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DEAD!**

By
**ALLAN K.
ECHOLS**

STORIES BY
**GRETA BARDET
CLIFF CAMPBELL
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Volume 5 ★ ★ ★ July, 1944 ★ ★ ★ Number 4

SURE-FIRE MYSTERY NOVEL

FINGER FROM THE GRAVE By Cliff Campbell 69

It was an ultra-clever murder plan, but there was one flaw. The killer wouldn't know exactly when old Manson Weeks died. So, if the man's death could be concealed long enough, the culprit would be forced to show his hand!

SHORT STORIES

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It was a deadly game of hide and seek, with a cunning murderer counting corpses as each victim was tagged "out"!

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Unless Ben Rogers could break the frame hanging over his fiancee's head, he'd be virtually a widower before he married her!

MR. ANGEL'S CONSCIENCE By Greta Bardet 30

Problem: Is reader Homer Angel a crook?

ONE KNEW THE MOTIVE By Stuart Friedman 39

It would be a perfect crime, because only Basil Denver's brother would know why Basil was killing him!

MURDER TAKES NO FURLOUGH . . . By Bruno Fischer 41

Private Sloan hit the man with his car in the dark, bounced him off a fender. But how did the victim manage to die of a stab-wound?

SOMETIMES MONEY TALKS By Frank Kane 51

The counterfeit notes were as nearly perfect as anyone had ever seen—but the face of George Washington had a story to tell!

HEADLINES IN LEAD By Lee Floren 60

Jim Perry knew that the way to deal with kidnapers was NOT to play ball!

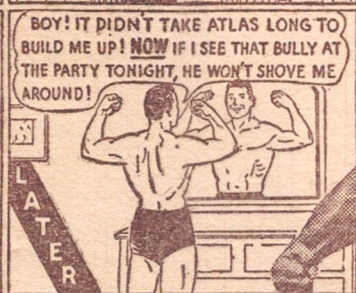
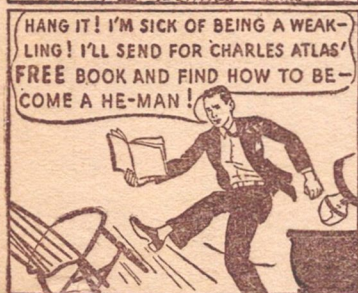
THE JINX By Basil Wells 65

Even in death, Edna Georges seemed to be thwarting her husband's crooked schemes!

Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

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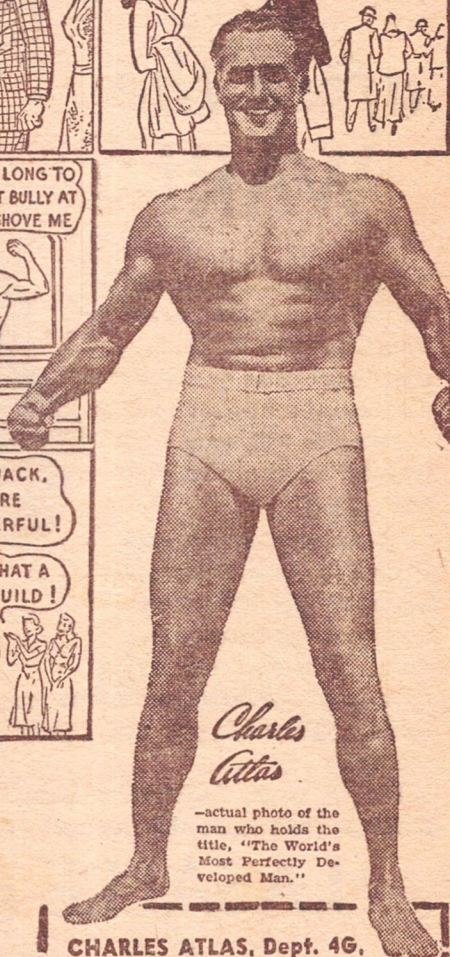
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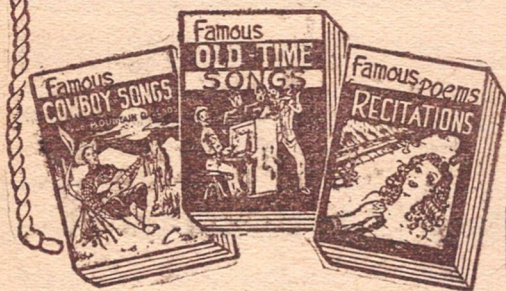
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Scarcely before the stricken waiter had hit the floor, a bullet shattered the glass in McNary's hand.

A ruthless, methodical murderer was counting his corpses, and Dave McNary had to find the secret of the silent death before he was tagged "out" in this sinister game of hide and seek!

BE SURE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★★★ THEY'RE DEAD!

By Allan K. Echols

IT WAS a nasty night. The wind whipped a slop of rain and snow against my windshield, and almost completely blotted out the road which crept under my dim headlamps, as I crawled up to the roadhouse. I didn't like the idea which had brought me here at all.

Inside the diningroom of the place the lights were dim, and there were very few people eating and drinking in the booths. I was glad

of it. I was looking for a girl I didn't know, one wearing a gray wool suit and a Russian caracul hat to match.

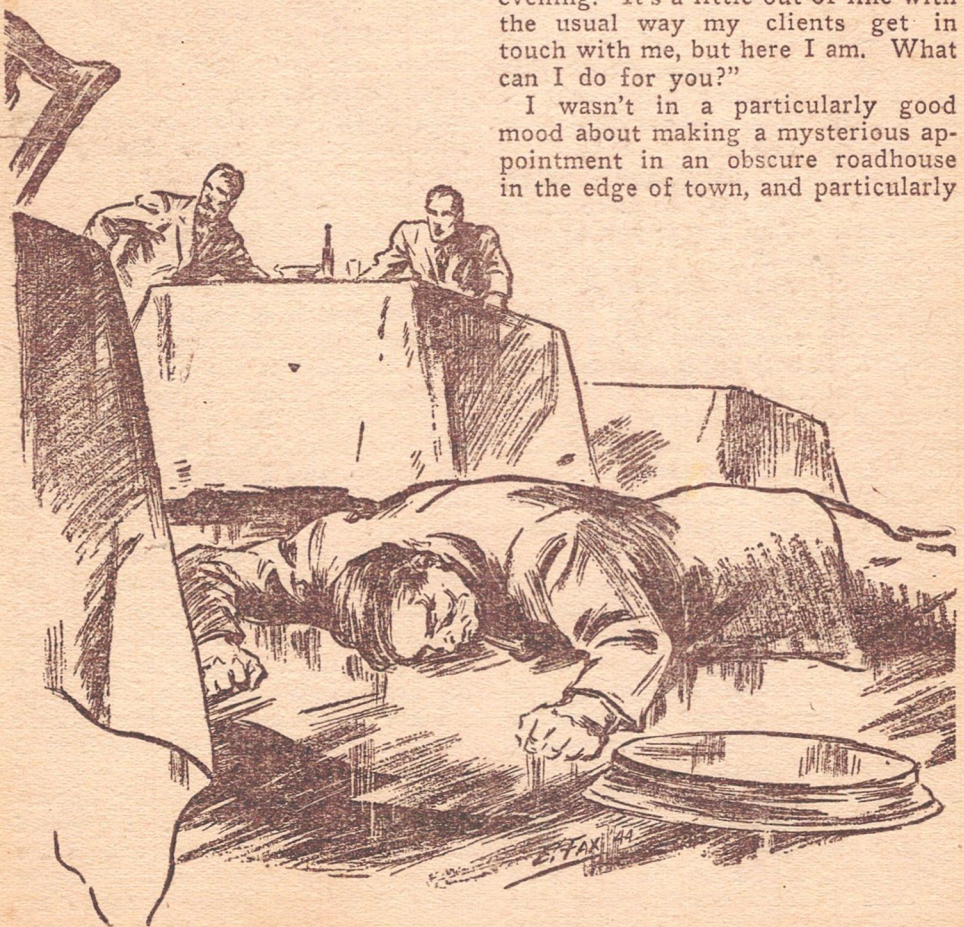
I found her at a corner table, sat down opposite her, and asked:

"Miss Newell?"

She looked at me shrewdly in the dim light, and answered, "Yes. And you?"

"My name is McNary," I told her. "My secretary said that you insisted on an appointment with me here this evening. It's a little out of line with the usual way my clients get in touch with me, but here I am. What can I do for you?"

I wasn't in a particularly good mood about making a mysterious appointment in an obscure roadhouse in the edge of town, and particularly



on a night like this. The waiter came and stood at the table expectantly. I looked at his pushed-in face, asked the girl for her order, then sent him for a Manhattan and a straight rye.

The girl across the table seemed to be studying me carefully while I ordered, and now I returned the compliment. She wasn't hard to look at, bronze hair and green eyes that were large and deep and more than a little intelligent. She had poise, just the right touch of self-confidence and shrewdness about her. She seemed frightened.

She smashed out a lipstick-stained cigarette in the ash tray, and said, "Mr. McNary, are you sure you weren't trailed here?"

"No! Why should I be?"

She did not answer me, but continued. "I hope you weren't, but I'm so—so afraid. I had to talk to somebody, and I remembered that you helped a patient at the sanitarium—a Mr. Tarver, whose son-in-law had him confined there."

I was still impatient, and I asked, "Yes? The man was no more crazy than I am. What was it you wanted to see me about?"

The girl said defensively, "You understand, a private mental institution is not responsible for a thing like that. It only looks after patients who are sent to it. Neither Doctor Belden nor Doctor Leslie would wilfully hold a person there against his will without a court order."

"But what can I do for you?" I repeated. I had no intention of discussing one of my cases with her.

"I know you can help me," she said. "I am Doctor Leslie's nurse; that is, I'm the nurse who assists him. At noon today I heard something. I wasn't eavesdropping, understand, but I just accidentally heard Doctor Belden's nurse talking over the telephone. There was no one supposed to be in Doctor Belden's office then, so I suppose she thought she was safe. She said—"

That was as far as she got with her story. The waiter with the bashed-in face came with our drinks, and she stopped talking. I caught a malignant look from the man's eye

as he set the girl's drink down. He seemed to be preoccupied with something.

He took my whiskey off the tray, set it down in front of me, then picked up the glass of water off the tray. He started to set it down on the table in front of me—then his hand stopped. I heard a peculiar sound come from his throat.

He tried to straighten up, still holding the glass and tray. I looked up at him and saw that his eyes were wild with fright—as though he were looking death in the face. The cords in his neck grew taut, and the muscles in his jaws bulged under the skin of his hard face.

THEN, still trying to balance the tray and glass of water in his two hands, his knees buckled under him and he fell to the floor. He kicked out with both feet two or three times, as though he were running in air—and then he lay on his side. His eyes were staring and malignant—but he did not move.

I knew that he was dead.

I looked quickly at the girl, just in time to see her throw her hand up to her terrified face and bite her wrist, as though to keep from screaming. I quickly offered her my whiskey.

As I held out the glass, a bullet whipped in front of my nose and splintered it. The bullet buried itself in the wall with a little plunking sound, and I looked at my hand full of broken glass and dripping whiskey.

I had heard the shot, and it wasn't very loud. Then a breath of cold air hit me and brought me out of my momentary daze. I looked toward the partly open window from which the draft blew—and then I acted.

I had caught one glimpse of a dark form of a person with a pistol framed in the window.

The girl was still gazing hypnotized at the dead waiter. I grabbed our table, threw it over out of the booth as I got to my feet. I caught the girl by the wrist, wrapped my other arm around her neck, and dropped to the floor with her.

And just at that moment, a second

shot popped outside the window, and another bullet buried itself in the wall of our booth.

The girl and I were crouched behind the overturned table, and I was digging my automatic out from under my left arm. I got it out just in time to throw one answering shot at the form in the window.

I heard a yelp, and then the shadow disappeared into the storm. There was a sudden silence in the dining room. But only for a moment.

The few people eating there had sat stunned, but now they broke out into hysteria. Women screamed, men shouted meaningless things, and they all scraped their chairs on the floor and got up out of their seats.

The manager was a level-headed man. He dashed toward the outer door and locked it before half a dozen people who were running toward it reached it. He stood with his back to the door and faced them.

"Everybody be quiet. It's all over. Go back to your seats and wait. I've already put in the police alarm." He was firm about it, and he stood there and ignored their arguments. He even sent the cashier around to collect their checks before the police got there.

I was still on the floor behind my table, with the girl in a heap beside me. I heard her stammer, "I thought so! You were followed! They tried to kill me."

I helped her up, and when she was on her feet I asked, "You think that man shot at you?"

She did not have time to answer before I heard the siren outside, and in another minute my friend Gentry, the night chief of police, and two uniformed men came in. The manager led them over to the dead waiter, then turned and headed back the crowd of men who started to gather around.

GENTRY is a short, heavy-set man who always has a cigar in his mouth. He walks with a limp on account of a bullet in his hip. He knelt and examined the dead waiter, feeling his pulse, turning him over on his back, and working one of

his arms. Then he got up, dusted his knees and asked:

"What happened?"

Everybody tried to tell him at once. He got them quiet and listened to a little man who claimed he had seen it. The little man said importantly:

"I saw it all. The waiter was over at that booth starting to serve a drink. The man sitting there pulled out a gun and shot him. There were a lot of shots fired. The man hid behind his overturned table and kept shooting till the waiter fell.

"Who was sitting at that table?" Gentry asked.

The little man looked at me and said, "That's him. He shot him."

Then Gentry saw me for the first time. He looked queerly at me as I came away from my booth and joined him. He said to the little man, "You must be mistaken. This is Dave McNary, the lawyer. He doesn't go around shooting waiters."

"But I saw him. He must have fired half a dozen shots."

Gentry looked at me. "What happened, Dave?" he asked.

I told him exactly what had happened. I handed him my .32 and showed him that I had fired only one shot. "I saw the man at the window and took a quick shot at him," I finished. "I think I wounded him, but I don't know. Anyway, there's only one shot gone from my gun, and there are two slugs in the wall over my booth. And—here's a point that proves how unreliable even honest eye-witnesses are—the waiter fell dead before a shot was fired!"

The little man didn't want his story ruined. He chimed in, "I tell you, I saw him shoot him, half a dozen times."

Gentry puffed at his cigar, then asked the little man:

"Maybe you can show me the bullet wound in him. I couldn't find one."

The little gink withdrew from the case.

The manager came up. "Maybe this will explain part of it. That waiter just went to work for me this morning. He said he had been in a

hospital with heart trouble. Maybe it got him."

"We'll find out when the coroner comes," Gentry answered. "But that doesn't explain the shooting." He looked at me again. "Have you got any idea who shot at you?"

I answered, "I was here talking to a woman who was afraid—" I looked around for the girl.

She was gone.

"She was from Rivercrest Sanitarium, and she was trying to tell me something when it started. I don't know what happened to her. She must have run out when the shooting was over."

"That doesn't clear up much," Gentry admitted. "So there's nothing much to go on until the coroner holds an autopsy. You can go any time you want to."

I was glad to accept the offer, and I got out of the dark roadhouse as quickly as I could get my coat on. Gentry seemed to be satisfied that the waiter had died of heart trouble, and that seemed the only logical explanation. But I didn't like it, somehow.

There seemed too much coincidence about it—and mystery. The frightened girl believed that an attack had been made on her life, and that the waiter's death was connected with it. But that didn't explain the waiter dying before the shots were fired.

I bundled up in my coat and went around the dark exterior of the roadhouse. I carried my gun in my hand—just to make sure.

I found my car, got under the wheel and started it. As I rolled out into the road I heard a bustling behind me, and a form slid over the back of the seat and plopped down beside me.

I grabbed for my gun in my overcoat pocket. I had it on the way out when a voice said, "I thought you were never coming."

It was the girl from the hospital.

I put the gun back in my pocket. "What happened to you?" I asked.

SHE snuggled down in the seat beside me like a little child. "I

was afraid," she confessed. "I couldn't stay there in that room knowing somebody was there to try to kill me."

I had my car headed toward my apartment house, and I didn't intend to let the girl get out of my sight until I found out what all the mystery was. After all, the waiter fell dead at my booth, and those bullets hadn't missed me very far. I told her where I was taking her.

"That's all right, if it is safe," she answered.

"How did you get out of the restaurant?" I asked her. "The manager locked the door."

"Through the window of the ladies' room," she admitted.

"How'd you know my car?"

"I've seen that yellow convertible too many times. You see, I live in the apartment house next to yours."

"Then I'll take you there—"

"No," she objected in sudden panic. "I wouldn't dare go there now."

"All right," I said. The poor girl was really terrified. I could feel her trembling against my body as I drove.

So, I brought her to my apartment, and got her comfortable before I started asking questions. Then I asked, "What made you say that person at the window was trying to kill you?"

She fumbled her cigarette nervously. "I started to tell you back in the restaurant. I'm Doctor Leslie's nurse. At noon today, I heard Doctor Belden's nurse talking on the phone. And she was discussing a plan to kill Doctor Belden tonight!"

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. And I believe that Sally Emery—that's her name—realized that I heard her, and put the other party on my trail to kill me to be sure I didn't tell anybody."

I reached for the telephone. "Why in the world didn't you call the police? Or tell Doctor Leslie, instead of waiting around to get in touch with me? That was crazy."

Before she could answer, the operator came in and I got police headquarters. "Give me Bob Gentry in a hurry," I said to the desk man. "This

is Dave McNary, and it's important."
 "Sorry, Mr. McNary, he's not in."
 "Where can I find him, but quick?"
 "He's on a call to Rivercrest Sanitarium."

I felt a cold chill go through me. "What's wrong out there?" I asked. "Doctor Belden is dead—"

I didn't wait for any more. Dropping the phone in its cradle, I got to my feet. "Damn it, you were right. Belden's dead. Why the devil did you wait to see me? If you'd got the police earlier—" She was sobbing as I put on my overcoat.

I told her, "You stay right in this room and keep the door locked until I come back. There's no danger while you're here, and I'll be back as soon as I can. I'll see if I can get you police protection."

"Where are you going?" she asked. "To Rivercrest."

As I pushed my car through the dark streets it was still snowing and my progress was slow. It made me impatient. I hadn't wanted to get into this case, but the death of the waiter, and the man with the gun outside the restaurant window had forced me into it. The girl was in very evident danger—and so was I, for that matter, until the death of the waiter was cleared up.

Rivercrest Sanitarium was a group of low, sprawling buildings occupying a whole block of terraced ground alongside the river. It was not a public institution, but a private sanitarium owned and operated by Belden and Leslie. Behind its walls were the living skeletons in the closets of all the wealthy families in this end of the state. It cost a lot of money to keep an insane patient there instead of in a public institution.

But it might have been worth it to those with the money. Belden was said to be a genius, and he had effected some miraculous cures of dementia praecox with the metrazol shock method. It was an open secret that the well-known young girl radio singer who had publicly announced that she was the mother of Whirlaway, the famous race horse, had been committed to Riverside, and had been cured of her insanity. There

were dozens of other famous names which had disappeared from print, their owners going into Riverside. Some came out, some lived on behind those secretive walls.

I PULLED up to the entrance behind Gentry's police car and rang the bell. The door was answered by a big dark-skinned man in a white attendant's uniform. He had one arm in a sling, and his black eyes looked at me angrily.

"Nobody come tonight," he said in broken English. "You come back maybe tomorrow." He started to close the door.

I put my foot in the crack and shouldered my way in. "Police," I snapped, and went on into the reception room. There was nobody there, and I went on down a long corridor, the dark man following me on silent feet. He was a great hulk of a creature, and I had little trouble picturing him overcoming a violent patient. It made me shudder.

I heard voices at the end of the hall, and found a laboratory room lighted up and occupied. Gentry and a uniformed man were there, and Doctor and Mrs. Leslie.

There were two other people in the room—Doctor Belden and his nurse. They both lay on the floor—dead.

Gentry looked up at me from a kneeling position beside the dead doctor who had apparently fallen off a stool while doing some work at his laboratory bench. He asked, "What brought you here?"

"I heard about it," I explained, "and I thought maybe I could help. But first, did the coroner find out what killed the waiter?"

Gentry got to his feet. "No. But he found out that it was not his heart. He's testing the stomach and organs now."

I looked at the dead doctor and his nurse. "Any clues on this?"

He shook his head. "Not a bullet hole, or a mark on either of them."

"Makes you think of the way the waiter died, doesn't it?" I asked.

Gentry looked at me puzzled. "Yeah. Why?"

Doctor Leslie had joined us. Up

to now, he had been standing with his arm around his wife, who still had her long black fur coat and hat on. She had evidently just come in. He was not much bigger than she was, but he was doing what he could to comfort her.

He said, "McNary, I'm glad you're here. There's something funny—something terrible going on, and frankly, I'm afraid. I know the police are doing what they can—"

"They'll straighten it up," I assured him. "Gentry knows his business."

Leslie wasn't at all like the man you'd expect to be running a madhouse. He was the administrator, while Belden was the scientist. Leslie belonged to the various clubs and got around quite a bit. He was a good mixer, even if he was a poor poker player. I had in my pocket at the time his IOU for three hundred dollars I had taken from him in a game at the Professional Men's Club only a couple of days ago. Right now, he appeared as if he needed a friend, as he groped awkwardly for a cigarette in his pocket and stuffed it into a holder with unsteady fingers.

He said, "No matter what it costs, I want you to get to the bottom of this. Poor Belden. And poor Emery. She was studying science. Had a great future."

I thought of the other girl's having heard the Emery woman plotting to kill Belden—and the problem grew more confused than ever.

"You take Mrs. Leslie to her quarters," I advised him, "and Gentry will take care of things. I'll do what I can, but I'm a lawyer, not a detective."

Mrs. Leslie said, "I'm worried about Miss Newell. I think she should be looked after—"

I reassured her. "Miss Newell is at my apartment, and she'll be safe there. As a matter of fact, she learned that Doctor Belden was in danger, and she came to me for help. It was too late."

MRS. LESLIE went out, and Gentry asked, "Who is Miss

Newell and what did she know about it?"

Leslie answered, "She's one of the nurses here. I hope she's safe."

"She is," I assured him. "Miss Newell heard this Miss Emery talking on the telephone today, and she says that Emery was discussing something which made her think that she was helping plan Doctor Belden's death."

"Nonsense," Leslie pointed out. "Emery is one of the victims."

"She might have helped the murderer plan the crime, and then he might have killed her afterward, to be sure she didn't break down and talk," I suggested.

"But why? Why would anyone kill Belden? He was just a scientist, and didn't have an enemy in the world?"

Gentry countered, "How about the patients?"

"Impossible," Leslie said. "They're all under lock and key, and with attendants guarding them. Simply impossible."

I spoke up. "About attendants. Who is that dark-skinned fellow, and what's the matter with his arm?"

Leslie smiled. "Oh, he's just a native Indian from Brazil. Doctor Belden brought him back from one of his trips up the river a few years ago. Saved the poor fellow's life, and Mazo has been like a faithful dog ever since."

"But his arm?"

Leslie hesitated. "Well—one of our men patients got a little obstreperous yesterday, and Mazo had to quiet him. He got a bad fall in the scuffle. But you can forget him. He loved Belden like a faithful dog loves his master."

I remembered hearing the man outside the window of the restaurant howl when I shot at him, and I wondered.

I said to Gentry, "I don't think Miss Newell is any too safe, even at my place. Hadn't we better go over there and talk to her and see what she knows, then get her to a place where she will be certain to be safe?"

"I had that in mind," Gentry said. "But we'll go to the morgue first, and

see if the doctor has found out what killed that waiter. Then we'll go to your place."

Leslie asked, "You don't know yet what killed them?"

"I know what didn't kill them," Gentry answered. "They weren't shot, and they weren't hit on the head. We can't learn any more until the coroner finds out exactly what did kill them. I believe now that whatever killed the waiter also killed these people."

He turned to me. "I'll be with you as soon as I take a look around the outside of the house for footprints. The window was open about a foot—"

"Like the one at the restaurant," I added.

"Yes. You wait in the reception room. I'll be ready in a minute or two."

I went out and paced the carpet in the reception room. I picked up medical magazines, threw them down, and picked them up again, trying to untangle the mystery. Three people were dead, apparently without cause, and for no discernible motive. One of the victims was apparently one of the plotters of the crime. And a fourth person was in fear of her life.

I was trying to make sense out of it when my eye was attracted to Belden's name on the cover of one of the magazines. I saw the issue contained an article by the dead doctor, so I turned to the page and looked at the article itself. "Some Methods of Reducing Metrazol Shock."

It was in technical language, but I made out from it that sometimes insane patients being given shock treatment had such strong convulsions that their bones were often broken. It was a terrible drug, but it would cure certain types of insanity. But, according to Belden, there was hope of controlling the convulsions it caused. Belden had found an alkaloid drug in South America which would paralyze the patient sufficiently to tone down the convulsions produced by metrazol, and thus eliminate the danger of serious fractures. . .

I was getting more interested as I

read further, and I had barely finished the article when Gentry came and got me.

I WENT along in Gentry's car to the morgue. The doctor was at his laboratory bench working over a group of vials. Gentry asked him what he had found.

"There was nothing in the stomach to indicate poison, and no evidence of heart disease. Frankly, I haven't been able to get hold of anything that could account for his death."

I offered my suggestion. "Have you tested the blood yet?"

The doctor looked at me like all doctors look at laymen who make suggestions to them. "No. Why do you ask?"

"It's out of my line, of course," I explained. "But I have a hunch that you will find an alkaloid in the blood, which, when it was administered, caused a complete paralysis of all the nerves and muscles."

The doctor looked at me tolerantly. "Just what alkaloid do you expect me to find?"

"Curare," I told him.

He smiled very briefly. "That is poison found in South America," he explained. "Native Indians use it to poison blow-gun darts down there to kill game—"

"And their enemies," I added. Frankly I was getting a kick out of this. "Also," I told him. "There is a limited amount of it here in America. For instance, Doctor Belden had a supply of it."

"Why?" the doctor asked.

"He was using it experimentally in very small doses to paralyze the muscles of insane patients so that they would not cripple themselves in their convulsion when he administered the metrazol shock treatment to them."

The doctor pursed his lips, and said, "Hu-mmm, you know, I believe I do remember now. Saw a paper on it that he published in a medical journal some time ago. . .never thought of it. . .maybe you've got something. . ."

Gentry said, "Hell, yes, he's got something. There wasn't a sign of any other kind of wound on any of

the dead people." He looked at me and continued:

"That attendant—didn't Leslie say he was a South American? Sure he did. And the man you shot outside the restaurant window—you thought you wounded him. That Indian's arm is in a sling. Doc, get on that blood, will you? Come on, Mac, we're going to pick up that savage in a hurry. Who ever would have thought of a blow-gun murder here in a civilized city!"

I started to remind him that I did, but changed my mind.

We went out and got into his car. I said, "Let's go by my apartment first. That Newell girl is there by herself."

"Sure," Gentry agreed. "If she knows anything, she's in plenty danger. But who'd have believed it—a South American savage going around killing people with a blow-gun right here in the heart of the city. But why? Suppose Belden broke one of their idols or something while he was down there? Maybe stole some jewels out of a temple?"

"You've been going to the movies," I accused him.

"Yeah? Then how'd you know so much about South American poisons?"

"Oh, I read a lot," I answered.

We pulled up at my apartment house and I rang my own bell. There was no answer and I rang twice more.

Gentry said, "H-m-m. Better use the key."

I opened the door to my living room. The Newell girl lay on my davenport, as though she had dropped off to sleep. Gentry crossed the room quickly, picked up her wrist, and was silent a moment.

"She's dead," he said. "Already the body's almost cold." He relit his cigar and walked the length of the room and back. "Say-y," he said, stopping in front of me. "If that bird killed her with a blow-gun, there ought to be arrows or darts or something."

I was already examining the dead girl. "There isn't anything like that sticking in her," I said. "At least as

far as I can see. Did you find anything like that at Belden's place?"

"I didn't look for anything like that," he admitted. "Who'd have thought—what I still can't figure is the motive. Why? Why were they all killed? And who's going to be next?"

I was already clawing through the girl's pocketbook, looking for her home address. I found some rent receipts, read them and stuck them in my pocket. When I closed the pocketbook, I did it with a very definite idea of what I wanted to do.

I SAID to Gentry, "Suppose this girl was really in on the deal. Suppose she knew those murders were going to happen, and she wanted to be in the clear on it. What would she do?"

"Naturally she'd establish an alibi by being with some disinterested party at the time they happened."

"Like me, for instance. I'd have to swear she was with me at that time."

"I see. And then her accomplice, just to make it safe for himself, hears you say she's alone here, and that we're going to the morgue and then coming here. So he beats us here and shuts her mouth for keeps."

"Could be," I admitted.

"It's not going to be easy to pin this on that savage."

"I think I can nail it down if you'll play along with me. But the idea could miss pretty easy, and we'd be back where we are now."

"All right," Gentry agreed. "You dug up the poison idea. Go ahead and see if you can nail the killer to the cross. What's on your mind?"

"We're going to take this girl's body to her own apartment first," I told him. "She lives right here in the block."

Gentry didn't like the job, but we got the girl's coat on and took her out to my car, and then to her own apartment, where we supported her between us and took her in a side door. If anybody had seen us they probably would have thought the girl had taken on a little too much to drink. But we got her into her apartment without being seen.

Be Sure They're Dead!

I found one of her night gowns, and we put her to bed, so that she looked as though she were in a natural sleep. Finally I had the room looking the way I wanted it, and then I went to the phone and called Rivercrest Sanitarium.

The Indian attendant answered the phone.

"I want you to give this message to Doctor and Mrs. Leslie," I told him. "Can you understand it all right?"

"Me speak good English," he answered.

"All right. Tell them that somebody tried to kill Miss Newell in my apartment—"

"She dead too?" the Indian asked in an even tone.

"No. She is not dead. She is going to recover. And she wants to talk to both Doctor Leslie and Mrs. Leslie. She is afraid she will die, and she wants to tell them something before she dies."

"You at her house?"

"No. There is nobody at her house now. The Chief of Police and I have to go back to police headquarters. But we will be back to the girl's house in one hour. We will meet them there in an hour—understand?"

"Si. Yes. I understand."

"All right. Don't forget. We will join them there in an hour. If we don't get there in an hour, tell them to wait. Understand? *Compre?*"

"Yes."

I hung up, and Gentry and I sat around and had a smoke. I showed him the rent receipts, and he studied them, then whistled. "This gets tangled-upper and tangled-upper all the time."

I said, "I think we'd better make ourselves scarce now. It's not far to Rivercrest."

We pushed our way into the tiny clothes closet in the Newell girl's bedroom, crouched in there with a wardrobe full of smart clothes, and the smell of perfume choking our nostrils. Fortunately, we did not have long to wait.

Gentry grabbed my arm in the dark

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and whispered, "Listen. Somebody's opening the hall door."

I heard it, and opened the closet door about an inch. I held my breath for half a minute, as I heard cautious footsteps crossing the living-room floor. Gentry put his eye to the crack of the door, then swore under his breath.

"Lord o' mercy. *Mrs Leslie!* She knew Leslie was playing around with his nurse."

I looked out and saw the long fur coat and the turban hat I had seen earlier in the evening.

The intruder stood, back to us, facing the bed. One hand came out of the pocket of the fur coat—with a hypodermic needle. Then the figure glided noiselessly to the bed, and in a flash, the hypo was jabbed into the dead girl's shoulder.

I threw the closet door open, and Gentry and I both came out with our guns ready to use.

"All right, *Doctor Leslie!*" I said. "Drop that syringe on the bed and back away from it."

THE figure whirled. Gentry grunted, as he saw Doctor Leslie standing beside the bed wearing his wife's coat and hat. We all three stood dead silent for several seconds, while both Leslie and Gentry got over the shock of seeing each other.

Then without a word, Leslie turned and grabbed for the hypo he had dropped on the bed beside the dead girl. Gentry suspected that he was going to kill himself, and dashed toward him.

But Doctor Leslie was a clever psychologist. His right hand held Gentry's attention as he reached for the hypodermic needle.

I shot him just as his left hand came out of the fur coat with an automatic pistol. Doctor Leslie fell to the floor without his hypo, and lay as though he were dead.

"That's the savage you're looking for," I told Gentry. "He was paying this girl's rent, and she was an expensive gal. He was losing a lot gambling, too. I've got one of his IOU's in my pocket now—which proves he was short of money. But Doctor

Belden had worked out this method of curing dementia precox, and it is good for a million from rich people who have it in their families. Maybe Leslie had been going to movies, too. Anyway, he decided to use this *curare* poison to kill the man who was going to benefit mankind with it. But he had to kill Belden's nurse, too, because she would have recognized the work of the poison. I figure he sent Newell to me to establish her alibi, then figured he might as well kill her while he was at it, and get rid of the danger of blackmail from her in case he got tired of paying her bills."

I looked down at the crooked doctor, and saw that he had moved slightly. He had managed to get his long cigarette holder out of his pocket, and was putting it in his mouth.

I kicked it out of his hand, and I was scared when I did it.

"I think that will explain how he tried to kill the girl in the restaurant. He used that cigarette holder for a blow-gun, but the distance was too far, so he hit the waiter by mistake. Then, he tried to finish the job with his pistol."

Gentry had picked up the cigarette holder, and he found a tiny dart in it, hardly larger than a toothpick. "What I don't understand," Gentry said, "is how he thought he could get away with it. Did he think we would give up on the case?"

"No. He knew that even if the nature of the poison was discovered, it would point to Belden's South American servant. He may even have been intending to later direct suspicion on him. What would be more natural?"

"Particularly," Gentry agreed, "since you said you had wounded the man in the restaurant window. I wonder—"

Doctor Leslie, lying bleeding on the floor, spoke up weakly. "All right. All right. You've figured it all out. But don't move me, it hurts. I've got my arm bandaged, where you nicked it. Now just let me die in peace, will you? That damned red-headed nurse. . ."

THE END

BRIDE AND DOOM

Rogers' fist
struck Heinz'
gun arm.



By **ROBERT TURNER**

(Author of "Kill-O'-The-Wisp")

Ben Rogers was determined to marry this girl, even if they had to walk down the aisle in lockstep — then the murder master played his ace in the hole!

•

JIMMY LYLE was a skinny, sallow little man in a glen-plaid suit that had once been typically and splendidly Broadway. The cuffs of the trousers and sleeves were frayed, now, though. The heels of Jimmy's shoes were run down and he looked as if it had been a long

time since he'd seen a good meal. Still, he was quite at ease here in Stephen Pawling's penthouse living-room. He looked around approvingly at the luxurious furnishings.

"This is just the move I've been waiting for you to make all these years, Bobbie." Jimmy sighed, templed his fingers, smiled smugly over them. His teeth gleamed yellowly. "There's nothing you can do but pay."

"But I can't get a lot of money without Stephen suspecting something," blond Mrs. Stephen Pawling said. She paced the room. Her golden hair was perfectly coiffured, her fulsome figure flattered by a tailored suit so simply designed you knew its costliness right away. But she had not yet learned to ease the Tenth Avenue brass from her voice. She shrilled: "You're a fool, Jimmy. I can't do it. I won't!"

"Yes," Jimmy Lyle contradicted. He leaned forward in his chair; one yellow eye narrowed shrewdly. "Yes, you will. I play smart, Bobbie. I don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. I take it a little at a time so you don't miss it. You're gonna give me a hundred bucks a week, every week." He moistened his lips in greedy contemplation. He chuckled. "I'm gonna get real social security."

"I never thought you'd do this to me, Jimmy," she whined. Her blue shadowed eyes strained to work up tears. She watched the door behind Jimmy Lyle's chair open, slowly, quietly, but she gave no sign. "You're sure you don't want to call it off, Jimmy?"

"What do I look like?" he demanded. He flicked ashes, disdainfully, on the thousand-dollar rug.

Behind Lyle, Harry Heinz raised a piece of heavy bronze statuary. Heinz had softly waved golden hair and a clipped blond mustache. His face was long and his cheeks held rose spots of color. He was the perfect "Nordic" type except that his eyebrows were sharply V'd black wings and his eyes were a slum-brown. The contrast was striking,

almost incongruous. He was a blond Satan.

"I said, what do I look like?" Jimmy Lyle insisted. "A sap?"

Bobbie Pawling watched Harry Heinz' perfectly ellipsed brown eyes widen under their winged brows. That was the only betrayal of emotion he showed. She watched the metal statue flash down, crush the thin-haired head of the frowzily flashy little man in the chair. For one moment her mouth slacked and she forgot to hold her head erect; the threat of a double chin spoiled her profile. Then her teeth clicked together and words came through them:

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes, Jimmy—a sap—a dead sap!"

Harry Heinz flashed his perfect white teeth. He whipped out a handkerchief, wiped his prints from the statue, careful not to get blood on his clothes. He set the murder weapon back down on the floor.

The cigarette dropped from Jimmy Lyle's limp fingers, started to burn a hole in the rich rug. Then the doorbell chimed.

Harry Heinz and Bobbie Pawling looked at each other. Heinz bobbed his head, smiled again. "Timed precisely," he said. "It's your husband."

Bobbie put scarlet-tipped, jeweled fingers to her throat to stifle a fluttering pulse. She watched Heinz move toward the door, watched him lift a small, capable-looking pearl-handled automatic from his pocket. They stood like that, waiting for Stephen Pawling, Bobbie's husband, to enter the apartment. . .

IN THE suffused lighting of a Times Square dance hall, Ben Roger's roughly good-looking features looked more scrubbed and redder than usual. On the table his hands, big and square-fingered, smothered the girl's small, white ones. He said:

"Well, honey, what do you say?"

Carole Booth didn't answer. She stared at the tiny, jam-packed dance floor. She listened to the tired band blasting out a brassy jazz number.

"You haven't got an ounce of

sense, Ben," she said, finally. "We can't get married tonight!"

His hands tightened on hers. He watched flecks of light from the revolving ceiling reflector dance over her copper-colored hair.

"Sure we can," he said. "We can take a train down to Elkton in a few hours. Tomorrow's Sunday."

"I'd like to, Ben." Her green eyes left his face for a moment. "But it's impossible."

"Why?" he said. "Why, Carole? For months we've been talking about it. It's always been—next week. This time it's now. My parole is up next week—they'll take me in the Army any time after that."

"Listen," she said. "Listen, Ben, it's ridiculous. In the first place, this is the busiest night of the week. Harry Heinz, the manager here, wouldn't let me off."

"He let that dumpling blonde, Bobbie Carmen, off a couple of weeks ago when she wanted to get hitched."

Carole dragged a limp straw from the soft drink in front of her. "That was different," she said. "Bobbie married Steve Pawling—a millionaire. It was big publicity for Dance-land here. And she didn't have to come back to this dump."

Angry color flooded his face. "Neither do you, Carole. You could—"

"That isn't all," she interrupted. "Ben, I've got to give Doris' message to her boy friend. I promised the kid I would. It's the least I can do."

He nodded, soberly. He was remembering how the kid, Doris, had looked there on the stretcher when they carried her out past his hack stand to the ambulance. He'd thought, then, *Suppose Carole should get an appendicitis attack like that, or something.* That had been the clincher to make him come up here. Suppose something happened to her some night and they never could get married.

"You could phone," he said.

"No. I tried." She shook her head. "Doris' boy friend is up at Stephen Pawling's apartment about some business deal. Pawling has a

private line. I couldn't get the number. I'll have to go up there."

"Pawling? The rich guy Bobbie married?" When she nodded, he went on: "That needn't stop us. I'll drive you up there and you can run up and spill the bad news. Then we'll catch a train for Maryland."

She pulled one hand free and covered her tired, mascaraed eyes for a moment. "I—I'd like to, Ben. God, how I'd like to. But I—I don't know. I've just got a feeling that tonight isn't—"

"You're stalling," he said. He stood up. He scooped his baggy, checkered cap from the table. He was big in a lean, tough sort of way. "You're always stalling. Okay, baby. We'll skip it."

He started away. She caught at his arm. "No, Ben! Don't go!"

There was something in her voice that made him pause. She arose, murmured: "You go down and wait in the hack. I'll be right down. . ."

WAITING for Carole in front of the grandiose, courtyard entrance of the swank, Gracie Square apartment, Ben Rogers rose up in the driver's seat. He looked in the rear-view mirror. His fingers worried a slight growth of beard. His crisp, black hair was tousled from the cap. His eyes were tired and bloodshot from the strain of cowboying through Times Square traffic all day. He told himself that he was a hell of a looking bridegroom.

The blond woman and the rosy-cheeked man with the satanic eyes came through the courtyard to the street. Their arms were linked with those of a limp-jowled, bald man whose flabby features were falling apart with shock and horror. He walked with loose, almost stumbling steps, like a blind man. They walked straight to Ben Roger's cab, opened the door.

He peered out at them. "Sorry, folks," he said. "I already got a fare. I'm waiting for someone."

The woman said, "Damn!" harshly, glanced up and down the street. "And no other cabs in sight."

Harry Heinz shoved the fat man

roughly into the cab, tumbled in after him.

"What's the matter?" Ben Rogers demanded. "Didn't you hear me? I said—"

Steel chilled the nape of his neck. "Get going," Harry Heinz said, unruffled. "Get onto the East River Drive, head north."

Ben Rogers stiffened. His temples throbbed and the cords of his wrists swelled. He didn't move for several seconds. Thoughts flashed in his brain.

What about his wedding? What would Carole think when she came out and he was gone? What the hell was this trio up to?

The gun muzzle jabbed harder at his neck and he switched on the ignition. He glanced into the rear-view mirror. He saw the evil brown eyes glowing beneath winged brows. He saw two hands resting on the back of his seat. One held a hat, shielding the gun in the other. To anyone looking in from the outside it would seem as though Harry Heinz was leaning forward, giving his driver directions.

From somewhere came the shrill whine of a siren. The woman said: "They don't lose any time, do they Harry? It was only a few minutes ago that we called."

The cab roared from the curb. Heinz said, conversationally: "If we're stopped, driver, I will probably be arrested for murder. Without any question I will make the charge double. If you try anything fancy, anything at all, some overpaid M. D. will be plucking lead from your gray matter."

"All right, pal," Rogers said. It wasn't that he was so scared. He was just filled with a cold, patient fury.

The woman in the back lit a cigarette. In the flare of the match Ben Rogers got a good look at her face and recognized her. Suddenly he guessed who all three were.

He had seen this woman in the hostesses' rush line at Danceland and more recently in the papers when she married Stephen J. Pawling, the Breakfast Food King. The scared fat man must be Pawling. The man

she'd called Harry could be Harry Heinz, manager of Danceland. Rogers had seen him up there, he remembered, now.

Pawling spoke for the first time. He said: "Why—why did you kill that man in my apartment? Who was he? Where are you taking me?" Except for the scratchy deepness of his voice, it could have been a frightened and bewildered little boy, speaking.

"That man was blackmailing your wife, Pawling," Heinz obliged. "There's only one way to shut up a blackmailer, y'know."

"Keep quiet, Harry," Bobbie Pawling's brassy voice said.

HEINZ chuckled. "Don't be so squeamish. I think the old guy deserves an explanation. . . You see, Pawling, that gentleman, Jimmy Lyle, used to be Bobbie's vaudeville partner. He was also her husband. They were supposed to have been divorced. But tonight Lyle showed proof that their Mexican divorce was a phony—illegal. You can imagine how that would embarrass Bobbie if it became known."

No one spoke then for quite a few minutes. The cab cruised along the East River Drive. There was no traffic at all, what with the lateness of the hour and the restrictions on driving. Ben Rogers glanced out at the lights of a tug on the black waters of the river. He listened to the noisy huffing of the little river craft, tried to think.

Carole hadn't wanted to make plans for tonight. She had a feeling, an omen of some kind. Why hadn't he listened to her? But how did he know?

He could crack up the cab but there was no way of guaranteeing he wouldn't be killed, too. It was better that he wait until they stopped. Maybe he could get a chance to make a break, then.

And then his heart came up and bumped the back of his teeth. He suddenly remembered something. Carole Booth had gone up to the Pawling apartment. And a man had

been killed up there, Pawling had said just a moment ago! . . .

LIEUTENANT DAN CROUGH bent over the girl, "So you admit you know that man?" he said. He pointed across the room.

Carole Booth was slumped on the sofa. She pushed both hands through the thick red hair at her temples, stared at Jimmy Lyle. Jimmy was sitting in the same chair. He was wearing the same self-happy grin. But a trickle of blood had dribbled from his head, down his forehead, along his fleshy nose and stained his yellow teeth. It made the grinning death mask of his face something terrible to see.

Closing her eyes, Carole turned her face away. "I only knew him to say hello to," she said. "He was the boy friend of Doris Allen, one of the girls down at Danceland. Doris was taken sick tonight, like I told you, and—"

"Sure you told me," Crough cut in. "We get an anonymous phone call that a woman is screaming as though she's being killed in this flat and we come up here and find you just about to sneak out of the joint. Just tell us why, Carole. That's all we want—why?"

Her fingers curled over the arm of the sofa. Her body arched upward. Cords stood out in her neck. She screamed: "I didn't kill him. For half an hour I've been tell you over and over. I—let me alone, now, damn you. Let me alone!"

She started to sob and to shake all over. Lieutenant Crough tilted the toothpick in his teeth. He sighed. He swung the tips of his fingers stinging across her cheek. She sucked in a long breath and came jerking out of the jeebies.

"Now look," he said. "Be nice. You tell us you came up here in your boy friend's cab. But we don't find any sign of him, can't even locate him. You tell us you brought a message from a sick girl to her boy friend, supposed to be up here on business with Pawling, and you found this boy friend dead when you got here. . . Look, Carole, let's start

over—all over—again. Mrs. Pawling being an ex-taxi-dancer, herself, something smells of blackmail maybe, here. Tell us the real story, Carole."

She looked up at him. She started to answer, but couldn't quite make it. A lone, violent sob escaped her. Then she whispered: "I've told you all I know. I've nothing else to say. That's all."

Another man touched Crough's arm. He was built small for a policeman. His clothes were nicely cut, perfectly fitted to his trim form. He had round, pleasant and intelligent eyes, heavily ringed underneath. He said: "Why not give her a rest, until we get a report from the hospital. And maybe they can turn up this cabby any minute. We checked and found there really was such a guy. There might be something in the girl's yarn."

Crough said: "Burke, you guys on the Broadway detail get romantic, soft, where there's a mooney-eyed girl in the case. . . But I will see if that girl's out of the operating room, yet."

He stepped to a phone, dialed, leaned his massive bulk against the wall. "This is Lieutenant Crough of Homicide. Is that Doris Allen dame out of the—" He stopped and listened for long seconds, his blotchy face showing strain. Then he said: "I see. . . Well, thanks, anyhow."

He replaced the phone. He looked around, took out a dirty handkerchief and blew his nose, sonorously. He stuffed the cloth lazily back into his pocket. "Well," he said, savoring the suspense he created. He wheeled toward Carole, then, suddenly. "Well, sister, there goes part of your story. Doris Allen died on the operating table."

Carole said nothing. This was anti-climax. This didn't even hardly hit home. Crough scowled at the fingerprint men bustling about. He spotted a colored elevator boy standing between two uniformed policemen. He strode toward him.

"Once again, kid," Crough demanded, gruffly. "Were Mr. and

Mrs. Pawling in earlier this evening, or not?"

The boy rolled his eyes, flapped his large lips. He said: "As I remember, Mr. Pawling went out about half an hour before this young lady came in." He nodded at Carole. "Then he came back and none of them went out after that."

"That isn't what you told me before." Crough's fleshy face got ugly. "Listen, sonny, don't try to confuse me. You said before that they must've all been out."

"I was so excited." The boy waited for his breath to come. "I figured maybe I'd been mistaken about them being here, since I hadn't seen any of them leave within the last hour and yet none of 'em were up here. But now that I been thinkin' about—"

Burke cut in: "Maybe they did have something to do with this. Maybe they copped a sneak on the operator." He dusted a dust speck from his sleeve. "All they'd have to do is watch the elevator indicator and when they saw that the lift was coming up with a passenger, run down the stairs."

"You and 'your imagination,' Crough said. "Let's get downtown. I'll talk to this girl there. I'll get something out of her."

Carole Booth stared at all of them, dully. She remembered, this was her wedding night. She wondered what had happened to Ben. She wanted to lie down somewhere and sleep forever. Or maybe die. She was so very tired. . .

THE New York cab sped out of the city on the Parkway, up through Yonkers, deep into Westchester County. Inside, Harry Heinz hadn't changed position. The nose of his automatic still rested against Ben Rogers' neck. He ordered, suddenly: "Turn left the next side road."

A couple of hundred yards in front the headlights showed a fork and an old tar road leading off to the left. "You mean here?" Rogers asked, and when Heinz acquiesced,

he swung off the parkway. The sign said: OLD QUARRY ROAD.

They passed a few houses and then there was no sign of habitation for several miles. On one side of the road was nothing but black woods. On the other side was an old wooden guard rail and a steep, hundred-foot embankment leading down to an abandoned marble quarry.

"Heinz said: "Stop here, driver."

Stephen Pawling heaved forward in his seat. He shouted: "Don't do it, you idiot. Keep driving. Don't stop. Don't you see what they're going to do. They'll kill—"

The pearled butt of the automatic cracked Pawling's skull with a sickening crunch. He said no more. His body thumped to the floor in back.

"I said, stop here!" Heinz ordered.

Ben Rogers braked. At the same time he reached for his cap, lying on the floor of the cab where the right-hand front seat would be in another car. He picked it up quickly, without bothering to remove the pair of gloves Carole had left there inside it. He clapped gloves and all on his head.

"Get out of the car with your hands up and your back to me," Heinz said.

Rogers obeyed until they were all out of the car, and then he turned around. There was a grim smile on his face. He said, "You won't shoot me. It would spoil your plans if they found a bullet."

"What do you mean?" Heinz' angled black brows worked up and down.

"I mean I've got this all figured," Ben Rogers said. "You and Bobbie must've been pretty pash for quite a while. Soon as she hooked Pawling into marrying her, the two of you planned to kill him so she would inherit his dough and you'd both be all set. But Jimmy Lyle and his blackmail put a crimp in your plans. With him alive, there was always the danger of the news getting out that Bobbie was a bigamist. Then, even if Pawling did die, she'd have no legal claim on his estate. So you killed Lyle. The police will figure Pawling did it, skipped out. They'll

be pretty sure when they find his corpse in a wrecked cab. Isn't that it?"

BEFORE the last word was out of his mouth, Rogers leaped, chopped one arm downward in a vicious swing, his fist striking Heinz' gun-arm. The automatic spun loose. Rogers' lean figure hurtled into the other man. They plunged backward to the road in a savagely thrashing tangle.

Bobbie Pawling ran up and seized a heavy, jagged rock from the roadside. She rushed back and stood over the two fighting men. She raised the hunk of rock, brought it down on the back of Ben Rogers' cap.

The two men stopped fighting. Heinz got up, his face livid, his chest heaving, his blond mustache stretched into a snarl. He kicked a small, pointed toe into Rogers' cheek.

"Stop that," Bobbie said. "We've got to hurry."

Neither of them spoke again as Heinz lifted the back seat out of the hack, fished around in a clutter of tools and junk and brought forth a small machine-oil can. He sprinkled the fluid over the upholstery. Then he loaded Ben Rogers' limp figure behind the wheel of the car. He twisted the wheel, released the emergency brake and let the cab start to move on a slight downgrade toward the guard rail.

Harry Heinz then lit a whole book of matches, flung them into the car. He leaped off the running board as the rolling taxi splintered through the ancient guard rail.

He and Bobbie Pawling stood at the top of the embankment, watched the car speed out, over and down. For a second it seemed to float in the air and then it somersaulted and landed on its side, barrel-rolled the rest of the way to end up in a crash on the rocks, far below.

Little flames bellied out of the wreckage for a few moments and then exploded into one solid sheet of orange fire that cast a reddish light all the way up the hill.

With the crimson glow on his features, Harry Heinz' resemblance to the devil was complete. He smiled at Bobbie, said: "You're a widow, Bobbie. We've got money to wallow in the rest of our lives."

Bobbie's plump, comely face was hard and pale. Her gaze dropped before the stare of Heinz' bog-brown eyes. She whimpered: "I—I wonder if it's going to be worth it, Harry?" She looked almost afraid for a moment. "We'd better get away from here."

He nodded and they walked off, together, into the blackness of the night. . .

CAROLE BOOTH was very pale. Her mouth sagged with weariness. Her eyes were raw-red from weeping. Her whole face looked like a once pretty wax mask that had gotten too close to flames and melted. Perched on the straight-backed chair in the white, hot cone of light, it looked like she was all alone. But there were faint rustlings of movement in the darkness around her. There had been for hours, now.

A voice said, quietly: "I think she's ready. I think she's had enough . . . Do you want to talk, now, Carole? It's up to you. Whenever you say the word there's hot coffee and cigarettes waiting."

"All right," she said after a great while. Her voice sounded like she'd just swallowed a handful of sand. "All right. I guess I've had all I can stand. What do you want me to say? . . . I did it. All right, I did it . . . Is that what you want? . . . If it isn't, tell me. I'll say anything you want. Please!"

"That's fine," the voice said. "That's fine." The bright light went off and the overhead bulbs went back on. . .

YELLOW fingers of dawn streaked through the venetian blinds into the penthouse. Sergeant Burke of the Times Square detail, put on his pearl-gray Stetson just so. He said: "Mrs. Pawling, I'm sorry we had to subject you to all this questioning. But you know how

these routine things are. It's almost daylight. I'll get out and let you get some sleep. Thanks for being so cooperative."

"You're welcome," Bobbie Pawling assured him. She pushed a wisp of yellow hair away from her pastry-colored forehead.

"You, too, Mr. Heinz." Burke bowed slightly from his small waist.

Harry Heinz raised his satanic brows. "Not at all, Sergeant."

Burke opened the door. Heinz sighed gustily. And then everybody froze. A uniformed cop stood there, about to ring the door bell. Standing next to him was a man in a battered, half-charred cap. He had no eyebrows nor eyelashes. One side of his face was a shriveled and shiny red, like polished pink leather. His shirt and necktie were bloody. One arm hung twisted and limp at his side.

The cop coughed delicately, said: "Pardon, Sergeant, but this nut barged into the lobby yelling some fool, crazy story, and—"

Harry Heinz interrupted: "Oh, yes, Officer. I know all about it. Step inside, please."

"What the hell is this?" Burke exclaimed. He looked at the automatic in Heinz' hand, shrugged. He told the cop: "You and your friend better do as he says, Mason."

The policeman and Ben Rogers stepped in. The door slammed shut. Rogers said through puffy lips: "Sorry I couldn't get here sooner, Heinz, but I didn't have a car hidden out up there in the woods like you did. I had to thumb back."

Heinz stood with his back to the wall, the gun covering them all. Bobbie Pawling started toward him. She asked, shrilly: "Have you gone crazy, Harry?"

He grinned. He jerked the gun toward her. "Forget the bluff, Bobbie," he said. "This guy's story will check. We're through. It was that kind of game—even Steven gamble. Either we got completely clean without a hitch and lived happily ever after, or—" He paused, blew breath through his nose. "You see what one tiny miscalculation does?"

He ordered them all into the living room and lined them up against the wall. Bobbie Pawling's blue eyes were animal-wild. Her head dropped. The loose flesh that was beginning to become another chin, quivered, but she didn't even care. She said: "What—what are you going to do, Harry. You—you're going to—to take me with you?"

He ignored her. He addressed them all as a unit. "I'm leaving," he said. "I imagine there're more cops down in the lobby so I'll take the fire stairs. I may stay outside in the hall, watching the door for several minutes. I might stay there ten. Anyone who wants to be a dead hero can make a test."

The uniformed cop was very pale. His eyes bulged. They cut toward the telephone table next to the wall where Bobbie Pawling was standing.

"Thanks," Heinz said. The spots of color in his cheek glowed like spotlights. "I'd already thought of that. . . Bobbie, do me a favor and yank out the cords of that phone."

Bobbie bent suddenly and wrapped her thick fingers around the wires. They ripped out noisily. And then her scream split the eardrums of everyone for blocks around. She shrieked: "You're not leaving me to take the rap alone, you crummy, blond double-crosser!"

She slung the telephone in a tangle of swishing extension cord, straight at Harry Heinz. Unconsciously, almost, he switched the barrel toward her and the little weapon spewed flame and coughed. Bobbie Pawling clutched at her waist.

The clutter of telephone cords whipped around Heinz' gun-arm just as Ben Rogers leaped. His good arm swung and the fist of it smashed full into Heinz' nose, spread it up between his black, winged brows. . .

"YOU poor thing!" Carole whispered. "You look terrible. Simply terrible!"

They stood in the vestibule of her rooming house and she gazed up at Ben Rogers with a tired but happy smile. She trailed her fingers over

the places where his brows used to be and the pad of bandages at the side of his face.

He grinned and winced at the same time, said: "Anyhow, the doc says he doesn't think the burns will leave very bad scars. And the eye-fuzz will grow back. . . You're no Rose O'Day, yourself, honey. . . Say, I think I'll go down and whack that louse, Crough—"

"Let's not remember him," Carole cut in. "Let's just think about how nice Sergeant Burke was, how he's saving us a trip to Maryland by pulling some strings at the license bureau so we don't have to wait the usual time."

"Yeah," he said, happily. "That's right."

She reached up and tugged off his half-burned cap. "Ben," she said, "why don't you toss this old rag away?"

"Old rag!" He snatched back the hat. "That cap, plus a couple of your gloves stuffed inside was all that saved my life tonight. It dulled that wallop on the dome so that the first shock of the flames brought me around and I could roll out into a pile of bushes before that old bus blasted."

He cupped her chin. "Now, you listen here, Mrs. Ben Rogers. . ."

THE END

TEN COMPLETE WESTERN STORIES

BENTON IS FORBIDDEN GROUND (Novel)By Archie Joscelyn

If the Silver Star mine was worthless, as Jared Hawks' uncle said, why had the man concealed the fact that Jared himself was its owner?

DEATH DATE ON BOOTHILL (Short)By T. W. Ford

Marshal Hunt was worried plenty, because he'd drygulched the Horseshoe Kid's brother, and the Kid had vowed vengeance. Only, no one could find hide nor hair of the Kid!

LAW-BADGE FOR A YOUNKER (Short)By Galen C. Colin

Tommy Burk thought he was going to be left out of the excitement in this man-hunt until he investigated the old shack . . .

PUBLIC DOMAIN (Short)By Chuck Martin

"I never gave anyone right of way through my property, Morgan, and this road is on my land. You'd better put down your guns and pay toll, because the law's on my side, and it'll back me up with lead!"

MAIL-ORDER FOR BOOTHILL (Short)By Lee Fioren

Joe Denton couldn't know that the mail-order Old Man Platson was filling out would seal his doom!

GIVE A MAN A HORSE (Short)By Cordell Staples

Sheriff Glass was ready to try illegal methods of getting War Eagle, since Dirk O'Hare wouldn't sell the horse!

NO QUARTER FOR A SHEEPMAN (Short)By Kenneth P. Wood

"I gave yuh fair warnin' about bringin' sheep through that pass, Carson—now try a taste o' hell!"

PETE LANDUSKY—INJUN KILLERBy Brett Austin

A Fact Article.

THE BULL ABOUT WILD BILLBy Al Storm

Little known dope on the famous Wild Bill Hickock.

HELL WOULD BE WELCOME (Novelet)By Joe Austell Small

When Back East Winston tried to ride Altitude, the Texas Wonder, it was a toss-up as to who got the biggest surprise, Back East or the hoss! Because the hombre stuck to Altitude as if he was glued on—which, as a matter of fact, he was!

FAMOUS WESTERN

SPRING
ISSUE
Now On Sale

MR. ANGEL'S CONSCIENCE

Wherein a reader of *CRACK DETECTIVE STORIES* unloads what's on his chest and poses a neat question.

Homer Angel
65 Martingdale Lane,
Brooklyn, New York

Robert W. Lowndes, Editor
Columbia Publications
Crack Detective Magazine
241 Church Street
New York City, New York.

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Since I am reading your *Crack Detective Story Magazine* for many years now, and being of sound mind and aged forty-six, I take the liberty to come to you with a problem which is bothering my conscience. You are a disinterested party and would judge without malice aforethought, or anything like that, and would view the problem fair and square on my side.

It is true, I done a couple stretches here and there, but I assure you I been on the level for ten years or so, and I do not consider myself a crook anymore. But now I ain't so sure, and my conscience worries me, so I have decided to write it down on a piece of paper, so that you, an expert on crimes, can decide.

It started like this. Now I am a good natured fellow; I like to see everybody happy and having a good time. The way it is explained to me, I do not see that it is doing anybody any harm, and I need the one hundred bucks.

Lester Guggenhime calls me on the phone I should come over to see him. I am changing the names of everybody because I do not wish to be

sooed. Many years ago I did for Googey a little job, a successful one in which I did not go to jail. So it is sort of sentimental with me.

And this is what Googey tells me.

A very wealthy millionaire just died, and what he couldn't take along with him is being auctioned off. In fact, it is going under the hammer the very next morning.

This morning, Googey went down there, to give the book collection a once over, and he comes across this book, and he near faints. In some way this dead millionaire got hold of a book, and he never had an idea how valuable it was. Googey thinks he must of bought the book in some old book lots without anybody being wise it was a real antique. The dead millionaire just liked expensive books but he didn't understand anything about them. He patched up this book, and writ a new title on it in gold ink, calling it *Fifteenth Century Poetry*, when it was actually a handprinted translation from the original *Songs of Solomon*.

The book is listed in the auction catalogue as No. 487. The auctioneers don't know how valuable the book is neither, and Googey is not the type of man to put them wise. He says the minute the estate finds out how rare a book it is, the price will go up like a charge of soap. Googey likes to get bargains, as who don't?

All I have to do is a very little thing, and I earn me a hundred clams. I am to go to a certain Mr. Minx, who is a Curio Dealer. Googey say I'm to go to his rare book de-

By Greta Bardet

(Author of "The Corpse Laughs Last," "Orchids for Madame," etc.)



In a moment, the safe is open, and I have the precious volume in my mitts.

partment, look around and come across a book called "Bonos Mores Inter Pocular." The price of this book is seventy-five bucks!

GOOGHEY gives me a hundred. "In case," says Googey, "he is trying to rook you. And Homer, one other thing; do not talk too much. For if you do, Minx will get wise you're not a man of letters."

"Now wait a minute," I says, "I

know my alphabet as good as the next guy!"

"That is not what I mean, Homer. You may look somewhat like a gentleman, but you do not talk like one. Keep your mouth shut as much as possible."

"You are the boss," I says, and leave with his money in my pants' pocket, and the cheerful thought that I am getting one hundred bucks when the job is all over.

I go to the Curio Shop, which is just off Fifth Avenue. It is a classy joint, quiet, and full of junk. I spot the books and mosey over. This little bald-headed guy stands around and gives me the once-over through thick plate glass bifoculars. This is Mr. Minx incidentally. I come across "Inter Pocular" and I says, "How much?"

He smiles like a Chinaman. "One hundred and fifty dollars."

"You're nuts! Seventy-five clams!" I open me wallet and show him the color of money. "Take it or leave it, Sonny!"

He takes it.

I bring the book back to Googey, plus the twenty-five bucks change. Googey doctors up the book, blots out the gold letters, sticks on new letters, "Fifteenth Century Poetry," and puts a little paper sticker on the bottom of the back No. 487. This book is now a ringer for the No. 487 in the library of the dead millionaire.

I go there. A clerk hands me a catalogue. I ask to see this book and that, until I finally get around to No. 487. When he gives it to me, I give it a look like I am disgusted at such a cheap object, which is easy to do. It is not only a old book, but the pages is dirty and all full of fly specks. It is practically falling apart, and it smells like it has been in a damp cellar since it was printed. And get a load of this, Mr. Lowndes! It was hand printed in 1451! If a guy has got to have money to burn for something like this, don't you think I am justified in doing what I done a little bit?

I watch my time. I switch books. A cinch! I hand the clerk the doctored "Inter Pocular," ask him for two more books, and call it quits.

Outside the dead millionaire's museum, I run smack into Mr. Hollingsworth. I used to deliver booze to him in the good old days. He has got more stomick, less hair, and looks like he got more money.

"Well, well, well, Homer Angel," he says to me. "And just what are you doing around here?"

"Nothin'!" I says. "I come to the

wrong address. The guy what owns this dump is dead."

"So they say! So they say! What are you doing these days?"

"Tryin' to earn a honest dollar, like everybody else."

We part company, and I get a cab. But I don't go immediate back to Googey's. Instead I go see a old pal of mine, Izzy Einstien. Izzy Einstien and me has been pals for a long time. I used to bring him material in the old days. He is the best fence in the city, and a straight-shooter if there ever was one, and there is nothing Izzy Einstien don't know!

I put the book out and say, "How much ya gimme on this?"

He looks down at it, then up at me. "It's a book," he says.

"I know it's a book. How much is it worth?"

He looks through it quick. "How much you want?"

"How much ya gimme on the book! How many times I gotta ask ya!"

"Look! Homer! For old time's sakes. You want a little loan. I give a little loan. Five dollars? And you keep the book. For this I wouldn't give you ten cents!"

"Ten cents," I says.

"Not a nickel more. You bring around old copies Art magazines, I give you twenty-five cents a dozen. Don't bother me with this foolishness!"

I leave Izzy Einstien. I am beginning to worry. Maybe Googey is really cracked. But why should I worry? His money is good and one hundred bucks, is one hundred bucks. I bring the book to Googey who is taking it from me like it is a newborn son! I get my money. Nobody is hoit. The library has got a book worth seventy-five smackers. They didn't know they got a valuable book in the first place, so what they don't know, don't hoit them. My conscience is clear at this point.

BUT while I am doing all this, something happens.

Mr. Hollingsworth, the guy I met outside the house, goes to the library, too. In his old age he got interested

in books, like Googey, and what if Holly, just like Googey doesn't get wise to the real value of book No. 487? Holly goes inside, he pulls a switch. In the quiet of his limousine, he finds that the book he switched, has already been switched, and he near has heart failure!

Holly takes one gander at the doctored copy of "Inter Pocular." He knows books, and he instantly knows this book come from Mr. Minx's shop. So what does he do? He goes over to Mr. Minx, and puts the cards down on the table, face up.

"You win!" Holly says to Mr. Minx. "You pulled a fast one. How much do you want for the 1451 hand printed translations of the original Songs of Solomon?"

Mr. Minx is considerable startled. "Huh? I don't get you," he says.

"This is your "Inter Pocular," says Holly, throwing it down on the table like it was dirt. "I know. I seen it here. You made this a ringer for the original. Look, Minx, I want that book!"

"My, my," says Minx, smiling like a Chinaman. "The Batito translations of the Songs of Solomon? You are pulling my leg, Mr. Hollingsworth."

"Nice act, nice act!" says Holly. "I don't blame you for playing dumb. How much do you want for the book?"

"If . . . if I had said copy. . . how much would you be willing to pay for same?"

"Five thousand bucks," says Holly.

Mr. Minx smiles like he thinks Holly is a nice little boy but a little dumb. "It is worth seventy-five to one hundred thousand dollars, if not more."

"How much do you want?"

"I don't know. I was just asking how much would you pay for it, if I had it!"

Holly gets up. "Bring the book around to my house anytime and fifteen thousand is yours. Fifteen thousand. . . because the book is hot! I can go to the authorities and accuse you of theft."

Mr. Minx smiles again. "How did you get the copy of 'Inter Pocular'?"

But he holds out his hand. "I think we can come to an agreement. I will see what I can do for you. Since you don't care for this copy of 'Inter Pocular' I'll credit your account with thirty dollars, the value of the book."

Within no time at all, Mr. Minx is at my house. How does he find me? Well, he seen my name and address on the identification card in my wallet when I handed over the seventy-five for the book.

"Okay," he says. "Who has the original?"

"Come again?"

"Don't give me that! I thought it odd a man like you coming into my shop and buying rare literature. It was not for yourself. I can see that by the layout of your diggings. Who hired you to switch books? If you don't come across I'll turn you over to the cops."

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

"I see I am using the wrong tactics. Five hundred says that book is in my store tonight."

I am surprised at this sum of money. "Five hundred?"

"Okay! Seven hundred and fifty. Is it a deal?"

"I don't know," I says, getting dizzy.

"You're a shrewd businessman," says Minx, getting red in the face. "But this is the way the cards lay, take it or leave it. Either I turn you over to the cops, or one thousand bucks says that book is in my hands by five o'clock!"

"Four-thirty," I says. I never did have much will power. We stand up and shake hands. Mr. Minx gives me the copy of "Inter Pocular" to switch for the real copy again. We part the best of friends.

ANY dopes what are willing to fork over such dough for a lousy book need to be taken. And I ain't got no scruples about getting the book back from Googey. That wasn't nice of him to take me for a sucker. Paying me a measly one hundred bucks when Minx is willing to fork over one thousand!

When I visit Googey's expensive

house this time, I do not enter by the front door, but come up through the cellar. I enter the house as unobtrusively as possible, and head for the room with the safe. Googey is not around. I hear voices and footsteps upstairs. Could be Googey; I do not know. I get down on my knees, and get to work on the dial. I did not lose my touch, I am happy to note. In fact, if I say so myself, I am just naturally talented when it comes to opening safes.

In about a half hour I got the door open. I take out Translations, and put the copy of "Inter Pocular" in its place. I am outside of the house before you can say, *cheese it, the cops!*

Since I am in the money now, I grab a cab. While I am being drove over to Mr. Minx's Junk Shop, I open the book and start to read. I get a little sore at guys throwing away dough for such an article. I am glad I am getting my piece. Why, the woids ain't even spelt right. "Thou sayfths sooth, ay man. . ." it says. And take a gander at this woid. "Mefeemith." Now, what the hell does Mefeemith mean, Mr. Lowndes? In the literature I am reading, like *Crack Detective Magazine*, everybody in a story is saying, he said, she said. But what do they do in this book? They quoth. And sometimes they sayeth. "Alack, bethink yourself, left evil befet you." The guy that wrote the book never had hair on his chest, if you get the subtle incineration!

I hand the book over to Mr. Minx and collect my thousand. He is grateful to me, and says he might be able to pass along a little business once in a while. No. There is where I am drawing the line. This business is not hurting anybody, and it started out as a favor. I want to remain on the straight and narrow, and do not wish to be a crook anymore.

I have now got one thousand and one hundred bucks to the good. I go home. And who is there in my room? Holly. We greet each other.

So, now what happens? Follow this careful.

"So, Homer, you sly old dog, you!

At the wrong address, were you! I knew you were up to no good when I bumped into you coming out of the building."

"You got me all wrong, Mr. Hollingsworth."

"Nuts! I'm a man of plain words. I've been to see Mr. Minx, that dirty so and so. He got you to switch books, didn't he? Tell me, is it true? Mr. Minx has the book, hasn't he?"

This is true, because after all, Minx has got the book now! But I don't say nothing.

"I had a talk with Minx," says Holly. "I knew he had the book there all the time. The crook is just selling to a higher bidder. Minx is nothing but a damned double-dealing so-and-so crook. After all the business I have done with him, too! Switching books! There ought to be a law against people like Minx. He has got the copy, hasn't he, Homer, old pal?"

LOOK at my fingernails. "Could be."

"Good boy!" He pats me on the knee. "Remember the good old days, Homer? You must of made a fortune on me, Homer. Go swipe the book from Minx for me, Homer, will you?"

"What's in it for me?"

"Good boy, good boy!" He pats my knee some more. "Five hundred bucks!"

I bust out laughing like it is the funniest thing I ever heard in my life. "Don't make me laugh," I says to him. "I wouldn't touch the job for a cent less than five thousand bucks."

I hold my breath while Holly gets pale in the face. "Two thousand," he says weakly.

"Five thousand five hundred," I says.

He jumps to his feet. "This is an outrage!"

"I don't care. Six thousand!"

"Okay, okay, okay, Homer! Five thousand if. . ."

"Six thousand."

"Now you look here. . ."

"Six thousand five. . ."

"Six thousand!" he hollers. "Six thousand! Yes!"

"Half down?"

"Half down!" He falls back into the chair. "Oh, well," he says, after a while, "it's a bargain, really."

To get into Mr. Minx's Junk Shop ain't easy. They got boiglar alarms around. But I get in! In the back of this dump is the offices. One room is the outer reception room, and the other is the inner office room where the safe is. It is in this safe I seen Minx put the book. Nobody is around, so I get to work. This safe is a honey! I have to fiddle around with the damned combination for almost an hour.

Just as I get the door open, the door of the reception room opens. In comes Minx. I slip around the side of the safe, wracking my brains for a alibi in case he ketches me there. I listen to what Minx is saying, for he is calling somebody up on the phone. Mr. Hollingsworth. Minx tells him he can now deliver the book in question. Then he sits up straight in the chair.

"What do you mean, Mr. Hollingsworth, you don't want the book anymore! . . . but Mr. . . . Hhh. . . But this afternoon you were so set on owning. . . well, if you don't want it, you don't want it!" And he hangs up. He sits back in his chair, and thinks a little bit. "Hm!" he says. "Hm!" Then he picks up the phone again.

I take this opportunity to open the safe door, and take out the book, and shut the door again. I start slipping out: of the room, by the back window, when I hear Mr. Minx say, "Hello. I should like to speak with Mr. Guggenhime, Mr. Minx calling." So I sit on the windowsill to listen because this is of interest to me.

He gets Googey and is very friendly. "I say there, Mr. Guggenhime, since you are a very special customer of mine, and have done much business with me in the past, I have something thrilling to offer you—a book. I'm letting you have first look at it before I put it on public sale. Would you believe it, sir, but I have in my possession an

athetical translation of the original Songs of Solomon."

"No," Googey must of said.

"Oh, but I have, sir. It has the blot and puncture on page. . ." Minx laughs like a cat. "Now, one moment, please. There are only two known copies in existence. One in the Looover Museum, in Paris, and the other. . . Mine is not a fake! . . . If you think. . ." he said sweet as honeypie, "that you have the copy, you are mistaken. If you've got a copy, yours is a fake!"

Here I am scrambling. The minute he hangs up, he will dive for the safe, and find that he has not got the book, fake or otherwise. I grab a cab and in twenty minutes am in Mr. Hollingsworth's penthouse mansion on Park Avenue. He gives me the dough. I hand over the book, and we part the best of friends.

I head for a classy chop souy joint, and order me the best spread in the house. Minus cab fares, and sundry expenses, which I do not count because it mixes me up, I am now seven thousand and one hundred bucks to the good. Holly has the original copy; Googey has the doctored copy of "inter Pocular"; the library of the dead millionaire has Holly's doctored copy, and Minx is holding the bag. Or. . . wait a minute. . . no, that's right!

WHEN I get home, who is waiting for me? Minx! He is so excited his glasses keep falling off his nose all the time.

"I been robbed!" he hollers at me frantic. "Hollingsworth! The thief! the robber! No wonder he didn't want the book no more! He stole it from me!"

"Who is this Hollingsworth?" I ask him. After all, I got to protect me own interests.

"A crook! A swine! And something tells me, you stole the book for him, too!"

"Take it easy, brother. I do not like to be called a crook!"

"Well. . . what matter who stole it? It's stole! After Hollingsworth refused to buy it, I thought I'd sell it back to Guggenhime. Guggenhime

went through a lot of trouble to acquire it in the first place. He lost it, so I thought he's willing to buy. Since Guggenhime deliberately and maliciously involved me by leaving my "Inter Pocular" there, I thought it was no more than fair to let him know I'm wise to him, and his dishonesty, and could have the opportunity to buy back the book."

"This is all Greek to me," I says. "What do you want?" As if I didn't know!

"I've got to have that book, Homer! Tomorrow is too late. Whoever has it will announce himself in possession of that book. It'll go sky high in price. Guggenhime called me back on the phone a little while ago and said he was interested in buying. He offered to pay much more than Hollingsworth offered. I want it, either to sell to Guggenhime, or maybe keep it myself, and advertise my owning it tomorrow. Besides I already got one thousand bucks invested in this deal. I want to cover my loss!"

"Look. I don't know no guy by the name of Hollingsworth. If you're hinting you want I should swipe the book back for you, it's no go! I'm tired. I want to hear *Archie Andrews* on the radio."

"I will give you another thousand dollars."

By now I am pretty exasperated. "Look, you come to me before with a cops or money proposition. You cornered me, so I done you a favor for a grand. You can't show me the cops no more, because you're in this now. I ain't interested in the job. If you want the book, and you know where it is, go get it yourself. I know how valuable this book is, but I want to listen to *Archie Andrews* and I wouldn't move a finger out of my house for a cent less than ten thousand dollars!"

About ten minutes later Minx can talk again. "You are out of your mind," he says.

"Yeah. So long! I get awful sore if I miss *Archie Andrews*."

"I'll give you two thousand."

"Go home, will ya? Ten thousand. And the cash signed, sealed, and de-

livered before I touch the job, or to hell with you!"

"Look, be reasonable. . ."

"No!"

I do not have any trouble getting into Mr. Hollingsworth's penthouse. He is eating supper, and I walk around on the roof until I come to a window I can open. I find the library. The book is laying on a table just asking to be took, so I take it. I bring it back to Minx who near busts out crying into tears when he sees his precious damnfool book again!

I go home.

And who is sitting on my welcome mat? Googey!

"Oh, go home!" I greet him. "Lemme alone, will ya?"

But he talks about old times, and I got to do him some more favors. Well, so far Googey has only given up one hundred bucks. The littleness of the amount makes me wince. And this is what Googey tells me.

He received a phone call from that dog Minx. "Imagine! The nerve of that rat calling me, asking me if I wanted to buy my very own book! Actually throwing into my face that since I procured it through illegal channels, it is each man for himself. All is fair in love and war. I thought somebody had pulled a fast one on Minx, only to go to my safe and find Minx had pulled a fast one on me! I was afraid of that, when I sent you to get that copy of 'Inter Pocular.' He must have smelled a rat and followed you."

"How you figger?"

"Well, I think he suspected something was up. What if he followed you to my place and then followed you to the library of the dead millionaire, and suspecting, switched a copy of another book, then came to my house and burgled my safe."

"That must of been what happened."

THAT'S what that phony did! Then he dares, dare to try to re-sell me back my own book! Homer, go to his place and get it back for me."

"No."

"This time I'll give you five hundred dollars," he says, like he is giving me a beautiful present. It is laughable.

"Look. For old times sake I done you a turn for a hundred bucks. What's the matter—you think I am completely dumb? I know this book is valuable. My friend, Izzy Einstien told me how valuable it was. My advice to you is pay Minx the price and call it a day."

"I pay him! That shyster! That crook! When it's my book? And I can get it cheaper this way? Don't be foolish!"

"Don't you be foolish! I wouldn't touch this hot book for a cent less than fifteen grand. Now, you better go buy it from Minx, like a good boy. . ."

Back I go to Minx. I cut a few wires, and am inside the joint again. I know the combination, so the whole job takes no more than five minutes at the outmost.

Back I go to Googey and hand over the book. I am now so rich I get dizzy every time I think of how much money I got. Thirty-two thousand one hundred. And by now my conscience worries me. I am beginning to feel like a heel.

Googey is so happy he has his book back, he offers me a drink of brandy. I sit down, and we gas a little bit, and drink. Frankly I do not like to go home so much in a hurry, because I am sure Holly or Minx will be warming my doorstep, asking me to steal the book from who-

ever they figger out has got the thing.

Googey talks about books, and he tells me what makes them expensive. Just because some monk writes two of them a couple centuries ago, these people go blow their tops. What is inside the book? The way I get it, nothing but plenty of old age! Does Googey want to read it? Such a thought. He just wants to own it. I try to read it, and Googey near busts a blood vessel laughing so hard at my pronouncements.

After a while Googey is feeling high. Me, I am tired, and wish only to go to bed. Googey puts his crumby old book in the safe, like it was his baby he was putting to sleep in a cradle. He says he's had the safe fixed over; an electrical business he is careful not to explain to me. Since I don't know nothing about such things, I know I can never open up Googey's safe, unless I learn something new. He bolts the safe. His book is safe.

And because he is feeling so cheerful and full of sentiment, he gives me a present of the copy of "Bonos Mores Inter Pocular." I do not want to take it because I think it is the brandy talking. But he insists. So what the hell, I take it.

We part the best of friends for life. I got thirty-two thousand and one hundred bucks to the good, and a book Izzy Einstien would maybe not even gimme a quarter for. As I ride home in a taxi, what am I find-

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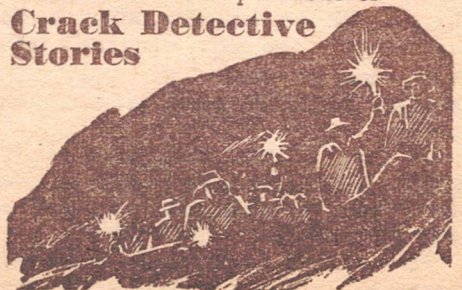
A Coward Comes Home

by Stuart Friedman

Hounded to Death

by Marvin Ryerson

Don't Miss the Sept. Issue of
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ing? Googey made a mistake and gimme the wrong book!

How do you like that! I near pass out! That dope! I start to tell the cabby to go back to Googey's house, when I change my mind.

This is too much; It has got to stop! So what do I do? Back I go to the library of the dead millionaire. I ask the cloirk for books, until I get my mitts on No. 487. I switch, and walk out of the place just at closing time.

I call Googey on the phone. I tell him a terrible funny joke I have just committed. I tell him that just for the hell of it, I went and switched "Inter Pocular" for the other No. 487 that was in the library. And I asks him if it is all right if I keep this book, too.

"Sure," he says. "Sure I give it to you, didn't I?"

"Well, you give me 'Inter.' Not this one."

"Do not be technical, my boy. Keep it, keep it!"

THAT'S all I want to know. I go to a hotel, register under another name, and get a good night's rest.

The next day I go to the auction. The three of them are there. They are purple in the face, glaring at each other. I keep hidden and watch them take looks at the No. 487. I know Googey and Holly will bid for it like mad, since they are millionaires. But I am not sure what Minx is going to do.

But Minx pulls a fast one. Just for spite, because he thinks one or the other or both of the men pulled a dirty deal on him, he goes to the executers of the estate, and notifies them what kind of a book they got by No. 487. So naturally, Minx is the sensation of the day. He gets a million bucks worth of publicity; Googey and Holly don't get the book cheap.

In fact, neither Googey or Holly get it. A disinterested party to this affair gets the book for two hundred and fifty-two thousand bucks.

Now. I feel I am clean. If I steal something and put it back again, no-

body can say I did not try to be honest. That is what I would like to do, Mr. Lowndes. Will you please tell me, am I a crook, or ain't I a crook. Should I give back the money, or keep it. I figger I earned the dough, since they was willing to pay through the nose. And yet I feel something is wrong someplace.

I rest the question in your lap, Mr. Lowndes, and will do whatever you tell me to do, because you are an ex-poit on crimes. In the meantime I will try to spend as little money as possible until I get the answer. So there is no hurry.

Thanking you very much in advance, I am very truly yours,

A Reader,
HOMER ANGEL.

(We are happy to know that your conscience finally got the better of you, Mr. Angel, but we regret to say that your part in this business wasn't exactly honest, even if no one was hurt and you did return the precious No. 487. You see, stealing is still stealing, even if the person from whom you are extracting the object in question is not entirely on the level.)

Moreover, Mr. Angel, in accepting money from Messrs Guggenhime, Hollingsworth, and Minx, we are afraid you made yourself a party to fraud. Here, again, the law isn't interested in the motives of the parties you "took."

So we can only urge you to return the money to Guggenhime, Hollingsworth, and Minx—anonymously, if you prefer. We hope that they will have learned a lesson from this affair—and we know you have. When you have done this, then you can settle back and honestly say to yourself that you are not a crook any more.

Thanks for writing—and we're delighted to hear that CRACK DETECTIVE STORIES has played its part in making a new man of you. Sincerely, Robert W. Lowndes, Editor.)

THE END

ONE KNEW THE MOTIVE

By Stuart Friedman

(Author of "Case of the Wonderful Wolf")

The only person who could possibly know why Basil Denver turned to murder was to be the victim himself!

BASIL DENVER sat perfectly still as he talked. His voice was a dead monotone, barely aloud. He didn't want to distract from the potency of his story by any movement, or emotion in his tone. His lean body was doubled forward, forearms on skinny legs, the warm coffee cup cradled between seamy palms. He and Stephen, his twin, had dined together to celebrate their fifty-fifth birthday. He could sense his brother's tautness in the chair beside him. Stephen listened, staring at the dance of bright flame in the library fireplace.

He left out no detail. . . The thunder of head-on collision with its glass shatter, that screech and almost human howl of metal torn at high velocity. Basil spotted his tale with deft bits, like the view of one woman trying to climb out the jagged frame of a broken door window as the cars pitched end over end into the gut of the canyon. He sketched the terrifying picture of the car suddenly enveloped by fire. One more detail he added: the sound which had threaded up out of the wreckage, the voices of trapped humans, burning, uttering their last mortal cry. Then he stopped.

Basil tasted his coffee, listened to the labor of Stephen's breathing. He didn't look, but he knew his brother was struggling to find voice. Basil Denver knew about Stephen's imagination—and his bad heart.

In a few moments Stephen cried out hoarsely.

"Medicine—the mantle—"

Basil leaped up, his coffee sloshing over. He grabbed the bottle from the

ledge above the fire. With trembling fingers he spooned out a dose, gave it to Stephen.

He stood above him, back to the fire, watched his brother sag back, close his eyes. Basil smiled slightly. He had told a good story. It had been pure fiction.

The story had been just a build-up, a conditioner. The actual murder would come later. It would be a fitting death. Stephen was a coward. He would die of fright!

Finally Stephen opened his eyes.

"I'm sorry," Basil said. "I shouldn't have told you that. I forgot—"

"I wish—I wish you hadn't," he said, hands tightening on the arms of his chair. "Since my accident—"

"I know," Basil said hurriedly. "Steve, we'd better forget mother this year. . ."

"No," he said grimly. "I'm not such a coward—"

"But I know how you feel—and night driving is dangerous," Basil said. "I should have got here so we could make that drive in the daylight."

But he hadn't. He'd called instead, told Stephen that he couldn't make it in the afternoon, as in years past. Basil knew his brother would want to go to the cemetery, part of the annual ritual. That trip honoring memory of their mother would be the only thing powerful enough to get Stephen into a car at night, since the accident years before which had caused the heart condition.

Basil slipped his brother's medicine in his pocket, walked to the coat rack.

"If we're going, we'd better start," he said. "Meet me in the back drive. I'll get the car."

HE WENT downstairs quickly, out the front entrance of the apartment. He started the car, nosed it into the narrow passageway cramped between the tall buildings. A quarter of a block away was the small door from which Stephen would step into the alley. Stephen would look toward the back—not the street where Basil waited, lights out. His brother would expect the car to come from the garage at the other end of the narrow drive. When Stephen tired of waiting, he would walk back toward the entrance to the apartment garages. Basil would accelerate then, throwing on the lights. He would come roaring along, swerving slightly between the confines of the walls. Stephen, coward that he was, would run. When the car was at his brother's heels, Basil would jam on the brakes.

Stephen's heart, with the strain it had already suffered tonight, would do the trick.

Then, Basil would get out, let the medicine fall and break on the concrete, near his twin.

At last, then, he would be free of the one thing—Basil waited, his heart thumping crazily. He didn't like to think of his motive for this killing. There was no reason to think of it. . .

Basil Denver had, after all, established a reputation. . .and he was being a fool to think of his true reason for wanting Stephen dead. Stephen knew. Without words, he knew. Basil had seen him smile at newspaper accounts that termed Basil Denver the tough character, the most scathing lawyer in the state. . . No one else smiled. No one else knew his reason for gathering around him an organization of the city's most hard-boiled gangsters. Newspapermen should know, Basil reasoned with himself. And they termed him a fighting fool. If they thought that—he was. A man didn't have to brawl physically to have guts. . .

Stephen was contemptible. A neurotic, scared of his shadow, living

like a recluse spinster on his part of the income from their parents' estate. The man hadn't even the guts to come out and say—say what? Basil clamped the steering wheel as his twin stepped into the alleyway.

Then Stephen was stepping away from the door. His back was to Basil. Basil gritted his teeth, jammed down on the gas. At last. At last he would wipe out forever this other half. . .this one person in the world who knew from a dozen boyhood encounters that Stephen wasn't the only coward. . .

He saw his brother swing about at sound of the motor. Basil laughed aloud as he reached for the light switch. He caught up the wriggling terrified shadow, saw the stark terror as that *coward* tried to run.

Something else thrust the solid lump of ice inside Basil Denver. Another car shooting head-on down that narrow lane! There was no place to turn. There was only room for one car. Basil Denver screamed in terror! In unreasoning frenzy he wrenched the wheel to the left as though to drive through the brick, out of the path of the oncoming car.

Then he saw. It hadn't been a car, but his own lights reflected in the windows of the garage entrance!

He had only an instant of realization, and then it was too late.

Stephen looked at the wreckage, sadly. Poor Basil. He had always made himself miserable, flailing, fighting that unseen something, that curse they had both shared. People had thought him funny, sometimes. His ranting in court, his make-believe bravado that had been so obviously forced.

Perhaps, Stephen thought, Basil would have been happier to have admitted what they both knew; might have adopted some ruse, as he had. No one expected much from a man with a bad heart. Even a coward could live happily, if only with honesty. Then, maybe Basil wouldn't have had to go out this way. It was odd, Stephen thought, that for all his cleverness Basil hadn't thought of a more subtle way of suicide. . .

THE END

The flare of the match revealed a motionless figure lying outstretched.



MURDER TAKES ★ ★
★ ★ NO FURLOUGH
By BRUNO FISCHER

Private Sloan knew he had hit this man in the dark, bounced the victim off his fender, but how did he come to be stabbed?

IN THE evening I parked the car across the street from Chester Ivy's real estate office. Through the broad store-front window I could see Fannie Marvin writing at a desk;

the frosted glass door of Ivy's private office showed light. I had plenty of time. My furlough didn't expire until tomorrow afternoon. I'd wait that long if I had to, to get my hands on Chester Ivy.

The frosted door opened, and I tensed behind the wheel. But it was only George Hewart. He stopped at Fannie Marvin's desk and spoke to her for a while. Then he dipped his face down to hers and kissed her. Fannie sat motionless through the kiss, and Hewart made it last pretty long. When it was over, he came out to the street.

Automatically I rubbed the spot on my jaw where Hewart's fist had clipped me that afternoon. I didn't hold it against the guy. It had been my fault.

Hewart's narrow, slightly stooped back moved down the street. I lit a cigaret and waited some more.

Time passed. All at once I was aware that the lights in the real estate office were going out. The frosted door was wide open and the room beyond it was in darkness. Fannie Marvin was standing in front of a small wall mirror and adjusting a crazy hat on her red curls. Her figure was too lush for my taste, though I suppose she was fairly good-looking. She picked her handbag off the desk and pulled the chain of the last of the lights and locked the door from the outside.

I muttered curses to myself. For more than an hour I'd been waiting here for Chester Ivy to come out, and all the time he hadn't been in the office.

Probably, then, he was home. I'd made it my business to find out where Chester Ivy lived. He had a cottage a few miles beyond, just off the highway.

After I left town and got onto the highway, I slowed down. If Ivy was home, there was no particular hurry. And the road wound crazily and the dimout made it hard to see any distance ahead.

It was the dimout that was really to blame. Aside from the fact that there were no lights on the road and the night was as black as my ser-

geant's heart, the upper two-thirds of the car's headlights were blacked out. Even so, I would have seen him in time if he hadn't been on the other side of a very sharp curve. Suddenly there he was, with my car practically on top of him.

THE brakes were good, but not that good. Frantically I twisted the wheel. The hood nosed away from him; the right mudguard caught him and spun him out of range of the light. I heard him yelp like a hurt animal. The car skidded broadside to the road and stopped.

The motor stalled, and abruptly there was pocket of silence all around me. The man was quiet; even the night insects seemed to have lost their voices.

I slammed out of the car and found myself gathered up by the darkness. The dimmed headlights pointed the wrong way, and I had no flashlight. I struck a match. A small area of light pushed itself into being. As far as I could see, there was no hurt man in sight. But I couldn't see far.

"Where are you?" I called.

My voice rolled across the open field on one side of the road. Within a quarter of a mile there were the lights of houses, but nobody lived nearer. The match burned my fingers. I flicked it out and lit another and took a few steps.

Then I saw the man's leg. It was half-buried in the tall grass that grew beyond the shoulder of the road. That was where the fender of my car had tossed him.

A third match revealed him lying on his back, his face turned up to the starless sky. There was no blood, no sign that he was badly hurt. But he was unconscious.

In the darkness I fumbled one arm under his shoulder and the other between his thighs and carried him to the car. He was quite a load; though I'm fairly strong, my knees were buckling by the time I had lugged him the few feet. I pushed the limp body into the back seat and got behind the wheel. I turned the car around and drove like mad back to town.

An attendant was coming out of the emergency entrance of the city hospital when I roared up the driveway.

"I hit a man on the road," I cried. "He's in back of the car."

As the attendant opened the door, I switched the overhead light on. He leaned in and said: "Out cold, eh? Where'd you—"

He cocked his head sideways and glanced at me where I knelt on the front seat. "I'll be right back," he said and ducked into the hospital.

For the first time I got a real look at the man I had hit. He was an overly handsome guy of about thirty. He had a neatly trimmed mustache over too full lips. There didn't seem to be anything wrong with him, except that his face was too white.

Suddenly I got a queazy feeling in my stomach. I leaned over the seat and touched his hand. My hand jerked back from the contact and I got out of the car.

An interne came out, followed by the attendant who had gone for him and another attendant. They carried a stretcher. The interne poked his head into the car.

"This man is dead," he told me.

I nodded and slowly set fire to a cigaret. When the attendants started pulling the body out, I went around to the other side of the car to get out of the way and leaned against a fender. My stomach was jumping inside of me.

This is a hell of a note, I thought. On top of everything else—this. And I have to be back tomorrow.

SUDDENLY I remembered that the fender I was leaning against was the one that had hit the man. I bounced away from it and then turned to examine it. There was a dent in the fender, but not a bad one.

The interne came over to me. "You'll have to hang around till the police come."

"I don't understand it," I said. "I didn't do more than nick him. He was caught around the hip or somewhere in the middle. That might

have hurt him badly, but it wouldn't have killed him."

The interne shrugged. "Maybe his heart gave out at the shock. It happens. Come this way."

He led me into a reception room and told me to wait.

"I've got to report it to the cops," he said. "Somebody will be here in a few minutes. Is the car insured?"

"It's a hired car."

"Then there's nothing to worry about," he assured me. "If you say you only nicked him, the accident was only an indirect cause of his death. But the police insist on red tape."

He left me. Burning cigarets, I paced about the small room. I was plenty worried in spite of the fact that I kept telling myself there wasn't any reason to. The accident hadn't been my fault.

After a while a solid looking man came into the reception room. He wore his clothes as if they had been dropped over him. He said: "You the soldier who killed the man?"

"I didn't kill him. The fender caught him and knocked him down. I'd almost stopped by that time. The interne thinks it might have been heart-failure."

"We'll see. I'm Detective Corde." He took a printed form and a fountain pen out of his pocket and sat down at the table.

I told him that I was Private Paul Sloan and had driven here in a hired car on a two-day furlough.

"I used to live at 342 Maple Avenue with my sister Dinah. She still lives there. I came to visit her."

It was a long sheet and he had a lot of questions to ask. By the time he was finished, the interne came back, looking puzzled.

"Funny," he said. "There's not a mark on the guy. And it wasn't his heart."

Detective Corde looked at me. "You said you hit him. You said you heard him yell."

"That's right. The front fender hit him. Not hard, but hard enough to toss him off the road. There have to be some bruises."

"There have to be," the interne

said, "but there aren't." He handed Corde a wallet. "This was in the cadaver's pocket."

The detective opened the wallet and took out an insurance identification card. "Chester Ivy," he muttered.

The name hit me like a punch below the belt. The startled look in my face that gave me away.

"You knew him, soldier?" Corde asked me mildly.

"I never saw him until a few minutes ago," I said. "But I've heard his name. He's a real estate broker. My sister works for him; she's one of his agents."

CORDE brooded over the card in his hand. "Chester Ivy lives outside of town, not far from the highway. What were you doing driving that way?"

I knew what was coming, so I didn't have to hesitate. "I promised one of my buddies, Ben Hotch, to stop in and see his mother. She lives that way."

Half of that was the truth. As for the rest, I had decided that I wouldn't have time to see Mrs. Hotch.

"Yeah." Corde stood up and scratched his nose, then went out. Frowning, the interne tagged after him.

I had hardly time to draw a deep breath before a uniformed cop came into the room. He didn't say anything. He just put his shoulders against the wall and stayed there in imitation of a statue.

It seemed like a waste of manpower to set a cop to watch me. Corde ought to know that I wouldn't run out on an accident, especially after I had gone to all the trouble of bringing the dead man in. A soldier was too easy to pick up. And there was no need to worry. The dimout and the curve were to blame, and the fact that Chester Ivy had walked on the road without a light.

But I hadn't told Corde that I had been on the way to see Chester Ivy when I had hit him.

Was that a mistake? After all, Corde had no way of knowing that I

hadn't really been going to visit Mrs. Hotch. If Corde knew where I had been bound for, he would probe deeper, and my sister Dinah would be hurt worse than she already had been.

Corde was still scratching his nose when he returned.

"You didn't hit a car or anything on the way from Army camp?" he asked.

"No."

"I put in a call to the place where you rented the car," he said. "They're positive there wasn't a scratch on the fender. They say their mechanics go over the cars each time they're returned. Yet there's a pretty big dent in the right front fender."

I nodded. "That's where I hit him. I told you that."

"And no contusion," he muttered glumly. "I wonder—"

I never knew what he was wondering. The interne returned with a gray-haired man in a doctor's gown.

"Detective Corde?" the man said. "I'm Dr. Parvis."

Corde shook his hand. "I've heard of you. You're the chief surgeon."

Dr. Parvis glanced at me with cold, unfriendly eyes. Then he turned back to Corde. "Dr. Willow here told me about the man who had apparently been killed in an accident and yet bore no external marks. Naturally I was interested. While I realize that thorough examination falls into the medical examiner's province, I took the privilege of taking a look at the body."

"Glad you did," Corde told him. "Did you find out how Chester Ivy died?"

"Yes," Dr. Parvis said, and glanced at me again. "The man was murdered."

EVERY eye in the room was on me. I started to reach for a cigaret and changed my mind. I knew I couldn't light it without my hand shaking too much.

"Murdered!" I whispered. "That's crazy!"

Corde didn't seem to see anything crazy about it. He asked quietly: "Was he poisoned, Doctor?"

"Stabbed," Dr. Parvis said. "Very

cleverly stabbed. An extremely long and narrow instrument—something like an old-fashioned hatpin, I should imagine—was injected under his earlobe. The point penetrated the brain. Death was practically instantaneous. Needless to say, there was scarcely any external bleeding. Under superficial examination, the minute wound was hidden by the earlobe."

Corde sighed. "Well, soldier?"

"You think I murdered him?" I gasped.

"I don't think that Ivy was killed and then got up and walked into your car."

I stood there in a daze, looking from face to face. There was no sympathy or understanding anywhere.

And then I had it. I started to laugh. The cop moved from the wall and came to my side. He, like the others, was sure I had lost my mind; that I was a homicidal maniac.

"Look," I said. "I know I hit a man. It couldn't have been Chester Ivy, so it had to be somebody else."

Corde expelled breath through his nostrils, but said nothing.

"It was dark," I went on breathlessly. "All I could see was what a match showed me. Come to think of it, Ivy was lying too far off the road. He couldn't have been thrown that far. That's where he had been murdered, but I couldn't know that. I was looking for a hurt man, and when I saw Ivy I rushed him to the hospital."

Dr. Parvis said: "Didn't you feel that he was cold?"

"I didn't touch his hands or face. It didn't occur to me that I could have killed him. Anyway, I was in too much of a hurry to get him here."

"And where," Corde asked dryly, "was the man you hit?"

"Lying near there, probably unconscious. I must have walked right by him without seeing him because of the darkness. Maybe another car picked him up."

The interne shook his head. "He'd be brought here, and there have been no accident cases since you came in."

I grasped at a straw. "He might still be there. I know he was hurt

because he screamed when I hit him and then was suddenly silent."

Corde found that his nose was itching again. "Well, it won't hurt to take a look," he said.

Driving out in the police car, Corde didn't have any more questions. He probably thought he had all the answers. If so, he was a lot smarter than I was. I had none of them.

"Here's the place," I said.

The uniformed cop, who was driving, pulled over. Corde had a powerful electric lantern. He swept it around. There was no injured man anywhere in sight.

Corde studied the marks of my tires where I had skidded. Other cars had driven over the marks, but they were still visible. Then I showed where I had found Chester Ivy's body.

"You see," I said excitedly. "The grass is still bent where he lay."

"Well, nothing more we can do here," Corde said noncommittally.

I was driven to police headquarters. Corde must have phoned in a full report from the hospital, because a police lieutenant named Taylor knew all the details when Corde took me into his office.

THIS Lieutenant Taylor was a lank, sour-faced man who looked at me as if I were a fiend incarnate. He didn't bother trying to be subtle.

"You think you're smart, Sloan," he said. "Just killing Chester Ivy would be dangerous. The body would be found and there would be autopsy, and certain facts would point to you as the killer. You figured that if you said you'd killed him in an accident, he'd simply be buried and that would be the end of it. That's why you stabbed him so it wouldn't be noticed. We got the goods on you. You might as well save yourself grief and confess."

I gave him a look of disgust and turned to Corde. "Tell him about the skid marks and the indented grass."

"That's right," Corde said. He, at any rate, had some sense. "He skidded all right, and a body was ly-

ing in the grass for at least a few minutes."

Taylor brushed his words aside with a wave of his hand. "He could've rigged that. He tried to play it smart." Suddenly he poked his face inches from mine. "What was your motive, Sloan?"

I guess I'm a bad actor, because Taylor pulled back his face and smiled.

"Spill it now, Sloan. We'll find out soon enough."

"I never in my life saw Ivy till I found him at the side of the road," I replied wearily.

Corde asked: "How long has your sister been working for Ivy, soldier?"

"Three or four years."

"You told me you were inducted into the Army ten months ago. You lived in this town most of your life, and up till your induction you lived with your sister. You mean to say you never saw your sister's boss?"

"What's odd about that?" I said. "He was her boss, not mine."

Lieutenant Taylor made a growling noise in his throat. "He's still trying to be smart. He doesn't know how us cops work. Lock him up, Corde."

I went with Corde halfway to the door, then stopped and turned. "But you can't keep me here. My furlough expires tomorrow."

Taylor chuckled. "That's the least of your worries."

FOR a while next morning I was completely ignored, except for breakfast which I hardly tasted. Then the turnkey unlocked my cell and took me into a room. My sister Dinah was waiting in there for me.

People say that Dinah and I look like each other. That may be, but Dinah is very pretty and I have never been mistaken for a matinee idol. She wasn't pretty now. Her face was a sickish green and her eyes were swollen from weeping.

She held herself in check until the turnkey was gone, then rushed into my arms.

"Paul, why did you do it?"

I stiffened. "I didn't kill Chester Ivy, if that's what you mean. "I—"

Then I remembered where we were and gathered her close to me and put my mouth against her ear. "There might be dictaphones or somebody listening outside."

"Oh." She dropped her voice to a whisper. "Paul, the police questioned me for hours. They say they know you murdered Chester Ivy and want to know why?"

"What did you tell them?"

"I didn't tell them *that*. It would absolutely convince them. Paul, you say you didn't kill him?"

"I give you my word. But whatever happens, don't tell them about the mess with Ivy."

She drew away from me and gave me a queer look. "Of course they won't find out from me."

It was clear the way her mind worked. She thought I was asking her to cover up for me, when all along I was trying to protect her. But I couldn't tell her that. She'd be sure to do just what I didn't want her to.

I said: "You stopped caring for Chester Ivy, didn't you, Dinah?"

"I don't know," she muttered listlessly. She stood on her toes to give me a sisterly, dutiful kiss and said she'd try to see me again later in the day. Her lips were like icicles on my cheek.

I wasn't in my cell thirty minutes before I was yanked out again and taken back to that room. This time there was quite a gathering inside. Lieutenant Taylor and Detective Corde were there, and George Hewart and Fannie Marvin.

"Hello, Fannie," I said, trying to act at ease.

I'd known Fanny Marvin for years. The lush redhead had been my sister's friend since schooldays. In fact, it had been through Dinah that Fannie had gotten the job as secretary in Ivy's real estate office.

Fannie didn't acknowledge my greeting. She glanced at me in horror, then quickly turned her eyes away.

I tried George Hewart next. "Sorry I caused that rumpus in the office yesterday."

Hewart didn't seem to hear me. He

was watching Fannie with a kind of hang-dog expression. He was a thin man, well advanced in middle-age, and those eyes of his were as sad as a dog's. I'd never met him before yesterday afternoon, and only learned his name later from Dinah. He and Dinah were—or had been—Chester Ivy's assistants.

LIUTENANT TAYLOR said sourly: "We got the autopsy report. Chester Ivy was killed around the time you say you had an accident."

That was something to know. "So it was probably the murderer I hit just after he'd murdered Ivy," I said.

"So you're still sticking to that story? You know these people and you know we got the goods on you. Are you ready to talk now?"

"I told you everything I have to say."

Taylor shrugged. "Okay, Miss Marvin, let's hear your story again in Sloan's presence."

Fannie Marvin said without looking at me: "Paul came into the real estate office yesterday at about three-thirty. Dinah wasn't in; Mr Ivy was in his office. Paul said he wanted to see Mr. Ivy. I called Mr. Ivy on the extension, and he said he had no business with Paul Sloan and not to let him in. When I told that to Paul, he looked wild and said, 'By God, he's not going to hide from me!' and started toward Mr. Ivy's office. Naturally I tried to stop him."

"Stop him how?"

"Well, I grabbed his arm. Not hard. Paul was always a gentleman, but he was half-crazy and—and—" She faltered.

"I can finish it from there," George Hewart said. "I was coming in and saw Miss Marvin struggling with a strange soldier and I took a swing at him. I'll say this for him: he's younger and bigger than I am, but he didn't try to make a fight of it. He stood rubbing his jaw, and he was suddenly quiet and so was his voice. He turned to Miss Marvin and said: 'I'm sorry I lost my head. Tell Ivy

he won't be able to hide from me forever.' Then he went out."

"Did you see Sloan again after that, Miss Marvin?" Taylor prompted.

"Yes, I did. When I closed up the office last night, I noticed a soldier sitting in a parked car across the street."

"Did you recognize Sloan?"

Fannie looked at me at last, and her eyes blazed with hate. "I'm sure it was Paul. He had a uniform on. He was waiting to murder poor Mr. Ivy."

Her hate and the vehemence of her tone bewildered me. Fannie had always liked me, and I would have bet before this that if ever I got into trouble she'd do her best to help me out. She was doing her best now—to railroad me to an electric chair.

"Good enough!" Taylor exclaimed triumphantly. "Well, Sloan, what have you got to say now?"

"All that is true," I told him. "But that doesn't make me a murderer."

"You waited for Ivy outside his office last night. When you saw he wasn't there, you drove over to his house."

"Yes," I admitted. "But I struck somebody with my car before I reached the place."

Taylor laughed mockingly. "You admit you were out to get him?"

"No. Only talk to him."

"What about?"

"He owed Dinah some money and I was trying to collect it."

CORDE pursed his lips and shook his head as if he were disappointed in me.

"So your sister sends her kid brother to collect dough for her from her boss?" Taylor sneered. "Couldn't you think up a better one?"

"It's the truth."

"Throw him back in the can," Taylor ordered Corde. "We got enough as is for the D. A. to take over." He went out with Fannie Marvin and George Hewart.

Corde didn't seem in a hurry to get me back to the cell. He offered me a cigaret and lit it for me.

"I've been browsing around, sol-

dier," he said casually. "Been having talks with your sister's neighbors. You can be sure neighbors never miss what's going on. I bet they know how many times Chester Ivy took your sister home and kissed her in the doorway or went up to the apartment with her."

So here it was. I should have known that a thing like that couldn't be kept from the police.

"By neighbors you mean old Mrs. Willow," I said.

"Among others. I can't say I blame you, soldier." Corde was using the man-to-man approach. "Your uniform shows you're a red-blooded guy. I found out about Chester Ivy. The guy was a wolf of the worst kind. Hell, if that had been my sister, I'd have done the same to him."

"I didn't kill him," I muttered.

"I phoned your Army camp. By the way, Lieutenant Andrew will be here late this afternoon to find out how the Army enters into this mess. Anyway, I learned you pulled all the ropes you could to wangle a furlough. You were pretty anxious to see Ivy."

"Not Ivy," I said. "Dinah. Miss Willow took it upon herself to write me about Dinah's falling for Ivy. We have no parents and I'm the man of the family, so I thought it my duty to see what was what. When I got here yesterday, I found that Dinah was pretty hard hit by Ivy. That part wouldn't have been so bad, even though the guy seemed to be a rat. What was cutting her up was that he had apparently become tired of her and had dropped her cold."

"So you wanted to make Ivy marry her?"

I looked at him. "Dinah was lucky to be rid of him, even though she didn't think so. What made it tougher for her was that he was her boss and she had to see him all day long. She thought if she could quit her job she could forget him. But it seems that Ivy wanted to keep her dangling on his string. He owed her a lot in commissions and would fork up only a little at a time and only while she worked for him. She

couldn't afford to let all that money go."

"She could have taken him to court," Corde pointed out.

"That's just it—she couldn't, and he knew she couldn't. I mean, she didn't dare, because her court trial would make an open scandal of her affair with him. The whole stinking mess would be smeared all over the papers. That's why I didn't tell you about it. I wanted to spare Dinah headlines."

"And you're willing to go to the chair to save your sister a bit of scandal?"

"It hasn't gone as far as that yet."

"Hasn't it?" Corde said. "You admit that you were after Ivy to get your sister's money from him. How did you plan to get it? By beating him up?"

"If I had to, but I would have tried to avoid that too. I didn't want to do anything that would cause a stink."

CORDE expelled smoke languidly through his nostrils. "Are you sure you're not trying to save your sister from something worse than a scandal?"

I didn't get it. "What are you talking about?"

"I've heard of women murdering men because they got tired of them," he suggested softly.

"You're not serious?"

Corde shrugged. "Both you and your sister had plenty of motive for murdering Chester Ivy. It's either you or her."

For one terrible moment I almost believed him. Then I saw the flaw in his reasoning and relaxed a little.

"It has to be the murderer who was struck by my car," I said. "The medical examiner says Ivy was killed about that time. The murderer was in a hurry to get away; that's why he didn't see my car coming around the curve. And that's why he walked along a dark road on a black night without showing a light. I saw him before I hit him, and there's no doubt he's a man."

"You saw him," Corde observed dryly, "but nobody else did. We have

only your word for it that somebody was on the road—and you're the prime suspect, so your word doesn't count."

I went to a window and looked down into the courtyard. I wanted time to get my thoughts straightened out. The truth wasn't any good—not unless I had all of it. Part of the truth was as bad as none at all.

Corde tagged after me. He said: "I can see it your way, and so will everybody else. You killed Chester Ivy because he betrayed your sister. That's justifiable homicide in a lot of eyes. Chester Ivy was a louse. He couldn't keep his hands off any pretty woman within reach. The hell of it was that a lot of them fell for him. I'm not a lawyer, but you got a good court case, soldier. Why keep up a hopeless fight?"

I whirled toward him. "I think I got it!"

"Got what?"

"The murderer," I said.

DETEKTIVE CORDE stopped his car across the street from the real estate office.

"Let me go in alone," I pleaded.

He shook his head. "And have you take a powder through the back door? I didn't tell Lieutenant Taylor I took you out here. I'd be broken if anything went wrong.

"Look," I said. "If I tried to run out, I'd be deserting from the Army as well. I wouldn't have a chance. If I did kill Ivy, I'd have a good chance to beat the rap. You said yourself that would be the smart thing."

"A murderer doesn't always do the smart thing."

"You agreed I had something," I persisted. "That's why you brought me out here. I've got to work it my way or it mightn't work."

Corde thought it over. "Okay, soldier, I'm a sucker."

"Thanks," I said and got out of the car.

I walked across the street to the real estate office. Through the window I could see Fannie Marvin seated at the front desk. Farther back Dinah was phoning at her own desk. George Hewart's desk was toward the rear of the office. I peered and saw him writing there.

Chester Ivy was dead, but the routine of the office was continuing. They were in the midst of deals and rentals and couldn't afford to let them drop. I took a deep breath and opened the door.

Dinah saw me first. She uttered a little cry and hung up the phone and ran over to me. "Paul, did they let you go?"

"They had to," I said. "They had no evidence."

Fannie was on her feet too. "You killed him!" Her voice quivered with hate. "You murdered him in the prime of life!"

I ignored her. I was watching George Hewart came toward me. His eyes were curiously fixed on me, and he moved with slow stiffness. I stepped around Dinah and walked over to meet him.

"Yesterday you took a poke at me for no reason," I said. "I came to pay you back."

He stepped backward, cringing. "I made a mistake, Sloan. I apologize."

"That doesn't make my jaw feel any better," I said. "Put up your hands and fight."

Dinah cried, "Paul, don't be a fool!" and I heard her coming up behind me.

Hewart still had his hands at his sides, and he stood a second step backward. I hit him anyway—not with my fist and not on the jaw. I slapped him hard on his hip. My open hand felt something stiffer than

WE HAVEN'T WON THIS WAR YET!
**BUY STILL MORE BONDS AND
 STAMPS**

flesh or underwear beneath his pants.

He yelled with pain and tried to spin away from me, to run into Ivy's private office, probably, and lock himself in. This time I used my fist. The blow caught his cheek and rocked him. I crossed with my other fist and he sat down.

BEHIND me the two girls were screaming. Dinah had reached me and was tugging at my back. Fannie was yelling: "You beast! You killed Chester and now you're trying to kill George."

Standing over Hewart and not taking my eyes from him, I said to Fannie: "Hewart murdered Chester Ivy. He's in love with you, Fannie. I saw him kiss you when he left the office last night. I saw the way he kept looking at you at police headquarters this morning. And I knew the kind of rat Chester Ivy was. There were two attractive girls in his office. He got tired of Dinah and then turned to you, Fannie."

Dinah's hand dropped off me. Both girls were silent except for their labored breathing. The load slipped from my chest. I was right so far; otherwise Fannie would have protested before this.

"I think you and Hewart were to be married, Fanny," I went on. "That's why you meekly submitted to his good-night kiss. Chester Ivy, though, was putting a crimp in it. You'd fallen for him. This morning at headquarters and just now you hated me the way only a woman who's mad about a man can hate his murderer. But Hewart had the real stake in killing Ivy. He couldn't take what was going on. Maybe it was not so much losing you as knowing that Ivy would merely play around with you and then drop you cold, the way he had Dinah and probably lots of others. Hewart couldn't make you see sense, Fannie. You were too far gone over Ivy. So he figured there was only one thing to do."

Hewart fingered his swelling cheek. He tried to smile, but couldn't quite bring it off. He was a fading, middle-aged man who had loved a younger girl and lost, and was now at the end of his rope.

"Your hip is tightly taped so you're able to walk, if you're careful, without a limp," I told him. "That's where the fender of my car struck you last night. You were in a car with Chester Ivy when you stabbed him. You ran the car off the road and dumped him out. Your car was past my dimmed-out headlights, so I didn't see it. You were returning to it when my car struck you. You heard me looking for you and were afraid I'd find the body as well as you, so you lay still in the darkness. After I was gone, you drove off."

The suddenness of his movement took me by surprise. He twisted up to his feet and raced limping to his desk. I went after him. Before I could reach him, he had a drawer of his desk open and there was a gun in his hand.

I was flinging myself sideways when gun-thunder filled the room. Hewart's gun fell from his hand. For a moment he gaped at his shattered wrist, then crumpled behind his desk.

Glancing over my shoulder, I saw Detective Corde moving past Dinah and Fannie. His hand held a smoking automatic. The street door was open; none of us heard him enter.

"You were a reckless fool, soldier," Corde said amiably. "But you did get what's as good as a confession."

Again I was going toward Hewart's desk. There was a second shot. This time it wasn't from Corde's gun. I went around the desk and stopped.

George Hewart had managed to pick up his gun with his left hand and put a bullet into his head.

"He's dead," Corde whispered at my side.

I turned away. Dinah sank into my arms and sobbed against my chest. Over her head I saw Fannie Marvin sink into a chair. Her face was stony; her eyes stared at nothing. I felt very sorry for her.

Perhaps what I did then was odd. But this was all civilian stuff, and I wasn't a civilian. I had a bigger job to do. I looked at my watch.

"I'll never get back to camp before my furlough expires," I complained.

SOMETIMES MONEY TALKS!

By Frank
Kane

*Swiftly
they loaded
the body into
a crate.*

(Author of
"Murder At
Face Value")



Whoever was doing the engraving on this new load of counterfeit bills was an expert—and that itself was a clue. But who'd have guessed that the whole secret lay in Washington's face?

THE tall man with the thin patch of white in his thick hair watched the patrons of the gallery admiring his handiwork. His chest swelled at every audible comment on the perfection of his reproductions.

"You can hardly tell your etchings from the original," one patron assured him. "I've never seen such uncannily accurate reproductions."

A man in a frock coat approached him. "I beg your pardon, sir. You are Monsieur Hans Jaburg?" The man with the white patch nodded. "I am the assistant manager," the newcomer explained. "Is there, perhaps, one of your etchings missing?"

Hans Jaburg hesitated. His eyes swept the gallery walls. "I think not," he said. "I have missed nothing."

The man in the frock coat rubbed his hands. "Splendid. There is a stupid fellow at the freight entrance. He insists he has some additional Jaburg etchings destined for this exhibition."

Hans Jaburg smiled indulgently. "He has, no doubt, made a mistake."

The man in the frock coat smiled oilily. "No doubt. No doubt. However, sir, you would do the management a great favor if you would accompany me and inform the stupid fellow of his mistake."

The etcher's eyes swept the half-filled room. "But—"

"It will take but a second, sir," the other anticipated his argument. "It would be of great convenience to us—"

Hans Jaburg shrugged indulgently, turned on his heel and started for the back staircase. He stepped aside to permit the frock-coated man to precede him. At the bottom of two flights of stairs a small group of men awaited them. A large wooden box stood on the floor.

The frock-coated man joined the group, turned to the etcher. "You will please explain to this person—"

Hans Jaburg felt, rather than saw the man behind him. He heard the whizz as the blackjack descended, then a dark cloud blacked out his consciousness.

The frock-coated man helped the others load his unconscious body into the large wooden box. The box was then dumped unceremoniously onto the back of a large truck.

Hans Jaburg's disappearance from his own exhibition was a three-day

wonder. The more cynical winked and said it was a good, if not entirely successful, attempt to get some publicity for his showing.

After a week, exciting war headlines had pushed the story of Hans Jaburg into the inside pages of the country's newspapers. Two weeks later, the only evidence of Jaburg's visit to the country was a crated, and unclaimed, batch of etchings at the county warehouse.

SPECIAL AGENT Vic Herlehy lolled comfortably in the leather overstuffed. He waited for the man behind the desk to get to the point.

"We've requested a loan of your services, Herlehy," the older man had explained, "because of the fine record you've hung up in the past in cases of this kind."

He hung a cigarette from the corner of his mouth and applied a match. The man behind the desk was staring out the window as though marshalling his thoughts.

"Herlehy," he said finally, "how familiar are you with the operations of counterfeiters?"

Herlehy grinned. He had big, square white teeth that made his grin something worth waiting for. "No first-hand experience, sir. Just happened that before I joined the Bureau I was a newspaperman. Kind of pitched in and helped some of your T-men to crack Abie Rosen's queer ring in the Big Town. I kind of got a pretty good insight into their operations from that."

The man behind the desk nodded. "Yes. I heard about the help you gave our department in the Rosen case. It was that that prompted me to ask for a loan of your services." He pulled open the center drawer of his desk, fumbled in it for a second, then plopped a stack of bills held together by a rubber band on the top of the desk. "We need your help again." He tossed the stack of bills over to the younger man. "What do you think of these bills?"

Herlehy caught the bundle, flipped through it with his thumb, then looked up, a puzzled frown on his

pleasantly homely face. "Are these queer?"

The older man nodded.

Herlehy separated a few bills from the stack, held them up to the light, rubbed them between his fingers, then whistled. "Hell, it sure would take an expert to spot these—"

The man behind the desk leaned over, selected a cigar from the humidior on his desk, denuded it of its cellophane wrapper. "That's why it's so important that we lay the gang responsible for them by the heels." He bit off the tip of the cigar, spat it in the general direction of the waste basket. "Unless we can find out where those bills are being made and get our hands on those plates, the very financial structure of our country may be undermined."

"Where's it showing up?"

"Everywhere." The man behind the desk touched a match to the cigar, exhaled a blue feathery tendrill of smoke. "A lot of it is finding its way into defense workers' envelopes. You know what that's going to do to morale—"

Herlehy nodded. He indicated the stack of bills. "Can I take these along for study?" The older man nodded. "Thanks for a crack at this case, sir. I assure you that I'll do my very best."

The man behind the desk stood up. "That's all the Treasury Department asks, Herlehy. Since this case is of such vital importance, I suggest that you make your reports directly to me. Good luck."

The wide grin split Herlehy's face again as he pulled himself out of the chair. "I'm sure going to need it, sir."

VIC HERLEHY shuffled into the Clover Club and leaned easily on the bar with a grace born of long experience.

"Rye, soda on the side," he told the guy behind the stick.

The Clover Club wasn't exactly up to the movies' conception of what a Hollywood night club should be, he decided, but what it lacked in glamor it more than made up in clamor.

A tiny dance floor was crowded

with swaying couples, decollete ingenues dancing with writers and production men in open-necked sports shirts. A wavy-haired juvenile whose name escaped Herlehy but whose face was as familiar as the hair tonic he indorsed, managed to dance on the outer fringe where he could be certain to be seen.

"Where's a guy find Mack Kramer?" Herlehy asked the barkeep. "They tell me he gets his mail here these days."

The bartender looked him over appraisingly, then as if satisfied, squinted into the spotlight and ran his eyes over the crowd clustered at tables around the dance floor.

"Ringside table, third from the band." He had to raise his voice to be heard over the blare of a corny trumpet. "Sitting with Mona Varden. She's the upholstered broad with the peekaboo dress—"

Herlehy downed the rye with a gulp, wiped his lips with the back of his hand and shouldered his way through the crowd to Kramer's table.

"Hello, Mack," he grinned.

The fat man behind the table grinned. He was not only fat, but he was soft looking. Dark, damp ringlets made a futile effort to cover the round bald spot that gleamed pinkly on the dome of his skull.

"Well, well. Vic Herlehy, the demon newshound!" His voice was guttural, sounded choked by the heaviness of his jowls. "What are you doing out here on the Coast? I thought the Big Town was your beat?"

"Got a minute, Mack?" Herlehy asked.

His eyes took in the sleek lusciousness of Kramer's table mate. She was inches taller than the squat man at her side. The deep cut of the neckline of her dress revealed the deep hollow between her breasts and served to accentuate their perfect roundness and prominence. She smiled at Herlehy as she felt his eyes upon her. Thick, temptingly soft lips split to reveal the flawless perfection of her teeth.

"Okay, turn off the glamor, Babe," Kramer grunted. "Go comb your

hair or something. I want to talk to this guy—"

The girl nodded, swished to her feet. Herlehy watched the supple figure as she swivel-hipped her way across the room. Then he dropped into the chair she had just vacated.

"What's on your mind, Vic?" the fat man asked.

Herlehy fumbled through his pockets, came up with a battered pack of cigarettes. "I need some information, Mack," he hung a cigarette from the corner of his mouth. "I'm working with the Treasury Department. There's a flood of queer being pushed. Where's it coming from?"

The fat man leaned an elbow on the table, brought his face closer to the detective's. "You know I'd tell you anything I could, Vic. I ain't forgetting how you took me off the spot back in New York when some of the boys were out gunning me." His face looked damp in the dim light. "But so help me, I ain't got no idea—"

Herlehy scratched a paper match negligently across the thin strip of sandpaper on the match box. "You used to be hep to the boys passing the stuff—" He brought the lighted match up to the cigarette, lit it.

"Sure, sure. Maybe I even made a buck or two in the old days, but things is changed, Vic." He looked around, lowered his voice confidentially. "Look, I wouldn't tell this to my own brother, but I know you're levelling with me, so I'm goin' to put you hep to a couple of things—"

Herlehy nodded.

"About two, three months ago," Kramer told him, "the boys shoving the stuff for some friends of mine, I ain't mentionin' no names, start kicking about the bum job on the queer. They claim even a blind man can spot it—"

THE detective flicked some ash into a saucer on the table. "So what? Those guys always beef."

The fat man nodded. "Yeah. But this time there's somethin' behind it. They got a new source, and I'm tellin' you, Vic, it's the McCoy. Well," he shrugged his shoulders, "you

know how it is, business is business. So, this friend of mine sends a couple of his boys out to find out who's makin' the stuff—"

Herlehy straightened up in his chair. "Swell. What did they find out?"

Kramer brushed two of the oily ringlets back off his forehead. "They found out that .45's is very fatal weapons at close range. All three of them gets dumped in the drink. So, I decided to come out here for my health—"

The detective stamped out his butt in the saucer. "Don't know who's making the plates, do you, Mack?"

"I'd tell you, Vic. So help me, I would." He bared the yellow stumps of his teeth in what was meant to be a placating smile. "Only, it ain't a regular. Whoever's making them plates, he's an expert—"

Vic Herlehy looked up wearily from the pile of correspondence on his desk when Tommy Woods came in. Tommy had left his job on the "Post-Tribune" the day Vic Herlehy had left the staff, and had tagged along as his assistant.

"Find anything, Vic?" he asked.

Herlehy shook his head. He indicated the pile of correspondence. "If Mack Kramer's hunch was anything more than just a hunch, I haven't been able to make anything out of it. I've checked on every professional etcher in the country. None of them can be making those plates—"

Tommy Woods rubbed his finger along the fine stubble on his chin. "I got something that might mean something," he said. "About four, five months ago there was an exhibition of etchings—"

Vic Herlehy leaned back wearily in his chair.

"The guy that held the exhibition, a guy named Hans Jaburg, was a Belgian. He was famous for doing reproductions of famous paintings—"

"What?" The weariness had left Herlehy's face. "Where is he? Have you located him?"

Tommy Woods looked unhappy. "That's the whole trouble, Vic. Right in the middle of this exhibition this here Jaburg disappears. Don't say a

word to a soul, just ups and disappears. They wait for him to come back, and when he don't show at the end of the exhibition, they just pack up his etchings and stick them in a warehouse. That's where they are right now—"

"That may be the lead we're waiting for!" Vic Herlehy was reaching for the phone. He clacked the receiver impatiently. "Operator, I want Will Ande, art editor of the 'Post Tribune' in New York. I don't care how busy the circuits are. Clear them. This is official business—"

The connection was made in less than three minutes. Bill Ande remembered the Jaburg exhibition vaguely. He also remembered that most of the boys had set Jaburg's disappearance down to an attempt to get some publicity for a not too inspired exhibition. Jaburg himself? Not a genius, certainly, but with a definite flair for making reproductions. Characteristics? Hmm, let's see. Oh yes, the eyes in a Jaburg reproduction always looked slightly tilted in an Oriental fashion. It was good to hear from his former fellow staffman, he assured Herlehy, and if there was anything else—

Herlehy assured him there was nothing else and hastened to end the conversation.

"Get me some of those bills and a high-powered microscope," he yelled at Tommy Woods almost before the receiver was back on its hook. "I think we've located who it is that's making the plates even if we still don't know where he is—"

TOMMY WOODS chewed the stem of his pipe and emitted occasional mouthfuls of deep blue smoke as he watched Vic Herlehy hunch over the microscope. Suddenly, Herlehy started to move the bill about excitedly. He made notes on a scratch pad at his elbow, studied them, then carefully tore them up and threw them in the waste basket.

Tommy Woods watched with interest until his curiosity would stand no more. "Find something, Vic?" he asked.

"I don't know," Vic Herlehy ad-

mitted. "But I'm sure as hell going to find out. Tommy, get me copies of all plane schedules now in effect on southern routes—"

Tommy Woods started to take his pipe from between his teeth to ask a question—

"You know as much about it as I do," Vic forestalled him. "Get the plane schedules and maybe then I'll know something. Right now I'm in the dark—"

Tommy Woods stared discontentedly out the plane window. Far below, green fields made a patchwork quilt, occasionally obscured by a low-hanging cloud. His attention was momentarily diverted by the buxom good-looks of a smiling hostess. He started to fumble for a cigarette, then changed his mind.

"Look, Vic," he said. "I don't like to seem curious, but just what the heck are we doing on this plane outside of getting airsick?"

Vic Herlehy grinned his broad grin without taking his eyes off the watch on his wrist. "Plenty," he said. "If my hunch is correct, we're pretty nearly where we're going. From there on in, it's going to be a lot more fun than it has been—"

Tommy Woods nodded. "Fine. But when do we—"

He was cut short by a wave of Vic Herlehy's hand. The hostess, catching the signal, came over. "Yes, sir?" she asked.

"It's now exactly 7:12, isn't it?" he asked. The girl consulted her watch and nodded. "Could you tell me exactly where we are right now?"

The girl smiled. She leaned toward the window, looked down. "If that's what you really want to know," she said, "we're now passing over Merrittsburg. We arrive at 8:26, and there's no place in town for dancing and dining. Anyway," she lowered her voice, "that's what my husband says."

Vic Herlehy grinned. He turned to Tommy. "Does that answer your unspoken question?" he asked. Tommy nodded.

At the airport, they caught the bus for the hotel, and as he sank back on the cushions, Tommy grunted. "I'm

sure going to appreciate a bed tonight. After riding in that cheese-box of a plane all day, my insides are still doing loops—"

Vic Herlehy stuck one of his ever-present Chesterfields into the corner of his mouth. "In that case," he said, "you'd better get a good night's sleep, because you're catching that cheesebox plane at 5:50 tomorrow morning for its return flight—"

Tommy Woods groaned. "You're kidding, Vic."

Vic Herlehy shook his head. "Never more serious in my life. I've got to know the exact position of that plane tomorrow morning at 8:14. Everything in the case depends on our knowing."

MEL TODD, sheriff at Gorman was willing to be helpful. He assured Vic Herlehy that in so far as he knew, the only radio transmitter in his area was located at Merrittsburg, "about 123 mile due north."

"I sure want you G-men to know that Mel Todd is willin' to pitch in any time to help," he said dubiously, "but I can't help very much if I don't know what you're looking for?"

Vic Herlehy found no fault with the logic of the complaint. "Thanks, Mr. Sheriff, I appreciate your help. As for knowing what I'm looking for, I'm not quite sure myself. I—"

He welcomed the interruption afforded by the ringing of the sheriff's phone.

"Sheriff's office. Who? Long distance? Yes. He's right here. Sure thing." The sheriff held the instrument out to Herlehy. "Somebody's callin' you long distance," he said.

"Thanks. I hope you don't mind. I guess the hotel told them I was here." He took the phone. It was Tommy Woods.

"Look, Vic," Tommy's voice was faint. "You playing games with me? We were right over Merrittsburg at 8:14. The same place we were last night when you asked—"

"Good. That's just what I wanted to know."

Tommy Woods grunted. "Wish I could say the same. What am I go-

ing to do in this whistle stop until tonight?"

Vic chuckled. "Say, that hostess can't have a husband on both ends of the line, can she?"

He heard Tommy snap his fingers. "Say, I never thought of that. Thanks for the tip—"

"By the way, Tommy," Vic added. "If I were you and I wanted to be in on the finish of this mess, I'd make sure to be here by tomorrow at the latest—"

"Do you know where Jaburg's hiding out?"

"I've got a pretty good idea. Tomorrow ought to tell the story—"

TOMMY WOODS chewed on his pipe and watched the scenery slip past the car window. Every now and then a little house with a well kept lawn would slide into view. At his side, Vic Herlehy puffed nonchalantly on his cigarette.

"So this is Merrittsburg," Tommy grunted. "It looked better from 10,000 feet. What makes you think you can find a counterfeiting mob in this town?"

Vic Herlehy deliberated a moment. "Hans Jaburg is in a house in this town. I'm sure of it."

"Oh, that's fine. There are only about 100 houses in town. What do we do, raid every one of them?" Tommy growled.

Vic took the cigarette from his mouth, regarded the glowing end. "Why raid every house when we're only interested in one?"

His assistant's teeth clamped tighter on the pipe. "You know what I'm fishing for? How are we supposed to know the house? Is Jaburg going to hang out a flag or what?"

"It faces on a radio transmitter from the East." Vic Herlehy tossed the cigarette butt through the open window. "There's only one radio transmitter in town, and we're heading there now. Does that answer your question?"

Tommy Woods growled under his breath. "You on the level about never being in this hamlet before?" Herlehy nodded. "Well, then all I gotta say is that you know more about

towns you never been in than any man I ever met," Woods relapsed into a sulkily silence.

The big sedan made a right turn at the village square, followed a concrete road to the top of a hill, and pulled to a stop alongside a large radio transmitter.

"Going to commune with the spir-its or stretch your legs," Vic Herlehy chided. Tommy Woods growled and got out.

"This way's east, isn't it?"

Herlehy nodded.

"Well," Tommy said, "Far as I can see there's only two houses east of here and neither of them look like a counterfeiter's den—"

"They never do," Herlehy observed. "Which of the two would you say is the more likely?"

Tommy Woods squinted into the afternoon sun. "I'd say that big dark one with the wall around it. That white one with the green shutters certainly isn't my idea of a gang hideout—"

Vic Herlehy found another cigarette. "Strangely enough," he said, "the white one gets my vote." He scratched a match and lit the cigarette. "In fact, I'm sure that's the one we're looking for."

"That dark house is my choice. It's a lot more sinister—"

"Maybe so," Herlehy agreed. "But it has no trees in its yard—"

Tommy Woods groaned. "That does it. The house isn't inhabited by gangsters because it has no trees in the yard. What's that got to do with it, anyway?"

Vic Herlehy took a deep drag from the cigarette and then dropped it to the ground. He ground it out with his heel, took a last look at the white house and then started to reenter the car. "That, my fine-feathered friend, has everything to do with it—"

And that was the last word he would say on it.

THAT night, Sheriff Mel Todd, four of his deputies, six men from the local F. B. I. office, Tommy Woods and Vic Herlehy met in Herlehy's room.

"Before we go out on this job,"

Vic explained, "I want you fellows to have some idea of how important it is to our country that we pull it off—"

Tommy Woods squirmed, then reached for his pipe. He saw Sheriff Todd look questioningly at the local F. B. I. regional man, who shrugged.

"Tonight I hope to put our hands on a well organized mob of saboteurs—"

Sheriff Todd sat bolt upright. "Saboteurs?"

Tommy Woods lit his pipe and clamped his teeth on the stem. "You mean counterfeiters, don't you, Vic?" he asked.

Herlehy reached over to the table, helped himself to one of the sheriff's cigarettes. He lit it with a steady hand, drew a deep lungful of smoke, exhaled it. "I mean saboteurs. These men have been counterfeiting United States currency not only for the profit they can make out of it. They've been using it to flood the markets in an effort to spread panic and to demoralize the American people—"

The sheriff gasped. "Well, I'll be—"

The F. B. I. regional man tilted his hat on the back of his head. "I'm accepting your authority, Mr. Herlehy," he said, "but I sure hope you're not goin' off half-cocked. We haven't seen any evidence of illegal activities of that kind in these parts—"

"They're too smart for that. After tonight's over you'll have an idea just how smart they are." He indicated Sheriff Todd. "I think you'd better cover the rear of the house, Sheriff. We'll take the front. I'd like as little shooting as possible. There's a man being held prisoner in that house—"

Tommy Woods almost dropped his pipe. "Jaburg? What makes you think he's a prisoner? I thought—"

Herlehy took a last drag on the cigarette, flipped it through an open window. "Yes, Jaburg's unquestionably being held prisoner. I want him taken unharmed."

He looked around. The F. B. I.

man nodded. Sheriff Todd indicated his understanding. Tommy Woods shrugged his shoulders.

"You're the boss, Vic," he grunted. "Don't tell us anything. It makes it all the more interesting—"

Vic Herlehy patted him on the shoulder. "There's plenty of time for explanations, Tommy. Right now is the time for action—" He looked at his watch. "Let's synchronize watches. It's now 8:43. Right?" There were mumbles of assent. "At 11:59 tonight, we take them. Any questions?"

THE whiteness of the house was ghostly in the darkness. The only sign of life was the occasional flicker of a firefly and the distant chirp of a cricket.

"It's just about 11:59 now, Vic," Tommy said in the darkness. "When do you suppose—"

A shrill whistle split the silence of the night.

Herlehy grunted. "That's Sheriff Todd. Okay, turn on the floods—"

Suddenly a blinding glare lit up the front of the white house. Its dark windows looked dead in the searching brightness of the floodlights. Upstairs a curtain swayed a fraction of an inch.

"You in the house. Come out with your hands up. This is the police. You're surrounded—"

His voice was drowned out by the chatter of a machine gun from the upper window. Somewhere behind him he heard a yelp of pain. At the back of the house he heard the staccato yelp of a rifle.

"Hold your fire, Todd," he shouted. The bark of the rifle was silenced. "Let 'em have the gas!"

The air was filled with the faint pop of gas guns. After a moment the machine-gun fire started to falter, falter. The front door was opened, a hand waved a white handkerchief.

"Come out with your hands high," Herlehy warned. "Don't try anything foolish. You're covered!"

Three men, their eyes streaming, stepped into the glare. Their hands were held over their heads. They blinked miserably in the bright light.

"Woods. You and two other men put on your gas masks. Go in and see if there's anybody else in there—"

The prisoners were handcuffed and in the car waiting to take them back to jail by the time Tommy Woods and the men detailed to help him came out. They brought with them a tall man with a shock of hair heavily interspersed with patches of white.

"Monsieur Jaburg?" Vic Herlehy asked. The tall, thin man nodded. "Let me congratulate you, monsieur. Were it not for your ingenuity, we might never have captured these saboteurs—"

Tommy Woods whipped off his gas mask. Would you mind telling me how you knew Jaburg was in that house?"

Herlehy chuckled. "Monsieur Jaburg told me. Isn't that right, monsieur?" The Belgian nodded.

"Jaburg told you?" Woods growled. "You never spoke to him in your life. What are you giving me?"

"I didn't have to," Herlehy explained. "It was more or less apparent that a man of his reputation wouldn't be in this of his own free will. Yet, I wasn't even sure of that until I got his message—"

"What message?" Woods demanded.

"A message that was right under your eyes all the time, Tommy. Yet, it was only by chance that I did find it—" He saw the deep lines of fatigue etched in the face of the Belgian. "We can discuss that later. Our first job is to get Mr. Jaburg to town where he can get a good meal and a rest—"

THE following evening, a more refreshed Jaburg, a frankly curious sheriff, an impatient Tommy Woods and an imperturbable Vic Herlehy sat in Vic's room at the hotel.

Tommy Woods laid his pet pipe on the table. "I've been put off for the last time. I want the lowdown on this case—"

"Well," Vic grinned. "It's all very simple. Mr. Jaburg told us where he was, we came and got him—"

The sheriff said curiously, "I've been studying them bills we took out of that house, Mr. Herlehy. I didn't see any message."

Vic Herlehy reached over and tilted a bit of rye into each of the four glasses on the table. "Yet it was there all the time." He passed the glasses out. "Ever notice the face of Washington on a dollar bill?" he asked.

Woods nodded. "Whenever I get my hands on one—"

"Then you must have noticed that it's shaded with dots and dashes. Monsieur Jaburg noticed that, too. He arranged his dots and dashes into a message calling for help—"

Jaburg's face was alight with interest. "Yes, that is true," he said. "However, I do not understand how, with facts so incomplete, you knew where to look for me."

Sheriff Todd put his glass back on the table, spilled a little more rye into it. "What was the message?" he asked.

Vic Herlehy grinned. "I have a copy of it here. I'll read it to you." He pulled a piece of paper from an inner pocket. "This is what Mr. Jaburg put on Washington's face: *Radio tower through palms. Face west. Plane daily 8:14, 7:12.*"

Jaburg smiled. "Precisely. Now, how could you have known from those meagre facts where I was. I could have been held any place in the country. How could you have found me?"

Vic Herlehy dropped into a big overstuffed chair, hung one leg over one arm. "Simple, Dr. Watson. The palms in the message set the locale as the South. If you remember,

Tommy, I asked for plane schedules only on southern lines—"

Tommy Woods nodded. "Check."

"All right, then," Vic Herlehy continued. "By studying all southern schedules it became clear that only one, the Intercoastal had reduced its runs to one a day at this time of year. We took a ride on that plane, and found that at both the times mentioned by Mr. Jaburg the plane was over Merrittsburg. Obviously, that was where he was being held. You recall I checked with you the day I arrived to find whether or not there was a radio tower in Merrittsburg?"

The sheriff emptied his glass.

"Okay, so we see how you found it was one of two houses due east of the tower," Tommy Woods said. "What I want to know is how did you know that it was the white house and not the dark one?"

Vic Herlehy pulled himself out of his chair, walked over to the table and poured himself a drink. "Remember you asked me what the trees had to do with my picking the white house? Well, if you remember the message, it said that Mr. Jaburg saw the radio tower through the palms. The black house had no trees in its yard—"

Tommy Woods poured himself another drink. "I wonder why I ever gave up the newspaper business?"

Sheriff Todd looked up. His eyes were becoming a little misty. "Oh, were you in the newspaper business, Woods?" he asked.

Tommy nodded and filled the sheriff's glass.

"Sell 'em?" the sheriff asked.

THE END

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HEADLINES IN LEAD

By Lee Floren

OLD JOHN Barleycorn has caused me a lot of trouble. Not that I'm a drunk, don't get me wrong; I seldom touch the stuff. Three years ago, a lovesick Mexican woman put a bullet through my guts because I wrote the wrong kind of feature story about her. Since then, I've laid off the panther fizz. But, six years back, I married Julia Cypress. And Julia's dad, Matt Cypress, is the millionaire whiskey-distillery owner.

Julia's sister, Henrietta, married the same year, only she marched a Prumont to the altar, not a down-at-the-heel reporter for the *Hollywood Star*. Old Matt never did like me, but he liked William Tell Prumont, the Third.

A year later, Jim, Junior, was born. I insisted he be named after me, not old Matt. The old hellion wanted his only grandson named after him. He had never had a son.

And, because of young Jim, I stood shivering and cold that March night, there beside the six-car garage, back of the Cypress' mansion in fashionable Beverly Hills.

It was one of those California spring nights; rain fell in buckets. The wind was biting, raw. Palms and eucalypti bent under it. Despite being in a dimout zone, the street-lamps made distorted lights dance on the wet pavement.

I looked at my wrist watch: twenty to twelve. Save for a thread of light



I let the short man have it.

showing from under a blind in the kitchen, the Cypress mansion was dark. My mind went ahead, inspecting the plan I had made. I looked for loopholes, found none. And, all the time I stood there, I was looking at the mansion, thinking: *My wife, Julia, is in that house. I haven't seen her for over a year. Damn old Matt for breaking us up. If I could only see little Jim—but Jim was gone, I realized suddenly.*

Then the kitchen light went out; the back door opened. A heavy-set man came toward me, his steps grinding hard against the gravel. He wore a raincoat and a felt hat; he did not see me. My gun descended as he was lifting the garage door. The automatic slapped him, hard.

He grunted, dropped the oilskin bundle he carried, and turned around. I cursed under my breath, and clipped him again. This time, I hit harder. He groaned, and his knees ran out; he never recognized me.

Hurriedly I picked up the bundle. I pulled old Matt Cypress into the garage, bound him with a piece of rope, gagged him with the gardener's old shirt. I got the keys from his pocket and backed out the Cadillac sedan.

The Cad slipped into the street, tires sucking the pavement. Five blocks later I reached Sunset boulevard and braked the Cad under a street lamp.

I opened the package.

Old Matt Cypress was ready to play ball with the kidnapers of his grandson, but Jim Perry knew that the right answer lay in direct action!

The bills lay inside, but I did not touch them. They were fives and tens and some twenties. There was a note scrawled in Matt Cypress' bold hand.

Here is your money. If the boy is not home in three hours I will notify the FBI. These bills are unmarked in any way.

I REWRAPPED the mazuma and slipped the Cad into gear. Julia's French maid, dark-haired Marie, had given me the details, that evening. I had been working late on a feature yarn when the phone had rung.

"Jim Perry?"

"Yes."

"This is Marie speaking." Her words tumbled from her. "I am calling from the corner drugstore. Little Jimmy is gone—"

"Gone?"

"Kidnapped. Your father-in-law, he is getting the money ready, now." She spilled the rest of her story hurriedly.

"Why didn't Julia call me?"

"They are afraid to notify anybody for fear the boy— You'll never tell I called, will you, Jim?"

I lowered the receiver, cursing old Matt. Then another thought, one that had been long bothering me, whispered that maybe old Matt wasn't all to blame. And I knew, suddenly, that thought was correct. The gods had dealt Julia and I the wrong hand; even without old Matt, we could never have gotten along. But the kid—my kid—was in danger.

I knew who had him—Marty Corriedio. Three years before, I had uncovered the Corriedio case, and exposed it; Corriedio had gone to McNeil Island. Two weeks ago, he'd been paroled. Now Marty had snatched the kid to get even with me, and to make some easy jack on the side.

And it would have been easy jack. Marty was smart—he'd never hurt young Jim. He knew old Matt had plenty of cash. He'd make Matt shell out and Matt would keep his mouth shut. And then another thought started pestering me: Maybe I was wrong. Maybe Marty Corriedio. . .

I tried not to think of that.

The corner of Sunset and Dawson was ahead. Here shrubbery grew along the sidewalks and a man could hide behind it. This was million-aire country. The mansions sat way back on their lots and a man could crouch behind that shrubbery and nobody would see him.

I blinked my lights twice, rolled down the window, and threw out the mazuma. The package skidded across the pavement, leaped over the gutter, and landed on the sidewalk. I watched the rear window as I drove two blocks before turning. Nobody came after the package.

Once around the corner, I braked the Cad at the curb and ran for my car, parked ahead. I stomped on the starter and moved away, the tires spitting mud behind me.

I circled the block. Seconds later, I was on the block directly behind where I had thrown off the mazuma. I took the Winchester rifle from the back seat, and, toting it under one arm, ducked between two houses, heading for the money.

I was in a rock garden. Thorny rosebushes tore at my soaked clothes as I hurried. The wind whipped across me, driving the old rain through my coat. My shoes were filled with mud and water. They swished with every step.

The Winchester was cumbersome, but it was the only weapon I had in my collection that had a silencer. And I figured I would need a silencer.

When I was close to the corner, I ducked behind the hedge, and studied the scene ahead. There was nobody on the street. The mazuma package lay there, looking like a folded, crumpled wet newspaper. I hunkered, aching for a cigaret, and waited—just about a minute.

A big Lincoln sedan rounded the corner, and came to a stop. My heart beating heavily, I saw a stocky, broad-shouldered gent step out, and pick up the package. I shot a quick glance at the Lincoln. The gent was alone.

I came forward, rifle upped.

He heard me, then, and whirled,

his hand going into his slicker pocket. He saw the rifle, now. He was bringing his own rod up when I let the rifle hammer fall. I shot from the hip. The gun made no loud report. Just a sweet little *spang*. I levered the Winchester twice.

The man went down in the mud. He lay on his belly, folded over the money, his automatic in a pool of water. I picked the rod up, shoved it into my pocket. The man was groaning.

"Get into your car," I ordered.

I GOT to his knees, and crept inside. He left a trail of blood behind him. The rain would wash that away. I was crawling behind the wheel when I heard the woman's voice say, "Jim."

I turned. She was small and sweet and dark, and her eyes were bright under her shawl. She had an automatic in her hand. My breath came back slowly. She was Marie, Julia's maid.

"Marie," I said. "What are you doing here?"

"I was afraid for you," she said. She spoke with a slight accent. "After I called you up, then I was afraid. So I thought I would see you if you came to the house. I heard the car leave and I found the old man tied up. I followed you in my car."

"Silly girl. . ." I murmured. "Get inside. We better get out of here."

The stocky man was slumped in the seat, holding his broken thigh. He was groaning. Marie climbed into the back seat. I cut across Hollywood Boulevard, took Laurel Canyon road. I drove fast.

Things were breaking quickly, but, I asked myself, were they breaking correctly? I let my thoughts settle on Marie. She was in danger every minute she was with me. I braked the car.

"Get out, girl."

Her dark eyes were searching me. "Why?"

"There's trouble ahead. You might get hurt. It's no place for a woman. Catch the P E car home. Don't go back for your car; this dog here

might have a friend or so coming around looking for him."

"But you—?"

There was real anxiety in her voice. I tried to tell myself I was reading something into her voice that was not there.

"Okay, kid, get out."

She opened the door and said quietly, "Be careful, Jimmy boy." I drove away thinking about her. She was a pretty trick, no kidding. She was the kind that would stick by the man she married come hell or—I shoved that from my mind, and put my thoughts on the job ahead.

The heavy man whammed open the door, trying to make a break. I grabbed him by the coat-tail, and snacked him twice. My knuckles hurt but the gent lay still. Ten minutes later I had him in my front room.

"Talk, buddy," I said.

He said, "T'hell—"

I brought my rifle up and put it against his other leg. "Who's be-hin' this an' where is the rat located? Is the kid alive?"

"I'm not talkin'!"

My voice was low. "Listen, I can let this hammer drop. Nobody'd ever hear the report with this silencer."

"You mean—?"

"You talkin'?"

He pondered that, his brown eyes sharp. He said, "I'm as good as in Alcatraz now with what evidence you hold against me. I won't rat, fella."

I let the hammer fall; the rifle went *spang*. The bullet went through his thigh and into the floor. He screamed. This time, his eyes held fear.

"I'll talk. The kid's okay. Anyway, he was when I left. He's bein' held by Marty Corriedio at—"

"Where, damnit?"

"Mount Washington drive in Highland Park. Only house on the left-hand side of the road."

"Anybody with Corriedio?"

"Nick Sporadi."

I GOT to my feet. I knew Nick Sporadi from police lineups. He was a rat-faced, slim killer. I also knew the Highland Park district.

Mount Washington was the name of a so-called mountain in that district. Any other place, it would be called a hill, but not here in California.

Once it had suffered a real-estate boom. But the boom had died prematurely, and now only a few buildings dotted the hillside. It made an ideal hideout.

I worked fast. I took a sheet from my bed, tore it into strips, and bound the gent's wounds, pulling the bandages tight to stop the blood. I took his coat and hat. I halted at the door, the mazuma under my arm.

"I'll send a doc back here," I promised.

He said, "Okay, pal." He had a sense of humor. "No use lockin' that door to keep me here. I can't go no place on these busted gams."

Outside, I slipped into the gent's coat, put on his hat, and stepped into the Lincoln. I still carried the mazuma pouch. Many thoughts tormented me. They centered, of course, around my kid.

I realized, with a suddenness, that I would hardly know the kid. I had not seen him for three years. Old Matt and his high-pressure lawyers had seen to that. I had met Julia once in two years. We had had lunch together at the Brown Hat. But I shoved those thoughts out of my mind, too.

The rain was hissing down. Riverside Drive was treacherous, covered by three inches of water. Little traffic moved at this late hour. I glanced in my rear-view mirror. Two blocks behind me was a black Ford coupe.

I thought no more of it until I turned into North Figueroa. Then, I noticed the coupe still followed me. But, when I turned up Mount Washington Drive, I forgot all about the coupe. Probably some swing-shifter going home from Lockheed or Vega.

Now the house was ahead. Bulking large, it stood against the rainy backdrop. I drove boldly in the driveway and climbed out, carrying the money bag. I glanced upstairs. A light showed from under a pulled-down blind. No other lights in the place. . .

I hurried for the porch, my borrowed hat pulled low. I hunched my shoulders, hoping to make them look wider. I crossed the porch, my heart beating like a triphammer. I had my free hand on my automatic under my coat. Another automatic rested in my hip pocket; I pushed the door open.

A musty smell assailed my nostrils—the smell of a house that had long been vacant. Dimly I saw a stairway ahead. I was in a hall. I saw a thread of light at the head of the stairway. It came from under a closed door.

Now a man detached himself from the dark shadows grouped around the stairway. He said, "Did you get the kale, Ike?"

He was Nick Sporadi. He could not see my face clearly because of the pulled-down hat. I said gruffly, "Sure did, Nick."

"Corriedio's waitin' upstairs—" He glimpsed my face, then, and his voice went hoarse. "Who the hell are you?"

The guy was fast like a tiger. He had a gun in his hand now—He drew it that fast from his hideout holster. But I had him bested. I couldn't wham him over the skull, didn't have time. He would have got me.

I stuck my stub-nose in his guts. Three times I pulled the trigger. The muffled roar pounded against the wall. The slugs snapped through his belly. He screamed, his mouth wide, but he did not have time to fire.

He sat down, dropping his gun. There was something wrong with his back, and he rolled over. Later I found out I had shot his spine in two. But I had no time for him now.

I was leaping up the stairs, three at a time; I was going up—and my heart was cold. Marty Corriedio, upstairs, had heard the shooting. And if he figured something had gone haywire he might take it out on the kid. . .

Then, my heart stopped beating, and I froze on one knee, a bullet whamming across my shoulder. Did you ever hear a bullet sing past you? Scientists say you can't feel its breeze. I disagree. . .

Marty Corriedio, a stocky block of humanity, had burst from that room, his shotgun talking. He was short, he was crouched—and he was tough. His second bullet slapped my left shoulder, and pain surged through me. Dimly, I was aware of my own rod spouting lead.

Another bullet slapped into my right ribs. The blow knocked me forward, and I leaned on one elbow, sick and shaky. I heard my gat click on an empty barrel. I tried to get my other gun, fumbled in my pocket.

Things were a red, hanging haze; otherwise I would not have drawn my other cutter. For, by the time I had it palmed, there was a dark, heavy hulk of humanity above me, draped over the top steps. And that hulk was Marty Corriedio.

SOMETHING inside said, *You got him, Jim. . .*

I was moving ahead then, filled with pain, and anxiety ate at me. I stepped over him and entered the room. A boyish voice called from behind a closed door. "Who—who's there?"

I opened the door. A tyke of five—tow-headed, freckle-faced—stood in a clothes closet. He had been crying. He was Jimmy, my kid. Not that I would have known him, had I met him under any other circumstances.

"Who—who are you?"

I said, "I'm your dad, Jimmy."

He looked at me through reddened eyes. "You—you're lying!" he stated emphatically. "I ain't got no dad. My dad's dead. My mother told me he was dead."

I asked hollowly, "Your mother—told you that?"

"Yes. You're one of these gangsters—"

I stood there, numb inside. For the first time, I forgot my busted shoulder, my cracked ribs. My own kid

didn't know me! That thought pounded dully at my brain.

Then, another thought came. The force of it overwhelmed me, and I don't know why, because I had suspected it all along. Julia didn't give a damn for me. Otherwise, she'd have taken our kid and left her old man, and moved in with me. But no, she was thinking of old Matt's money.

"Okay," I said quietly. "I was only kiddin' you."

I sat down on a chair, feeling giddy. Next thing I knew, Marie was kneeling beside me.

I said, "How did you get here?"

"I hired a car on Hollywood Boulevard," she said quietly. "I thought that perhaps you'd— Well, I followed you here."

I remembered the Ford that had been trailing me. Her fingers were taking off my shirt. I remembered then that she was an ex-nurse. That was the last thought I had until I woke up in the hospital. And, strangely, she was sitting beside my bed, even then.

"My kid?"

"He's with his mother."

"She told him—he has no dad. . ."

She said, "Hush, Jim. I know all about that."

"How long have I been out?"

"This is the morning after, Jim."

She added, "Julia hasn't even been to see you. You'd think she at least—"

"That's all right," I said. "There were lots of things—they're straightened up, now. I should have seen that before. Years before. . ."

Her voice was throaty. "You are sorta blind, Jim."

I looked at her, surprised. First, I didn't know what she meant, but then her eyes gave her away. They were warm and bright and there was something hidden there. I decided, then and there, I would find out what it was, after I got well.

And I did.

YES

The Red Cross Still Needs Blood.

Make an Appointment Today!

THE JINX

By Basil Wells

Even in death, Pete Georges' wife seemed to be able to thwart his plans.

THE cheap revolver blasted twice and Charles Snodgrass, manager of the Dairy Feed Store, clapped thick-knuckled hands across his middle. There was a surprised, puzzled look on his stubbled broad face as he folded forward to his knees and then slid to the bag-polished floor of the warehouse.

Pete Georges looked woodenly down at the stubby-barreled, metal thing in his hand, and the first slow wave of panic began to flood through his stunned brain. He hadn't meant to shoot Charley, but the old man had moved his right hand too quickly as Pete ordered him to raise his arms, and he had fired. This meant a murder rap—and he'd been out of the stone walls less than a week!

Automatically he went through the dead man's pockets. A cheap gold watch, a worn, thin wallet, and a thick, double-compartmented bag of striped canvas; he stuffed them into his coat pocket. He pushed at Snodgrass' flaccid body with his foot before he turned toward the door. Dead all right. Pete shrugged, his stomach feeling suddenly very empty.

He paused at the door long enough to snap the spring lock, then closed it behind him. There was a satisfying click. The stolen blue Buick waited just beyond the loading platform, and as he came out into the early spring twilight the starter whirred and the motor coughed unevenly into life. Toad Marvin hadn't made his getaway when he heard the gunfire after all.

A bone-jolting jump from the loading dock and five steps brought him to the open car door. A muted jumble of excited voices came from the front seat as he slid inside. Pete's eyes darted to the instrument panel.

"Toad, you fool, you had the radio on!"

The warty, unlovely features of the squat little man at the wheel twisted into a grin. He shifted gears smoothly as the car rolled across the cindered yard in front of the feed store.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Heard that Crime Slugger program. This Slugger Barnes walks into a half-dozen gangsters with his bare fists, and knocks 'em for a loop! You shoulda heard the shooting and yelling!"

Pete bit his lip as he choked back what he was going to say; Toad hadn't heard the shots.

"Everything go off okay?"

"Uh huh," grunted Pete, as the car swung down Burke Avenue out of Littleton. "Left Charley tied up on the floor."

"How much," asked Toad with a quick side glance. "Ain't you going to count it before we ditch the car?"

"Uh—sure, Toad." Pete dug out the canvass bag and unrolled it. One compartment was filled with change, and in the other side a thick roll of bills, folded once lengthwise, was stuffed. Pete counted quickly by the dashboard light.

"Three hundred fifty," he grunted, not mentioning the two fifty-dollar bills he palmed as he counted. After all, why should Toad get a quarter of the take he told himself.

"Not bad," Toad shouted above the radio commercial. "With the change that makes my cut a hundred bucks."

PETE snapped off the radio. "Any other day in the week," he said, "we'd have taken less than two hundred. I used to hand around the loading dock, Toad; that's how I knew Charley would get this extra dough for cashing the farmers' milk checks.

"Takes brains to figure the angles. I'm out of the cheap rackets now, and I'm staying out. My six months in stir showed me what a fool I'd been for playing for peanuts."

"You're doing okay, Pete." The little man was swinging off the highway into the parking lot of the Littleton Cemetery. "We don't even have the cops on our trail. Guess we really don't need to cut across the graves to *Bill and Peg's* to pick up my car."

Pete laughed harshly. "We'd look like fools driving up to the beer parlor in a stolen heap. Nope. We cut across the boneyard and are drinking beer, peaceful-like, when the alarm is given."

Pete started to open the door. A sudden thought struck him. Why share any of the money with Toad? Once he found out old Charley had been killed, any fool could figure that Toad would sing. He was just a cheap crook, selling the numbers, running a string of pinball games, and peddling a few black market tires.

He let his hand slide into his pocket again, and this time it came out with the gun. The gun was Toad's, too. This was really luck. He'd let Toad have it in the face a couple of times, plant the rod in the little man's fist, and leave the canvas bag with thirty or forty dollars in it, on the seat beside him. The dead man would explain the stick-up—murder and suicide! The police knew what a small-timer was Toad. They'd figure he'd lost his nerve and done the Dutch.

"That gun—Pete!" Toad fumbled at the door latch. "Put it down. It might—no, don't!"

The terrified voice of the driver cut off suddenly as the gun blasted, twice. Pete cursed at his ragged nerves. He had missed the first time. He sneered. These hick cops wouldn't notice an extra bullet hole. He wiped the gun on Toad's coat and planted it in his fist. Blood was just starting to seep through the dead man's shirt as he tossed the almost-empty money bag down on the seat and climbed out.

There were no cars approaching from either direction. This was a lonely stretch of road; the revolver shots might very well go unheard. He turned toward the cemetery.

The horizontal black pipes of the cemetery fence offered no obstacle for they were spaced two feet apart at the closest. He slipped through and started at a half-trot across the newer section of the burial place. He had plotted his course three days before, and knew that by swinging to the right he would collide with no shin-splintering markers.

Pete congratulated himself on his careful attention to detail. Now that his wife was no longer able to queer his projects he was going places in a hurry. He grunted harshly, thinking of Edna.

She didn't like the numbers racket—wanted him to work instead. Then, he'd paid fifty bucks for that counterfeit green, and Edna had put it into the stove. That was the time he got plastered and broke two of her teeth. And then this last deal she had pulled, when she testified at the trial that he had been selling fake gas coupons—all the rest of the guys had gotten off! But he drew six months!

Yeah, Edna had been his jinx for too many years, but now she was dead and her father had seen that she was buried. Pete snorted derisively. Her old man hadn't even sent word to him about the funeral yesterday. He'd known Pete was back home again too; he'd kicked him out that first day and told him to sponge off some other dame for a change.

WELL, the bugs had got into her lungs and now Pete was free to go ahead with his plans to cut a big slice of Littleton's underworld take. This four hundred-odd dollars was the first installment.

"Uuuh!" Something had raised itself out of the murky darkness beneath his feet. Pete found himself sprawling, face downward, across a loose mound of muddy earth. He felt flowers, wreaths of flowers and wilted sprays, rustling beneath him.

He had stumbled across a grave, a freshly dug grave, because three days ago this level stretch of brown grass had been free of any such long narrow mounds. A sudden thought came into his tense brain. His wife had been buried yesterday. Could this be. . . ?

Pete struck a match briefly. A small cardboard square, clipped into a slender metal rack was stuck into the end of the grave. He bent closer.

"*Edna Kolski Georges!*" He shook out the tiny flame of the match with a hand that shook.

The superstitious fear that underlay Pete's twisted mind asserted itself. He moaned softly. Even in death, it seemed to his shaken small-time soul, Edna was trying to thwart him.

The hatred that flamed up suddenly made him forget his fear of the moment before. *She* was dead, wasn't she? His foot lashed out viciously at the little nameplate. Blood began pumping hotly again through his drawn face. Action pushed back the fear from his frayed nerves.

His feet sent the wreaths spinning. He was afraid no longer. This was just a grave like thousands of others in the cemetery.

After a moment he went on across the empty land toward the further fence and the tiny squares of light that marked *Bill and Peg's*.

Pete was just finishing his third bottle of beer when the policeman came into the roadhouse. He looked around at the tables and booths, and came directly across to the booth.

"We want to see you down at headquarters, Pete," he said.

"What for, Buttons?" Pete grunted.

"One of your pals was found dead over on Burke avenue."

"Yeah? Who?"

"Toad Marvin. Seems he knocked himself off."

"No kidding? I saw him less than an hour ago drinking at the bar." Pete jabbed an elbow at the bar's left corner. "He treated me to a drink, too. . . Too bad."

"Come on, Pete." The policeman was impatient. "Let's get going."

"But I don't know. . . Okay, Buttons, I'm with you."

Pete grinned at the check girl as he went out the door, and paused for a moment in the door to light a cigarette. The brilliant light of the entry made his worn suit look even more shabby. By this time next week he'd be wearing something a lot snappier.

"Get in here, Georges," ordered a gruff voice from the rear of the cruiser.

"Why, it's Captain Hardy, ain't it?" Pete shrugged. "If you can stand it so can I."

THE prowler pulled away from the tavern back toward Littleton, and Pete let a tuneless little whistle drone through his clenched teeth for a time. After a minute of complete silence from the others he shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"What's the idea picking me up. Your cop tells me Toad Marvin gets bumped. So what? All of you know him. You don't need me to identify him."

"You rats never learn, do you?" asked the big police detective. "One week after you get out of prison you're back at it again. Only this time it's murder."

"I thought Buttons told me it was suicide." Pete sat up straight in the seat. "Say, you don't think I killed Toad?"

WE HAVEN'T WON THE WAR YET!

**Keep on Buying Those Bonds and
Stamps**

"I was referring to Charles Snodgrass," Hardy said, "but I could have meant Toad Marvin just as well."

"Old Charley Snodgrass?" demanded Pete. "You mean to say somebody bumped that old guy?"

"You should know, Pete. Either you or Toad shot him, and I have a hunch that you did it. Toad had more sense than that; he valued his hide too much to risk the chair."

"Now, Captain!" Pete's voice was convincingly angry he thought. "You can't just tell me I did a murder. Why, I didn't leave *Bill and Peg's* since five o'clock this afternoon."

"That alibi will be easy to break," said the officer confidently.

Pete was worried. Why they had arrested him so quickly was hard to figure out. He had expected to be picked up for routine questioning in a day or two if the original plan had gone through, but now with Toad's apparent suicide after a robbery he should be in the clear.

"You know, Pete, you let your temper run away with you." Hardy's cigarette glowed red as he paused for a long second. "You forgot that she kept you in spending money for a good many years. She kept you from starving."

"Yeah," jeered Pete thickly. "Then she railroads me into the pen. A swell woman, my wife, sure—to stay away from!"

"Too bad you didn't stay away from her then." The officer's voice was soft, but each word clipped off crisply as he said it. "Because kicking those flowers off her grave was a rotten thing to do."

"What flowers you talking about?" Pete crushed out his stub of a cigarette in his palm, welcoming the sudden pain.

"We thought maybe Marvin had hidden some of the money in the cemetery before he killed himself," explained Hardy, "and hunting for it we came across your wife's grave. There was only one man we could think of who would do anything as low as that. That made us begin to wonder about Toad Marvin's suicide."

There was a sudden hollowness in Pete's middle, an emptiness and frozen shrieking panic, as he heard Hardy's voice drilling relentlessly onward. He sensed the flimsiness of his alibi now that Toad was gone. For Toad was to have sworn that Pete was with him all that afternoon and evening. If they could prove that Toad was murdered. . .

"SO WE checked Marvin's hands for gunpowder. The paraffin test you know, Pete. It was negative. Toad hadn't fired the gun that killed him. So we began looking for you. We wanted to use the same test on your hands." Hardy's voice was growing harsher as they pulled up in front of the station. "Also, we want to examine that patch of dust on your coat sleeve. I saw it there when we picked you up."

The door opened and they helped Pete, none too gently, toward the twin lighted globes on either side of the station doors. Pete seemed to have shrunken in the last few minutes, and his legs wobbled drunkenly. He knew where that dust must have come from. He had leaned against the dusty post beside the inside platform scales while he waited for Charley Snodgrass to come in from the warehouse platform.

They were climbing the ten worn stone steps now. "You might as well confess, Pete," Captain Hardy's voice came from a great distance away. "We have witnesses who saw you hanging around the warehouse earlier in the day, and there were fingerprints on the cartridge cases in the revolver." He jerked at the doors. "You shot at Marvin twice."

All Pete's strength seemed to have drained away through his shoes. He sobbed brokenly. "All right," he croaked, "you got me. I did it."

The heavy double doors swung outward; then closed behind Pete. Blue uniforms were all around him. He fumbled at the buttons of his coat. The room was suddenly very cold.

THE END

FINGER FROM THE GRAVE

A Powerful Mystery Novel

By Cliff Campbell

(Author of "Body, Body, Who's Got the Body,"

"They Only Hang You Once," etc.)

Whoever planned the murder of old Manson Weeks was a little too clever about it, and Frost thought he had a way to trap the culprit. There's no murder without a corpse, and if the death of Weeks could be kept secret until the anxiously-waiting killer was forced to show his hand . . .

CHAPTER I

DR. MARK HOPPER, personal physician to Manson Weeks, came through the doorway of the private card room of the country club, a grave look on his saturnine face. The eyes of the three men waiting around the card table jerked to him and the buzz of conversation broke off. Then Prager, general manager of the Weeks plant, came half out of his chair, seamed face smiling. There was the echo of the faintest guttural accent in his voice.

"Say, don't tell me the Doc is going to sit in on this session," he said. "The Chief said he might get you hooked in some night to get back some of the overcharge for that operation but—"

Then he broke off as the doctor shook his head. "I don't think there will be any poker session tonight, gentlemen. Manson Weeks has been unavoidably detained."

Young Bain Heddors stopped rifling the cards and bent his dark head to his wrist watch. He peered a moment through his heavy-lensed spectacles. "Might have called us. The old boy is half an hour late now and—"

Again there was a pause. Tragedy emanated from the doctor. "Another coronary attack?" asked the iron-gray Major Sewell Bascom, junior partner of the Weeks firm. He spoke

in an easy, cultured voice slightly hoarsened by years of imbibing one of the finest Scotch whiskies imported. His words issued through the smoke of the cigaret dangling from the corner of his sensitive mouth. A glass of that Scotch blended with a modicum of soda was half lifted to his lips.

The broad-shouldered doctor's bald head inclined slightly. "You might call it that. It was his last, anyway . . . But it was not from natural causes, gentlemen!"

"He's dead—the Chief?" Jacob Prager said, just catching up. His voice sounded like a phonograph record with a scratchy needle.

"His heart has stopped," Hopper continued as if uninterrupted, "but not from natural causes. We have reason to believe it could be called—murder." He clamped his powerful jaws on the word.

For a moment the room was a frozen tableau. One of the trio of players waiting for the arrival of Manson Weeks to start the weekly game of draw breathed out the medical man's last word like an echo. "Murder. . ." And it seemed to hang like a quivering live thing in the air.

Reflexes evinced themselves. Jacob Prager made a rattling sound in his throat and his spatulate hands clawed and clutched at the arms of his chair like a cripple-legged man trying to haul himself up. But his

body never moved away from the chair back. "The Chief's been killed," he said weakly.

NERVES frayed at the sharp scraping sound as young Bain Hedderts' chair shot across the floor. Nerves jumped again as the ashtray on the corner of the card table clattered to the floor. He didn't seem aware of the uproar caused by his sudden leap to his feet. A whispered word burst from his lips, a name, was lost in the slap of the autumn wind at the slightly ajar casement window. But that name wasn't Weeks. Or Manson. Then his tall, lanky body twisted, the mouth with the humorous curves now a tight white line. His intelligent eyes screwed past the doctor to the door as if he wished he were out of it.

The next moment he had himself under control. "Good God! How? Why murder?"

The third at the table, Major Bascom, lowered his aristocratic head to his right hand a moment. He raised his face almost immediately and the man-of-the-world look was erased by sadness. His drink, still half raised in his other hand, went up to his mouth steadily and he drained it to the bottom in the manner of a man needing it for genuine shock. Then he spoke.

"We have reason to believe it could be called murder," he said, repeating Doctor Hopper's last words. "Who is 'we'? The police, you mean?"

"Oh, pardon me," Hopper said. And they saw the other man peering past his massive shoulder from behind. "Mr. John Frost of the Frost Investigation Agency from Chicago, gentlemen." He introduced him around as Frost stepped into view, a slim angular man who seemed to lounge even as he stood in the ruffled, custom-tailored soft gray suit. Frost had a snapbrim hat, gray too, down over one eye and a raincoat slung over his shoulder. He had a sharp, sunken-cheeked face with eyes esconced in permanent black circles. He was only thirty, always looked bored, had a way of dropping his

voice and sometimes the final words near the end of a sentence. When you first looked at him, he seemed smaller than he was. And much less dangerous.

"Evening, gentlemen," he said. "Most unfortunate affair. Too. . ." And the voice trailed off and the word "bad" was completely lost. He seemed unaware of the way the battery of three pairs of eyes drilled at him.

Sewell Bascom stood up unhurriedly, big, loose-knit, with no extra baggage around the waist despite his almost fifty years. He was top golfer of the club, high goal man of the local polo team, and an enthusiastic hunter. A crack shot, in the bargain. John Frost languidly applied a match to a cigaret as he checked off those things in his mind. He had complete book on Sewell Bascom, Weeks' college roommate and lifelong friend.

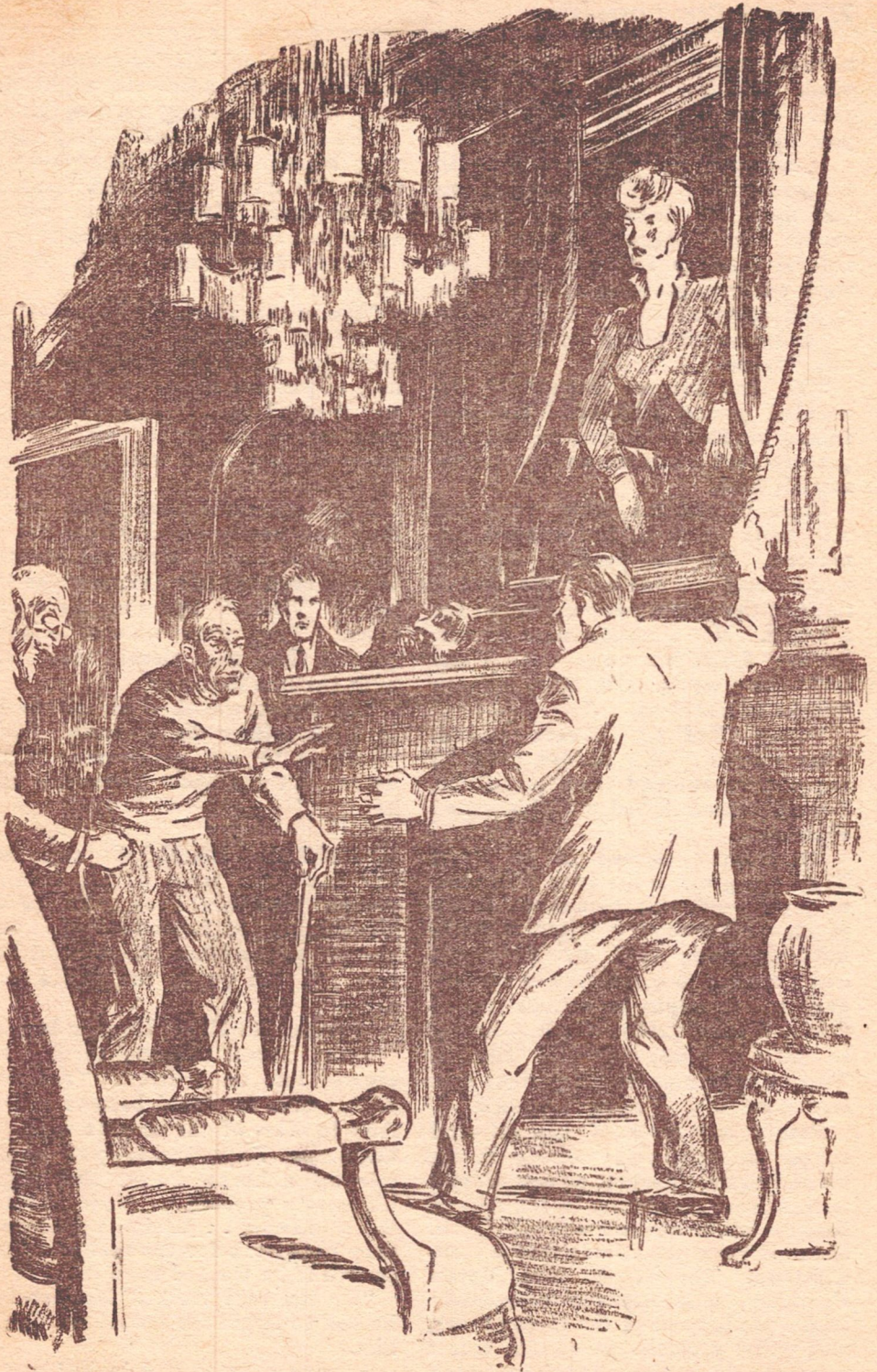
Bascom inclined his distinguishedly gray head toward Frost, spoke to Dr Hopper. "From Chicago, you said. That would be mighty fast travelling—even by plane connection—to get here so soon. I saw Manson at the plant at six—alive." There was a veiled demand for an explanation.

Frost only belled blue smoke from his mouth, offered, "Didn't come by plane."

The doctor explained. "Weeks had known his life was in danger for several weeks. He believed attempts had already been made on his life. A few days ago he hired Mr. Frost to come in and investigate. Too late, unfortunately."

PRAGER'S shrewd little eyes seemed to sink into the wrinkles that pocketed them at that piece of news. The tall Hedderts raked his loose, dark hair quickly as he sized up the private detective the way a man would measure an opponent in the ring. Then the bland Bascom was stepping forward and shaking hands with Frost, apologizing for being rude in the shock of the moment.

"Of course, I was well aware of Manson's heart condition but—well, somehow you never thought of such



Terror-stricken, Lacy stumbled toward the picture, yanked desperately at the golden cord.

a vital person as Manny ever being dead. But, murdered. . . How, Hopper? What happened? What makes you think something—somebody—

It snapped the frozen feeling in the atmosphere. Full realization settled upon the three waiting to play cards with Manson Weeks. The natural reaction followed and they were curious, pressing to know how it had occurred.

"What do the police say?" shot Jacob Prager.

"Do they suspect anybody?" demanded young Heddgers. He kept raking his hair with long fingers; the gesture gave a certain college sophomoreish look.

Frost turned his head from the side table where he had strayed, unnoticed. He was putting together whisky and cracked ice. "We haven't notified the police yet—and won't for a while. No announcement of Mr. Weeks' death has gone out. None will—for a while. Officially, Manson Weeks is *not* dead. . ."

Young Heddgers' mouth jerked. That was all. The sudden twist in the picture stunned them to silence. Sewell Bascom lifted a sophisticated eyebrow.

Dr. Hopper carried on as Frost lifted the glass to his face. "In view of certain—uh—circumstances at the plant, we consider it wiser to withhold the news until Mr. Frost has had a chance to make certain investigations. It might be serious indeed if Mr. Weeks' sudden death gave rise to certain kinds of wild rumors. There might even be allegations that it was suicide. You understand?"

Prager had reseated himself and rolled an unlit cigar slowly in his thick fingers. Hedder strode around with a fresh-lit cigaret in his mouth. Bascom made himself a fresh drink. None of them protested; they all understood. The Weeks Art Metals Company, now engaged completely in the production of the tools of war, was under a cloud. A certain secret weapon which they had just begun to turn out had been found faulty by the government. It did not appear to be a case of sabotage. Rather it seemed as if the Weeks outfit was

guilty of using inferior materials to cut production cost. It might develop into something very ugly.

The three scheduled to play cards with Manson Weeks said nothing at first. All three understood, being in the company, Heddgers as an expert analytical chemist in the laboratory.

"Who does know he is dead? And—"

"We in this room, his housekeeper, chauffeur, Lettiber. Anybody else finds out till we're ready—we'll be able to put our finger on who leaked and it won't be. . ." Again the dropping off of the bored voice. They knew the last word would have been "pleasant."

More questions came then as if they had finally regained control of their vocal cords. How had Manson Weeks been killed? Where was the body? When? Did they have any clues? They were natural enough queries from men closely associated with the late deceased.

But Frost waved them off as he squirted seltzer in a fresh drink. "Nothing to say, gentlemen. 'S all we can tell you now. Tomorrow perhaps. . ."

SEWELL BASCOM smoothed down the front of his evening jacket. "See here, Frost! You're being mighty high-handed," he said sharply as the other two remained silent. "I can go to the police now and—"

"Please, Sewell—" Hopper began.

Frost faced Bascom, tossing his cigaret into an ashtray. "Yes, you could; then it would become public. And in view of the trouble with the Ordnance Department, you would stir up a hornet's nest that might ultimately prevent us from catching the murderer. . . Which would be a very neat trick for the real murderer to pull if he wanted to cover. . ."

"Up his own tracks," Hopper felt he had to finish the unsaid words for him.

Bascom snorted and looked at the other two, then shrugged. "Talk about a murder without the corpus delicti. . . Oh, well, if it's all right with the others, I'll go along."

There was some talk with Frost examining the hunting prints on the wainscoted wall with little interest. He always gave the impression of a man with nothing better to do regardless of what he was doing. There were some more questions, but John Frost only shrugged. The three card players moved forward; Prager tongued his cigar.

"Are—are any of us—well—you might say, are we—"

Frost flicked him with his eyes from the bald patch on his high-domed head to his glistening shoes. "You knew him—which could give you a motive—didn't you? You were in the same state tonight, weren't you?"

Frowning, Bain Hedders buttoned up his sports jacket. "Well, are we—er—well—"

"They mean—under surveillance?" Bascom said sharply.

Frost followed a puff of cigaret smoke with a dry laugh. "Don't try to book passage on the Trans-Pacific Clipper—if you could."

They went out, their feet slapping on the staircase.

When that sound was gone, Dr. Mark Hopper looked at Frost with a "What?" in his eyes.

Frost flipped over the top card of the deck on the table. It was a diamond trey. "Hell, in good murder plays or stories it's always the black ace. . . Yeah. Any one of them *could* have done it. Any one of them."

He dropped into one of the vacated leather arm-chairs. "Whoever has been trying to kill Weeks was taken by surprise. Naturally they didn't expect—or know *when* to expect—to find him dead. So there may be some scrambling to make sure tracks are covered. That's what we watch for."

The doctor seated himself, too. "Y-yes. It's still a risky game we're playing."

Frost shrugged, slumped in his gray clothes. "The one of the three who was trying to liquidate him didn't intend it to look like a murder—or anything violent or unnatural. It isn't as if they ever tried to put a gun against Weeks' head,

so they mightn't know it when he would die and. . ."

Dr. Hopper frowned at another of those unfinished lines. "It's terribly risky," he said again, thinking of his own medical standing. "If anything *should* happen now, why—"

Frost smiled with an air of ennui. "Weeks paid me five thousand to find out who was trying to put him on the well-known spot marked X. For five thousand, nothing is—" He didn't bother to say "dangerous."

Hopper brushed at perspiration on his creased forehead. He'd like to send the man to a psychiatric clinic to discover why he had that trick of leaving the final words unsaid. "I have one hunch. When you said we hadn't notified police I noticed that—"

"Apropos of that, doctor," Frost cut in, voice louder and clearer, "I had a case once over at Grand Rapids. One of those triangle affairs." He was on his feet, lounching toward the door. "At least, it seemed so at first. Then we found another angle, like opening a door on a dark room and finding—" And he swung back the door even as the knob clicked at his twist.

Sewell Bascom stood in the hall, shaking water from a dark fedora. Rain fingered the window panes on a passing gust of wind. "Just getting the water off my hat," he said evenly with no embarrassed or furtive note about him. "There was a matter I didn't want to mention in the presence of the others so I came back."

"Come in," said Frost.

BASCOM got to the point directly. "I don't want to level the finger of accusation, but there are certain facts that may not be in your possession. I feel it is my duty to—"

"Nice feeling," mentioned Frost. "Had it once and. . ."

Bascom smiled without liking for Frost. "Bain Hedders is in love with Marion Weeks, Manson's daughter. They wanted to marry; old Manson was against it."

He went into details. There had been some bitter arguments between

the two men. It maddened the usually quiet Hedders that Manson Weeks would give no reason for his opposition. A month ago, out on the golf course, Hedders had wrapped a putter around a tree at the ninth hole and tried to quit the company. But Manson Weeks had laughingly held him to his legal contract.

"Bain thought the old man got a kick out of torturing him, of keeping him here and yet not letting him have what was so close."

Frost took out a small leather-bound notebook and applied a pencil industriously to it. "Very interesting, Bascom. Nice detail to..."

"Remember" should have followed.

Bascom moved to the door. "Oh, something else. You may learn that Jake Prager came out of Germany in 1936. It's true, but I'd vouch for his integrity—and patriotism."

When he went, Frost eyed the pretty little sailing boat with a pennant on its mast that he had drawn in his notebook, then put it away.

Well, everything he said is so—what we already know," Dr. Hopper said finally.

Frost nodded. That was true. He had talked with Manson Weeks and learned it from him. . .

CHAPTER II

WHEN they had waited half an hour, Frost nodded at his wrist watch. "All of the three should be home—or wherever they're going—by now?"

The doctor said yes. They left and sat in silence as they rolled away from the club in Manson Weeks' long, black limousine. Frost tapped a fingernail steadily on a hammered silver cigaret lighter as he checked off the facts as Manson Weeks had given them to him. The doctor sat frowning at the tap-tap sound. "The three all had motives," Frost muttered dreamily once.

There was the angle on Bain Hedders as Bascom had related it, and that was exactly as Manson Weeks himself had given Frost the picture in their conference. Marion, Weeks' daughter, was out of town now,

which was a help in the odd method Frost was utilizing to solve this case.

Then came Prager, Jacob Prager, obviously Teutonic. What Bascom didn't know about Prager was that he had been a bona fide member of the Nazi party in the Third Reich and had entered this country on a forged passport, when, sickened and disillusioned by the Party's excesses, he had fled Germany. As a one-time Nazi, he could not have gotten into America otherwise. But he had made a clean breast of the whole matter shortly after he had entered Weeks' employ as an industrial expert. Claimed he was no longer a Hitler sympathizer; far from it, in fact. Manson Weeks had told Frost that.

Finally, the sportsman-socialite, Sewell Bascom. They had been roommates at Harvard, Weeks had said. Friends of long standing. When Bascom's family had lost their money, Weeks had carried his friend along. Bascom had been working for Manson Weeks most of his life, and when the retired eccentric millionaire had smelled inevitable war in the offing after Munich and opened up a plant easily convertible to munitions production, he had brought in Bascom as a junior partner.

That was that. There had been two indirect attempts on Manson Weeks' life. One had been in his own private office at the plant. A bottle of medicine prescribed for emergency use in case of a heart attack had been the clue. Leaving it standing on his desk, he had stepped out of the office. When he returned, he saw that his pet Siamese cat, that went everywhere with him, had overturned the bottle and lapped up some of the contents. He had phoned Dr. Hopper at once to know if there had been anything in the prescription that could harm the cat. It had been almost an hour before he could reach Hopper in surgery at the Lake City Hospital.

WHEN Mark Hopper heard the cat had given no symptoms of distress of any kind, his suspicions had been aroused. He had come to the office and had the remainder of the bottle analyzed. The prescrip-

tion had contained strychnine, enough to have raised Cain with anything the size of a cat. The lab report showed presence of every ingredient of the original prescription—except the strychnine that would have rallied the system in case of a heart attack. If Manson Weeks had had a seizure and depended upon the medicine, he would have died almost without doubt.

"That ties in Bain Hedders," Frost said as they climbed the long grade to the exclusive suburb development overlooking Lake City. "What you found, Doc." Then he went back to tapping the cigaret lighter.

Hedders was an expert chemist, having taken a post-grad course in it. He could easily have broken down the prescription, then duplicated it for color and taste and omitted the strychnine. Still, the whole thing might have been passed off as an accident, even as some pharmacist's almost fatal error, if it hadn't been for a second incident.

Taxing his weak heart with overwork, Weeks, at Hopper's insistence, had gone up to his shooting lodge for a week. On his second day there, while out in a boat duck hunting, somebody from shore had taken several shots at him. That had been well conceived, too. Whoever had been shooting had known Manson Weeks' character well, had known how quick-tempered and rash he was when roused. Weeks had rowed ashore and gone stalking the sniper, picked up the trail and spotted him slipping off through the trees too easily, he realized afterward.

Disregarding his heart condition, Weeks had pursued him along a faint path in the dawn dimness to a small footbridge spanning a creek in a small gorge. Just before Weeks reached the bridge, a huge mastiff kept at the came came through the woods to join him. The big animal, weighing ninety-odd pounds, bounded out on the bridge ahead of him. Midway the narrow structure crashed beneath him. The mastiff plunged onto the rocks forty feet below and was killed—in a fall planned for Manson Weeks. There was no doubt

of that when he and his lodge-keeper inspected the fallen timbers later in the day and found saw marks.

Manson Weeks had called Frost long-distance from the camp and engaged his services then. He wanted to find out who was trying to kill him.

"And Sewell Bascom is a crack shot. . . just the man who could come close to Weeks with a gun—to lure him into that trap—without hitting him," Frost said aloud.

Dr. Hopper followed his thought train as they swung into the grounds of the sprawling white mansion that was the Weeks home. "Yes. But Prager was missing from the plant that same day."

MR. GREW, tense-faced under her white hair, let them in. Weeks' place was unpretentious but thoroughly comfortable. It looked like the residence of a man in the twenty-thousand-dollar income tax bracket rather than that of a millionaire. They crossed a narrow hall and went down two steps to the Aubusson library, a book-lined room running across one whole wing of the place. There was a warmth about that room, a certain vitality as if it had taken on the character of the owner who spent most of his time in it while at home. A press of a button swung a small dining table out from one side of the carved mahogany desk. Another little button job and the north window seat became a Pullman-style bed.

"Prager's the one of the three nothing points to—except that he might have had a motive considering his background," Frost was remarking as if holding a whispered dialogue with himself as they moved across the library. And the phone on the desk jingled in a melodious series of chimes, another of Manson Weeks' eccentricities.

Dr. Hopper lifted the receiver from its cradle, spoke once, then extended it toward Frost. "One of your operatives. Hines."

Frost's eyes rimmed by the deep circles sparkled a moment. "The guilty man's got to start showing his

hand now and when he. . ." He got on the wire, said, "Yeah, Frost. Go ahead," and listened. Then his mouth fell. He hung up and shrugged. "Hell, Bascom's down in the bar of the Royal Hotel drinking with some friends. That's not the move I figured for him."

"By the way," Hopper paused halfway to the door, "in the car, you said all three had motives. What was—what could be Bascom's?"

"Weeks was going to force him out of the company. Fire him and compel him to sell his stock, Weeks buying it up, of course."

"Oh," said the doctor. "Still, a man doesn't usually commit murder because he's in danger of getting sacked—if Bascom even knew."

Before Frost could reply, the phone chimed again. He picked it up, listened a moment, then said, "Go ahead, Tom." He got a disgusted look and slumped on the corner of the desk when he hung up. The instrument was hardly in the cradle when the chimes played again. Again Frost listened to the voice at the other end, gave the "go ahead" order to a man he called Flint. When he finished that call, Frost sat shaking his head.

"The bugs under the microscope aren't behaving the way they should, Doctor. Or should we say 'misbehaving'. That was Tom Henning tailing Prager. Prager was driven home by Bain Heddgers. Right now Prager is in the study of his cottage trying to read a book and pacing around; innocent enough. The last call was Flint; he's on young Heddgers. Heddgers bought himself a quart container of coffee at a drug store lunch counter, went to his apartment downtown, and hasn't come out. Nobody's doing. . ." The voice dropped off.

"Anything," Hopper snapped, completing it for him, lifting his voice against a rumble of thunder as the rain increased. "I'll drop upstairs. See you shortly."

WHEN he returned to the living room with a curt nod to signify everything was all right, John Frost was over in a small alcove

formed in the east wall where two of the floor-to-ceiling bookcases came within a few feet of meeting. "He's all right, eh?" said Frost. "Hey, what's this?"

He gestured negligently toward a picture bulging under the velvet drapes that masked it in the back of the niche. He had already flipped a switch that turned indirect lighting on the sheathed picture. The illumination revealed the black draw-string with the large brocaded gold knob on the end of it.

"A portrait of Manson Weeks' wife," the doctor said. "She died years ago—when Marion was born."

"Oh." Frost reached for the large bulbous knot of golden cloth to bare the portrait for a look. "Let's see—"

Mrs. Grew's voice knifed sharply from across the library. "Mr. Weeks permits nobody but himself and Mr. Bascom to uncover that portrait," she said severely.

Frost's fingers paused a bare inch from the drawstring knob. The phone chimes tinkled. Frost walked over and answered, said, "Who?", then covered the mouthpiece and said, "Man called Lacy," to Hopper.

The doctor took the instrument and talked a few moments. "I'm sorry, Mr. Lacy. Yes, I don't doubt it's very important, but Mr. Weeks' condition won't permit him being disturbed tonight. No. Sorry." When he hung up, he explained to Frost. "Lacy's a government metallurgical expert. Assigned to the plant. He claims Manson forgot to sign a statement regarding the faulty parts under investigation before he left tonight. Wanted to come up now. Very damned insistent about it, too." Outside lightning gouged the sky with clawed fingers and the big French doors at the end of the room were bleached in a livid light. "Strange, too, because I heard Lacy say this afternoon he was catching the midnight train to Washington. It's well after midnight now and—"

The phone chimes played their little refrain again. Hopper answered, then extended the instrument to Frost. "Your operative, Henning."

Frost was gesturing for his hat and

coat on a chair before he returned the instrument to the cradle. "Doctor, one of our bugs has jumped. Jacob Prager is dead. Suicide. . ."

CHAPTER III

THEY took a sports sedan from the garage with Dr. Hopper at the wheel, not bothering to wake Lettiber in his sleeping quarters above. Frost was almost gleeful when he found that Prager's modest cottage was in a new cheaper development further out from the city than Manson Weeks' place. Frost wanted to reach the scene before the police showed. Then he slumped back and looked morose, muttering "Poor Prager" once. He acted like a surgeon disappointed over a patient who died on the operating table, acted sad because now there was no further use in continuing the exploratory process in this case.

They passed a shoddy corner drug-store, turned into a two-lane macadam strip, then off that into a dirt road with a few scattered homes crouching dimly in the rain. Prager's was at the end of the rutted mud and on the left side. They halted the car some fifty feet away and moved down a gleaming strip of sidewalk. Henning, a paunchy man with a baby face and bright hard eyes moved out from behind a tree. Frost sneered at him.

"I don't pay you a salary to let murder suspects bump themselves off under your fat nose, Henning."

Tom Henning wiped rain water from his face and looked hurt. He gave the facts. He had been watching Prager in his study, a room at the side of the house. He pointed out the bush on the handkerchief of lawn that had been his vantage point. Finally Prager had felt the room. Henning had watched for his return when the study light was turned out.

"I waited to see an upstairs light go on in a bedroom. Nothin' happened, John. . . Then there was a long lightning flash. I could see into that study like it was daylight. Prager was in a chair at the desk—his

head flopped down; there was blood on it."

Henning had kept his head, Dr. Hopper told himself. Had scouted around, found the back door open, and entered. Using his torch, he found Jacob Prager with half the side of his head blown off, very dead, with a still warm pistol flopped on the blotter beside him.

"And you never heard the shot, eh, fathead?" Frost inquired wearily.

Henning said, "Look, John, this storm and—" The rest of his words were lost in a reverberating clap of thunder. It was self explanatory.

THE doctor said what they were doing was illegal and that they ought to call the police just to protect themselves as Henning led them in the back door. "Pretend you're the coroner and. . ." Frost told him.

They found their way into the study in the little cottage that was so still it seemed to be listening to them. Frost got the window shades down and called for lights. Prager wasn't a pretty picture. The bullet had smashed in the right side of his head at the temple and there were powder burns on the side of the face. It was grisly. Shoved out on the blotter and blood-spattered was an evening edition of a local sheet with the threatened investigation of the Weeks plant proclaimed in glaring headlines. Off to the left of Prager's collapsed head lay the lethal weapon, a German Luger automatic.

"A very perfect picture," remarked Frost as he gingerly picked up the gun with a handkerchief. Hopper said something about fingerprints on the weapon. Frost eyed him as if he were a child. "How many cases have you ever heard of where police got decent prints from a. . .?"

He replaced the gun to the left of the body and waved them out, snapping off the light button. The three climbed in the car.

"Looks pretty obvious," said Hopper as he drove off. "Investigation of the plant looming. . . Prager, an ex-Nazi in this country on a forged passport. There was his motive to kill Weeks, to silence him. Then

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when we walked in and said Weeks was dead and that murder was suspected he lost his nerve and shot himself."

"You figured that out all by—" Frost didn't finish that time because he was cursing hotly. The car had slipped into the ditch making the turn and was bogged in mud. It took them a full ten minutes of pushing in the muck before they got it free and climbed back in with shoes and trousers coated with mud. Down at the corner drugstore Frost used the phone booth and dialed police headquarters in the city.

He told the sergeant that answered that he was a neighbor of Jacob Prager's, giving the address. "I thought I heard—"

"A shot," finished the sergeant at the other end for him. "You're the second one who called in about it, mister. A squad car is on its way out now."

FROST clicked down the hook, lips pursed. "Somebody beat me to the..." "Punch" was the last word that died on his tongue.

He deposited another coin and got the Weeks place, Mrs. Grew answering. When he absorbed her message, he bounced out of the booth. At the car, he half plucked Dr. Hopper from under the wheel. "I'll be driving, Doc, and you better drop off here." To Henning, "Tom, Flint called in and left a message. Hedders has lammed it out of town. Flint called from Groton up the lake where he tailed him. We're going." He clashed the gears, then stuck his head out the window at the already bedraggled Hopper on the sidewalk. "Better get a tag and drag your pants out of this vicinity unless you want to get tied in with Prager's murder, Doc."

It was some twenty minutes later when they skidded on a sharp turn into a culvert and over a bridge into the sleepy little town of Groton. It was one of those nine-o'clock burgs where they rolled up the sidewalks. Outside of a few wan street lamps in the rain, it was darker than a cemetery in a fog. Tall, bony Flint stepped out from the doorway of a shop as they drew up at the main



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crossing blinker as he had said he would in his message left with Mrs. Grew. He slid into the rear seat.

"Next left, Frost. He came down in his coupe like the devil was on his tail." They made the left turn into a residential section with the wet foliage of the trees almost forming a tunnel. "Apartment house on the right."

It was a modest four-story little building set back from the property line. A single light showed at the window of a third-floor center apartment. Flint said it had gone on shortly after Hedders entered the building.

"Where's his coupe?" Frost asked.

Flint scratched his head audibly and said it had been there in the heavy shadows under the trees. It wasn't now. Then the lone light blinked out. Frost was out in the rain, running swiftly. He told Flint to find the car and Henning to cover the back of the place. Frost skirted privet hedges and reached the front entrance. The outside doors of the vestibule gave to his pressure. Inside it there were mail boxes and call bells for the individual apartments. He thought he was licked till he saw the inner door was on the latch, not having closed completely and locked when the last person passed through.

He lunged into a dim-lit plain entrance hall, saw that it was a walk-up, and hit the stairs. They broke halfway at a tiny landing and angled back on themselves to the second floor. He barged into darkness. Somebody had turned off the bulb of the light and he suddenly realized the clatter he himself must have made. He felt along the wall, came to a corner, and realized the hall ran across the building, from side to side.

(Continued On Page 80)

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Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 79)

Then there was a scraping sound. Frost tiptoed to the left toward it in the gloom.

A man was never supposed to try to take a punch on tiptoe. Frost learned it the hard way and conclusively. The fist arced out of the blackness just as a baby started to cry in an adjoining room. It collided with Frost's jaw and lifted him off his feet as lights flashed in his brain. Then he bounced off a wall, punching back blindly but punily. A hand seized his coat to measure the range, and another set of knuckles belted him in the forehead.

WHEN Frost came out of it, he was sitting on the floor and the salty taste of blood was in his mouth. Dimly he realized he had just heard a sharp pattering as of feet, but something about them told him they didn't go with the punching. His eyes focussed and he twisted toward the sound in time to see the door of an inbuilt fire escape closing slowly at the end of the hall. A bar of light from that set of stairs showed for an instant. In it Frost glimpsed a vanishing figure.

He shifted one of his hands and came on the half-drawn gun that had dropped from his pocket, pushed himself up. The fist landed again and he flopped, really out that time. When he came out of it again, he stumbled up and made for the front stairs. Outside, he whistled sharply. Henning plodded through soggy grass around from the rear of the building and Flint appeared across the road from a parking lot. Both shook their heads.

"Saw a dame going down the street with a bag, but nobody came out of that front door," Flint called softly as he neared.

The soft purr of a motor came across the night. Their eyes swept around for car lights. None. Then halfway down the block keen-eyed Frost caught the faint sheen of water on the steel body of a coupe backing from a private driveway beside a boarded-up empty house. It was gone like a mirage. At the corner in the dim glow of a street light he saw it

Finger From the Grave

turn and vanish, picking up speed swiftly. Henning ran toward their car, cursing.

Frost thought of the three-branched fork just beyond the rail crossing at the edge of the tiny town. There would be no way of telling which turn the coupe took. He caught at Henning's arm. "You two slam down the road with plenty of noise as if in chase. Sound your horn plenty, too. In about five minutes come back to the corner and wait till you get my whistle."

The pair banged away, Henning choking the sports sedan to produce a few backfires. They sirened at the turn and cut it on again as they hit the main street. Frost had already hopped the privet hedge and dropped behind a blue spruce on the apartment grounds. He didn't have to wait five minutes.

A tall figure slipped from the vestibule and strode swiftly toward the street. Frost smiled with sore lips and moved and leaned across the hedge and jabbed his automatic into the other's back.

"Take it easy," he half hummed ala the song tune. "We—"

Again he didn't finish. The tall one lashed around, half ducking. Frost chopped with the gun barrel and only got in a glancing blow off the tall man's hat. A swinging fist swept savagely at John Frost, but this time it was different. He could see, hadn't walked smack into a man waiting for him in the gloom. His left flashed as he swung his head out of line of the blow. The left hooked to the other's jaw with blinding speed. Snapped it twice more in a blur of action. The bigger man unhinged at the knees, then tilted backward and went down on the sidewalk. Frost stepped over him and whistled sharply toward the corner.

When Flint and Henning drew up in the sedan they were dumfounded to see their boss helping Bain Hedders off the sidewalk.

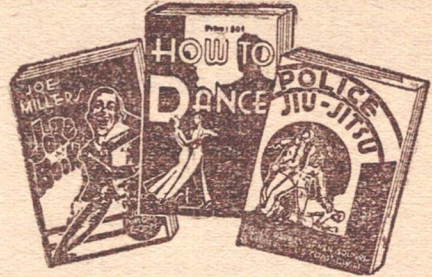
CHAPTER IV

SEATED behind the desk in Manson Weeks' library, John Frost let cigaret ash dribble

(Continued On Page 82)

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Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 81)

down the lapel of his rumpled suit and waved wearily at bespectacled Bain Hedders. "Okay, spill. Who was the girl who got off in your car and..." He began toying with a paper weight.

Hedders put down the empty brandy glass and recrossed his legs the other way, thumbed blood on his sports jacket from a cut lip. "You hit like a load of brick, Frost. Don't know of any woman."

"Look, Hedders. I'm a private investigator. It's my business. So don't try to fool me. After you slugged me around the first time in the hall I heard the sweet patter of high heels going away. They went down the inside fire escape stairs. Now."

Hedders shook his head. "Too bad Manson Weeks isn't here to tell you. He had a pack of investigators digging into my background before you came into the picture, Frost. Me, I'm not speaking."

Dr. Hopper glared across at Hedders. He had liked the boy practically from the first, had been tacitly on his side in the matter of the girl. Now he was convinced of his guilt. "I think this has become a police matter, Mr. Frost."

Frost looked up from his watch, knuckling an eye sleepily. "Prager should be calling any moment now. Suppose we all shut up till then."

The ticking of the clock on the staircase landing seeped down to the library for about thirty seconds and then the chimes of the phone pealed gently. Frost said, "Yes. Sure, Mr. Prager. Is that so? Well, all right. Okay. If you say so." Hanging up he studied Hedders. "Prager said that two weeks ago you threatened to kill your boss."

Hedders nodded, mouth wrenching. "It's true. I thought Jake Prager had more sense though. He knew I was hot under the collar at the time. Wouldn't I be doing myself a lot of good in murdering the father of the girl I want to marry?"

Frost bounced a match packet off the top of the desk and motioned to Henning and Flint. "Take this monkey home and put him to bed and..."



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Finger From the Grave

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HOPPER stood slack-jawed as he watched the two operatives go out with young Heddgers. Then he wheeled on Frost, face flushing with wrath. "Look, you—"

"That was Hines calling," Frost said, pulling his tie loose and unbuttoning his collar. "Bascom spent the night hitting the whisky with a crowd at the bar. Went up to a private party in a room but came back to the bar soon. Seems he got pretty plastered; had to be helped upstairs and put to bed at closing."

Hopper banged an end table so a cigaret box rattled. "But, my God, you let Heddgers walk out free and—"

"You saw him when he thought I was talking to Prager. Heddgers didn't know he was dead—or else he ought to be on Broadway behind footlights."

"Then Prager's death was suicide as it looked?" Poor Hopper was totally confused now.

"No—but Heddgers didn't do it. Check your time element; figure it out. Heddgers was driving like hell into Groton when Prager died. The time when Henning called me to report Prager's death and the time when Flint phoned in from Groton were too close to each other for Heddgers to make it from Prager's house to Groton."

"I thought—well, it looks as if he had a strong motive now. He was keeping a woman down the line in Groton and Weeks learned about it so he opposed the marriage to his daughter. So Heddgers killed Prager to shift suspicion. . ." He paced the rug. "Look, you clear Heddgers, and you still say it wasn't suicide?"

"I—" He broke off that time, but with a purpose, staring at the drapes beside the entrance to the living room. "Come in, Mrs. Grew."

The housekeeper stepped into view bearing a tray with a pot of coffee. "Mr. Weeks always liked a cup of coffee before turning in so I thought. . ."

(Continued On Page 84)

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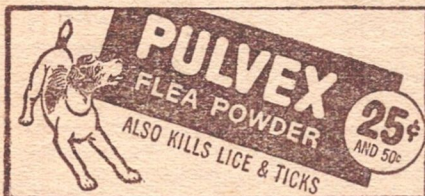
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Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 83)

"Coffee at night—against my express orders," groaned Hopper.

"We will," said Frost. "Thank you. And with some brandy to lace it to drug our weary brains and. . ." When they got the drinks fixed up, Frost watched Mrs. Grew leave, then went on to answer Hopper. "No, not suicide; Prager was right-handed."

"Well, the bullet entered his right temple."

"Sure. Powder burns around it, too. Only the fallen gun was to the left of his head. The butt turned to the left, too. A left-handed person shot Jacob Prager, Dr. Hopper."

"You think—you've got our man?"

"I've got ideas—no evidence. We'll see tomorrow when. . ."

Hopper bit his lip at that breaking-off trick as they left the room to turn in. He caught at Frost's arm. "Do you think we ought to tell—to tell about Hedders' girl over in Groton?"

"Is that a crime, exactly? And do you know the kid was keeping that dame there?"

The doctor tongued his lips, "Well—l . . . Wait. Another thing. I just remembered what I wanted to ask you earlier this evening. At the club, you told those three that ourselves and Mrs. Grew and Lettiber were the only ones who knew Weeks was dead. But Lettiber doesn't know—he isn't in on it."

Frost nodded, smiling. "'S right. It's bait, doctor. Look. Usually it's the killer who strikes unexpectedly, who cuts down the victim before he even knows he's in danger. Right?"

"Well, yes."

"Fine. But the way we've rigged this case, matters are reversed. The would-be murderer learns unexpectedly that the victim is dead. So now it's the killer who's in the dark and plenty curious. He wants to know when the victim got it and all the circumstances. He can't be sure. He's worried about covering himself. *He's got to know.*"

"Yes," said the befuddled doctor.

"All right. So the killer believes Lettiber knows some details. . . Catch? Bait. Who'll nibble? I'm waiting for the first person who tries

Finger From the Grave

to pump Lettiber—to close my case.”

IT WAS a sparkling winey day the next morning when Frost trotted down to breakfast as if he had the case in his pocket. Dr. Hopper was already at the table, looking haggard with worry. When Sewell Bascom called, Mrs. Grew plugged in a portable instrument and Frost took the call with a forkful of kidneys in his mouth.

Sewell spoke about Prager and said it was too bad. Frost winked across the table. “Yes. Of course, it doesn’t touch our case. Prager was the one man cleared from the start.” He chuckled as he heard Sewell cover a gasp with a cough at the other end. When he hung up, Frost jabbed a fork at the doctor’s necktie. “Shouldn’t wear a tie like that, Hopper. Looks like your tongue dragging over your shirt front.”

Hopper sniffed. “This tie happens to be green, and my tongue is red.”

“Maybe you’re bilious.” Frost sat back and lit a smoke and signalled yes when Mrs. Grew offered him another cup of coffee. Then she was smoothing down her apron nervously, tucking at her white hair.

“Mr. Frost, I feel there’s something I’ve got to tell.”

Frost shrugged nonchalantly. “Confession is always good for the . . .”

She blurted the next words. “That was no—no paramour Bain Heddgers was keeping over in Groton.”

“Nice eaves-dropping, Mrs. Grew.”

Her mouth pinched, but she went on doggedly. The girl was Heddgers’ sister who had been teaching school over there. She had changed her name because she had once written a check on a bank where she had no funds to get a worthless husband, since divorced, out of a jam. She had done a jail stretch for it. For the same reason, Bain Heddgers had kept her nearby presence a secret, or thought he had.

“How do you happen to know this, Mrs. . . .?”

“Manson Weeks told me. His investigators had found it out.”

Frost tapped a salt cellar with a

(Continued On Page 86)

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Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 85)

thumbnail annoyingly in broken rhythm. "So when this thing broke—the kid rushed over to get her off the scene before we dug it up and made it a motive for him to—to. . ."

Hopper had half risen from his chair, staring at Mrs. Grew. Mrs. Grew met his eyes levelly. "Manson Weeks actually always liked Mr. Hedders. He simply had him checked on to protect Marion, then brought him into the company. Mr. Weeks' apparent opposition to the engagement was simply to test the boy's mettle, Mr. Weeks said."

"Nice sense of humor," Frost murmured.

"Manson Weeks told you all that—he discussed his daughter's affairs with you, Mrs. Grew?" Hopper asked hoarsely.

Mrs. Grew nodded firmly. "My daughter's affairs, doctor."

Frost didn't even show a flicker of surprise and he drew it from her quickly. The Weeks had been in Europe when his wife died in childbirth. The girl baby had only lived a few months after her. Manson Weeks had been stricken by the double blow. Mrs. Grew, deserted by her husband who had never been heard from since, had given birth to a girl baby while travelling with the Weeks menage. Manson Weeks had become more and more attracted to the child. Gradually he had begun to rear it as his own. And before they returned from Europe two years later, he legally adopted it as his own child with Mrs. Grew's consent. Her face twisted.

"It's been hard, living in the same house with a child that doesn't know I'm her mother. . . But I was thinking of her future."

Frost patted her shoulder gently as he rose. "Thank you, Mrs. Grew. Thank you very much. . . Oh, one other thing. You said Mr. Weeks permitted nobody but Bascom to uncover Mrs. Weeks' portrait in the library. Why Sewell Bascom? Do you know?"

"Yes. Mr. Weeks told me about it once. Sewell Bascom had been engaged to the girl when he was in college. A week before they were to be

Finger From the Grave

married, Mr. Weeks eloped with her."
 "Oh, just that. I see." Frost headed for the library.

Hopper followed him and sank into a chair with a sigh. "That clears poor Hedders all right. And—well, I'll confess—I was going to call the police on my own this morning."

Frost smiled tiredly. "Don't worry about it. They would have ignored your call. Paid no attention to. . ."

"Ignored my— Say, how do you know?"

"Talked to the chief last night before I went to sleep. Identified myself and called his attention to the fact the gun was on the left side of the body of a right-handed man. He agreed with me then that it wasn't suicide. I also vouchsafed for Hedders being with me at the time."

"You—my God, Frost—I think—"

FROST looked up at Mrs. Grew in the doorway. Mr. Lacy, government metallurgical expert, was outside. Hopper took control then and said to show him in. Lacy strode into the library, a big man bulking in tweeds, with three chins and an air of eternal amiability. Behind that air Frost sensed bearlike power. He let Lacy take his hand and pump it repeatedly in a massive paw as Hopper introduced him as an associate, a coronary specialist.

"Of course, Dr. John Frost. I've heard the name, I know," Lacy said in his good-natured voice. "Now, Dr. Hopper, be reasonable. After Prager's death last night—his suicide, I guess," he said, tapping the folded paper under his arm, "things smell bad. I've got to see Mr. Weeks."

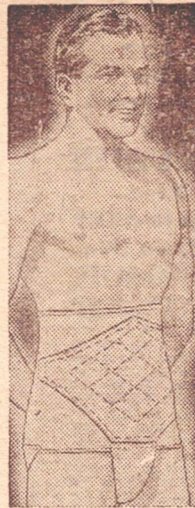
But Hopper was adamant. Lacy's buglike eyes narrowed, but he finally left, beaming again, on the strength of Hopper's promise he would try to arrange it for later in the day. A call came in from the city desk of a Lake City newspaper. The voice at the other end asked for verification about rumors concerning Manson Weeks' death.

"They're getting nervous," Frost said.

"Who?"

"Whoever wanted Weeks dead."

(Continued On Page 88)



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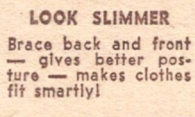
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(Continued From Page 87)

They're trying to force our hand to show the corpse. Curiosity is a nine-lived. . ." "Cat" was supposed to be the final word. Frost put in a whistle for it. He was gazing out the windows at the garage over to the left. Lacey was out there beside a maroon convertible as Lettiber leaned into the open motor.

Hopper came over in time to see the chauffeur close the hood and Lacy back out. Frost called Mrs. Grew and said he wanted to see the chauffeur. Lettiber came in promptly, a wooden-faced man in a neat, dark green uniform.

"What did Mr. Gilbert Lacy have to say for himself?"

Lettiber looked puzzled as he faced the slouched Frost. "Nothing much. Just said he'd had some trouble with his job backfiring as he came up the hill and asked me to take a look at it. Then—oh yeah, he asked me what time I took Mr. Weeks up from the plant last night? And did I take him out anyplace afterward. Say, isn't the boss late getting down this morning?"

Frost said, "Maybe," softly. "What was wrong with his job?"

Lettiber shook his head. "Nothing I could find."

When he left, Frost grinned like a kid. "A nibble, doctor. A. . ."

"Lacy? He—"

"No. Not exactly. We know he was in Washington when Weeks' medicine was switched. Down there, too, when Weeks was shot at up at the camp. But he might. . ."

Hopper bared his teeth, groping mentally for unspoken final words had him half crazy. "Twenty minutes," he said sharply when Frost asked him how long it would take Lacy to get back to the hotel in the city.

"In twenty minutes then, we strike, Doctor. You better be prepared to have the—the corpus delicti enter the scene then."

"You know the murderer, Frost?"

"He's going to walk in here and pin the label on himself unless I'm. . ."

"Crazy," breathed Dr. Hopper wearily as he went out.

Finger From the Grave

CHAPTER V

FROST gave the twenty minutes two more and got through to Gilbert Lacy at the Royal Hotel. "Mr. Lacy. Ah, yes. Dr. Frost. Dr. Hopper has informed me you can see Mr. Weeks if you come immediately. But—at once; Mr. Weeks might have another weak spell and. . ."

Hopper came to the door and said he would have Weeks ready when wanted. "You think Lacy is the man?"

Frost said no with a sneer. Hopper watched while Frost kept snapping a humidor lip up and down in quickening tempo with his eyes locked on the phone as if it would give some sign before it rang its chimes. They came and Frost clawed for the cradle. Said hoarsely:

"Okay, Hines. I knew you'd call. Shoot." When he hung up his face glistened with sweat. "Hines reports that Sewell Bascom went into the bar across from the plant and called Lacy."

Hopper frowned. "Well, Bascom's practically running the plant. And Lacy's a government expert who's in on the probe."

"He went to a bar to call him."

"Bascom drinks a lot. I've warned him a couple of times to—"

Frost waved him silent. The ticking of the stair clock floated down to the silence of the room. Frost closed his eyes and paced slowly, opening them only to check his watch at intervals. Then a muted roar came from outside and they could see Lacy's maroon convertible half skidding the curve of the road up the hill. Frost made a sign and Hopper ran to the stairs, up them.

When Mrs. Grey showed in a slightly panting Lacy, John Frost was standing over before the niche where the masked portrait of Manson Weeks' wife hung. His back was to the room and he gave no sign when Lacy greeted him twice. Lacy came over and touched his arm. "Dr. Frost!"

Frost nodded. "But not 'doctor.' I'm John Frost, private investigator,

(Continued On Page 90)

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Crack Detective

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Lacy," he said softly. "And I'm going to put you under arrest."

Lacy's thick face broke around an uncertain smile. "Washington will be interested!" He forgot to show surprise at learning Frost's real calling. "On what charge?"

Frost faced him. "Attempted murder."

Lacy fell into the trap. "I came here to see Mr. Weeks, Frost. If you can't produce him, it's a government matter!" he bombasted.

"You think he's dead, don't you, Lacy?" He nodded toward Hopper in the doorway. "What made you think that, Mr. Lacy? Because you knew he should be dead, didn't you? And we know how you planned to kill him — because Manson Weeks will be there to testify against you in court!" he bellowed that last and didn't drop a word. Then his pointing arm shot past Lacy to the door.

Lacy whipped around—to see little wizened but fiercely bright-eyed Manson Weeks, eccentric millionaire, in a pair of flannel slacks and a roll-collar sweater, walk into the room beside Dr. Hopper. Lacy's bug eyes almost sagged from his head.

"I know, Lacy," Weeks said in a deep bass that was like a blow, so unexpected it was from the tiny frame.

Lacy was a man looking at a ghost. His eyes flung wildly around the room as if to see if it were real. Saliva ran over his three chins. He lurched sideward toward the masked portrait in the niche. Frost had his hand on the automatic in his side pocket. But Lacy made a move he hadn't expected—yet somehow had. It was the move of a man seeing guilt wall him in and not able to believe it and doing the one thing to prove what he saw wasn't real.

He grabbed at the golden-cloth knob at the end of the draw string of the portrait. The velvet drapes parted a third of the way over the oil. And then Lacy stumbled backward, staring at his hand, face blackening with blood one moment. A few moments later he was flat on the Aubusson, dead. . . Aged Manson Weeks swayed, staring. Hopper gasped.



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Finger From the Grave

"A coronary attack! I never suspected he had heart—"

Frost was shaking his head. His eyes riveted on Sewell Bascom coming across the hall at a half run. Bascom bobbed into the room, then saw Lucy's body. He looked as if he would strangle and failed to notice Hopper and the supposedly dead man off to one side.

Frost's voice purred. "Yes, Bascom. He's dead. But I don't think he got the full dosage; he talked first. You're under ar—"

John Frost never even finished that word because Bascom whipped an automatic from his topcoat pocket. His first shot slivered a piece off the top of the desk. His second smashing report was for a bullet that plowed up into the ceiling. For Frost had fired twice through the cloth of his coat with the gun in his pocket. Both shots smashed into Bascom's shooting arm. He half spun and went onto his knees, shrieking in agony. Frost sauntered across the carpet and kicked the dropped weapon under a chair.

THE aged millionaire, Weeks, was up in his bed and Hopper had come downstairs after giving him a hypo. Bain Heddars was there now, sleepless face haggard as he sat between Henning and Flint. Hines had come in through the French windows where he had set himself to cover Bascom after trailing him from the city. Mrs. Grew stood in the doorway, watching Frost with awe in her misty eyes as he lounged at the desk and lazily reconstructed the case. A shot in his bandaged-up arm to deaden the pain, Sewell Bascom, face frozen, sat in a chair across the desk.

"Of course Manson Weeks wasn't dead, but he was going to be if we didn't do something quickly," Frost said in a low key as he slowly tapped the automatic on the blotter before him. "So we decided to have him dead—to make the murderer show his hand. Mr. Weeks has been living in the gardener's cottage back in the woods. He often retired there when he wanted to get away from folks. There's a private line to it from his

(Continued On Page 92)

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bedroom by which he could communicate if. . ." Again the dropped word.

"We knew it was either Prager—Hedders—or Bascom here who was out to get him. So we set the stage—and waited. Not for. . ." "Long" belonged there. He sighed as if more bored than ever. "Killers get impatient when the corpse doesn't appear, it seems."

Bascom puffed cigaret smoke and gave him back a thin smile for his.

Frost went on. "When I got a look at Prager dead, my case began to build. You phoned him, Bascom, and said you were coming out. He let you in the back way, expecting you. Neat. You slugged him and carried the body into the dark study, propped it in a chair, and shot him point-blank to look like suicide. Very neat—and convincing in view of the facts about poor Prager. So you pointed him out as the killer of Weeks."

"Yes?" said Bascom.

"Yes. Only you forgot one detail. You shot him in the right temple—as a right-handed man would commit suicide. But you dropped the gun on his left—in your hurry to get away. And you're left-handed, Bascom. I noted it when I saw you lifting your drink in the card room at the club."

Dr. Hopper exhaled loudly. "Never noticed that in all the years I've known him!"

"It's natural. Most left-handed people are cured of writing left-handed in their school years. But they'll do the unconscious things—like lifting a drink—with their left hand. Also, Bascom was the one man of the three in the card room who recovered himself first when we broke the news. Why? Because he figured he was well covered—that it could never be proved it was murder." Frost thumbed carelessly at the golden knob he had cut from the drawstring of the portrait.

"But the corpus delicti wasn't showing up—and Bascom got impatient with worry. So first he gave Hines the slip in the crowded hotel barroom and came up the hill and shifted suspicion to Prager. I killed that by telling him we had known all

Finger From the Grave

along Prager was in the clear. Then he began to show his hand more."

"Most interesting, Frost," Bascom said caustically. The blood was returning to his face. "But I'd like to get to the hospital and—"

"The police will handle that in a few minutes. You convicted yourself when you drew a gun on me at sight of Lacy dead. Remember?"

BASCOM shrugged. "He was my friend. So-o—"

"Friend in murder, I believe. You showed your hand through him. He kept demanding to see Weeks so we'd finally have to admit his death when we couldn't produce him. Why did you want the corpse produced? So it would be found Manson Weeks had apparently died of a coronary attack—and the murder idea would be washed out. Is that. . ."

"So?" Bascom instinctively finished for him. Laughed.

"When Lacy questioned the chauffeur, I knew we had you nibbling, and it hooked him in too. Lacy left, got my call he could see Weeks, phoned you at the plant. You didn't want to speak over the office phone, rushed to the bar, and called him. When you heard what was happening, you rushed up here after him as fast as you could, figuring we were on the spot and could only produce a corpse. I'm getting thirsty." Frost winked at Mrs. Grew. She disappeared for the brandy. "You had to see that corpse, Bascom."

"Go on," said the accused man.

"That's about all. Poor Lacy was shocked by sight of the man he believed dead. I didn't mean to have him killed. He was only an indirect accomplice. I expected him to break and spill about you. Instead—well, he instinctively reached for the murder instrument to see if it had been used. It had not been—and he was killed instead."

"Murder instrument?" called out Heddors.

Frost held up the golden knob from the portrait drawstring. He held it by a portion of the string gingerly, then spun it and pointed to where he had spread the brocade with a letter

(Continued On Page 94)



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Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 93)

opener. "There! You can just see the needle of the syringe concealed in the knob. See. . .?"

They began to nod. "Poison," said Hopper. "An autopsy or a necropsy will show—"

"No." Frost looked ready to yawn. "Will show nothing. Manson Weeks was supposed to get the works—only he and Bascom ever touched it. And Manson Weeks would have been duly put down as victim of a coronary attack."

Hopper advanced. "Y-yes. . .that's what I would have sworn Lacy was in the fatal throes of. All the signs—"

"I happen to be an expert on poisons, Doctor. It's insulin in this syringe—unless I miss my guess. About two hundred and fifty units, I should say. The victim—who was supposed to be Mr. Weeks—received a terrific insulin shock which is indistinguishable from the symptoms of a fatal coronary attack. . ."

It was very still, the whole room appalled at the ingenuity of the thing.

"You never forgave Manson Weeks for stealing your fiancée and eloping with her, did you, Bascom?" he said in almost a whisper.

Bascom made a sharp laughing sound. "May I use the phone? . . . I want to call the police to arrest you for shooting me." He uncrossed his legs. "Frost, you're smart. You talk a nice case. But you haven't got a single damned piece of real evidence that would stand up in court! Rot!"

Frost eased around the end of the long desk, getting further away from Bascom briefly. "Only two men touched that drawstring knob, Bascom, and Weeks didn't insert that syringe of insulin in it to kill himself, did he? . . . Come on, Bascom, Confess and get a lighter. . ." "Sentence" was what he left unsaid.

Bascom had shot before with his right hand. His move now was with his left. It streaked across the desk and seized the automatic he left unguarded, whipped it around to cover the whole room.

(Continued On Page 96)

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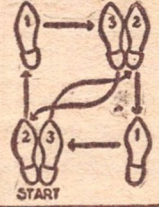
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Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 94)

"ALL right! Now I talk!" He cleared his throat. "All right—I never did forgive Manson Weeks for stealing the girl destined to be my wife! I've waited—waited for years and years. This new secret weapon at the plant was my chance. Gilbert Lacy went to college with me, too. I knew him. We planned it. He had the capital. I could buy a controlling interest in the stock with the money he could get up—as a silent partner."

"Huh?" said Frost as if overcome.

"With Weeks dead—yes. Then I would have revenge on my enemy—and have taken over his company in a reorganization at a bargain too. There would have had to be a reorganization after the scandal of the inferior parts. Yes, I did that. I'm an engineer. I made some changes in the blueprints. Just enough to interfere with the functioning of the weapon. Lacy ascribed it officially to inferior material; reorganized we could have corrected it easily. All right, Frost. That's it. Now—"

"Thanks for filling in the. . ." His voice faded off on "blanks."

"Now I'm walking out of here. And—" His eyes swept the assemblage. "And I'm taking Hedders as hostage. If you turn in an alarm—well, you'll have another corpse and—"

Frost's hand dipped into a side pocket, showed rising with the butt of a gun. "That one's not the one I shot you with, Bascom. It's loaded with blanks—so you'd show your hand one last. . ."

The blast of the gun in Bascom's hand killed the final word without Frost's help. It roared again. Frost stodd there with an icy smile, covering Bascom with his other weapon, unharmed.

"Thanks for convicting yourself, Bascom." Frost looked around boredly. "The police have what they call their third degree. That trick is what I call my fourth. . ."

The last word wasn't necessary then. What he meant was very plain.

THE END

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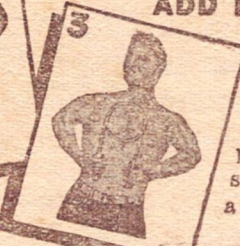
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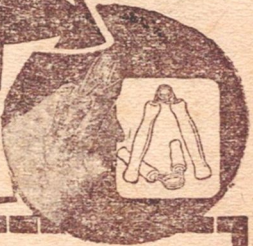
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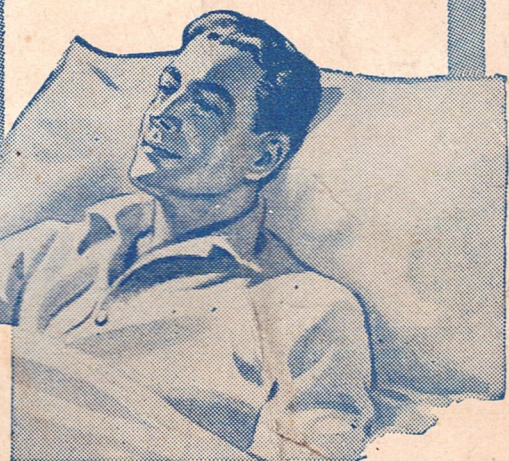


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