brought blood spurtling from the other's lips with a lightning-like hook. Then he was struck from behind.

## CHAPTER V

**A**S IF he had springs in his legs, Cross eeled sideward even as he was driven down. He slid by the man who charged to grab him from in front. Coming off his knees, he threw himself into the dim side

hall. He tried to get the automatic unhooked from his back pocket again, but a door opened and another man in evening jacket grabbed for Cross. The latter hooked a foot around to the shins sharply and flung the other flat as he went off balance. He had to get to Frangipani.

He darted a look behind even as he realized his own gun had fallen from his pocket. The lumpy-faced one was back there, swinging up an automatic himself. Cross flung through the door the last one had stepped out of.

He was in the night-club office. He had a glimpse of Nicky Dochene behind an ornate mahogany desk, a phone in his hand. He had seen the debonair impressive Dochene greeting guests when he dropped around before. Dochene was short and sleek with patent-leather black hair and oily eyes. He was the Latin type and had the stamp of a gigolo on him. Dochene was giving a number to the club switchboard girl.

"Heights 9-4414," Simeon Cross heard. Then the man stepped out from behind the open door and brought a brass-knuckled fist up to Cross' temple. . .

Cross heard himself talking. It seemed in answer to somebody else. Blurredly he was aware of the rain trickling down what he once knew for his face. Then he made out his maroon convert. In a vague way he realized somebody was helping him along. He had never taken such a beating in his life.

**L**IKE something in a ghastly mare dream he remembered the alley in which he had come to, after being dropped in Dochene's office. Then two men were holding him up, and the lumpy-faced one stood off and smashed fists like rocks at him. Once he had managed to rip loose, but a knee in his abdomen had sent him sagging against the side of the building again. After that it had been just brief pain-wracked spasms of consciousness. And then he had sensed being carried, finally dropped.

He heard the person at his side saying, "Now get away from here! And whatever you do, don't return to



your apartment. Hear, Mr. Cross? Don't go back home, please!"

He felt himself being helped behind the wheel. There was the acrid scent of spirits of ammonia under his nose. He made out the green vial. It was gone. Lips touched his cheek quickly. Then the car door slammed and he was alone.

After a while he propped his head up from the wheel. He managed to snap on the dash light. There was a certain fragrance in the car. He wanted to vomit as he poked his bashed face feebly. One eye was no good. The other picked out the smudge of gold powdery substance on the white plastic of the wheel. Then he put it together in a flash.

He recalled the voice of the person who had helped him to his car. A woman's voice. It had been Frangipani, the gilded nude. The gilt stuff on the wheel proved it. He sucked in his breath slowly. So she was on the side against him too.

Somehow he got the car started and turned out into the thinning stream of late night traffic. He was re-acting instinctively, like a wounded animal. It was time he called in the police, he decided dazedly. Somebody in this game held all the cards against him. They knew too much. He'd better call in the coppers and show them the second bullet in the door frame of his apartment, tell them all about the blonde corpse, too.

**A**FTER what seemed a long time he found himself parked in front of the Chelsea Arms. He half rolled out and moved across the big lawn from one corner of it. The rain had stopped but it was moonless. He put a hand in his back pocket, realized he had lost his gun. Put it in a side pocket, just to be sure. The gun wasn't there either. Then he realized something else. That was the pocket where the square-cut emerald ring had been. It was gone, too.

He slipped on the wet grass and lurched against the shrubbery in front of the building. Somebody came out of the glass doors of the

main entrance and walked swiftly out toward the street. Cross cocked his one good eye at him. He had seen the man before; he knew it even though he was wrapped in a long covert coat. Probably some tenant he had seen. He pawed through the doors. The night man on the switchboard was repeating a number into the mouthpiece. It reminded Cross of a number he had heard recently. Somebody had been phoning and—

It hit him like a bucketful of icy water. Nicky Dochene had been using the phone, as he, Cross, had barged into his office. The number flashed through Cross' mind. Heights 9-4414. It was fairly familiar. Then he had it; it was Jaycee Moon's number!

Simeon Cross pulled himself together. The thing was like a tonic, the tonic effect of danger's tocsin. He couldn't fit it in yet. But he knew it did fit. He tried to preen his mustache.

"Holy smokes, Mr. Crossly!" said the night man as he wheeled around, "You oughtn't to go on bats like this! Gees!"

"What bats?" snarled Cross.

The night man winked knowingly. "That sure was a hot party you threw upstairs this afternoon. The boys tried to hush things up. But it must uh been pretty bad. The boss was just here to see about things. That was him going out."

Cross moved unsteadily toward the elevator. "Give him my regards," he snorted. "Tell him—whatever his name is—"

"It's Mr. Dochene! And here's the key to the new lock we had put on your door, Mr. Crossly."

Cross went cold all over. Jaycee had told him he owned this building. But Dochene— He suddenly wanted a gun in a very bad way. There was a twin to the stubby automatic in a secret pocket of his travelling bag upstairs. He got into the elevator and started up.

When he let himself into the place, he snapped on the foyer light and sang out loudly, "Here I am—anybody! Don't shoot—I got a bad headache!" He walked in and nothing



happened. He turned on a living-room light. Nobody around.

**H**E WALKED stiffly toward the bedroom and that other automatic. He turned on the bedroom lamp. And he looked smack down into the cold face of the dead blonde. She was sprawled on his bed almost as she had been before.

"This ain't fooling," Cross said hoarsely, and he had had enough. He turned back to the telephone in the hallway, turned to face a stocky man with glasses who had stepped in from the foyer. The stocky man had an ugly revolver spiking from his hand. He lifted his hat and half nodded. A patch of court plaster was revealed on his short-cropped blond head.

"Mr. Cross, we would like to have a little talk with you, please!" He spoke precisely with just the shadow of a foreign accent. Two men in black overcoats took form behind him.

"Coppers again, eh?" Cross said. Then he knew better. The court plaster over a head cut told him. This man was the bespectacled one he had seen at the scene of the deliberate accident. The one who had dropped as he knelt over the form of the dead blonde on the sidewalk.

Simeon Cross put his hands halfway up and walked back into the living room. He was completely in a fog now. The other two fanned out to flank him after one had stepped forward to check him for a gun.

"Let's have it," Cross said.

The stocky one nodded again. "Assuredly. Please to cooperate and everything will be very simple. You had a body here before today, the body of a blond girl. We would like to know what your friends did with that body, please."

Cross shrugged. "I haven't got any friends in this town. Whoever took it is unknown to me."

The man stepped closer so his revolver tipped one of Cross' vest buttons audibly. "Let us waste no time, Mr. Cross. We are in a hurry. Your friends killed that girl. We shall have no compunction about killing you." He poked with the gun.

Cross looked more haggard than ever. He said, "Go ahead—and see what you learn from a dead man, mister!" He was angry in a cold savage way. The body was back there in the bedroom. But if they wanted it so badly he was damned if he'd tell them until he learned why he was being framed and worked over. They had not planted that cold blonde here originally. But they had known it was here, and they knew what was so valuable about the body.

Simeon Cross intended to learn the answers to those things before he put out with a thing. Even as he stood fencing eyes with the cropped-haired one, it came to him that while his bouncing corpse might not be Donna Moon, there was a connection.

"You are a very determined man, Mr. Cross," said the other slowly. The man on his right unbuttoned his overcoat deliberately.

**C**ROSS shook his swollen head. "Maybe. Don't know, fella," he drawled. That drawl was no affectation then. It was an effort for him to talk. "But right now, I've been through so damn much I don't much care what happens. I also am standing in the shadow of the electric chair—so there isn't much that can scare me."

"No-o?" The cropped-headed one motioned. "Manfred."

Manfred was the Joe on his right. Torso swelling inside his loosened coat and bullet-head sinking into his shoulders, Manfred reminded Cross of a weight lifter eager for work. Only it would be a tossing job instead of lifting. And Cross knew he was a stand-in for the weight. He smiled patronizingly and glided sideways with catlike grace as Manfred sprang.

But there was no percentage. The third man clipped him across the nape of the neck from behind with the side of a hand hard as a two-by-four. Cross wobbled like a rag doll and Manfred got his hands on him. Cross recalled afterward flying through the air. He hit something



and tried to pull himself up and saw it was the side of the big divan. Manfred was helping him up.

"It is very noisy," the one with the short blond hair said. "The radio!" The third man snapped it on.

Cross tried to throw punches. Manfred's stony face came at him through a fog and his knuckles seemed to bounce impotently off the face. Manfred's thumb was in his bad eye and gouging. Simeon Cross thought of how close the blonde corpse was to them; it was almost funny. Then he ceased any attempt at resistance. The sooner it was done and he passed out, the better.

But Manfred had other ideas. Cross felt himself hauled out of the blessed coma of unconsciousness as his arm was twisted in its shoulder socket. He was shoved backward and came to rest on the sill of the double windows of the living room. He braced himself tremblingly on his hands and summoned a lopsided sneer.

"Will two corpses help you chaps?" he husked. His left hand caught at the drape. Then he remembered, remembered where he had planted the .32 pistol he'd found in the bag of the blonde corpse. His hand worked up the drape as he forced a laugh. Manfred had drawn a rubber hose from his pocket.

"A man can die very—very slowly, Mr. Cross," the crooked-headed one reminded him. "We don't care about you. We just want to know about the body and—" He waved the automatic loosely. "If we don't—"

Cross' hand slid behind the drape as he let his head wobble and his knees buckle, looking as if he would crumple. "All right, boys. You want that body. Don't know why you got such a craving for a corpse but if you got to have one—"

He snatched his hand out. In it was the .32 he had secreted in the fold of the drape. But the blond-haired one sensed it coming. His automatic jumped up as the little one just behind him pulled from a breast pocket. Cross' .32 snarled. The blond, short-haired one went into a slow spin and lurched over to the

divan, holding his belly. He'd gotten it in the intestines. There was a sharp tinkling sound and a bullet hole appeared in the window a half inch from Simeon Cross' ear. His .32 answered and the little one's gun clattered to the floor as he grabbed his smashed arm.

Manfred stood staring stupidly with the length of rubber hose dangling, overcome by his surprise. Cross motioned to him. "Aw, come on! Try to take a crack at me, brother. Try. . ."

The front door smashed open and a torrent of plainclothes men and cops flooded in. Docker was at the head of them. . .

## CHAPTER VI

"LOOKS as if we got you at last, Cross," Docker said, bony face thrust out gloatingly. They had discovered the blonde's body on the bed.

Propped on the arm of a chair, Cross pulled a hand over his hamburger of face. He had already been relieved of his gun. He said, "You chumps! That body was planted here. Somehow these men knew it. Ask them—"

The squat police captain beside Docker of Homicide spiked a finger at the wounded blond-headed one on the divan. "That's Heinzmann of the former Nazi consul's office in 'Frisco," he spat. "The F. B. I.'s been circulating his picture since he got out of that internment camp."

"Goody-goody," Cross lipped. "And I'm not with those guys. Remember that!"

"Yeah?" sneered Docker. "Maybe. But they're in your place with this perambulating corpse and—"

"How the hell do you think they got those bullet holes in them?"

"Give up, Simeon," Heinzmann muttered. "Yes, officer, he is one of us. We had a little argument and—" He shrugged. "We are whipped. You must get me to a hospital at once, though."

Cross swore hoarsely and Docker bore down on him. "Sure, that's it, maybe. You got a corpse here. You



had it here when I dropped around earlier today. Of course, you didn't kill the gal. You don't know how she got here. Of course. But decent citizens notify the police when they stumble over a dead body and—"

Cross said, "If that body had been around before, I'd have told Captain Gerhardy when he phoned me over the noise complaint this afternoon," the cornered Cross bluffed.

Gerhardy shook his head. "I never called you, Cross."

Docker plunged back to the attack. "Quit lying, Cross! We got you red-handed now. See that?" He opened his hand with a square-cut emerald ring in it. "One of the boys just found that in there beside the body. It belongs to Donna Moon. That's who you killed, chump! Donna Moon—the missing Donna Moon! Who hired you, Cross? The Halbot bunch, maybe?"

A light began to dawn in Cross' mind. "That ring's a phony stone, Docker."

But the little man with Heinzmann forgot his role as he gazed at it with bulging eyes. "I have been in the gem-cutting business. That emerald is real—and very valuable. Extremely so!"

**S**IMEON CROSS met Docker's sneer. Another round for the Homicide Bureau chief. "The body wasn't here when you come earlier today, Docker. How did I get it back in this time then?"

Docker laughed shortly. "Same way you did earlier, probably. You and a big guy brought in this dead girl—Donna Moon—around noon-time. You was holding her up and you said she was drunk. That's the hall boy's story. We just squeezed it out of him! Now, Mr. Cross?"

The latter shook his head. "I didn't come back till late this afternoon. The hall boy couldn't have seen me. I had lunch with—" Then he broke off. Jaycee Moon would be no alibi. As he had said, if Cross got into a jam he would be forced to deny any connection with him.

Gerhardy put in a word. "The hall boy said he didn't get much of

a look at you on the way in. You had your coat collar up. But when he got a call to bring up your mail, you answered the door yourself. You were pretty cockeyed—dropped the glass you carried. And you had shaving lather on your face."

Simeon Cross sucked in his breath. They had him framed very nicely. That shaving lather stuff was neat, about as good as a mask without seeming like one. That was the kind of testimony in court that could slap him right into the chair. And then he saw one of the cops pass Docker that telegram from Halbot's campaign manager, Lockes. Docker whistled.

This looked like it. Cross rose to get ready for the bracelets. Even though most of the uniformed men were out scouting around the building, there was Docker and Gerhardy and a Homicide man and two coppers in the place. "All right. Just tell me one little thing, Docker. What made you think you'd find the body here this time—now?"

Docker smiled smugly. "We had a tail on you when you went into The Bistro. And after the rumpus you staged there, one of the waiters turned over a handkerchief you'd dropped, Mr. Rom—Cross. A blood-stained handkerchief. It's down at the city toxicologist's office now. Anything else?"

Cross was smiling. He knew they'd take him in. Sweat him some perhaps. But it wouldn't go the limit. Not after what Docker had just said. Docker motioned the uniformed men forward.

"Hold it, all of you!" Little Frangipani stood in the hall doorway, having just stepped from the kitchen. She gripped an automatic and it swept the room slowly. She had on slacks and a loose coat beneath the golden turban that matched her gilt dancing paint. And she had the drop on them.

**D**OCKER thought he was fast enough; he was desperate, too. He went for his police positive. Cross reached him in a surprising spring without seeming to gather



himself. He caught at Docker's gun arm, wresting it downward. The gun blasted and Docker pitched side-ward before going onto the carpet. The bullet had raked down his thigh and gone into his knee. There was a second report as the girl sent a warning shot into the ceiling.

Then it was over. Cross straightened with Docker's gun. He whipped over the writhing cursing Homicide chief and snapped an automatic from another pocket. He faced them.

"Gerhardy, I'm leaving. And I'll tell you where I'm going. The Bistro. I'll be waiting for you there. But I want a five-minute head start. Say no—and I'll take along one of your men as a hostage!"

Gerhardy swallowed. He started to swear. Then he nodded. "Okay. Five minutes. You got my word, Cross, dammit!"

Cross slid over to Frangipani. "And don't let that Docker get away. Nicky Dochene and Jaycee will pull him down with them when the trap closes!" Then he darted into the kitchen, dragging the girl with him. They left by the service stairs.

The taxi shot uptown toward The Bistro. Cross glanced through the rear window. There was no pursuit yet. Luck had been with them getting away from the apartment house. The shots upstairs had drawn investigating policemen away from the rear. They had gone out and around the garages and picked up the cab on the street behind.

Now Cross half turned in the seat and fastened a hand on the girl's wrist above the gun in her pocket. "Baby, you got a lot of talking to do. You took a shot at me. Remember? Get explaining!"

She looked sullen. "I just got you out of this last jam! Now get away and—"

He leaned over and kissed her full on the lips that smelled of jungle blossoms. He said, "I'm sticking around. Somebody tried to give me a head start to the chair. Besides, you're all dirtied up with it now. By the way, what's your name?"

"Jane," she said in a small, tired voice. "Jane Arma." A tear slid

down her cheek, and then the rest of it came. The dead girl was Iris Marks, her roommate. Iris worked as a waitress before she died—or had been killed. Suicide had been the first police verdict. Supposed to have shot herself in the room late one night.

"I didn't know about it till I got home from The Bistro myself. The landlady said she phoned me at the club but the message never reached me." She'd been told as she entered the house. But when she got up to the room, the officer on guard was out cold, slugged over the head. And the body waiting for the morgue wagon, was gone.

"I was afraid—terribly afraid," Jane said taut-voiced. "Iris had been running around with the man back at your place, that Heinzmann. Only Iris knew him as Bill Holden. Iris wasn't very bright, I'm afraid." Her voice trailed off a moment.

Holden claimed he was handling government contracts. He had Iris listening to the table conversation at her restaurant where many of the officers of the city's main war industry ate. Holden claimed they were rivals and he wanted to outsmart them.

"Then something made Iris suspicious of Holden," Jane said, lurching against Cross as the taxi took a corner. "She just hinted at things to me. Then she began to write things down. And she rented a safe deposit box for them. Once she said maybe the F. B. I. might be interested—if they didn't get after her first. And she had made a special secret pocket in her undies for that safe deposit key.

"That was what I was afraid of—of who might get that key."

Cross snapped in, "That's what Heinzmann and his boys were after all right!"

She nodded, plucking the cigaret from his mashed lips. He scarcely knew it; his own brain was going in a whirl. Jane went on. She was deathly afraid the dead Iris might be branded an enemy agent if she went to the police and told her story. She wanted to get the key first her-



self. Now she tapped her bag. It was there.

"You got it?"

"Yes. When I slipped in tonight I went into the bedroom first. I—"

Cross caught her hand again. "Wait. . . How'd you know she was there? What made you think Iris was there this afternoon?"

**T**HE morning after the death of her friend she had been walking the streets in her grief and worry, and she had seen a blue sedan with the tire shield missing from a slightly damaged rear fender. It had recalled to her she had seen that car, or one exactly like it, going around the corner from her place when she went home the night before. Going away in a hurry, too.

Wondering, she had gone back to inspect it just in time to see two men half lift a coat-swathed girl into it. One of them had been saying, "Dolly had too many old-fashioned, huh?" On a hunch she had grabbed a cab and tried to trail the blue sedan as it went away. Over in the residential section near the Chelsea Arms, she had lost it. Then, passing the latter place, she had seen the car and the two men walking the girl into the apartment house.

With a little work on the hall boy, pretending she was half tight and looking for some partying friends, she found what apartment they had gone to. Cross', of course. After that, she had slipped in the service entrance and climbed the stairs in the rear.

"But how'd you get into the apartment?" Cross demanded.

"Your maid was careless. The service door into the kitchen was caught on the latch."

"So then you tried to drill me, eh?"

She squeezed his swollen hand. "Not really! Naturally, I thought you were one of them. I shot to try to scare you away. I wanted to get the key—that was all."

## CHAPTER VII

**C**ROSS still wasn't satisfied. How'd she gotten in tonight. She giggled. She had taken

the key from the inside of the door when she had slipped away that afternoon. And the gun? It was Iris'; she had bought it a week before she was killed.

"Then she wasn't killed by her own gun!" Cross snapped. "At least that gun found near her—the .32—wasn't hers! Look. Did—did Nicky Dochene know Iris?"

Jane frowned puzzledly. "Yes-s. Iris used to drop into the club at off hours. I guess—"

"And you never got the landlady's message about her death—at the club—that night. . . Wait. . . Ever think how much your Iris looked like this Donna Moon?"

Jane pursed her lips as the cab wove through traffic. "Yes, they were the same type. Blond and slim and—"

Cross banged the seat as he told the driver to pull up at the corner down from The Bistro. Cross closed the glass partition between the front and back seats. "Donna Moon is mixed up in this somehow."

"You mean Mrs. Dochene?"

"What? Say that again, lady. Slowlike!"

She did. They were secretly married. Iris was crazy about dancers. Dochene had been a vaudeville ball-room dancer in his past. He had let it slip to Jane one night after hours when he was half drunk. "She's out at the Riverside Sanitarium now," Jane went on. "She's an alcoholic and has to be put away at intervals. I heard Nicky talking on the phone to a doctor there earlier tonight. She's incognito, under an assumed name, of course. They keep her doped up, I gathered. Why?"

The thoughts flashed through Simeon Cross' brain. Dochene married to the daughter of the boss of the political machine he was apparently siding against. It stunk. He said it out loud.

"What, Simeon? My next show goes on soon and—"

"This case isn't broken yet. Nicky Dochene had Iris killed—maybe did it himself. Him and Jaycee Moon, working together, were behind it."

"Wh-what?"



"Sure. That's it. Only they didn't know they were bumping off a girl accidentally tied up with a ring of enemy agents." He was thinking of the motor accident he had witnessed earlier that night after leaving the drugstore. When the body had been taken from the bunch who had stolen it from his car. The latter had been the Heinzmann crowd, of course. It brought back that mysterious phone call in the drugstore.

"You did that," he accused the girl.

She nodded. She had been out by the garages when he had slipped the corpse out, had ridden right along with him on the tire rack of his convertible and made the call from the lunch counter across the street. "I found out from the hall boy you were a private detective. And I wanted to throw you on another trail, Donna Moon's, so you'd leave Iris alone maybe. I was desperate."

"Yeah." He drew out Docker's automatic and placed it carefully inside his hat and put his hat back on his banged-up head. "Curtain going up for the last act," he muttered.

"Wait. I still don't understand why they wanted to put her body in your apartment. You didn't kill her! I had a hunch it would be back there again tonight so I came—"

"Thank God, babe," Cross muttered. "They put it there to frame me. She was Donna Moon apparently! There I was—ripe for the plucking. Apparently working under cover for Halbot." He told her about the telegram from the rival candidate, Halbot, in answer to one he'd never sent himself. And the fact that he was living in an apartment house owned by Dochene, not Jaycee Moon, who was apparently backing Halbot. "But he was like hell actually! So, it looks like I bumped off Moon's daughter. Then there was that phoney call from Captain Gerhardt who never called me. They wanted me to be caught red-handed trying to move the body. My car wouldn't start this morning so Moon had the excuse to drive me back home and send me in the rear way so

I wouldn't be seen. Oh, very pretty, very, very pretty. Yes!"

She tried to grasp it. "Maybe Mr. Moon isn't—"

"Yep. Right in it up to his ears. When I pulled the emerald ring on him tonight, he threw me off by saying it was an imitation. And it was stolen from me in the scrap at your club, and now we know it was no imitation. When Heinzmann stole the body—it disrupted their plans. They were just waiting to grab me with it. Very damn sweet—and dirty!"

"But the case wouldn't have stood up in court."

"Wouldn't have needed to, sweetness," the angry Cross said. "The smear would have been on. Election's in three days. Halbot would have been all dirtied up. Lost the election. Then Donna—Mrs. Dochene would have turned up. Everything would be cleared. Except me, of course, who would still be harnessed with a nice little corpse around my neck!"

She gasped. He was hustling her out of the cab. "Look, can you get me in to see Nicky?" She looked worried. Cross still couldn't come up with any concrete proof, she said. "I'll make 'em prove it on themselves," he came back, smoothing his mustache. "Gosh, I must look a mess."

She began to nod. "I guess I could. I can say you were a friend of Iris and want to apologize for the scene. But what—"

He half shoved her toward the entrance. "Get me in. And when you know I'm with Nicky, get to the phone booth. Call Jaycee Moon. Don't say who you are. Just tell him you're speaking for Docker. Tell him Docker said Mr. Rommel—get that name, Rommel—Mr. Rommel is wise and is spilling the beans. That he's gone to Halbot! Got it?"

Very ashen, she nodded. "All right, Simeon."

He scowled as he adjusted his gun-bearing hat. "Make it good, babe, if you want to get the men responsible for Iris' death. . ."



**W**HEN he walked into the foyer bar of The Bistro, the barman goggled as if he'd seen a ghost. Cross waved airily and ordered a Boilermaker. He was halfway through it when one of the sleek house bouncers in the usual dinner jacket tapped his arm. They went rearward, through a door just inside the main room, down a corridor. They turned again into the thick-carpeted hallway that ran across the back of the place, the one Cross had entered from the other end earlier as he chased Frangipani.

The lumpy-faced one, smiling innocuously, stepped from Nicky Dochene's office. Cross felt his escort's pocketed gun dig into his back. Lumpy Face ran over him and relieved him of Docker's Police positive.

"Little boys shouldn't play with these things," he said in a mocking simper. "Okay, Frank." The other went away.

"Can I see the great man?" Cross said meekly as he noted the room across the hall with the half open door. It was empty.

"Sure, Toots," Lumpy Face said.

Cross took off his hat carefully, plucked out the heavy automatic, and chopped it down over Lumpy Face's forehead. Cross caught the big man as he unhinged and dragged him into the empty room. "Part two coming up soon, brother. You and me have a date."

His hat was on but the automatic in his pocket when he stepped back to the door of Dochene's office again. He opened it and walked in on Nicky and three of his boys. Nicky beamed. "You don't owe us a thing," he said suavely. "All that was on the house."

Simeon Cross walked over to the desk. "Well, thanks. Now maybe it's my turn. I didn't come here to kiss your foot, brother. I'm wise. Shall I start spilling? Docker's already sung plenty."

Nicky's smile remained but it was a ghostly grimace. He motioned to two of the men and they left the room. The third one backed into a corner. Nicky nodded. "Say things—bluffer!"

"I'm onto the frame, Nicky. You and Jaycee were out to dress me up as a stooge to fix Halbot. I'm not playing, Nicky—unless I'm taken care of." He had a hand in his side pocket on the gun. Nicky knew it.

"You say a helluva lot of riddles," Nicky said.

Cross talked. He took him right down the line as he had reconstructed the case. "And now I've caught up with the corpse—and the boys behind it," he finished.

Nicky laughed. "Prove something, pal!"

"When the police pick up your wife at the sanitarium—"

Nicky shook his head. And Cross knew he had played it doubly safe and had Donna Moon removed from there.

**C**CROSS shrugged. "Well, Docker'll hang you all anyway—unless I don't back up his story. I—" A red bulb button flashed beside the humidior on Dochene's desk. That meant the police were outside. "Hold it," Simeon Cross snapped, levelling the gun in his jacket. "I hold the aces. Pay off, Nick." As he finished, the battered Simeon Cross swayed against a chair. "It's on the line,

Here's A Topnotch Baseball Novelet For You!

## SWING FROM THE SPIKES

By **CLIFF CAMPBELL**

You'll find it, along with other fine yarns, in  
the Spring issue of

# ALL SPORTS MAGAZINE



Nicky," he said to the night club owner. "How do you want to play it?"

Nicky smiled oilyly. "You say so but—" His desk phone tinkled. Eyes running over Cross, he picked it up. "—you can't prove a thing, my friend. Hello..." His swarthy face whitened. "What's that you're saying, Jaycee? Mr. Rommel is wise and—" He snapped his jaw shut. Then he nodded and hung up.

Cross knew what the call was. Jaycee Moon, of course. And Moon had passed on the warning as he had bet he would. Nicky stood up in his clothes that looked as if they were painted on. He nodded.

"Mr. Cross, you hold the cards. Your price is—"

The door over on the right side of the room opened. And Frangipani came in. Cross half switched and his left hand jerked up to try to warn her back. Dochene grabbed the split second for his play. His left hand flicked to a desk drawer. And his man in the corner dug for the shoulder rig inside his evening jacket.

Cross sent lead smashing from his pocket gun through the material of the trench coat as he twisted. The man in the corner fell back with a smashed shoulder, screaming through the gun reports. Cross saw his second shot slice up the surface of Nicky's desk, Cross himself dropping to his knees. Nicky's gun spiked powder flame and Cross felt his coat sleeve twitch and the left arm go numb. Then the lights were out as Nicky Dochene snapped a hidden switch on his desk.

The gun crashes hung in the air. Then Nicky's voice came. "I got the girl, Cross! You shoot and—"

Simeon Cross fired. Fired again. He shot at the flash of Nicky's diamond ring in the dark. The flash was still feet from the girl. The lush carpet seemed to sigh as a weight hit it. Then the door behind ripped open and a policeman's flash-beam pencilled the darkness with a yellow line. It came to rest on the

form of Nicky Dochene, sprawled on its back, a slow-waxing red splotch on the chest of his evening shirt. . .

GERHARDY superintended the passing of drinks in the boss' office after the smart Bistro had been cleared of shouting patrons.

"That's how it was," he said as he explained the cause of it all, why Moon and Dochene had wanted to frame Halbot and incidentally Simeon Cross. "Nicky had a gambling joint upstairs and several others around the town. The funny part of it was that Moon was his best customer. There was an argument one night and a dice player in a game with Moon got killed. We on the force had our hunch about it. Jaycee himself had done it and Nicky got the body out of the place. But there was nothing we could do."

A lieutenant came in. He had just returned from Jaycee Moon's mansion on the Heights. He shook his head. Jaycee had committed suicide.

"Sure," Gerhardy went on after a hard-boiled "Good riddance! We knew things. But the records of the case were in the D. A.'s office—Moon's hand-picked D. A. So if Halbot copped this election—and he was showing surprising strength—a new D. A. would have access to the file on that killing. Moon and Nicky knew what that meant. You see?"

Cross nodded and looked down at Jane's pale but smiling mouth. He didn't intend to forget how that lipstick tasted.

"But how did you figure Docker was in on the thing with them?" one of the plainclothes men said.

Cross preened his mustache over a swollen lip. "Back in the apartment tonight, he made a slip of the tongue. He started to call me "Mr. Rommel"—which was the give-away he was in on it!" He bent low over the girl. "How about finding a nice quiet place for a quiet talk and a quiet drink?"

THE END



Complete  
Novelette



*Figures were moving stealthily on the upper deck.*

# FRONT PAGE GUY

By ARTHUR MANN

Spot Murdock couldn't figure out how he happened to find himself in a St. Louis hotel, when he thought he was in Chicago—but there was a news story in this mystery somewhere!

**H**IS EYES opened and blinked at the sight of a swell layout, but a strange one. The night-table, lamp, telephone, ceiling fixture—they were hotel props, all right, but it wasn't his hotel. The place was too neat.



Sunlight streamed through the curtained window and he sat up. A slight buzz made his head feel heavy, but it wasn't a hangover; he wasn't thirsty. He wheeled around and sat on the edge of the bed. The walls were papered with birds flying over water. Freud had something to say about that, but he couldn't remember the significance. At the thought of paper, he recalled his own, the *Chicago Blade*. He reached a long, impatient hand for the telephone and pulled it back, then ran it through a shock of black hair that seemed to be fighting a losing battle with silver streaks.

Baggage! He peered about the room, and saw none. His coat was draped over the back of a chair, and his slacks had been tossed across the seat of the same chair. There was a collared shirt and a necktie. He had slept in his underwear and socks. He puzzled, rumped the hair again, and wondered where he had been or what he had done to flop in a Loop hotel for the night.

On the way to the bath room, he paused at the sight of a newspaper that had been slipped under the door. He picked it up and his gray eyes squinted to mirror his thorough bewilderment, for it was a copy of the *Globe-Democrat*, the morning paper of *St Louis!*

On the back of the door, confirming his worst suspicions, were the rules of the Jefferson Hotel, one of St. Louis' best. With a gasp, he dropped the paper and rushed to his coat. He plunged his hand into the inside pocket and withdrew the contents. The wallet still contained his police card. . . . "Clay Murdock, *Chicago Blade*." There was his draft registration. . . . "Clay Murdock, III-A." And, wonder of wonders, the wallet contained \$286 in bills. He rifled the pants pockets and produced a few more small ones and some change.

"Wow!" He gasped, sinking to the bed again. He picked up the telephone set.

"Jefferson Hotel. Good morning!"

"A. . . what time is it?" he stammered in a half-audible growl and studied his wrist-watch.

"Ten thirty-seven, sir. You left no call."

He nodded. It took a war to put St. Louis on daylight-saving time and parallel Chicago's clocks in the summer. "Could you. . . could you tell me what day it is, please?"

"Why. . . Monday, of course. Call room service for ice—"

He slammed the telephone into its cradle and muttered something about dames who think every late-rising male has a hangover.

"St. Louis!" He muttered aloud and lighted a cigaret. "What am I doin' in St. Louis on Monday, and what happened to Sunday?" Then he said, "And who's sellin' stuff as powerful as that?"

Now both long hands rumped the shock of hair, and he searched his skull for bumps or sore spots, for he could have been slugged and shanghaied. . . . or something. Finding no tender spots, his thoughts centered on the money in his wallet. Saturday had been pay-day, but he had collected no such sum, due to deductions by the cashier. . . . social security, victory tax, income tax, repayment of a loan in weekly doses. After that he had paid back a couple of borrowed fives, and so he couldn't have reached the Loop with more than a hundred bucks. Here he was in St. Louis with more than three hundred—

An assignment! And he had drawn expenses in advance, of course. Pretty big story, too, otherwise he never would have been trusted with such an advance. He'd been sent to St. Louis before. . . . on the packing house fire, the race riot, the cyclone, political stuff and once to do a World Series feature. Obviously, something was going on in the town. He studied the morning paper, but found nothing of local importance. He shook his tousled head in despair, and decided that thinking would be easier after coffee and breakfast.

**N**EWSPAPERMEN—the incurable type—are a peculiar breed of humans. A story, because of its limitless possibilities, frequently becomes a personal project into which



a reporter can throw all of his conscious thoughts and energies at the exclusion of everything else—his surroundings, his pocketbook and even his physical welfare. Give him a real story, with avenues of mystery and skulduggery, and nothing else matters.

This strange quality is not blind devotion to a particular paper, though paper-loyalty often plays a big part in reportorial rivalry. The fealty is to the intangible character—the thrilling appeal—carried by the story itself, which acts like a magnet upon the thoughts and feelings of the newspaperman afflicted. He rarely weighs the value of possible success or failure in taking steps and gathering the facts of story-development, for he is so quickly lost in the maze of ramifications and possibilities, headlines and deadlines, that his fired brain, often loaded past the plimsoll line, hasn't room for thoughts of personal gain. The race to produce the story first is all-consuming.

Through breakfast, Spot Murdock had only one thought: the story he had been sent to cover. Perplexing, of course, was the fact that he couldn't remember the precise details of the assignment, but he took that in stride, for he was an old hand at the game. This obviously wasn't a fire or a murder, for there would be a blaze or a body. It was something more subtle, perhaps a situation that needed stealth and investigation. Most probably it was such a story, because a parade of facts and interpretations would otherwise be churning within his head, which was now crystal-clear, and wholly without a buzz.

Besides, this was St. Louis and he was known there, perhaps feared. It was possible that they wouldn't cooperate, but in all probability they would, because the smaller-city writer always envies the star reporter from the big city. Sometimes it's hero-worship. Sometimes it's bread cast upon the water, for the smaller-city reporter always hopes to wind up in the big city, and taking care of the big frog might be reciprocated when needed.

That was why Spot Murdock barged into the office of the St. Louis *Telegram* an hour later with all the brazen effrontery of a fourth offender. But there was a decided absence of fawning, chiefly because of Joe McGurk, top man of the staff, whose freckled face, nestling beneath a thatch of red hair, seemed to pale at the sight of the Chicago reporter. The sparring began immediately as they lighted cigarettes to conceal mutual apprehension, plus an eagerness to feel each other out.

"Quiet as a Monday church," McGurk replied with a shrug in answer to Murdock's casual interest in 'things.' "You...you're down here on...politics, I suppose?"

"Oh...not exactly," Spot said and weighed the possibilities of a general term like politics. "Poked around Springfield yesterday. (He referred to the Illinois capital). But they're layin' low even there."

"Quiet in J-C (Jefferson City), too," McGurk added. "Guess the state boys all over are waitin' for the weather flags to be raised."

"Well...I'm at the Jefferson, Mac," Murdock said with a sigh of simulated boredom. "Might hang around for a few days. If anything stirs, gimme a buzz, will you?"

"Oh, sure," the redhead promised.

**B**UT as soon as Murdock's rangy frame had disappeared from view, McGurk was making his way through the bustling city room, because no newspaper sends a man meandering through the country without a specific goal or story in view—not with man-power at a premium. And man-power like Spot Murdock couldn't be turned loose that way. McGurk panted his message to a puzzled managing editor, Plasner.

"Your so-called friends at the FBI—they must've talked," Plasner muttered, and pounced the desk for emphasis.

"Impossible, boss," McGurk exclaimed. "They couldn't afford to—neither Althouse or his assistant, Carmody. They've promised me the



story, an' they'll keep their promise. They've got to."

"I wonder," the managing editor sighed. "Maybe the Chicago packers tipped off Murdock. Better call the FBI and see if there's been a leak. I'm counting on this Black Market story to push the war to the other side of the page."

McGurk was dialing fast. He tapped the desk as the call went through. He shouted as the office responded. Then he calmed down and, after a few pointed questions, hung up.

"A new guy's there," he said. "Fisher, just in from Baltimore. Murdock hasn't been there. Says Althouse and Carmody aren't back from a week-end fishin' trip."

"Doesn't sound good," Plasner muttered. "You'd better get out on the meat story and clean up what you can. If it breaks in Chicago first, our packers are left holding the bag. Go to it!"

**T**HE *Telegram* appeared on the streets an hour later with a first-edition headline crying, "Hint Vast Beef Black Market." It was an eight-column banner, supported by a two-column story on the right-hand side. Spot Murdock studied its ambiguity, noted its lack of names, places, and its generalities. The treatment was just enough to produce a headache, and drive him to the telegraph office. After all, he could claim to have lost his note book, even though he never carried a note book, preferring folded copy paper, as do countless other reporters. He paused in thought and then dispatched a feeler to Chicago in the long-shot hope of receiving a reply that would return some reason for his presence in St. Louis.

Back in Chicago the florid face of Ed Barrett, city editor, took on an apoplectic hue as he scanned the cryptic message.

Ed Barrett  
City Editor  
Chicago Blade  
Chicago  
Orders on story incomplete Stop

Please repeat and clarify Stop  
Waiting Jefferson Hotel.

Murdock

Just what Barrett would have done with his free-wheeling rage will never be known, because his assistant came in at the moment with a caller, one Caesar Veggio, who had something to say about the itinerant reporter. With hat in hand, he told a peculiar tale, though typical of Chicago.

"The boss is plenty worried, Mr. Barrett," Caesar explained. "An' he don't want no hard feelin's wit' th' Blade. But somehow some hop-headed mug rolled Moidock in th' Loop Saddy night—"

"Good!" Barrett exclaimed. "The mug should've mugged him."

"They was goin' to," Caesar went on, "on'y they happened t' peep in his wallet. One of 'em did. The other had beat it wit' th' dough. Th' second one, whose name I am not permitted t'reveal, Mr. Barrett, got cold feet an' confessed that he had knocked over Moidock. Well, we rushed woid t'th boss, an' he was sore. So he ordered dough put back into Moidock's clo'se, an' taken home."

"But he never got home," the assistant reminded.

"I know," Caesar sighed. "Th' fella' wit' th' cold feet put th' dough in Moidock's pockets an' took him down t'th Randolph Street Station. Y'see...y'see, Mr. Barrett, he'd been given a powder or two in his las' drink—"

"You boys have a lovely system," Barrett muttered. "Go on."

"Well...they ain't much more," Caesar sighed. "Instead of takin' Moidock home, this guy wit' th' cold dogs put him on a train, but he forgot where he bought th' ticket to. Th' boss says he's sorry, Mr. Barrett, an' he will do anything to help toin up Moidock...as a favor."

"That's overwhelming," Barrett gasped. "But you tell you boss that we've located Murdock an, everything's all right. Beat it."

Caesar nodded and backed away, still frightened by civilization. He



found his way from the city room, and then Barrett emitted a loud guffaw. He was still chuckling as he scribbled a telegram.

"Here," he said. "Send this wire to Murdock."

**S**POT MURDOCK gazed at the telegram in stark horror that was reflected in every line of his swarthy face and in each of the furrows that creased his brow. He read it again and again.

Clay Murdock  
Jefferson Hotel  
St Louis, Mo.

Instructions perfectly clear as written in orders Stop Rush story or come home.

Barrett.

He searched his clothes once again for the "orders," and, of course, found none; but he had no intention of going back. In fifteen years as a reporter he had never gone back without the story, and he had no intention of breaking the record, not while there were police stations and dumb desk sergeants to tip him off. And so he loaded up with cigars to dredge the new channel of possibilities.

But his visit to three police stations and headquarters with cryptic questions only confused matters, because each desk sergeant telephoned his good friend, Joe McGurk, and presently the *Telegram* office was droning with excitement, to say nothing of rage in the region of the managing editor's sanctum sanctorum.

Oblivious to all this, Murdock decided to pick up the vague sabotage trail mentioned in the newspaper headline. After a shave, he took a taxicab and headed for the river. Things always happened near waterfronts. You could find bodies and skulduggery and in all probability something of that nature was taking place at the moment near every waterfront, inasmuch as war provided men with money that other people wanted to get.

"Are you by any chance hot, buddy?" the cab driver asked.

"Always... in St. Louis," Murdock laughed.

"I mean we're bein' tailed," the driver muttered. "There's another cab been on us for the last two miles. I got a wife an' fam'ly. I don't want no trouble—"

"Turn right at this corner," Spot said. "Then turn back, an' we'll tail them."

The driver obeyed, wheeling to the right for a block and to the right again, heading back to town for a block. A third turn headed them toward the highway they had just left and they parked near the corner until the trailing cab had passed.

"Here it comes," the driver warned.

Murdock leaned forward, peered at the vehicle and its contents and then muttered a heart-felt oath.

"McGurk!" he exclaimed. "Why, the double-crossin', no-good..."

**T**HE driver pulled out, made another right turn and trailed the speeding cab, which disappeared from view behind the slope as they neared the river district.

"Cruise around," Murdock said. "We'll pick 'em up."

The driver obeyed, but protested suddenly.

"Here they come again, buddy!" he gasped. "Gimme my dough an' get out—quick. I don't want trouble. D'ya hear me? I don't want no trouble. I had—"

"You had what?" Spot asked when the driver paused.

"Nothin'." His hand was held out. "The meter says three bucks forty. Pay, or I'll drive right up to that cab—"

Spot handed the fellow a five-spot and left the cab just as the other seemed to have spotted them. Without reason, he ducked into the nearest doorway, and peered out, grinning as McGurk's taxi wheeled around and followed the empty cab toward the river.

"Well, that's that," he sighed, half-aloud.

And, as though echoing his voice, words floated from behind him. He turned and saw no one. He was in a tinsmith and plumbing shop, ap-



parently alone, because no one else was in sight, and yet there were voices. They were louder as he walked to the rear of the grimy shop.

"Five packages had to be dried," somebody exclaimed rather heatedly. "Dried junk ain't so good. Y'gotta fit th' discs so's the white's as dry as the red. An' rush it. Glassman says the Queen leaves early, which moves everything up. Okay, Phillips?"

Phillips evidently muttered an okay, which Spot didn't wait to hear. The meeting was breaking up, and it was a good time to get out of the shop. Who was the 'Queen?' *Cherchez la femme!*

It wasn't much of a conversation, but three words would have stood out to any veteran police reporter. To a desperate Chicagoan on the trail of a phantom story in St. Louis, the three words were everything. If you have been around police headquarters or the FBI, you well know that junk is not scrap metal, but dope. You also know that cocaine is packed in white paper and opium in red to facilitate handling, and to perpetuate an old Chinese custom.

He walked toward the Mississippi River, now seething with activity. Shipping had taken on the color of the old days. New boats were plowing through the stream, and old boats, scraped of barnacles, were re-suming careers of usefulness. Craft of all kind had been mustered into service to aid in the traffic of war, giving the old St. Louis port a color it hadn't known since the turn of the century.

"And why not?" Murdock muttered. "In all this...with everybody thinking of war contracts and shipping and sons and brothers fighting it out...why shouldn't they ship more dope than ever before? The FBI is busy with sabotage. The T-men are busy with counterfeiting stamps and certificates...Holy cow!"

Before him stood the Pleasure Queen, ancient river boat that had for years plied between St. Louis, Hannibal, Memphis and often to New Orleans. Repainted, refurnished,

glistening, she was steaming for a quick shove-off. And she would carry whatever Glassman decided to, and to whatever port he chose. With a colorful band, dancing, war-workers, and business travelers unable to obtain seats on the railroads...this was it! Anything could happen aboard, and in all probability did.

**L**IKE a pointer picking up the scent, his nerves tingled and his step quickened. He cursed McGurk aloud for trying to cover up this story, because that's what the black-market headline was doing. And McGurk was prowling around to see exactly what a visiting scribe could pick up. The heel!

Spot Murdock retraced his steps and headed back toward the tinsmith shop. The thing could be tied into a neat package with a little unmitigated gall, and nobody had ever accused him of lacking that type of fortitude. He passed the shop, peering through the dusty windows and, guessing that the others had long since cleared out, he cut back and entered the place.

His sudden appearance startled an elderly man who stared at him with bated breath. He was covered with plumber's grime and wore whiskers.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Something?"

"I...I was supposed to meet... Mr. Phillips?" he queried.

The old fellow nodded.

"I was supposed to meet two... a couple of guys here," the reporter said. "Glassman sent me."

"Glassman?" the tinsmith puzzled.

"Okay, drop the act," Spot said. "My train was held up in East St. Louis. Glassman's on his way up from N'Orleans. The Queen's leavin' early, and...he wants to make sure about the...the containers. Last time...well—"

"I know," Phillips muttered. "They leaked. The two...Fromme and Baker...they jus' left. They didn't say nothin' about you."

"They don't know me," Murdock replied. "I deal direct with Glassman. Now, how about the containers?"

"In two hours...a few minutes



more, maybe, but that's all," the old man promised. "I'm not a machine."

"You're paid for speed as well as skill. Will they leak?"

The tinsmith beckoned Murdock toward the back, and they proceeded into an adjoining workshop, a marvel of disarray. Every conceivable tool and something to use it on was scattered about the place—metal, pipes, joints, nuts and bolts. It was a fortune in odds and ends. Phillips picked up a globe of sheet steel, about a foot in diameter and soaking wet. At the top was a stout iron ring and a snap-hook, each covered with rubber as a silencer against clinking. The ball must've weighed about five pounds, as near as Spot could guess, and the two lips at the circumference were gripped by three snap-clamps. It was the most skillful of jobs, and Spot tried to open it.

"Ah-hah!" the old man exclaimed. "That is another trick. Only one released the pressure. The others merely hold. I make them dummies for quick opening. See? This is the key-clamp and it opens at the side."

He pulled the contraption apart and revealed two half globes, the shells being about 3-16 of an inch thick. Soldered through the center of each was a half-disc, dividing the area equally. The lips at the circumference were stripped carefully with soft rubber, which made the hollow globe airtight—

"Sh-h-h-h!" the old man gasped, and snatched the globe. "Someone came in the store. Wait here...no noise, please!"

Spot Murdock couldn't have uttered a sound, had he wanted to. His head began to throb again as he scanned the dimly-lighted room for a quick exit, in case. When he heard the voice of the visitor, his heart began a tom-tom beat that was almost audible outside. Of all people, it was Joe McGurk.

"A newspaper man came in here," McGurk was saying. "What did he want?"

"When?" Phillips asked.

"About...oh, fifteen or twenty minutes ago."

"You mean...he left here... alone?"

"Yes. He came in an' ducked out. What did he say?"

"You're mistaken," Phillips corrected. "Nobody was in here alone. Who are you?"

"I'm from the *Telegram*. I saw him duck in here. What did he say?"

"I tell you, mister," Phillips said, and a threatening quality entered his voice. "Nobody was here. If it's trouble you want—"

"Okay...okay, only I thought. Skip it!"

**M**CGURK'S footsteps disappeared as he closed the door behind him. Spot gathered up the jangled nerves as Phillips returned.

"You...do you let newspapermen walk in like that?" he demanded.

Phillips shrugged. "Too much caution would arouse suspicion," he replied. He picked up the globe again. "I had my son-in-law who went to college here, figure out the thickness of the shells for me. The weight of the ball is just three and a half ounces more than its displacement in water."

"Then your son-in-law better go back to school," Murdock laughed, "and learn his Archimedes."

The old man shrugged. "Well, you understand what I mean," he said. "It just barely sinks an' my son-in-law told me how thick to make the shell. Course, he don't know what it's for. He did it by arithmetic."

"That's a swell job, Phillips," Murdock ventured, slapping the old man's back. "Glassman'll be pleased. "Don't tell the others about my-bein' here. They talk a lot. We almost got nipped in Memphis last trip—on account of their talkin'."

"You weren't here on the last trip," Phillips corrected.

"I went East from Memphis," the reporter said, stalling for as much information as he could get. "It's been hot since the Feds increased their staff here."

Phillips nodded. "Well, it's a risky business," he sighed. "All the way across Mexico an' the Gulf."



Spot gulped. "Yeah..." he gasped, fighting his amazement. "Glassman an' I joined the caravan at Biloxi an' drove over in a bus. Well, so long, Phillips."

His head was reeling as he left the grimy shop, and he failed to notice whether or not McGurk was watching the place. In fact, he forgot all about McGurk. His sole interest lay in the *Pleasure Queen*, tied at the Municipal wharves in the shadow of the Eads Bridge. Stevedores were loading her with precious freight. Deck hands were polishing her renewed metal trimming. Near the port stern (she was pointing upstream) was a small float and ladder.

"Well, Sonny Boy," Spot muttered aloud. "It's hustle from here on out, unless McGurk has already tied the story into pink ribbon. I wonder!"

**H**E HURRIED up the brick slope that is the river bank and waved to a taxicab that was discharging passengers at the Erastus Wells, another rejuvenated old-time river boat. He was in the cab as they were paying the bill. As they left he called, "Get me to the Federal Building in a hurry or I lose my badge!"

Unfortunately it was five o'clock in the afternoon, and, by the time he reached the FBI, no one figured to be there. The taxi answered his every urge to step on it, but twenty minutes had elapsed when the brakes screeched in front of the Federal Building. Spot had parted with a five-dollar bill and was on his way upstairs before the driver could pull away. The reporter's hopes sank as he began a search through the cubicles, only to find each one empty. Reaching the Chief Inspector, however, he was rewarded with the sight of a human, even though it was only one signing letters.

"You the Chief Inspector?" Murdock breathed.

"No, I'm not. I'm assistant to the assistant Divisional—skip it. Who are you and what do you want?"

Spot entered and closed the door. The man was young enough—not forty—but he looked too timid.

"Can you handle a big case? It's in your lap, but you gotta work fast."

"What's your game?" the letter-signer puzzled. "Are you pigeoning for Mr. Althouse or Carmody? Or simply squealing to save your hide?"

"Neither, Junior," Spot muttered. "Where's the guy you're assistant to? I got big talk for big men—"

The telephone jangled. The man lifted the instrument, called a hello and then shook a head of sandy hair.

"No," he replied, "they haven't come back...that is, not here. They'll be in tomorrow. Yes, I know of you, Mr. McGurk...Who?... Murdock...Chicago?..."

He stared at his caller, who at the moment was struggling to still his thumping heart again. He reached for a cigaret and lighted one with a trembling hand as the man resumed talking.

"No-o-o-o...I haven't seen anybody by that name," the man said. "My name's Fisher...transferred from the Baltimore office... Yes, I know you've helped on the story... Yes, I'll remember that, Mr. McGurk... And if I hear from him, I'll call you... Yes, good-by."

Spot Murdock studied the features. He didn't resemble a G-man. He had the wispy hair and indoor pallor of an office sleuth. He looked weak—weak enough to telephone Joe McGurk as soon as he learned anything. It's a sure way of getting a newspaper break, and honorable mention in the papers means a whole lot to some types of Federal men...those who depend upon publicity and pressure for promotion. It was the place to walk out, and yet—well, you couldn't take Glassman and his crowd alone. You'd need—good grief! How many men and iron men would you need? Could this Fisher round up a quota? Spot watched him signing the letters, fought against talking until the man revealed something of himself.

"Baltimore..." Spot muttered finally. The indoor tan...the letter-signing...the confession 'assistant to the assistant Divisional—oh, skip it'



...all of it indicated a demotion. The transfer to St. Louis was that. Perhaps he had stepped on someone's toes—

"Baltimore's near Washington," Spot murmured.

"Went to school, I see," Fisher replied without looking up.

"All right, Fisher. Listen to me. I can get you back, not to Baltimore, but to Washington. You can give these two fishermen a sort of hot-foot. Want to tackle a round-up job?"

**F**ISHER looked up from his mail. He wore a sickly grin. He sighed. "Look, mister," he said. "I got work to do. You can't do me any good. Speak your piece and beat it."

"I suppose if I told you I could show you how to get Glassman and his crowd, you'd pick up that phone and call that fellow right back, eh? Get you a lotta publicity."

"Glassman!" Fisher gasped. "Is ... is *that* what they're workin' on? Are you ... you with Glassman?"

He rose from the desk, reached over and pulled a wall-switch.

"You can't leave without bringin' in every cop in the building," he whispered. "Now. Talk."

"I'm Clay Murdock... from Chicago," Spot said. "But if you touch that telephone, I'm dumb from here on out."

"If you don't talk pretty quick, you've been dumb since birth," Fisher countered. "What kind of money you after?"

"Not a dime. I'm hot on a hot story. The paper sent me all the way here for it. Somebody in this town is tryin' to doublecross me. Well, they won't, because I've got the story, but I need help. If you refuse, or if you call that *Telegram*, I won't say a word, an' nobody can make me. *And*," he jabbed a finger at Fisher, "you'll let Glassman slip right out of your fingers!"

Fisher turned even paler. Nervous fingers tapped the desk. He jumped as Spot tossed his wallet and credentials to the desk. He examined them and nodded.

"Okay," he whispered. "I... I won't call McGurk. Spill it."

"Gimme a gun and I'll go with you. You'll need at least two or three strong guys to take this crowd. But I've got to break the story in my own sheet, d'ya hear? Tomorrow afternoon an' not a word is to be whispered before. Okay?"

Fisher nodded. It was a desperate chance, but what else could a man do when opportunity knocks?

"Get your deputies together," Murdock whispered, "an' book staterooms on the *Pleasure Queen* from here to Quincy. I'll tell you the rest when we get aboard!"

**B**ARRETT, sulphurous city editor of the *Chicago Blade*, erupted in the manner of Vesuvius the next morning after a single glance at the assignment sheet. He demanded the scalps and jobs of everybody, but specifically of the night editor who had left. Then his right bower thrust the telegram before his bulging eyes. He read:

Send Costa and Berg pronto to Quincy Stop Have followed orders and have story Stop Tell them to bring plenty flashlights and plates for morning arrival Stop Hold eight-column lines and spread for junk story but big.

Murdock

"Hasn't anybody a brain around here?" Barrett roared. "Using up money and men on a drunken has-been. I'll clean up this place some day and have it the way I want it. Wire Murdock he's fired for good, and bring Costa and Berg back to make pictures here!"

Fisher and his gang had boarded the *Pleasure Queen* at ten p. m., and the FBI man was still overloaded with doubt. He didn't disbelieve Murdock, despite the reporter's refusal to come clean on the whole project. It was just that more could be gained on the gamble, and plenty lost if he ignored the story. Besides, the boat wouldn't pull out until midnight and, if nothing happened, there would be time enough to get off.



Spot Murdock kept a sharp watch on the wharf, partly for the Glassman crowd, but particularly for signs of McGurk. There was a chance that Fisher had sent a tip-off. If so—

"Fisher!"

The FBI workman was at Murdock's side, quickly, peering over the rail.

"That's Joe McGurk... there, leaving that cab?"

"It is?"

"You know it is!" Spot whispered an oath. "The deal's off!"

Fisher shrugged in the darkness. "You're the doctor, Murdock," he murmured. "I'm not due at the office until morning."

"Wait a minute... he may not come aboard." Spot was gripping Fisher's sleeve. "If he does..."

The noise of final preparations, the traffic of last-minute baggage and freight, and the sound of voices, music, dancers—all added up to convenient confusion. McGurk was scanning the big boat undecided as to whether he should board and search. Spot's gaze left him for an instant, attracted by movement in the murky darkness at the stern. The small platform... the ladder... figures were there... peculiar figures silhouetted in the glow of the wharf-lights and a blanket of stars overhead.

"You win, Fisher," Spot whispered. "You lucky stiff. Whether McGurk comes aboard or not... there's the story. Look... there at the stern. The business!"

**I**T WAS a daring maneuver, but seemingly a part of the movement and traffic of the hour. Five figures moved about in the dim glow. They disappeared into the shadow of the loading platform. One of them emerged an instant later in a bathing suit. With that Fisher and Murdock raced from the deck, downstairs and tip-toed to the stern of the heavily-loaded lower deck.

The bathing beauty was descending the ladder, carrying one of the globes. He disappeared into the water for what seemed to be minutes, but re-appeared without the sphere puff-

ing hard. With that a second diver emerged from the opaque shadow and carried another globe into the Mississippi. He was under water even longer and surfaced still carrying the globe.

"What's the matter?" Glassman had spoken.

"This damned hook is stuck," the driver panted. "Rubber... caught over catch. Loosen it."

Meanwhile the first diver submerged again with the third sphere. By the time he completed his task, the second diver was ready for his turn, and down he went, surfacing after he had hooked his burden to the stern of the big side-wheeler. Then they put on their coats in the darkness and filtered among the wharf traffic. Fisher called his men and identified them, for their clothes dripped river water on the gangplank. It was a simple matter to trace them to staterooms.

"Thanks, Murdock," Fisher whispered. "Thanks a million."

"Thanks nothin'!" Spot muttered, scanning the faces of the milling crowd aboard. "I'll lay plenty to one that damned McGurk sneaked aboard!"

He was eminently correct, but fortunately he spied the *Telegram* scrivener first. McGurk was at the bar, scanning all the faces, struggling to attach significance to each, and hoping to spy the interloper who had invaded St. Louis to snatch a story right from under his nose. Why had a Chicagoan booked a stateroom on the *Pleasure Queen*? That much McGurk had learned from the ticket office.

But Spot remained out of sight until midnight—until he saw McGurk scan the faces for the last time and then disembark just as the gangplank was being hauled from the wharf. With a sigh of relief, Spot walked to his stateroom for a welcome sleep.

Of course, sleep was out of the question. He tossed and rolled worse than the old *Pleasure Queen* herself. And he could hear the music and the laughter of the dancers until late. He thought of the steel globes coming loose, of the culprits getting



off at Hannibal, or Alton. Supposing they weren't on the boat at Quincy, or supposing the office had disregarded his telegram!

A hundred and one times he cursed his lot as a reporter, and as many times he called himself the luckiest stiff on earth. It was a downright miracle that he had backed into a tinsmith to duck Joe McGurk, and had backed into the story. Of course, there was no telling where Glassman intended to unload the steel globes, or if he planned to unload all three at once. Evidently the last batch had been ferried from St. Louis to Memphis, or was it from Memphis, north.

**B**REAKFAST was late and difficult to digest. Nervousness had tenanted his every joint, and he struggled to conceal a peculiar combination of apprehension and fatigue. Villages were slipping past them as they stole up the River, and soon Quincy would appear. Somewhere in the dining saloon was the biggest dope-runner in the middle West, and perhaps in the country. But Spot Murdock was ignorant of his whereabouts or his appearance. He had feigned indifference since entering the place, and, if Fisher and his ten deputies had spotted the crew, only Fisher and the deputies knew.

If there were a fight when the seizure took place, Spot Murdock wouldn't be able to fight back, because he wouldn't know whom to battle. If Fisher had made a mistake—

He tossed his napkin to the table with an oath, and paid his check to the waiter. He strolled the decks, watching both shore-lines, trying not to be too apprehensive or impatient over the arrival of Quincy. And it seemed as though an age passed before the first few scattered buildings of the outskirts came into view. It was then, just about twenty-four hours after he had awakened bewildered in the Jefferson Hotel, that he realized how swiftly things had happened.

The crowded steamer seemed to tremble with excitement. The warning whistle boomed, showering the open deck with drops of cold water. Women giggled. Men talked in low tones. Only then did Spot take a chance on searching for Fisher. He found the FBI man, unobtrusive and quiet, standing almost motionless in the crowd that had gathered around the entrance to the gangplank.

The big boat took on the importance of an ocean liner as the hull slid toward the dock. Townfolk on the shore set up a din of welcome. The captain rang a wild assortment of bells and the craft quivered as each order was obeyed in the engine room. Then, out of the din came the piercing cry of the deckhand:

"Quincy, Illinois!"

Spot Murdock never saw what happened, for it happened so quickly and quietly as to defy detection. In fact, neither Glassman nor his four men realized what had happened until they started toward the gang-

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## SHERIFF ON THE SPOT

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# DOUBLE ACTION WESTERN



plank. Then, feeling a tug at each waist, they struggled. Each was double-handcuffed to a deputy at either side.

"Listen, Glassman," Fisher said to a small, bespectacled man of about fifty. "The whole narcotic squad has come down here by plane from Chicago and, if you start any fuss, you'll be well drilled. Want to do it quietly, or settle it aboard ship?"

"Who's the stool?" Glassman muttered, and Murdock recognized the voice. "One o' my men?"

"It'll all come out in the wash," Fisher said and motioned to his helpers. "Dig deep, boys. See what you find."

Only Glassman was armed, a distinctive feature of his racket. He disliked violence and notoriety. Murdock liked it that way, too, because it would obviate suspicion on the part of any local newsboys who happened to be handy. He threaded his way through the crowd and rushed down the gangplank and into the arms of Costa and Berg who were waiting with cameras and flashlights ready.

With that Fisher kept his part of the bargain. As the excitement of an ordinary boat-landing ran high near the bow, he ordered the divers under water to recover the huge spheres. As they performed the unusual chore, Costa and Berg snapped a pictorial record, for the Chicago *Blade* as well as the United States government. After that came individual portraits, with Fisher featured in plenty of advantageous poses. As a matter of record, all three spheres were opened and the contents photographed. The chore finished, Fisher marched his quarry to town for a quick plane-flight to Chicago, and he made certain that the two planes contained room enough for the photographers and reporters.

"FORMS still open?" Murdock gasped as he barged into the city room of the *Blade*.

"Murdock, you drunken bum, get to hell out of here!" Barrett shouted and his features turned a salmon red.

"What is this, a gag?" Spot shouted. "Didn't you get my wire?"

"Where's Costa and Berg?" Barrett demanded. "A picture star's coming in from Hollywood and we can get some cheesecake."

"Listen, boss, this is ten times more important than leg pictures," Murdock muttered, and opened his typewriter. "Costa an' Berg are up developin' the greatest set of plates that ever came into this office. A quarter of a million dollars worth of junk—an' pictures of the whole set-up, plus the cast of characters. When you send Murdock out on a story, he comes back with it. Hold those lines for my lead."

He shoved copy paper into the machine, lighted a cigaret, looked at the ceiling, ruffled his hair and began to write.

"Boy!" he called and tore out the lead within a few seconds. "Boy, give this to Friedman. Tell him to read fast, because that's the way it's comin'."

He wrote with a strange fury that seemed to pour the "takes" from his typewriter in a cascade. Barrett glared in silence as he read the first few, and then waved them on to Friedman, who corrected minor typing mistakes and passed the stuff to the composing room. The city editor was trying to puzzle the whole thing out, struggling to remember now whether he actually had sent Murdock down there. But of course—

The story continued, page after page, and he was still writing "ad-lead junk" when the first bulletin edition had come out on the street. He wrote as one possessed, oblivious to all else in the room, in the world, and entirely without interruption, except for once when the copy boy said:

"Spot... a guy's on the phone... long distance... St. Louis... name's McGurk. Wanta speak to him?"

Spot shook his tousled head rapidly from side to side and kept on typing. Then he barked:

"Tell him I said the place is as quiet as a Monday church!"



# MURDER WORE A SEALSKIN COAT

*An arrow was embedded in the door, shaft quivering!*



**By Jay Karth**

●  
*Death stalked like a cat in the dark here at this lonely radio station, for somewhere lay the map to old Pribiloff's fabulous treasure!*  
●

**J**OHN LAWTON shivered, although the air blowing into the Bering from the North Pacific was warm as it caressed his bronzed cheeks. Winter ice and snow had long since disappeared. His sharp blue eyes swept searchingly over everything within range: The oily skinned, slant-eyed Aleut' Indians, the three white men standing near the center of the dock, the sprawling,



weather-worn village spreading up the slope from the landing, and the four tall masts of the radio station in the flat, a quarter of a mile from the village. There was great danger here, Lawton knew. He could feel it in the air. But from what direction would it come? The feel of the police special resting under his left arm-pit was reassuring.

One of the white men stepped forward. He was bulbous-eyed, short, rotundish. "You are Lawton, the new mechanic?" His voice was surprisingly mild, with a slight nasal inflection. "Yes."

"I am Asa Hungerford, the superintendent here." He extended a hand which Lawton found limp and damply cold. Hungerford turned to his two companions. "This is Chief Radioman Sanders, who has charge of the radio station, and Dr. Mason, who I swear keeps us alive simply to use as guinea pigs... eh, Doctor?"

Mason, a large, ruddy man with penetrating grey eyes, laughed as he shook hands with Lawton. "You'll make a good specimen, Lawton."

"Like... Joe Patrick, Doctor?" John Lawton said.

For a moment the air was explosive. Violent anger flushed Sanders' cheeks until they were almost purple. Mason's eyes turned agate cold, while Hungerford's bulbous orbs were suddenly bottomless pits.

"Steady, gentlemen," the superintendent's mild voice broke the poignant silence, "This is Mr. Lawton's first day on St. Paul's Island."

Mason expelled a deep breath. "Sorry. My fault."

Sanders, a wide scar on his chin alternately turning pink and white, remained smokily silent, and did not offer his hand.

"I'll show you to your quarters, Lawton." Hungerford issued orders to the Aleuts' to take care of Lawton's luggage, then turned up the hill. They had gone only a few steps when he noticed that Lawton was carrying one of his bags.

"The boys could take your bag."

"No thanks," Lawton said, "I'll take it." He felt Hungerford's eyes strike him searchingly.

**D**IRECTING him to a room in the bachelor dormitory, Hungerford looked at his watch. "You've time to clean up. We eat at six." The superintendent turned toward the door, but paused. "And Lawton... it isn't necessary for me to tell you that firearms are taboo in the Pribilof Islands, especially here on St. Paul, during fur-sealing season. If you want target practice, you will have to take up archery... we have some excellent equipment here."

"Thanks... the rookery is quite close by, isn't it?"

"The largest rookery in the Islands, the Karanina, is a half mile from the village. Two hundred thousand fur seals! They are the treasure of these Islands. Thirty thousand furs will go out this year to warm the shoulders... and hearts... think of it... of thirty thousand women!"

"How about the treasure old Gerasim Pribilof is supposed to have buried here?" John Lawton said.

A cold light appeared in the little superintendent's eyes. "I'd forget such fairy tales, Lawton. Stick to your mechanics."

John Lawton stared for a long moment at the center panel in the door through which Hungerford had passed. Then he shrugged.

Deep thought lines creased his forehead as he shaved and distributed his limited wardrobe in the drawers of the old oak bureau. Hungerford, Mason and Sanders, all sharp men, and all strangely affected at mention of Joe Patrick.

Joe Patrick... Lawton shivered again... for Joe Patrick was dead, and Lawton was stepping into his shoes... a dead man's shoes! A cock-eyed world! Joe Patrick, one of the Department of Commerce's ace investigators, who had cheated death a thousand times, sent to St. Paul to check a suspected shortage in the fur seal pack, and supposedly cut to pieces by those very same seal, in that rookery just a half mile from where he, John Lawton, stood at this very instant. Cut to pieces by infuriated bulls when he stumbled into a harem! ... It was so screwy it smelled... because seals are not red meat eat-



ers! And Patrick's bones, according to the wireless report, had been picked entirely clean! Identification had been accomplished by the discovery of his watch and a card case, with shreds of his clothing, among the bones.

And now he, John Lawton, because he was a fair mechanic, in addition to being an ace Department investigator, was on St. Paul to find out how and why Joe Patrick had died, or pay the penalty of failure . . . death!

**H**E HEARD a knock at the door. It swung open, and he saw Sanders' big frame in the opening. "I owe you an apology, Lawton."

"Forget it." Lawton extended his hand. "I spoke out of turn."

Sanders nodded briefly. "I'll show you to mess."

"Right. Be with you in a jiffy." He turned his back to Sanders to cross the room for his coat.

"Lawton," there was a strange note in the big radioman's voice, "did you know Joe Patrick?"

Lawton's face hardened. Did this mean something? His sharp blue eyes were bleak as he stared through the room's one window. "No," he lied. "Why?"

"Just a hunch I've had about him. I think he was more than just a mechanic! And I think something happened to him before he . . ." Sanders paused, ran long fingers through his hair.

"Before he was killed, you mean?" John Lawton said, softly.

Sanders ran a wet tongue over his thick lips. His eyes rolled curiously. "You should investigate Dr. Mason first, Lawton."

"What are you talking about?" John Lawton said. "Do you think I am a policeman?" He laughed shortly. "Don't be a fool, man. Let's go eat. I'm hungry."

Returning to his dormitory an hour later, John Lawton found a darkened hallway. He located the light switch, but discovered at the same time that the circuit was out. Feeling his way along the wall he reached the door to his room. Entering, he

crossed to the table where he had placed his bag, intending to get his flashlight.

The bag was gone!

It was at that moment that he sensed another presence in the darkened room, and then all the devils in hell exploded in his skull.

When he regained consciousness, his room was flooded with light. Climbing shakily to his feet, he stood wide-legged in the center of the room and gingerly rubbed the big goose-egg on the back of his head.

Opening his tightly clenched left hand, he saw a mackinaw button, torn blue threads sticking out of its four eyes.

**M**ORNING, in addition to a throbbing head, brought promise of action. Shortly before noon, just after Lawton had given the station tractor a test run out across the flat following an overhaul, and returned the big machine to the shop for final adjustments, an Aleut' Indian whom Lawton had not seen before, slipped into the shop.

"What do you want, Pete?" he said.

"My name is Serge, if you please, sir, Mr. Lawton, Serge Chicagoff."

Lawton saw that the Indian was young, somewhere in his early twenties.

"You speak good English, Serge."

"The Uncle Samuel is good enough to operate school on St. Paul Island for native, sir."

"Yes, Serge, our Uncle Samuel is aces."

"You beg my pardon, sir?"

"I mean he's a good friend . . . a fine fellow."

The Indian nodded his head in agreement. "Is so . . . is so."

"Do you want something, Serge? Or . . . or do you just want to visit?"

"I want very much something, Mr. Lawton . . . very much so."

"Well?"

"You know this Mr. Patrick? He have your job before you have it . . ."

"What about Patrick, Serge," Lawton said, softly.

"I not think he dead!" The bomb-shell left Lawton breathless for a



long moment. Then he caught the Indian boy by both shoulders.

"But they found his body... why do you say this?"

"Not Mr. Patrick's body! Was my father's body. I am double check." At a sudden thought, the boy trembled. "You not tell what I say, please, Mr. Lawton."

"Of course not, Serge, of course not. You tell me more, I give you many cigarettes."

"Is good. My father, he have only one leg! Mr. Patrick have two. When I see bones with only one leg in seal rookery, I think, by God, that was my father's body! That night I go to his grave... I right, he's gone! I know this wrong, because I see him put there last week!"

"But what about Joe Patrick, Serge?"

"You got tobacco now?" Serge was driving a bargain.

Lawton impatiently dug a half empty package out of his pocket. He handed them to the boy, who lighted one and placed the package in his pocket. Inhaling, he grunted, "Very good. Thanks."

"Patrick, Serge?"

"Me think pretty cockeyed sure Snow Spirits have cotch! They trade my father's bones for Mr. Patrick!"

"Yes."

"Long ago, before white man come to Fur Seal Islands, Aleut' have no wood to build house, so live in ground." The Indian youth pointed toward the north, in the direction of the rookery. "Snow Spirits use now... they have Mr. Patrick there!"

"How do you know this, Serge?"

"Hear talk!"

"Why haven't you told Mr. Hungerford?"

Mention of Hungerford's name frightened the boy. "No, no, not tell big boss man... not tell!"

"Why not?" Lawton pressed.

"I afraid! Big boss man make Serge go with him to home of Snow Spirit! Serge go there... he die!"

**A**ND that was all that Lawton could get out of him. However, at the promise of more cigarettes, he elicited the promise that he would

meet Lawton at the entrance to the machine shop at nine that evening, and point out the way to the old underground dwelling places of his people.

Shortly before nine, Lawton slid a fresh clip into his blunt, black automatic, tried the safety twice, and slipped it into his shoulder holster.

During the late afternoon a heavy, creamy fog had blown in off the ocean from the northeast, and when he slipped quietly out of the dormitory the nearest buildings were mere shadow outlines.

He made his way down the narrow street, the deep combined roar of surf and seal herd neutralizing the sound of his boots on the hard packed earth.

He reached the machine shop at nine. There was no sign of the Indian boy. Lawton was walking impatiently up and down in front of the big door when a mild voice brought him up short:

"Waiting for someone, Mr. Lawton?"

John Lawton turned quickly, his hand sliding toward the gun resting under his arm. "I work here, Mr. Hungerford," he said softly, "and you?"

"I do not answer for my actions, Lawton." The mildness of the tone softened the rebuke. "However, I'll tell you. I've lost one of my best natives... Serge Chichagoff!" The man's bulbous orbs seemed to glow through the fog. "He hasn't been seen since he walked into this building late this morning!"

John Lawton felt a sudden premonition of danger. Blind instinct caused him to move involuntarily back toward the machine shop door.

Hungerford followed him, saying, "What's wrong, Lawton? Have you been med..."

Lawton heard a sudden twang, a dry rustling sound, a thud, and Hungerford groaned once and slumped to the ground. An arrow was imbedded solidly in the wood of the machine shop door, shaft quivering.

Working swiftly, Lawton opened the sliding door, hauled the other man into the shelter of the shop. Switching on a light, he saw that the



injured man was not seriously hurt. The arrow had plowed a deep furrow across the top of his skull, and he was bleeding slowly, but otherwise no harm had been done.

Lawton felt a great emptiness in his stomach as he realized that the arrow could have been intended for him! Had he remained standing in the same spot for another ten seconds it would have pierced his throat!

**T**HIRTY minutes later, with Hungerford in Dr. Mason's care, Lawton left the village and walked toward the radio station, in the flat. He kept his hand on his gun, straining eyes and ears to pierce the fog hemming him in. It was with a feeling of relief that he finally saw the lights of the station buildings break through the eerie, swirling mass. Passing the dormitory housing the station personnel, he entered the main building.

"Sanders around?" he inquired of the red-headed operator seated before a bank of receiving sets, headphones hanging idly around his neck.

"He was in here until five minutes ago," the redhead said. "Think he's out in the battery room now." He nodded toward a door on the opposite side of the room.

"Thanks," Lawton said.

"Sure."

Crossing to the door, Lawton opened it gently, slipped through and pulled it shut behind him. At the far end of the long room, at another door, he saw the big radioman, standing with his back to the room. He was either on his way out or was just returning from the outside.

"Oh, Sanders," Lawton said.

Sanders turned, rather swiftly, Lawton thought, but his face was perfectly calm, and broke into a smile as he recognized Lawton.

"Hello there," Sanders said, "you're just in time to help me with this battery solution."

Lawton noted that Sanders was wearing overalls and long gauntleted gloves, the common raiment of men who handle the powerful battery acids.

"Working rather late, aren't you?" Lawton leaned against a work bench.

"Nothing else to do up here," smiled Sanders, "except sleep, eat, and watch an occasional Fisheries or Coast Guard boat drop supplies, or a new mechanic..." While talking, Sanders had been moving slowly away from the door. Removing the gloves, he tossed them on the table against which Lawton was leaning watchfully, then faced him, standing loosely. "Why?"

**L**AWTON'S voice was very soft. "When you work late at night, do you always work out here, Sanders, or do you mind, I'm just asking... or do you, perhaps, try your hand at other sorts of night work, such as bag lifting, or moonlight archery... only there isn't any moon."

"Why, you..."

"Steady, Mister... steady." The wicked muzzle of Lawton's gun winked into view, pointed at the big man's middle. "You left your calling card last night."

Sanders' face flushed. "There are a dozen..." He caught himself, clamped his lips tight.

"A dozen mackinaws on the Island, Sanders, is that what you mean?" Lawton smiled, "but this button..." He spread the fingers of his left hand, revealing the button, "this button was not my visitor's only identification."

Sanders' nostrils flared. The scar on his chin turned white.

"Careful. Don't do it." Lawton remained watchfully silent then until he saw the other man loosen, then he continued, "That scar on your chin... I didn't realize until today that I'd felt a scar last night before I was slugged. Incidentally, what in hell did you use, a \*seal billy?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I won't try to draw you a pic-

---

*\*A smooth, blunt club is used to kill the fur seal. The death blow strikes the seal in the center of the forehead. This prevents damage to the valuable skin.*



ture," Lawton said grimly. "I know you have my bag, and I know, too, that if you don't start talking damned quick you're going to be facing a rap for attempted murder and robbery."

"You talk big, Lawton. You seem to forget we're on a two-by-four Island in the middle of the Bering Sea, and that Asa Hungerford is the only law we have here."

John Lawton held out his hand. Sanders read the inscription on the small nickel badge. He whistled softly between pursed lips.

"Was the only law here, you mean," John Lawton said, softly.

"Yeah, that's right," Sanders said, slowly, "that's right, isn't it." He scratched the lobe of his right ear. "You're right, Lawton, I have your bag. So many screwy things have been happening here that I had to find out if you were on the level. I had just entered your room when you returned from mess, and I popped you one so that you wouldn't catch me redhanded."

"You're sure you weren't looking for a map. . . . a map showing the location of Pribilof's treasure?" Lawton pocketed his gun, and lit a cigarette, offering the case to Sanders, who took one, using thumb and forefinger to lift it from the case. Lawton saw that the fingers were steady.

"You're been listening to some of this native guff," Sanders said, as he leaned forward to light his cigarette, "I suppose they've sold you on their Snow Spirits, too."

"Not exactly," Lawton said, "I was just remembering what the boy, Serge Chichagoff, told me."

"Oh. . . ." Sanders said, questioningly.

"I suppose you know he has disappeared, along with Patrick, and perhaps others."

Sanders whistled between pursed lips.

"Sanders, you know this Island, don't you? I mean the old section, where these natives lived before we . . . ah, civilized them?"

"Like a book."

"Natives stay pretty well away from there now, don't they?"

"Yeah. They say their Snow Spirits

live there and do not allow anyone else around, on penalty of death!"

"You believe that?"

"Of course not. Plain guff."

LAWTON nodded approvingly. "I'm going out there tonight and look around. I'd like for you to show me the way. How about it?"

"Sure." A slow smile spread over Sanders' face.

"Good." Lawton stared at Sanders for a moment, then he said, "Sanders, you're not very friendly with the superintendent. Why?"

Sanders shrugged. "I don't mind telling you," he said. "I tried to tell him something was haywire here. He told me to mind my own business." He shrugged again. "So I thought what the hell, I'll play this my own way. I've suspected all along that there was something wrong with the way Patrick died. More than a thousand seal skins have disappeared from the dock storehouse this season.

"I had it doped that Patrick was up here to find out where those skins were going. I think Hungerford suspected Patrick of having headquarters connections, too. He probably had it figured that if Washington sent an undercover investigator up here, he was just as much under suspicion as anyone else. I think it just about drove him nuts.

"Then, there is a rumor among the natives that he has the Pribilof treasure! Whatever it is. The story goes that he found it years ago and moved it to a more secure hiding place. The natives claim that this made the Snow Spirits angry, and that they have brought back the spirit of Pribilof to get his treasure." Sanders dropped his cigarette butt, ground it under his heel. "Of course, if he really does have the treasure, I can't blame him for not wanting people prowling the Island after nightfall."

"How long has Mason been here?" Lawton asked.

"Three months. Came up last supply ship. Replaced old Doc' Stevens, who went out because of poor health, so they say."

Lawton turned toward the door.



"Meet me at my room in about fifteen minutes."

**L**EAVING the radio station, Lawton made his way through the fog to Hungerford's house. He found the place in darkness, and the sound of the surf and the roar of the seal herd was the only response to his knocking against the heavy door. Then the door swung silently inward on well oiled hinges, and Lawson felt the hackles rise on the back of his neck as he stared into the pitch black hallway. From somewhere out in the village a mournful native chant reached his ears as he threw a beam of light from his flash into the black void and moved forward.

Half way down the hall, a faint sound, as of ripping cloth, brought him around on the balls of his feet, automatic waist high. The sound came from the room to his right. He slipped quickly through the open door, his flash probing into every corner. There was nothing.

But then the sound reached his ears for the second time! He saw movement behind a davenport across the room. Lawton took two cautious steps forward, then relaxed. A half grown kitten, its sharp claws dragging long furrows in the thick rug, backed into view from behind the davenport.

Lawton watched the kitten for a moment before turning toward another door on the opposite side of the room. That feeling of danger persisted. There was something wrong in this house! And then, as he passed through the door, he knew: He was in Hungerford's bedroom. And death was his companion! The little superintendent lay sprawled in the center of the room, his head resting against the foot of his bed! His wide, jutting eyes were fixed on the ceiling.

He had been stabbed. Stabbed twice, through the heart. Rigor mortis had not yet set in, and Lawton fixed the time of death at less than an hour before he found the body. This meant that he was killed almost immediately after Lawton left him in Mason's care.

John Lawton's face was very grim as, with rough gentleness, he spread a blanket, pulled from the bed, over Hungerford's body. It was grimmer still when he left the house a moment later and walked purposefully toward Mason's infirmary.

**M**ASON was gone! Lawton, after knocking at the door and receiving no response, kicked in the lock and entered. A search of the three infirmary rooms and Mason's quarters, adjoining, revealed no trace of the missing man. Eyes bleak, Lawton went through the rooms a second time, searching for something he knew must be here. But he had almost given up when, while on his knees, tapping the lower portion of the library wall, he espied a dark object beneath Mason's bed, in the adjoining room. Springing to his feet with an ejaculation of triumph, he crossed to the bed in six long strides. Swinging it aside, he saw revealed a compact radio receiving unit. Suddenly he whirled at a sound, his gun muzzle boring at the door.

It was Sanders, staring wide-eyed at the receiving set. "I'll be damned," he breathed.

"What are you doing here?" Lawton's voice was sharp.

"I heard you break down the door, and figured I should find out what was happening," Sanders said, coolly.

Lawton looked at him for a moment, then shrugged. "Look through these rooms and see if you can locate a radio transmitter."

"If Hungerford walks in here. . ." Sanders began.

"Hungerford is dead," Lawton interrupted him, his voice grim, "and everyone else will be dead unless we get this maniac soon."

Sanders was silent.

A five-minute search proved fruitless. Lawton stood over the receiver. "Wound for half-meter reception, isn't it?"

"About that," Sanders agreed.

"You have anything down at the station that'll tune that low?"

"No. Fifteen meters is as low as we can go."



"Stuff this set would pick up would be directional, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"But why," Lawton said, "why just a one-way set?" He was plainly disappointed. "Take me to the old village, Sanders. I think we'll find the answer there."

Sanders led the way through the village, past the building in which Hungerford lay dead, and on down the one narrow street. From somewhere in the buildings in which the natives were housed, Lawton again heard that mournful, wailing chant.

"What is that?" he said.

"Death chant," Sanders replied, "these natives are like animals; they sense death before it comes, almost."

No further words were exchanged until they were a good quarter of a mile from the village. They were walking directly toward the Karanina rookery, and the never-ending roar of the great seal herd beat against Lawton's ear-drums until they rang. Suddenly Sanders caught Lawton's arm, pointing ahead and down. Almost at his feet Lawton saw a faint light! At the same instant he heard a voice, faintly, through the heavy roar from the rookery.

Moving silently, Lawton crouched close to the opening, which was covered with the skins of several hair seal. He recognized Mason's voice. Then a great surge of gladness almost caused him to shout out when he heard the weak, but unmistakable voice of the missing Joe Patrick!

Tensing, Lawton ripped the cover off the door and leaped feet first. He landed upright, legs spread wide, his gun pointing at Mason's middle. The Doctor had been standing above another man who half sat, half reclined against the dirt wall across from the opening which served as a door. The man on the floor was a horrible sight, his unshaven face covered with dried blood, iron shackles binding his ankles and wrists. He had been gagged, but the gag had been removed and lay on the floor by his side. Lawton smelled burnt flesh.

John Lawton's blue eyes were

bleakly gleaming with the urge to kill as he faced Mason. His tone literally begged, as he said, "Just one move, Mister. . . One little move." He moved to the center of the room. "Going to finish your job here, like you did with Hungerford and the Indian boy, eh?"

Mason's eyes filled with shocked amazement. "Wait, man. You don't think I . . ."

"Shut up and get over there." Lawton waved the muzzle of his gun toward the far corner.

"John . . . Lawton . . ." Patrick's voice was very weak

**L**AWTON dropped to one knee beside the shackled man. "Yes, Joe?"

"Not . . . not . . . Mason, John." Before he could say more, his head slumped forward onto his chest. He was dead.

"Behind you. . ." The sharp warning came from Mason.

Lawton heard a brittle laugh behind him. It was Sanders. "The brilliant Mister Lawton," he jeered, "I'll take that peashooter now. Just drop it on the floor."

Lawton tensed, gauging his chances, but loosened when he felt the hard muzzle of Sanders gun in his back.

"Drop it." There was deadly menace in Sanders tone.

Lawton dropped his gun.

"Now move over there with Mason."

Lawton backed against the wall beside Mason. "So it was you," Lawton said.

"Sure, I killed them." Sanders laughed wickedly. "And now I'm going to bump you and your sawbones mate there." He edged toward the opposite wall. "But first I'm going to show you the missing radio transmitter." He pushed against a section of the wall. A cleverly concealed section swung around, revealing a compact half-meter transmitting unit, and another receiving set. Pressing a button-switch and making slight adjustments on several dials, Sanders began sending a coded call. Lawton, watching the gun in the



man's hand, heard him send the signal, "XIR XIR XIR XIR DE STP STP." Almost immediately there was a response, "Go ahead, XIR."

Sanders spelled out, "Everything clear. Have located Pribilof treasure. Stand in to dock."

The reply was short. "Good work. Will dock in an hour."

John Lawton thought he saw the gun muzzle waver as Sanders pulled the switch shutting off the power in the radio units, and took a desperate gamble. He leaped across the room, his strong fingers reaching for Sanders' throat. But suddenly his legs were rubber. He collapsed. His last remembrance as he slid into oblivion was the shock of lead slugs pounding against his flesh as Sanders triggered his gun, and the strong, acrid smell of gun powder in his nostrils.

John Lawton fought his way up out of the black shadows through the force of a powerful will to live. His face had been lying in the filth covering the earthen floor. Raising his head, he spat, weakly. He realized that there was no strength in his left side above the waist. He could taste warm blood in his mouth and it was difficult to focus. Laboriously he worked his right arm under his body and, with what seemed a Herculean effort, raised to a sitting posture. He almost went out again, then, but hung on tenaciously until his head had cleared.

Sanders was gone.

The place was a shambles. Mason lay in the middle of the floor, in a widening pool of blood. "What a lousy shot," Lawton gritted between clenched teeth as the muscles of his right arm corded as he raised to his feet. Two wavering steps and he was leaning against the false wall. It took him an age to swing the false

section out so that he could get to the radio. But finally it was accomplished. Pushing the button-switch, he watched impatiently while the tubes heated. Then, jaw bulging with the effort required to remain on his feet, he began pounding the transmitter key, "XIR XIR XIR Stand off. Danger! Danger!"

"Pray God I'm in time," he muttered. Completing his message, he listened for a moment, then slumped against the wall, a grim smile breaking through the grime and blood smearing his face. He gulped in deep breaths of the fetid, but strength-giving air. Lurching across the room, he slid to one knee beside Mason's body. The man was dead. The whole rotten picture was now clear in Lawton's mind. One thought pounded through his mind: Would he be in time? Struggling to his feet again, he lurched to the opening. His foot struck a hard object. Looking down, he saw his gun. Armed once more, he half pulled, half pushed himself through the opening into the outer air. He gulped gratefully.

The fog had lifted, and he could see the lights of the village below. How he made it, he never knew, but after what seemed an interminable passage of time, he reached the dead Hungerford's house. He was dully aware of fresh blood in the palm of his right hand. The gun was slippery and hard to hold. Before entering the building he laid the gun down on the steps and wiped his hand on his coat, then dried the gun off in the same manner. Now, moving very quietly, he entered the hallway. It seemed hours before he reached the living room in which he had encountered the kitten so long ago. The room was pitch black. Reaching the door, he stood for a

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long moment. There was complete silence. A slow panic struck him. Could he have been mistaken after all? He shook his head savagely to ward off the numbing weakness reaching toward his heart.

**W**HAT was that? Was it a sound? The stimulus cleared his brain. Across the room, Lawton knew, was a dressing room. He circled Hungerford's stiff body and reached the door, which he found almost closed. Gently pulling it open, he again heard that same sound. He was right! There was a cellar beneath this room! And someone was down there. Lawton heard low, exultant voices!

Four men were dead and others were to die this night because of the secret that cellar held! Would it be worth the price?

There were two men down there. New strength, from some deep-lying source, cleared John Lawton's brain and sent new life surging through his tired body. His eyes were mere slits in his begrimed face as he hefted his gun and prepared for what he knew he had to do.

Things happened fast, then. John Lawton launched himself through the opening, landing halfway down the rickety flight of steps. The steps collapsed, Lawton dropping feet first, like a cat, and landing upright in the debris.

In the center of the room, Sanders and the redheaded operator from the radio station frantically tried to rid themselves of the small, but heavy ship's chest which they had been carrying toward the steps. Sanders screamed, once, as he recognized the bloody apparition blocking the only exit, and frantically tried for his gun.

John Lawton triggered his jumping automatic deliberately. Sanders collapsed, dying with a look of unbelief on his hard, scarred face. He lay sprawled, his body wrapped half around the rusty chest, as if to carry his new-found wealth with him even into death. The redheaded operator died silently, fear in his eyes, folding slowly at the waist for a long mo-

ment, then toppling forward on his face.

Characteristically, John Lawton was not finished. Taking a small ink pad and a small square of smooth, white paper from the pocket of his coat, he made an impression of Sanders' right thumb print on the square of paper opposite another print already appearing on the strip. Lawton grunted with satisfaction. The prints were identical.

"Bows and arrows," Lawton said, softly, "or guns. It's all the same. You're still a lousy shot." With this parting shot at the dead Sanders, Lawton turned up the lid of the chest. It contained a ship's log, two small portraits of two young boys, and a roll of yellowed parchment.

"And six men died for this," Lawton shook his head sadly.

Fifteen minutes later he staggered into the radio station. A startled operator rushed across the room to help the bloody apparition to a chair.

"The Coast Guard Cutter Northwind is standing about five miles off the harbor," Lawton said. "Radio her to drop her ship's physician off here as quickly as possible. Sign it Lawton." He lit a cigarette with fumbling fingers, inhaled gratefully while the operator jumped to carry out his instructions. When the operator turned, two minutes later, to announce that the Northwind was standing in to dock with all possible speed, Lawton was unconscious, the cigarette was lying on the floor between his legs. Loss of blood and shock had finally taken its toll.

**S**EVERAL days later Lawton, propped up in an infirmary bed, listened to the Commander of the Northwind relate the capture of the pirate boat which had been working under Sanders' direction.

"You say it was a Japanese crew, eh, Commander?"

"From skipper to cook." The Commander, a grizzled veteran of the ice and seal patrol, shook his head. "I am totally bewildered. I have met death many times, but never before have I seen men's lives sacrificed so wantonly for so little."



"Commander," Lawton said, "I think Hungerford was to blame, more than anyone else, for these killings. The roll of parchment in that chest is a land grant, executed in the eighteenth century, making the explorer, Gerassim Pribilof, the sole owner of these Islands, which he had discovered. The grant carries the seal of the then Czar of the Russias. Hungerford found this grant twenty years ago, while he was exploring the old village. I think, from that day until his death, he considered himself the rightful owner of these Islands. Incidentally, the portraits are those of Pribilof's two sons, St. Paul and St. George, after whom the larger two of these Islands were named. The log contains the account of Pribilof's discovery of the Islands."

Lawton moved to a more comfortable position. "Like any other story, with retelling, the tale of Hungerford's finding this chest became distorted until even the oldest natives on the Island believed it contained

fabulous wealth." Lawton lifted his shoulders expressively. "All of us would like to find a treasure, I suppose, although only a few would resort to murder to obtain possession. Sanders was such a man."

The grizzled commander chuckled grimly. "But I doubt he would have tried his luck here if he'd known he would have to stand against a tough one like a chap named John Lawton."

It is doubtful if John Lawton heard the words. There was a dreamy faraway look in his eyes as he said, "Commander, would you believe Asa Hungerford could have a romantic soul?"

"What!" gasped the veteran.

"He said something about real treasure. . . about thirty thousand seal coats caressing the shoulders of . . . think of it, Commander . . . of thirty thousand beautiful women" John Lawton closed his eyes. "I think he had something there!"

THE END



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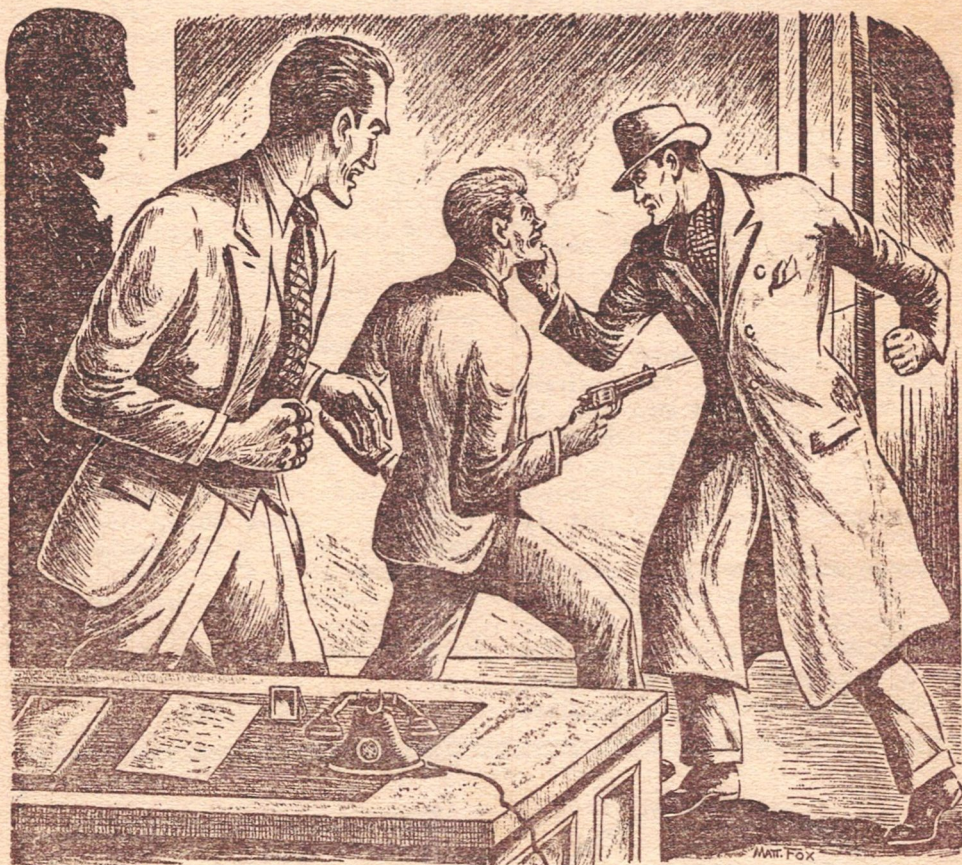
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# DEATH COMES WALKING



*Donovan's big fist smashed into the blond man's teeth.*

**By HENRY G. HORNLEIN**

*Dark was the night, and grey the fog, and terrible the heart of Terry Donovan when he went walking out to find the man who'd crippled him, and killed his sweetheart's father!*

**A**FTER a while, they began calling him "Terrible Terry." Not to his face, of course; just a discreet whisper occasionally. There weren't even many whispers, because only a few people ever knew all the details. Most knew only that a big, thick-shouldered man was to be seen often in night clubs and out-of-the-way eating places; a big, quiet man with thoughtful eyes and a bad limp.

But a lot of people in dark places knew a little more. They called him

worse names. And when his eyes went narrow with cold rage, and his stride became the repressed, furious motion of a powerful man hampered by a crippled leg, those other names were whispered too.

Even Captain McCafferty and the piquant honey-blonde, Ann, dropped their voices then. They'd both been in on the whole ugly business that had led to his smashed knee and had first brought to his wide-set eyes that cold, unreasoning hatred.

They knew, as well as he did him-



self, that somewhere deep inside him he was remembering that other time. Remembering mostly the first and last nights. . .

Captain McCafferty had hit the roof that first night.

"Donovan!" he roared, his crisp, grey mustache bristling. "You are a double-barreled, half-witted fool. We want you here; we need you here. You're the best damned man on homicide. War or no war, we'll still have murders, and we've got to solve them."

Donovan just grinned. "Sure, captain. I know that."

"Then why the seven levels of—"

Donovan cut in: "Have you ever watched a battle wagon plowing through mountains of water? Have you ever stood on the deck of a destroyer while it scampered over the ocean like a startled water spider?"

"So all right," McCafferty growled. "So you were in the Navy once. But this time—"

"This time it isn't target practice. Remember the Japs?"

McCafferty ran stubby fingers through his crisp, grey hair.

"Donovan," he said harshly, "I should slug you. You're leaving me in a helluva hole. I should knock you down and jump all over your face." He suddenly chuckled and extended his hand. "But I'm not the only guy in a hole these days, and you're a lot bigger than I am. Good luck, son."

Donovan's grin widened. "Thanks. I'll stay on till they call me. About a week, they said."

**T**HE night was filled with rain and fog. Donovan turned up his collar against the chill of it, and strode briskly through the darkened streets, his big body erect, his broad shoulders thrown back. It would be good to feel the roll of a ship again.

He walked steadily on, not worrying about direction. The fog seemed to smell of salt, and the patter of rain was spray splattering a deck.

He had thought it all over carefully. He liked his job and the feeling of usefulness it gave him. And so he had to go back. With his pre-

vious training and experience, it was the place where he should be. There was a war to be won to make jobs like his possible. . .

The shot startled him. He wasn't sure, at first, that he'd really heard one. He stood motionless, listening alertly. He heard a car motor race, heard the clash of hastily meshed gears.

He ran quickly then, with long, loping strides. Down to the next street, off to the right.

The street was a black-walled canyon, filled with fog. Half-way down the block, store lights spilled a glow into the thick mist. From the next block he could hear other footsteps, running toward him. There was no sign of the car.

Donovan raced through the damp darkness, and felt mildly proud that his breathing was still even as he reached the lighted windows.

The store was very small. A sign over the rear counter read "Watch Repairing." The rest of the place was mostly filled with various types of watches and inexpensive wedding sets.

Two people were in back, near the watch repair counter. A short, plump man with thinning, sandy hair lay on the floor, a bullet hole in his right temple. Above him a slender, blond girl stood rigidly, arms straight and stiff at her sides, staring down at the blood staining his sandy hair.

She looked up at Donovan.

"The police—" Her full lips twisted in pain.

"I'm a detective," he told her gently.

"They shot him. They killed him." Her eyes were blue and level and filled with shocked grief. A patrolman came running in and nodded to Donovan. She didn't notice him.

"They killed him because he wouldn't give in," she said woodenly. "They said they were going to make an example of him."

Donovan asked quietly: "Who were they? What did they look like?"

She seemed to become aware of him once more. She gazed at him



steadily, and her blue eyes slowly narrowed. Tiny muscles at the corners of her full mouth tightened.

"It doesn't matter." There was cold anger in her soft voice now. "They were gunmen, cheap killers; Bernie Cole's men. He's the real killer; he gave the orders."

"Could you identify the men?"

"Of course. But Bernie Cole's the real killer. He's the one to go after."

Donovan sighed and went over to the phone. He reported the murder, hung up slowly.

They'd never pin this on Cole, he knew. The gunmen—maybe. But Cole would probably have untouchable alibis for them too. He'd tried to get Cole on these racket killings before. That was his one tender spot, the one black mark on his record. Cole had just laughed at him.

The gaunt racketeer could afford to laugh. He'd killed off all competition, and bought up every crooked politician. He ran all the organized underworld and didn't permit any free lancing. You were with Cole, or you were dead.

AND there was only a week. He turned and looked at the girl, standing straight and stiff by the murdered man, and muttered maledictions on Bernie Cole and his gunmen, and the conditions that made their existence possible.

He went back and asked more questions. He got descriptions of the two men, learned that her name was Ann Mallory and that the murdered man was her father—and that the killers had been after diamonds. Not rings or brooches, but only diamonds.

And that was all. She didn't know why they wanted them, why her father had refused, or why they had killed him. She couldn't even say definitely that Bernie Cole had sent them.

"But it was Cole, just the same," she insisted. "Who else could it be?"

She was right, Donovan knew. There didn't seem to be any logical reason for Cole developing a sudden yen for diamonds; but, also, no one else in town would dare try anything like this.

Yet there was nothing to go on, and he felt oddly uneasy, looking at her, and knowing there was little he could do.

He left the patrolman in charge and went out into the night.

Bernie Cole advertised his place as high class and low brow. It was glittering and flashy, located in a slums district. There was no name on the gaudy marquee: just three pot-bellied figures with violins under their chins—all done in neon, including the moving bows.

The fog had grown thicker now. Donovan stood in the mouth of an alley just outside the yellow and blue globe of brilliance the lights of the night club formed in the mist, watching customers come and go.

There was no sign of anything untoward. No doorman stood on guard outside; no loungers leaned against the blue glass front. Just customers, coming and going.

Donovan sighed. He couldn't get the picture of Ann Mallory out of his mind. Straight and slim, standing guard over the body of her murdered father. Telling Donovan now how her father was killed, but who to look for as his killer. He could remember her eyes, level and filled with cold anger.

"Bernie Cole," she'd said.

It was hard to think of her, and to know how hopeless a job it was to try pinning the murder on Cole. And yet it would be harder to think of her if he didn't try.

His lips formed inaudible names for Bernie Cole. And then, abruptly, he was stiffening, stepping back into the darkness of the alley. From the deeper darkness behind him he could hear the grating of a key in a lock.

He moved a little farther into the alley, where the fog and the night thoroughly concealed him. A door opened somewhere in the blackness. Donovan's back was against the wall of the building that housed Cole's night club. The sounds were very much as though someone were coming surreptitiously from within that building.

No lights showed, but a car motor came quickly and quietly to life.



Donovan began to edge forward. This alley went all the way through to the next street. Whoever had come out obviously didn't want to be seen. And that was enough for Donovan to want to get a good look.

He had his gun and his flash out and was moving quickly now. He would have to get very close to see anything in this fog. He moved swiftly, yet cautiously; and then his foot caught on some obstacle. Before he could stop, there was a metallic *thunk!* and the noisy clattering of a tin can skittering down the alley.

Up ahead the door closed hastily.

Donovan switched on his flash. The car was very close and by it, near a door in Cole's building, was a short, stocky man with slicked-down blond hair. The blond man's eyes gleamed malevolently in the beam of light.

A searchlight on the cowl of the car came suddenly to life then, focussed on Donovan. He blinked and winced at the intolerable brilliance.

Somewhere a gun began roaring, and Donovan fired blindly in reply. Pain smashed his right knee and the leg buckled uselessly under him. Other slugs tore into his upper body.

He heard the car door slam. He was on the concrete paving of the alley, his flash just beyond his reach, throwing its beam against a brick wall. He tried to lift his revolver. There was no strength in his arm, and he could no longer hear the purr of the car's motor. In the column of light from his flash, fog swirled thickly.

**H**E WOULD always remember that stay in the hospital. White walls and the bright glow of sunshine; nurses making light of his injuries, cheering him, and thrusting thermometers into his mouth; probes and bandages and the constant smell of antiseptic.

McCafferty came to see him, and fumed profanely about Cole.

"So help me, he's lying like a politician at election time," McCafferty growled. "He doesn't know a thing. Nobody came out of his building.

He claims that side door is never opened, damn his dirty heart! We've tried to sweat him and those double-dealing shysters of his keep turning up. I'm beginning to talk to myself—just to get some answers!"

"How about the blond guy?"

"Need I tell you?" He lifted his shoulders and leered heavily. "Sorry, captain, but there must be some mistake." He let his shoulders drop back and snorted. "I'll never go to Egypt for a vacation. Looking at the Sphinx would be too much like staying home!"

They'd both expected that, of course, but it didn't help to make Donovan feel any better. He lay on the bed, feeling the pain of his knee, wondering about it. The other two bullets had hit him high in the chest, and the wounds were healing quickly. The knee wasn't doing so well; he could tell that by the doctors' expressions.

He didn't mention his fears to McCafferty; Ann guessed them. He tried to make ordinary conversation when she came, asking her about her father's store, and her plans.

At last she said quietly: "Mac tells me you were scheduled for the Navy."

He eyed her steadily, meeting her level glance.

"That knee," she said gently. "It worries you."

He felt better telling her about it. His words must have sounded very mixed up, he realized afterwards—descriptions of red sunsets, and stars on the night watch; tales of Navy tradition, and the new traditions that were being created every day. The things he wanted to do and be a part of.

She sat very quietly when he was done. She didn't say anything; but she reached out and held his hand and pressed it tightly. There was a strange little smile on her face, and he smiled back and closed his eyes, aware only of the pressure of her hand.

When he awoke she was gone; but she came the next day and the next. They never mentioned the knee again; yet each time, before she left,



there was the quiet, hopeful touch of her hand, and the warm strength seemed to flow from her into him, awakening the bright glow of hope within him once more.

Bernie Cole came too. He was a very tall man, lean and gaunt, with dark skin and prominent chin and nose. He moved and talked with slow deliberation. You had to know him, and his power, to realize that behind his deep-set eyes was a brain so sharp it had taken him to the top in the rackets.

Donovan said nothing, watching him sit down and very carefully cross his well-trousered legs.

Cole spoke first, in his slow, deliberate voice. "Congratulations on your rate of recovery."

The big detective remained impassive. "I'm listening."

Cole seemed to be choosing his words with great care. "It's unfortunate this had to happen near my club."

Donovan nodded shortly. "Isn't it?"

"Frankly, I'm completely puzzled about this blond man."

"So I hear."

Irritation showed in Cole's deep-set eyes, and Donovan felt cold amusement. You didn't talk back to Bernie Cole; it just wasn't done. The racketeer wasn't enjoying this.

"It's true, Donovan," Cole insisted. "If I had any idea—"

"The guy who shot me," Donovan said evenly, "was short and stocky and had blond hair. Very light hair. His eyebrows were dark though, and he had a square jaw and a crooked, bumpy nose."

"Quite a thorough description."

**D**ONOVAN smiled sardonically. "Accurate, too."

Cole shrugged. "I wouldn't know, of course."

"He was pretty quick on the trigger," Donovan went on. "Shot first and completely forgot to ask questions. Must have been something important, something private. Very private."

Cole was silent, studying him; and Donovan felt the cold amusement

grow. *Always keep 'em reeling, he thought.*

"By the way," he said casually, "Picked up any good diamonds lately?"

Cole stood up quickly. His nostrils flared and his eyes went hard. Immediately, his face was again a mask.

"After your recovery," he said steadily, "I suggest you be careful where you walk. Very careful."

He put his Homburg on with great deliberation then, and calmly strolled out of the room.

A grim smile was on Donovan's lips as he lay on the bed. He knew now that Cole was definitely involved, and that the short, stocky man who had shot him was an important cog in some one of the gaunt racketeer's schemes. The diamonds, too, were apparently important.

He looked down at his hands. The bullets hadn't damaged them. He tightened them till his knuckles glistened against the pale brown of his skin.

Ann stopped coming then. She sent no message; and, because she did not, he never asked McCafferty about her. The long hours became longer days, lonely days, and something cold and hard began to form inside him.

He came to dread the approach of visiting hours. McCafferty had a preoccupied look these days, as though something big were stirring, and didn't say much. Ann didn't come, and he missed the quiet touch of her hand, the comfort in her glance.

It was then, too, he wondered most about his knee.

An interne made his doubts a certainty. The interne was young and thin, with bright eyes and a nervous manner. He hesitated and fussed with his fingernails and said at last: "You've guessed it by now, I suppose. That knee—we can't do anything for it."

He watched Donovan, hesitant, and then left quickly as the horror and bitterness grew in the big man's eyes.

After that, time became an endless corridor, with antiseptically-white



walls, down which he limped—painfully at first, then more surely, till finally he stood once more in the cool darkness of the night outside the hospital.

His wide, sloping shoulders were lifted slightly and hunched forward now. His broad jaw projected grimly, and harsh lines bit into the hospital whiteness of his face.

He waited there, as though he had nothing else to do, his eyes bright with the fresh impact of normal human activities. He watched people hurrying busily, warmed to the sound of tires on asphalt, and let his glance wander along the brightly lighted store fronts. He went rigid then, his gaze fastened on the display window of a small jewelry store.

For long moments he stared. Then he hailed a cab quickly.

Riding through the busy streets, he tried to concentrate on McCafferty's intense preoccupation the past few days. But always he found himself turned toward the car window, watching people. Watching them walk.

When he got out of the cab before the brownstone-fronted house where he roomed, he hurried across the sidewalk and stiffly, awkwardly, mounted the marble steps.

**T**HE thump of his footsteps echoed loudly in the empty hall, and the uneven sound of them was cannon fire, driving him to cover. He limped quickly to his door and stopped there, staring down at the thin thread of light seeping out below it.

He hadn't told anyone he was coming home tonight. Not even McCafferty. Tonight was bad. He was back in the world again, and the world was still the same—but he wasn't. He wanted time to think, time—

The door before him opened swiftly. It would have to be Ann, he thought dully.

She saw him and started. "Oh!" She looked puzzled. "I heard you come up the hall, and when you didn't come in, I thought—" She

stepped back. "Welcome home, Terry. It's good to see you again."

He limped slowly in, wishing she hadn't waited for him. The lithe straightness of her made him feel like a shambling hulk, the clear frankness of her blue eyes made the bitterness in his own seem somehow wrong. He felt confused, and he was afraid to feel confused.

She came around in front of him. "Terry. Aren't you glad to see me?"

"I missed you at the hospital," he said slowly.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't make it. I can't tell you why right now, but I just couldn't get there."

He nodded; then asked evenly: "You expected me here tonight?"

"Yes." She smiled faintly, apparently relieved. "Your nurse has been sending me daily reports. You know—temperature, rate of recovery. That sort of thing."

"And mental attitude?"

His voice was suddenly fierce, and she stiffened, her level eyes studying him intently. He knew she was seeing now the little, downward lines at the corners of his wide mouth, his hunched shoulders.

Her slim face went angry. "No reports are needed for that. I can see for myself. You ought to be slapped silly."

That startled him. He eyed her blankly.

"You look," she went on coldly, "as though nothing would suit you better than to weep and moan and cry. Go right ahead. I won't watch."

He started to protest. Instead, he turned away and lighted a cigarette. After one puff, it lay on an ash tray, forgotten, and he limped over to the window.

He wished desperately that she would go. This was something he had to face alone, this business of starting a new life on the wrecked plans of the old.

From behind him her voice came, brittle, cutting. "McCafferty was going to come over. Lucky he—"

Anger swept through him and he whirled savagely. "Shut up!"

"Ah!" she said sardonically.



"There is a spark left in you—when you're criticized." She bit the last words off. "Terry, you poor fool. Use your head!"

His big hands were knotting once more and his eyes were very bright.

"Bernie Cole," he said slowly. "Bernie Cole."

Her eyes went wide then. She stared at him as though seeing him for the first time. "Terry! I didn't mean—you mustn't!"

She was frightened now, clutching at the lapels of his coat. Very firmly, he disengaged her hands. The corners of his mouth were pulled down sharply.

"Bernie Cole didn't kill your father," he said steadily, "but he gave orders to the men who did. Bernie Cole didn't fire the bullet that smashed my knee, but he was an accomplice of the man who did."

She shook her blond head desperately. "I know, Terry, I know. But—"

"That bullet smashed more than my knee—"

He stopped, not daring to say more. The blind, unreasoning anger he had been fighting for weeks was once more raging through him. He brushed past her and limped quickly across the room.

He could hear her saying: "You mustn't! McCafferty sent me. You don't—"

Then the door was between them and the uneven thud of his feet was loud and angry in the quiet hall.

**T**HE coffee was hot and strong and burned Donovan's mouth. He was only vaguely aware of the thick food odors in the tiny diner. He sat alone at the counter, sipping the coffee, his right leg thrust out at an angle under the next stool.

He paid his check and limped determinedly out to the street.

The three little fiddlers still played their neon violins on the marquee of Bernie Cole's night club. Donovan watched them from across the street. The neon bows moved idiotically, tunelessly. Donovan crossed the street.

He limped slowly, and stopped by

a glass-enclosed panel of black velvet, containing pictures of the floor show cast. He let his glance wander thoughtfully over the pictures.

His moving eyes stopped suddenly and all of his body went taut. The pictured girl was very pretty, as pretty as in real life. The painted legend next to the picture stated: "Ann Mallory — Featured Songstress."

He turned purposefully and entered the night club.

He entered a short hall, containing a flight of stairs and a check room. Through a door just ahead, he could see people at tables, and a corner of the dance floor.

He ignored the meaningless smile of the thin, dark girl in the check room, limped to the door. She was there. She sat alone at a small table near the orchestra box. The orchestra was blaring and people were laughing and dancing, and she was just sitting there watching the door.

She saw him and her face went white. She made no effort to rise, but her eyes pleaded with him to go. He could see the sudden rapidity of her breathing.

He turned and limped slowly through the short hall, his wide-set eyes wondering. McCafferty had sent her, and yet she was here. He was passing the stair. He heard a door open, and involuntarily looked up.

Cole was just entering a room at the head of the stair. Inside that room was a short, stocky man with slicked-down blond hair and dark eyebrows.

The brief glance left Donovan incapable of motion. He was seeing again the alley, and the sharp column of light from his flash. He was seeing the malevolent face of the man by the car.

He turned grimly toward the stair.

The hat-check girl called: "Sorry, sir, but you can't—"

Donovan's glance was cold and hard. The girl subsided, wide-eyed.

Very deliberately, Donovan moved up the wooden treads. He moved slowly, easily, so that the thud of



his stiff-legged gait would not be noticeable.

He expected the door to be locked. He drew back as he reached for the knob. When the door failed to give under his hand, he crashed into it with all the weight of his big body. The lock splintered and tore loose, and Donovan was in the room.

They looked up quickly from some papers on a flat-topped desk. Almost instantly, there was an automatic in Cole's hand. Donovan had expected that, too. He fired quickly; Cole screamed and dropped the gun.

The blond man came at Donovan in a flying leap that sent both of them to the floor. Donovan's big fist smashed down in his face. The blond man snarled through bleeding lips and loosened teeth.

There was blood on Donovan's hand now, and pain from the stocky man's teeth. He surged upward. The other man swung and brass knuckles gleamed, and then slashed along Donovan's jaw.

COLE had a blackjack in his left hand, was closing in; Donovan thrust the stocky man off, turned. The blackjack came down, smashing across his upraised fist. A shudder went through the big detective. His whole arm went numb.

While his useless arm was still falling, he swung at Cole with everything he had. His fist landed with a sharp crack! on the racketeer's jaw. Donovan smiled grimly. That broken jaw would pay in small part for his knee.

The blond man had scooped up Donovan's gun from the floor now. Donovan started for him. The blond man was just bringing the gun up from the floor. The big detective saw he wouldn't make it—the stiff leg made him too slow.

He still tried. He launched himself in a desperate leap. The blond man jumped and fired. The bullet whistled harmlessly, and then both men were on the floor.

The stocky man flailed at Donovan with the gun, broke loose. He started for the desk and the papers on it. Donovan thrust his stiffened

leg out. The blond man tripped, went headlong. His head thumped against the desk and he fell limply.

Donovan rose to his feet unsteadily. Footsteps were clattering up the stair. McCafferty's familiar roar rose above them.

"Donovan! Of all the chuckle-headed nitwits I have seen in my day, you take the dirty blue ribbon!"

He was already darting to the desk. "If you've wrecked this case, so help me I'll pull all your hair out with a pair of tweezers—but slowly. We put Ann in here so Cole would be suspicious enough of her not to be so alert for detectives. We even made her stop seeing you so he wouldn't be too suspicious and realize she was a red herring."

His voice died to an indignant mumble as he hurriedly thumbed through the sheets Cole and the blond man had been going over.

Donovan wasn't listening anyhow. She stood in the doorway, slim and straight, her level gaze fixed on him. He smiled and she came over and took his hand as she had done in the hospital room.

McCafferty's voice was clear again. "You're a lucky dog, Donovan. This clinches it. These two slugs were hooked up in schemes to get industrial diamonds for Hitler, so those lice could keep building weapons. These prove it. Lucky for you or you'd be bald before your time."

He looked up at them. "Donovan! I'm talking to you, not for posterity!"

Donovan grinned at him. "Sure. I'm listening."

"You're a liar. You're a big, Irish, no-good liar. But listen to this much. We've got a lot of this stuff to cope with. You can't get in the Navy, but you can work on this. Now get the hell out of here, and don't blight my life with your presence till you're ready to do some work."

Donovan looked from one to the other of them. When he walked to the door with Ann, his broad back was very straight, the bitter lines gone from his face.

THE END



# A CLEAN NOSE

A Thrill-Packed Novelet

By **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

(Author of "The Magpie Touch," "You'll Be Dead at Eleven," etc.)

## CHAPTER I

**A** MAN CAN take so much and then he has his belly full and has to sound off.

Patrolman Barney Hartigan stood it for three months, ninety days of young and grinning Patrolman Mike Shand. Shand was a rookie just out of the Police Academy, and filled to the tonsils with ideals and dreams, ambition and duty. In thirty years of flat-footing, Barney had seen 'em come and go; but Mike Shand was the most exuberant of all, the one who really got in Barney's hair.

First, there was Mike's nimble tongue. From the moment they started their evening patrol of Hell's

the trial of former County Attorney Sam Froste for accepting a bribe, malfeasance and misfeasance in office. Marvin Conroy, it was said, had been the go-between who delivered the bribe money to Froste. Without him the governor's special counsel had only surmise, rumor, and a few unrelated facts. It was awfully convenient that Conroy died when he did. But there was nothing to hook Froste to the kill.

The finger woman, the luscious young frail, who delivered Conroy to the Golden Oak night-spot where the gun blast caught him, just vanished. An attorney named Bill Cavaechi issued a statement saying she was highly connected, had nothing to do

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*"You're young and bright, and fresh out of training, Mike. They taught you all the things a cop should know at that school—all except one. But that one thing can break a policeman, especially when he's strong, and full of ideals like you. Keep your nose clean, Mike; when you see you're up against crooks with political protection, lay off!"*

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Kitchen until two A. M. when they were relieved, it was rarely quiet. They had filled him full of regulations and detective theory in Police Academy (as if any theory can take the place of experience) and he sounded off about a lot of unsolved murder cases as if Barney Hartigan personally had something to do with the failure.

"If the dicks had concentrated on Nardella Fane," chirped Mike, "they would have caught the killer of Marvin Conroy. The trouble with the detective department is, it's old-fashioned. It needs new blood, new ideas."

Mike was referring to the mysterious shooting of a key witness in

with the kill, and would testify to the proper authorities but did not wish to be hounded by notoriety. That was the last heard of her.

The case against Froste collapsed. He waited three months, then resigned. Rumor said he was still the king pin of crime but it was just rumor.

Barney Hartigan had heard the inside grape-vine. He knew that dirty politics had reached into the department to stop the dicks from finding Nardella Fane. The same thing had happened often enough in thirty years, and would continue to happen so long as venal politicians took criminal money. So Barney got red with fury and blew his lid.





*Kofodes made a bad mistake, and went for his gun.*

"You cocky green-horn," he raged, "those men forgot more about detection than you'll ever know. Keep your tongue off them."

**MIKE** turned a bronzed, freckled, all-square face to Hartigan in

amazement. The Mick was in his blue eyes and his smile. He could grin and it split his face open and pushed his ears back. He had the body of a light heavyweight, and he had the sense to know he was in wrong.



"Why, Barney," he cried, "what have I done now?"

"What have you done? Talk! Talked my ears to nubbins. Talk about ideals of service. Remind me that a cop is a public servant who should plunge into a fire to save a cat, and shoot it out with sixteen gunsels if necessary. That I can endure. But you don't know from nothing about Conroy's murder—and don't talk about it."

"What do you mean, Barney?"

"I mean this, you ignoramus. Conroy was killed by a political crime ring. Froste, the head of that ring, is one of the controllers of pay and promotion in this man's police force."

He broke off sharply. "Did you ever hear of keeping your nose clean?"

Mike frowned. "Too often. If anything is haywire in the department, all the guys yelp, 'Well, my nose is clean.'"

Hartigan said, "And right they are. Here am I with thirty years of service. I've been lieutenant in my time, and busted for what? Because I didn't keep my nose clean. I bucked the politicians and did me duty. I've been sergeant and wound up on Marsh Avenue talking with the cows for company because I didn't keep my nose clean."

He swore flatly. "I'm to be retired in ninety days. I should retire as a lieutenant with a decent pension fit to keep a man in some comfort. But long ago I got the name of being too active, of stepping on toes. And so what am I? A harness bull to the last."

He wagged a finger at Mike. "You say you want to be lieutenant, captain, the commissioner no less?"

"That's right," nodded Mike. "How do you think I'm going to dress your lovely Judy in the silks and furs she deserves on a harness bull's pay?"

Barney Hartigan stopped flat on his tracks, and swore again. When Mike was first assigned to him, he had been nice and invited the lad to his home to sample Judy's beef stew. Judy had kept house for him since Annie died, and a broth of a girl she was.

The thought that he might lose her made him madder.

"So behind me back you've been a-courtin' my Judy, is it?"

"No man ever loved a girl more," said Mike, "and she loves me. You can ask her."

Barney didn't have to. He was remembering several things, Judy's whistling and her singing and the bright light of her face.

And actually Barney had nothing against Mike except this cursed yap of ideals and duty, and climb to the top, no matter how.

"It's more sense she should have than to pick a blarney-stone kisser like you."

"You were talking about clean noses," said Mike quietly.

"I was and I'm telling you, my bucko, if you want to get ahead in this department keep your nose clean. Do what you're told; step on no politician's toes, and time will give you a sergeant's stripes. Try to be a story-book cop and you'll lose your shield before the year is out."

And as Mike opened his mouth Barney roared, "And muffle your clapper from now on. I aim to keep my nose clean until I'm retired."

This didn't shut Mike up, of course. His eager young vitality had to have an outlet. But he wasn't so cocky, and Hartigan could dream of the fishing he was going to do at Great Sheepshead's Bay, come the blessed day of retirement.

And so came the night two weeks later when the thin, dark man staggered up out of the darkness. His face was a bloody shambles, and he had been beaten within a heart-beat of his life.

## CHAPTER II

**M**IKE SHAND caught him, or he would have fallen. "Good God, Barney," he muttered, "look at his face."

"A drink," mumbled the man. "I'll be all right. I'm going to even it with the dirty double-crossers."

A shot of whiskey from O'Flaherty's place revived him and Bar-



ney started to telephone for an ambulance.

"No," said the man, "if there's law and order in this man's town I want a big gob of both."

"What's ailing you?" said Mike.

"In Apartment Eight-B in the Crescent Arms Hotel over there," the man pointed, "I was inveigled into a crooked poker game. They took me for eight thousand dollars. Then when I found the game was crooked, they beat me up and gave me the old heave-ho."

"Whose game?" asked Barney sharply.

"Tony Tullio!"

Barney swore. Tullio had more influence than any other gambler in town.

"How'd you learn of the game?" asked Mike.

The man leered. "I'm Philip Blake of Indianapolis. I married a dame, she robbed me and ran out. I followed her; she mentioned this game. I went there to play and get some dope where she was."

He held out a playing card.

"It's marked on the back—professionally. There are more up there—if you want to raid the joint. I'd like my dough back."

It was rare that a trimmed sucker squealed. This chump was willing to testify. It looked like a grand opportunity for action for Mike. He craved action, having had none in four months patrol.

By now they had reached a drug store in the Crescent Arms Hotel block. Barney sent Blake in to get patched up.

"Barney," cried Mike, "let's go up and make the pinch. Tullio is a big shot gambler. It'll be a big thing on our record."

"Now, keep your shirt on," replied Barney with asperity. "You've no right to go into any apartment in that hotel without a search warrant or a warrant for the arrest of somebody you believe on the premises."

"But by the time we get that, the card game will be busted up and all evidence hidden," said Mike.

"That may be but that's the law."

"But if we pinch Tullio with the

goods, the judge isn't going to ask how."

"No? Listen, my young bucko, Sam Froste would be in court to prove false arrest. And threaten, by God, to sue the city."

**MIKE** swore impatiently. The mention of Sam Froste's name blew his cork.

"What you mean," he cried angrily, "is that you don't want to get your nose dirty. You'd let them get away."

The shot stung Barney because subconsciously he knew it was true.

"If I wasn't on duty I'd smack you down, Mike Shand," yelled Barney furiously. "Laws are made to be obeyed by all."

He stepped closer, face red.

"Furthermore, that's no 'travelling' crap or card party; it's been going for months. It's Apartment Eight-B, and I've reported it to headquarters at least six times. That means that if headquarters wanted it closed, the vice squad would have closed it. They didn't. So that means it's running under political protection."

Mike's face indicated complete bewilderment.

"But they're breaking the law—now."

Barney shrugged. There was a long, queer silence during which Barney looked in at Blake getting his scalp patched and another cut repaired on his cheek where somebody's ring had savagely raked him.

"Then what happens?" asked Mike at length.

"Well," said Barney, "we send this guy to the precinct. He swears out a complaint, and if they want to they pinch Tullio. Tullio will have an alibi and say somebody was using his name in vain. This guy Blake will be told that gambling is a felony in this man's town and he will go on trial with those he's had pinched. If that doesn't scare him off, he'll get another beating. Nothing will be done."

The druggist was winding a bandage on Blake's head that was like the turban on Mahatma Ghandi.

Suddenly Mike Shand cursed. "By







## A Clean Nose

God, I won't believe it. We're police officers sworn to enforce law and order, keep the peace, and protect honest citizens from crooks. And we stand here and we don't do a damned thing."

"You'll learn after a while," said Barney.

Mike stood very still, his mouth white and compressed. He was seeing once again that thrilling moment when the commissioner had passed among the graduates, handing out the coveted shields. The power of the law, he had called those shields.

"Remember," he had warned, "the people of this city vest a great responsibility in you with this shield. It gives you the power to deprive a man of his liberty, take away his good name. It gives you the power to carry weapons and use them—even to kill—if you think the occasion demands it.

"That shield does not put you above other men. It makes you the servant of them. You are sworn to guard them even at risk of your own life. You are sworn to make this city a fit place for man, woman or child to travel safely.

"Any man wearing that shield who fails to do his duty will be a traitor to the people who have vested in him this trust. You need more than brains and brawn to wear that shield. You need character, honesty, loyalty."

**R**EMEMBERING that, Mike Shand now, suddenly, fingered the cold metal pinned to his left breast.

"By God, Barney Hartigan," he said, "you can't tell me—nor anybody else—that a police officer can lose by doing his duty and capturing criminals in the act."

Before Barney could protest this, Blake came out, swollen, but not so encarnadined.

"Well, what are you guys waiting for?" he demanded angrily.

Mike felt his .38 Police Positive gun in its black leather holster. A .38 mounted on a .45 frame, and he had done some neat shooting with it at the Police Academy drills.

(Continued On Page 72)



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## Crack Defective

(Continued From Page 71)

"You'll get action," he said softly. "Come on, I want you to identify the guys."

He turned, paused, looked back with thin, hot gaze at Barney. "Are you coming with me?"

Barney was shaking with fury. The kid was violating the law, risking his shield. With retirement only ten weeks off, did Shand want him to risk dismissal "for cause?" He'd get no pension at all then.

Somehow he mastered his anger to say, "You make illegal entry and you're ruined."

"To hell with illegal entry and you, too," snarled Mike. "No wonder you've worn your arches to the ankle pounding beats all your life. Keeping your nose clean. Well, keep your nose clean."

He seized Blake's arm and dragged him at a half-run toward the canopied entrance to the Crescent Arms.

"You're not going to back down on testifying against these monkeys?" he panted.

Blake's voice was ugly and cold. "I'll testify. And unless I get my wife and my dough, I'll tell a lot more than you know."

Going up in the elevator Mike gave the man's battered face a sharp look. What did Blake mean? What did he know? And about what?

Mentally, Mike made a note to interrogate this guy further, but it would have to wait. He paused before the door of Eight-B.

"When I knock," he whispered, drawing his gun, "you give them a whine."

Blake nodded and Mike rapped his knuckles. His heart thudded with excitement.

Somebody inside growled, "Who is it?"

"It's me," Blake whined. "I come to get carfare. You guys can spare me that, can't you?"

**T**HERE was a muttered oath inside. Then the key in the lock turned, and the door came open with a crash. Two young gorillas with plastered hair and high-cheek-boned faces leaped out, saying, "We'll fix your clock, you beefing chump—"



## A Clean Nose

"You'll step back inside and keep your mitts up," said Mike.

He had the .38 in front of him and he had the majesty of his six feet of blue uniform, and he had the shield. Hatred and surprise blazed in their hot narrow eyes but they backed up and they kept their hands high. Mike followed them.

There were three other men seated at the green baize table. There were slots for poker chips, little rests for drinks, a scattered deck of cards. The backs of these were the same as the marked card Blake had given Mike.

Mike recognized only one face at the table. There was only one man with a gorilla body, black eyebrows an inch thick and a shiny bald skull—Tony Tullio.

Those tremendous black eyebrows knitted now in a frown. "What goes, officer?" his voice was as soft as a woman's.

Mike ignored him momentarily. He gestured to Blake. "You identify all these as players, Blake?"

Blake's voice was raspy with hate. "I'll say I do."

"Who among them beat you up?"

"Those two torpedoes of Tullio's—those who came to the door. Slick Durno! Blacky Kofodes! The other two I don't know. But Tullio was kicking my ribs in while they swung the brass knucks."

Tullio didn't seem perturbed.

"The guy's a liar. I never saw him before in my life."

"You'll see plenty of him from now on," said Mike grimly. "You're under arrest—all of you—for running a common gambling place—assault and battery with intent to kill."

Without turning his head he pulled out his handcuffs.

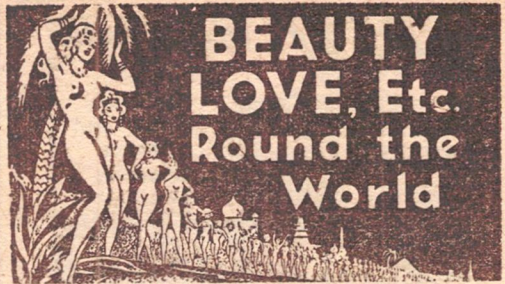
"Frisk Tullio, Blake, and then cuff one wrist."

Until now the two gunsels, Durno and Kofodes, had merely smoldered. Now Kofodes made a mistake.

Perhaps he got a desperate signal from Tullio, or maybe he had just sniffed a deck of snow and didn't give a damn. Anyway, he went for his gun and he brought it out shooting.

He got off one shot, bringing it up

(Continued On Page 74)



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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 73)

to the aim. But this shot was just an eyewink too late. Mike had been trained in police school that if you had to shoot, you shot quick and fast and to kill. His gun roared and the slug hit Kofodes in the chest and knocked the air and the life out of him in one grunt of amazed agony.

For a long minute there was a horrid silence. Mike had a dry tongue, and his skin was crawling, for he had never killed a man before. Yet his voice when he spoke was cold and steady.

"Listen carefully, Blake. Take Kofodes' gun in your handkerchief and wrap it up and put it in my side coat pocket. Take the necktie off Kofodes and tie up Durno. Get Durno's gun. Search those other two and then handcuff one to Tullio and tie the other to Durno."

Even Blake was gray and shaken as he carried out the orders. The sudden roar of guns, the dead man, the smell of cordite and death—Tony Tullio found his tongue first.

"You dumb Irish cluck!" he said softly, "I'll have you broken for this. I'll do more than that: I'll have you tried for first degree murder. I believe I'll have you burned."

Mike ignored this. He stepped to the table, picked up several marked cards to go with the one Blake had given him. He gathered up the guns. Then, covering his left hand with his own handkerchief, he telephoned headquarters.

"Officer Shand reporting. Send the Homicide and Vice Squad to the Crescent Arms Hotel."

He carefully put the French phone back on the cradle. Carefully he checked his evidence. In the silence, waiting, he thought grimly of Barney Hartigan. Barney and his fetish of keeping his nose clean. Barney would see what happened when a cop did his bounden duty.

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**A Clean Nose**

Mike Shand got up willingly enough this day and sped to Essex Market Court.

In the first place, Philip Blake, the chief complaining witness, was not there.

And almost immediately Mike got a load of Sam Froste's cleverness. When Tullio stepped to the bar, Sam Froste said in a silky voice, "Your Honor, representing my client, Anthony Tullio, I move that the charges against him be dismissed on the grounds that he was illegally seized in his home without due process of law."

He went on, quoting the constitution and amendments. And old Magistrate Paleski scowled over his glasses and asked for details. He got them.

"Without warrant or complaint," thundered Froste, glaring at Mike, "this officer invaded a home, assaulted the guests, murdered one man, shooting him down like a dog.

"Your honor, I not only move for the dismissal of these charges, I request you to issue a bench warrant for the arrest of this arrogant policeman for assault and battery and illegal entrance. And I move that the evidence be submitted to the Grand Jury for a first degree murder indictment. A homicide occurring during the commission of a felony is first-degree murder. And this officer should be electrocuted as an example to other policemen that they are servants and not dictators of the people."

(Continued On Page 76)

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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 75)

MAGISTRATE Paleski called Mike to the bar. "Did you have a warrant, Officer Shand?"

"No, Your Honor, but Blake said—"

"That will be enough," said Magistrate Paleski. He leaned back, cleared his throat, adjusted the thick-rimmed spectacles. He said slowly, "This is still a land of liberty, where the government is a government of laws and not of men, where no one can be above the law, or act without its sanction."

His fist fell lightly. "Motion granted. Officer Shand is to be held for felonious entry pending such action on the homicide charge as the Grand Jury may see fit to take."

Mike Shand's eyes popped. "But, Your Honor, the law was being violated. Blake had been brutally beaten. Blacky Kofodoes drew his gun and I shot only in self-defense."

"Shand," said the magistrate, "the only admission in this court was that you unlawfully invaded the premises at Eighteen-Twenty Tenth Avenue. What occurred thereafter will be for the Grand Jury to determine. That is all."

An official hand fell on Mike's shoulder. He who had stood there many times to watch police court procedure, now found himself a prisoner.

Things happened swiftly then. He was suspended by Police Commissioner Harkness and his beloved shield taken. Subject to the action of the Grand Jury, he was held only for felonious entry. Judy Hartigan came by because the Flatbush home was in her name, and she found the bondsman, Fatso Lynn, and Shand came out of the jailhouse in \$20,000 bail.

The case became a sensation. Some newspapers called Shand the "Ges-tapo," the "Cossack" type of officer of whom the department would be well rid. The *Sphere* was more thoughtful.

"If Officer Shand and the complainant, Blake, are telling the truth, then a crime had taken place and the culprits were still present. In the street, in such a crime, Shand



## A Clean Nose

would be justified, even enjoined to interfere. But since the crime was indoors in Tullio's apartment, he is himself a criminal for trying to arrest criminals. Methinks the law is weighted too heavily in favor of crime."

San Froste declared that Mike should be electrocuted for cold-blooded murder. That Kofodes had not drawn a gun. The district attorney said, "If the Grand Jury indicts I shall prosecute to the law."

The insiders laughed at Mike and called him a chump. He had collided with the politicians and he was going to get the works.

Mike went to Barney's home, crushed, bewildered.

Judy had dark curling hair that flowed down her ears where it could be soft and sweet against a man's face. She had blue eyes like Barney's, bits of clean washed sky. But mostly she had soft warm lips, and these she pressed to Mike's and said, "Come, darlin', I've got a grand dinner for you, and then we can talk and see what's to be done."

**B**ARNEY HARTIGAN sat in the living room, his slippers feet on a hassock, his pipe bubbling and crackling. Mike came in and sat down. There was silence. Then Mike said, "Why don't you say it? Go on—I didn't keep my nose clean."

Barney said gently, "Mike, all rookies get their jolt. 'Tis sorry I am yours is so serious."

For an instant Mike welled up. "Ah, if you'd come as you should, then they wouldn't have dared."

Barney didn't get sore now.

"Don't be a fool, lad, there'd be two of us instead of one."

Mike burst out, "But how can they do this? I'm right, Barney, you know damned well I'm right."

"No man is right who doesn't follow the processes of the law," said Barney. "Particularly against people who have political influence."

He paused. "Don't take the murder rap seriously. Blake can prove self-defense. Why didn't he appear in court today and make a deposition?"

(Continued On Page 78)



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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 77)

Mike jumped up. "Yes! Why didn't he come? I warned him. I clean forgot—"

"Find him," said Barney. "He's the only man who can save you from the electric chair."

Mike passed up Judy's excellent stew. He put on his hat. "That guy was mysterious enough, now I think on it. I'll go get him now."

But as he reached the door Judy called, "Telephone for you, Mike."

Mike heard Sam Froste's soft purring voice.

"Shand, get this because I won't repeat. I'll make a trade. Give me by messenger the playing cards you took from Tullio and there will be no murder charge. You'll merely be dismissed from the department."

"How generous!" snapped Mike. "And the stink all quieted. Is that it?"

"That's it. Be smart. I can make this tough."

"I'll make it tougher for you."

Mike heard a soft laugh, a receiver click. He turned to Barney and Judy.

"He tried to trade. Why? He'd throw Tullio to the jackals if he had to."

"There's a lot at stake," said Barney.

Mike had the call traced. It came from Booth Three in Grand Central Terminal! A total loss. He kissed Judy and turned to the door.

"Will you come with me to Blake, Barney?"

"No," said Barney. "I can't help you now." He saw the queer look on Mike's face and his own grew red. "Sam Froste is dynamite. He could get me discharged, without my pension."

"I see," said Mike quietly, "then I'll be going."

Judy walked with him to the door, and held up her lips again. "Don't blame Dad," she whispered. "Once he thought the way you do, darlin', and they blasted him down. They broke his heart and made a time-server out of him. He was under suspension when I was born—maybe that was why Mother didn't ever get back her health."



## A Clean Nose

Mike passed his lips over her hair. She was so warm in his arms, and gave him strength and confidence.

"I'll not blame him," he said, "even though I can't understand, I'll never blame him."

"You've the heart, Mike," Judy patted his cheek. "But," she added fiercely, "go on thinking your fine thoughts, and lifting your eyes high, Mike darling. That's the way I want you."

**M**IKE got to the Tangier Hotel at eight o'clock. It was an old, shabby place, once a famed theatrical hostelry, now living in its tinsel and its glittering memories.

The switchboard girl said languidly, "Fifteen-O-Ni-un doesn't answer."

Mike started for the elevator, now definitely worried, but a hand took his shoulder.

"Just a minute. Ain't your name Shand?"

Mike turned. The round, three-chinned face could belong but to one type of man—house dick. Mike said he was Shand and he wanted to see Blake because it was important.

"The girl told you he wasn't in," said the dick, identifying himself as Herman Olson. "If you want to wait, wait down here. You don't do no illegal room-casing in this house."

Mike's eyes turned steely but he sat down in a chair. He went out for cigarettes. He bought a paper and looked at his picture. At ten-forty he said to Olson, "Something's happened to him."

"Nothing ain't happened to him," said Olson. "He's out like the girl told you ten times."

Mike went out to a drug store, got some hairpins, an oustiti, then went in the kitchen entrance to the hotel and walked up fifteen flights.

If he was caught this was going to be nasty but he had to know. The door was locked. Worse, the key was in it. If it were locked from the inside, why didn't Blake answer? The delicate jaws of the oustiti (a slim pair of pliers) gripped the key-nose and turned it.

(Continued On Page 80)

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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 79)

Mike went in and switched on the lights.

The bed was torn to hell and gone. A chair was smashed. And there was Philip Blake on the floor. He wore a pair of shorts and nothing else. His hands were raised over his head, doubled into tight fists. His eyes stared. His mouth was wide as if to scream.

And he had been neatly stabbed through the heart. Neat was hardly the word. Something like a stiletto had been used, so that there was just a small blue puncture with maybe a cupful of blood, black on the floor. He was quite dead.

## CHAPTER IV

THERE was a long roaring in Mike's ears; and he had ice cubes in his stomach. But he forced himself to be calm; then he remembered Sam Froste's call, the soft laugh. Swiftly he bent and felt of Blake's buff flesh. Not too cold.

In the Police Academy he had been taught that ordinarily a dead body cools a degree an hour. He tried to guess, and figured Blake was five degrees colder than normal. Five hours. This was borne out by the bathroom. Blake had been about to bathe; the water was still in the tub. He had been killed, then, about six o'clock.

"Froste knew this guy was being bumped," he muttered.

He knew the dismal truth then; unless he found the murderer of Philip Blake and could prove it to the hilt, nothing could save him from a murder conviction.

He took a big breath and began to case the room.

There was a phony fireplace with a gas log in it, and in this he found the ashes of a burned piece of newspaper. Burning as it did in no draft, the ashes held together in the original form, so that Mike could see the printing. More, he could see finger and palm prints. Not clear but enough. The rest of the newspaper was on the floor. Obviously the murderer had got a spurt of blood on his hands in driving home the blade, had used the newspaper to wipe his



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## A Clean Nose

hands and the stiletto, and had then burned it.

Mike took hope. What was that they had taught in Police Academy about black light? He went to the bathroom which had a large window. Deliberately he drove his fist through the glass. The shattered fragments showered down, and Mike picked the biggest two.

Carefully he got the burned piece of newspaper between the two chunks of glass and carefully flattened it. The imprint of the hand and the smudges of blood, as well as outlines of type, were still there.

**CHEERED** by this, he examined Blake's clothing next. Here he came upon a singular fact. Blake's watch, a big, old-fashioned hunting-case thing of gold, had been smashed. Inside the gold cover was a round polished place as bright as new as compared to the rest of the watch, which showed some wear. As if something had been there and recently removed.

"Now," said Mike to himself, "why did that watch get busted?"

Not in the fight, surely, because what fight there was occurred when Blake was undressed. You could see the marks of his bare feet in the nap of the rug.

And then it was that Mike saw the clue that made his heart pound the way it did the day he won the Police Academy quarter-mile run.

There, in the nap of the rug, was printed the word, "Nardella!"

Blake had had a finger free for one desperate instant before he died and had left this vital clue.

Nardella? Who but Nardella Fane, the finger gal who had put Conroy on the spot, had saved Sam Froste from prison.

But where did she fit into this murder picture? Had she fingered Blake? No, it had been publicly stated that he lived at the Tangier. Had she been here? He could find no evidence to prove it.

But he sensed then he had a whale of a mystery by the tail. Tullio had doubtless killed Blake to save himself from a later gambling rap.

(Continued On Page 82)

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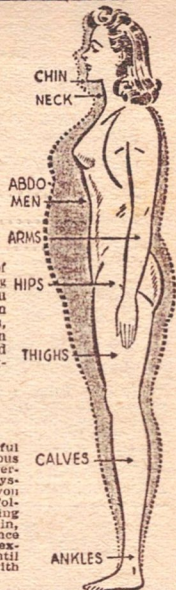
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 81)

It seemed a weak motive to kill a man until you realized that to racketeers human life against a stir-rap is cheap.

He was searching for some other clue when he heard a wheezing in the hall. He sprang to the door, but too late.

Olson cursed and said, "I had a hunch you'd try something. Now, by God..."

He broke off, for he had seen through the door the lifeless sprawled body. He said, "Cheese!" He turned his head. Then, on a sudden, his hand dove for his holstered gun.

Mike didn't wait. In face of what had happened, he couldn't have the detectives hold him now. He had to have his freedom.

He swung from the ankles, his fist a blur of white. The knuckles exploded against Olson's jaw. He lit on the back of his spine and didn't move. Swiftly Mike dragged him into the room. He was going out and then remembered his duty.

So he took the phone and called Homicide and reported the murder. Then with his two pieces of glass and the ash he went out the lobby entrance....

Detective First Grade Verne Hawkins, of Homicide, looked thinly at Barney Hartigan and then said, "Barney, if you know where Mike Shand is, tell me."

Barney shook his head wearily.

"Verne, you know me. I'm telling you I ain't seen the lad since he went out the night Blake was killed."

That was four days ago and it seemed impossible that anybody could have ducked prowls cars, radio alarm and fugitive broadcast.

**B**ARNEY said, "The kid didn't kill Blake. Common sense would tell you Blake was his one chance of beating the Kofodes rap."

"I know," said Hawkins, "but he's jammed things up. There's plenty of pressure from the politics to get him."

Barney said nothing.

"Well," said Hawkins, "keep your nose clean, Barney. With retirement



## A Clean Nose

coming up, you don't want trouble now."

Barney went out, grim-faced. He did not go home because he was too troubled in mind and it was as well he didn't. In his parlor, sitting in his easy chair with Judy on his lap, was Mike Shand.

He was weary, sick with fatigue. For ninety-six hours he had been a hunted rat. For seventy-two hours he had sought a break in the case, and had none.

The ultra-violet photographs of his ash had produced clear fingerprints. He had sent a copy of the photo to Homicide. The newspapers told him they were not Tullio's prints.

Whose were they? Nardella Fane's? Had she done the kill? If so, why?

Mike had spent eating money for taxis to tail Tony Tullio for ten hours. And this had got him no place.

Tullio went from the hotel to an old brownstone front at Twenty-eighth Street and River Avenue. A garage man told him Sam Froste owned it but did not live there.

So this lead petered out. And now, with Judy rubbing the scratchy whiskers on his face, he went over and over it, hoping she'd see something.

But she could not. She fed him, even to two slabs of home-made apple pie. She loaned him an old gun of Barney's. But that was all.

"Darlin'," she whispered tearfully, "why don't you give yourself up? This is only making it look worse."

"Maybe if the Homicide men knew about Nardella Fane, they could get a connection. In Indianapolis, maybe."

Mike shook his head. "The minute I'm in jail I'm done for," he muttered. "This is my only chance—" something flashed in his mind, and an idea almost tore his skull open.

"Great Saints!" he muttered, "you're right, Judy. Indianapolis! Nardella!"

He swept her into his arms and kissed her.

"I've got it, hon," he said. "I'm sure I have."

(Continued On Page 84)

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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 83)

He ran almost all the way to the subway and rode to Times Square. Here he went into the *Sphere's* office on West 40th Street, and sought out the sports department.

He had made quite a name for himself in high school and Police Academy sports, so when Dave Rennie, sports columnist, got the note, he whistled in amazement and came out. He shook hands.

"Do you know the police are turning over manhole covers to find you?"

Mike nodded grimly. Then he told Rennie why he had come.

"Your newspaper receives telephotos," he concluded. "I want you to get some reporter out there to wirephoto a picture of Mrs. Philip Blake."

"Why?" asked Rennie.

"Get a picture of Nardella Fane out of your morgue and we'll see."

**R**ENNIE smelled a big story. "It'll take time to get the pix," he said and then, grinning, "I'll hide you in the *Sphere* morgue. Behind the 1832 files."

Mike Shand sat in the *Sphere* library for nine straight hours, dying one death each hour. It was not until 9:30 that Rennie came in, his eyes shining. He held a photograph in each hand.

"You win, Mike," he said, "look."

The photograph of Nardella Fane and that of Mrs. Philip Blake were not only of the same woman, they had been printed off the same negative.

"What's it mean?" asked Rennie.

Mike shook his head. Vague ideas struggled in his mind but none was clear.

"I don't know yet," he said, "but I think by midnight I can hand you the swellest murder yarn you ever saw wrapped in cellophane."

"I'll be waiting," promised Rennie, "and I'll hush up anybody who spots you going out."

Mike went down the fire stairs but it wasn't in the *Sphere* office that disaster struck. It was at Forty-second Street. He was about to board a crosstown trolley when a black



## A Clean Nose

coupe dashed up to the curb. Brakes screamed. The door slammed.

Detective Lou Riley, who had taught him ballistics in Police Academy, jumped at him and said crisply, "You're under arrest, Shand."

Mike froze, stared. Then he stepped close to Riley. Pled.

"Listen, Riley, I've got this case broken. Give me until morning. Give me only until midnight. I'll give myself up then, I promise."

Riley shrugged, shook his head.

"You know I can't do that, Mike. Come on, let's not have any trouble."

Mike sighed and threw his right. He vaguely saw Riley go diving for his gun. And then he saw his hook hit Riley's jaw, saw Riley bounce off the prowler car with a clang. People started to scream. Then Mike was running, ducking into side streets and alleys. Instinctively he worked fast. It took him nearly an hour to reach Tenth Avenue because he heard the cordon gathering to trap him. A broadcast blast had gone out from Riley to the radio patrol cars. They had formed a barrage, closing in to make an ever-tightening circle inside of which dicks with machine guns and other weapons would relentlessly hunt him down.

It was nearly midnight when he got to Tenth Avenue and Fifty-Fourth Street. Here was the call box where Barney would be making his hourly call.

He worked cautiously along the shadows. Then he saw Barney and the new rookie with him, Officer Ostrander. As he watched, a prowler car with a sergeant and a driver pulled up. Barney went to the curb and talked. Then Ostrander followed.

Mike smiled mirthlessly. They knew Barney was his friend; they were checking. Then, surprisingly, Ostrander hung to the running board and the prowler car shot off. Instantly Mike darted forward. This was his one big chance to talk safely to Barney.

He came up quietly behind the old cop.

"Barney," he said softly, "You've

(Continued On Page 86)



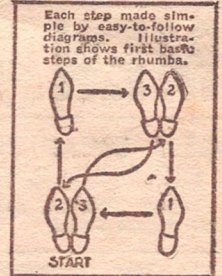
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**Crack Detective**

(Continued From Page 85)

got to put some chips in my game now."

Barney whirled, his hand instinctively diving to his holster. He didn't relax when he saw Mike's white taut face.

"My God, boy, what have you done?" he said harshly. "They've got riot guns and tear gas and the reserves coming for you."

Mike told him what had happened. Not only about socking Riley but about Nardella Fane being Mrs. Philip Blake.

"I can bust this wide open if I just can get to River Avenue," he concluded.

"And you want me to risk everything and let you get there?"

"That's the play," said Mike quietly.

**CHAPTER V**

**B**ARNEY blew up with a curse. "You muddle-headed idiot! You can't any more legally go into that house on River Avenue than you could Tullio's place. You'd only land me in the dock beside you." He stepped closer to Mike.

"I'm arresting you, lad, before they shoot you. Come now, I'll telephone for a prowler car to take us down."

Mike stared unbelievably at Barney.

"You mean with everything at stake you won't give me this one break?" he cried. "You mean that knowing this will prove I shot in self-defense you won't help me clear myself?"

Barney stood silent. His tired face and weary eyes did not lift.

Mike laughed harshly, mirthlessly. "Why, you're yellow, Barney Hartigan," he cried. "You'd let them smash me to bits to keep your own nose clean. To hang onto your chance of a pension you'd let them take away my liberty and maybe my life."

He suddenly took out his gun. "I should belt you down but for Judy's sake I can't, so call the prowler car. Take me down, it'll help keep your nose clean."

Every scratching word burned Bar-



## A Clean Nose

ney Hartigan like a blow torch flame.

He stood there now, feeling old, weary, seeing a lot of empty years march past in his memory. The politicians had broken his spirit.

He had done his duty, no more and no less. He had abided by regulations. He had one citation of bravery for shooting it out with one of Kid Dropper's old gang. And all this had got him what? The chance to smash this boy, break Judy's heart, so he could get his monthly pension.

Suppose, he told himself, this Nardella Fane clue could clear Mike and he had stood in the way. He'd never sleep of nights and his pension would mold in his hand.

If Mike was right—

**B**ARNEY HARTIGAN suddenly stepped back and cursed. He was seeing Judy's face and it haunted him.

"All right, you young idiot," he said savagely, "I'm a fool—but let's go."

Incredulously, Mike stared. Then he laughed deeply, richly, a fine sound to hear. He flung an arm around Barney's shoulder.

"Barney, I knew somewhere in you was the makings of a great cop."

They worked north, and Barney flagged down a cab and gave the River Avenue address where Mike had trailed Tullio. During the ride across town he made Mike go over every detail of reasoning, everything that had happened.

"There was a picture in that watch," concluded Mike. "Blake was old-fashioned enough to carry a hunting-case watch, and have a picture stuck inside the cover. I'm certain it was Nardella Fane's picture. And it was taken out. Why? When we know that, we've got the pay-off clue."

Barney nodded. "Let's hope you're right, lad."

Just before the cab stopped on River Avenue Mike said, "If this goes haywire, you'll take me in and say you pursued me into this house, and I submitted then to capture and arrest. That'll keep your nose clean."

Barney cursed as he climbed out.

(Continued On Page 88)

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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 87)

"Stop saying them words. I'm sick of the phrase, I am."

The brownstone front was dark and Mike's heart sank. Suppose no one was there? This was his last chance. But he mounted the steps anyway and rang the bell. Barney drew his gun and waited. Mike rang again.

"Maybe—" he began.

The door suddenly opened and a girl wearing a white maid's cap and black silk dress and white apron, peered out at them.

"Que voulez-vous? What ees eet you weesh?" Then she saw Barney's uniform and tried to slam the door. It was Barney who now violated the law of illegal entry.

He leaped across the threshold and slammed a hand over the girl's wide-open mouth. He stifled a scream that would have been heard in Yonkers.

"All right, lad," he said, "get going."

Mike laughed softly and went in. He heard Barney, tying and gagging the girl. Then he heard a radio softly playing somewhere, "You're the One." He went toward it.

He peered through a pair of dark maroon velvet portieres into a drawing room. He heard Barney come up behind him and tugged at his sleeve and pointed. Barney jumped excitedly.

Then Mike levelled his gun and went into the room with one jump.

"Hello," he said, "am I intruding?"

He was grinning savagely, showing his back teeth like a wolf, and looking at Tony Tullio. He stared also at the white, distinguished face of ex-county attorney Sam Froste. But most of all he studied the very beautiful features of Nardella Fane.

Barney stepped alongside of Mike. "This is a pinch," he said briefly.

**TULLIO'S** swarthy face turned gray. Sam Froste smiled gently but his eyes were wary. The girl looked scared to death.

"Arrest for what?" said Froste. "Where is your warrant? How dare you break in here!"

"You're under arrest, Froste, for

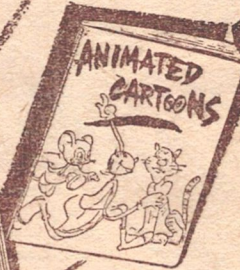
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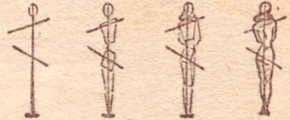
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(Continued From Page 88)

the murder of Philip Blake," said Mike. "This gal of yours, Nardella Fane, is under arrest as an accessory. And we'll take you along, Tullio, as an accessory before and after the fact."

"This," said Froste, rising, "is ridiculous."

Mike grinned and pulled his bluff. "I'll show you how ridiculous it is," he countered. "You also killed Marvin Conroy, the key witness against you. This woman, Nardella Fane, is your sweetheart. After the Conroy kill she was hot. To hide her you made a deal with this busted play-boy, Philip Blake. She marries him and gets a new name, and he got twelve thousand bucks for keeping quiet about who she was. Later she was to get divorced and come back to you."

"But Blake fell in love with her. And when she ran out, taking what dough she could get, he followed. He made threats in front of Tullio. Even if I hadn't come busting in, you'd have killed Blake. You had to shut his mouth."

It was sheer guess-work and hunch. Froste betrayed nothing. But the Fane girl flinched.

"That will take a lot of proving," said Froste.

"Not as much as you'd think," said Mike. He grinned. "You handed us the perfect clue."

He let that sink in. Then: "You wiped that stiletto on a piece of the Evening Sphere, Froste. You wiped a little blood off your hands, too. Then you burned the paper. Only the ash held and under black light—you've heard of ultra-violet photography, Froste—your fingerprints came out."

"That will burn you, Froste, and then you'll squeal and that heat will burn Tullio for helping you kill Conroy."

The shot told all the way around. Froste's white eyebrows went up. Tullio cursed. Nardella moaned, "Oh, Sam!"

Then before anybody could say another word, Mike felt a cold prod at the base of the neck.

(Continued On Page 92)

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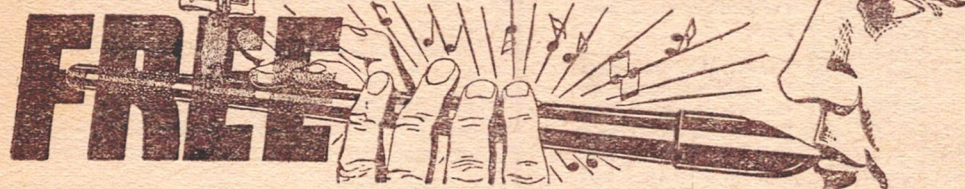
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 90)

"What do we do, boss," said a harsh voice, "cut loose here?"

Mike half-turned. The man was Slick Durno and another tough guy had a gun on Barney's shoulder blades.

Sam Froste took out a billowing silk handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"Slick, sometimes you're a positive genius," he said in his soft voice. "This monkey has the truth and it seems I left my souvenir. So I'll have to attend to these two to get time for a get-away."

It was the confession of guilt.

He turned to Nardella. "How'd you like a nice South American climate, honey?"

Nardella said, "I know you shouldn't have killed Phil, Sam. He could have been bought."

Sam turned to Mike. "What's done can't be mended. Throw down that gun, Shand. You've been too smart for your own good this time."

Mike looked at Barney and his lips tightened.

Mike looked at Barney and his lips tightened.

"Sorry, Barney, I made a mess of it."

Deliberately he tossed his gun into the center of the room.

"You, too, Hartigan—" began Froste, but he got no farther.

Mike's gun exploded with a terrific roar.

He had thrown the gun, cocked, and the force of falling had tripped the trigger.

**N**ARDELLA screamed. Slick Durno was startled, jumped, and looked from Mike to the gun on the floor. That was a mistake.

Mike leaped and he threw a punch that started at his instep, and it hit Durno with a sound that made you sick at your stomach. The man crumpled and hit face down. Mike followed right after the blow, wading in and dropping on top of him, grabbing for the automatic just as it fell from Durno's senseless fingers.

The guy who had Barney covered blasted at Mike, and at ten feet he couldn't very well miss. Mike felt

(Continued On Page 94)



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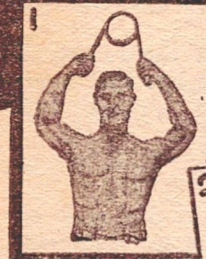
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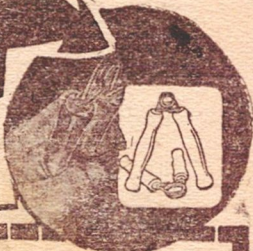
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 92)

the lead go into him and he went down as if kicked. He fired, a snapshot that hit the young killer. It didn't knock him down, but it served to save Barney Hartigan's life, for the weasel-faced kid had whirled and intended to give it to Barney then and there. Mike's slug threw him off balance, and Barney got his own gun working.

But Mike didn't see the result of this because his attention had been whirled back to Sam Froste and Tony Tullio.

Sam Froste shouted, "This is the big try, Tony."

Whatever else might be said of Sam Froste, there was no doubting his courage. He went point-blank into the gun that Mike whirled. Mike shot and saw Froste shiver to the bullet's impact. But he came forward, tugging out a gun, and Mike shot again and the gun flew and Froste fell down. Then Sam Froste tried to crawl away. Mike went after him. From then on he only saw Sam Froste's white frozen face. His fingers clawed for Froste's throat. Froste was smashing at his face with a bullet-smashed hand. A blackness was on him but he fought it off.

He never really knew he had his fingers around Froste's throat. Froste's face had disappeared into a red-tinted fog. Time had ceased to be and there was only the feel of crepe skin under his fingers and the blackness getting blacker.

Somebody pulled his fingers loose, finger by finger.

"Leggo," Barney Hartigan's voice pierced the foggy darkness. "Leggo, Mike, you're choking him to death."

Mike's vision cleared momentarily. He saw Barney. He saw a blur of faces behind Barney. He grinned feebly.

"That's what I started out to do," he mumbled. "Give Rennie the story—," and fainted.

**T**HEY have a special ward at Bellevue where they pull the lead out of wounded cops, and Mike woke up that fine sunshiny morning and found himself in it. A little

(Continued On Page 96)



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**Crack Detective**

(Continued From Page 94)

while later, after he had found he didn't feel so badly, he had visitors. Barney and Judy.

Judy kissed him and said, "Thank all the saints."

And Barney said, "You lucky idiot!" but he shook hands.

"What's the score now?" grinned Mike.

Barney handed Judy a paper. "Read him about us."

Judy read: "The gray old badger, Sam Froste, once political king of all he surveyed, was run to his hole last night, and today he faces electrocution for murder, all because of two gallant cops, Michael Shand and Barney Hartigan, who risked their careers to trap the alleged criminal leader. These two heroes—"

"I like that part," said Judy, "about heroes, I mean."

"It's accurate," said Barney. "But read him about where I get my sergeant's stripes to retire on."

Judy did that. Mike beamed. "That's grand, Barney, but it should have been a lieutenant's bars."

"I'll read what Commissioner Harkness said," cut in Judy.

"This daring initiative will be suitably rewarded," Police Commissioner Harkness declared vigorously today, "and as soon as proper legal action has been taken to dismiss the murder indictment, Shand will be reinstated and his alert intelligence put to work...."

Mike beamed. "Alert intelligence? Commissioner Harkness is a very observant man."

"But," Judy read on, "Shand will still have to learn that laws are made to be obeyed by policemen and all. His suspension for thirty days will continue."

"Why," cried Mike, "he's as blind as a bat, he is."

"It's just his way of telling you from now on to keep your...."

"Keep what?" chorused Judy and Mike.

"...Keep your feet on the ground," said Barney, and then grinned as they roared.



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