

10¢

# CRACK DETECTIVE

NOV.

STORIES

Robert Turner

T. W. Ford

Arthur Mann

KEEP IT  
SIMPLE

By  
Mel  
Vitt



A  
DOUBLE-ACTION  
MAGAZINE

Here's the Greatest **BILFOLD BARGAIN** in all America!

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**\$1.98**

# 3 BIG VALUES in ONE

- ★ This Smart Leather Billfold and Pass Case
- ★ Your Choice of Emblems and Name Engraved on the Billfold in 23k GOLD
- ★ 3-Color Identification Plate Beautifully Engraved with your Name, Address and Social Security Number

**YOU GET THIS!**  
Smart looking, beautifully styled Leather Billfold with Pass Case to hold membership and credit cards. Patented snap feature locks securely so currency and valuables can't fall out.



**HAROLD S. SANDER**  
YOUR NAME ENGRAVED HERE!

Your Permanent Engraved Identification Tag.

● Rising Costs of Leather Goods may make it impossible to repeat this amazing offer!

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Your Favorite Emblem, Name, Address and Social Security Number

**Engraved IN GOLD!** All At This One LOW PRICE

**YOU GET THIS!**  
Your choice of Emblems and your Name richly Engraved in 23k Gold on the Face of the Billfold. Your name is also engraved in Gold, inside the Billfold.



Your Full Name Here

Your Favorite Emblem Here

**YOU GET THIS!**  
A beautiful 3-color Emergency Identification Plate which carries your full name, address and Social Security Number. A perfect identification record for you.



Here, without a doubt, is the greatest Billfold and Pass Case Bargain that you'll be likely to see for a good many years to come. Through a fortunate purchase we have a limited quantity of these smart leather Billfolds available at this low price. If you have shopped around, you know that it is virtually impossible to get a good leather Billfold of this type beautifully engraved in gold with your Lodge Emblem or Army, Navy, Marine or Air Corps Insignia and Name at this sensational low price. In addition we also send you a specially designed 3-color Emergency Identification Plate, on which we engrave your Social Security Number, your Name and your Address. This smart Leather Billfold must actually be seen to be fully appreciated. Besides the spacious compartment at the back which can be used for currency, checks, papers, etc., it has 4 pockets each protected by celluloid to prevent the soiling of your valuable membership and credit cards. This handsome Billfold has the sturdy appearance and style usually found in costlier Billfolds.

● Due to difficulty in obtaining good leather because of war conditions, the supply of these Billfolds is limited. Remember, you get 3 Big Values for only \$1.98. So rush your order today! If after receiving your Engraved Billfold, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you ever came across, return it and we'll refund the money.

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**AMAZING NEW**  
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**a month**

✓ **PAYS** accumulated **CASH BENEFITS** **\$6000.00**  
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# 10¢ CRACK DETECTIVE STORIES

Volume 5    ★    NOVEMBER, 1944    ★    Number 6

## SUSPENSEFUL MYSTERY NOVEL

- DEAD BLOOD RUNS PURPLE.....By Frank Kane 66**  
Johnny Liddell's throat was ripe for the slayer's knife, unless he could spot the Sinister Number One man behind the jewel-snatching, blonde-murdering setup at the Tropical Club!

## TWO THRILLING NOVELETS

- KEEP IT SIMPLE.....By Mel Watt 10**  
The trouble with most murderers, reasoned the deadly killer at Sea Cliff, was that they let their crimes become too complex!
- KILLER'S CURTAIN CALL.....By Robert Turner 22**  
One by one the little men accosted Evan Molloy, warning him to keep away from Big Mac's wife, Patricia. Only Molloy had never met Patricia. And it didn't make sense when he found Big Mac dead in his room—only it would to the police!

## SHORT STORIES

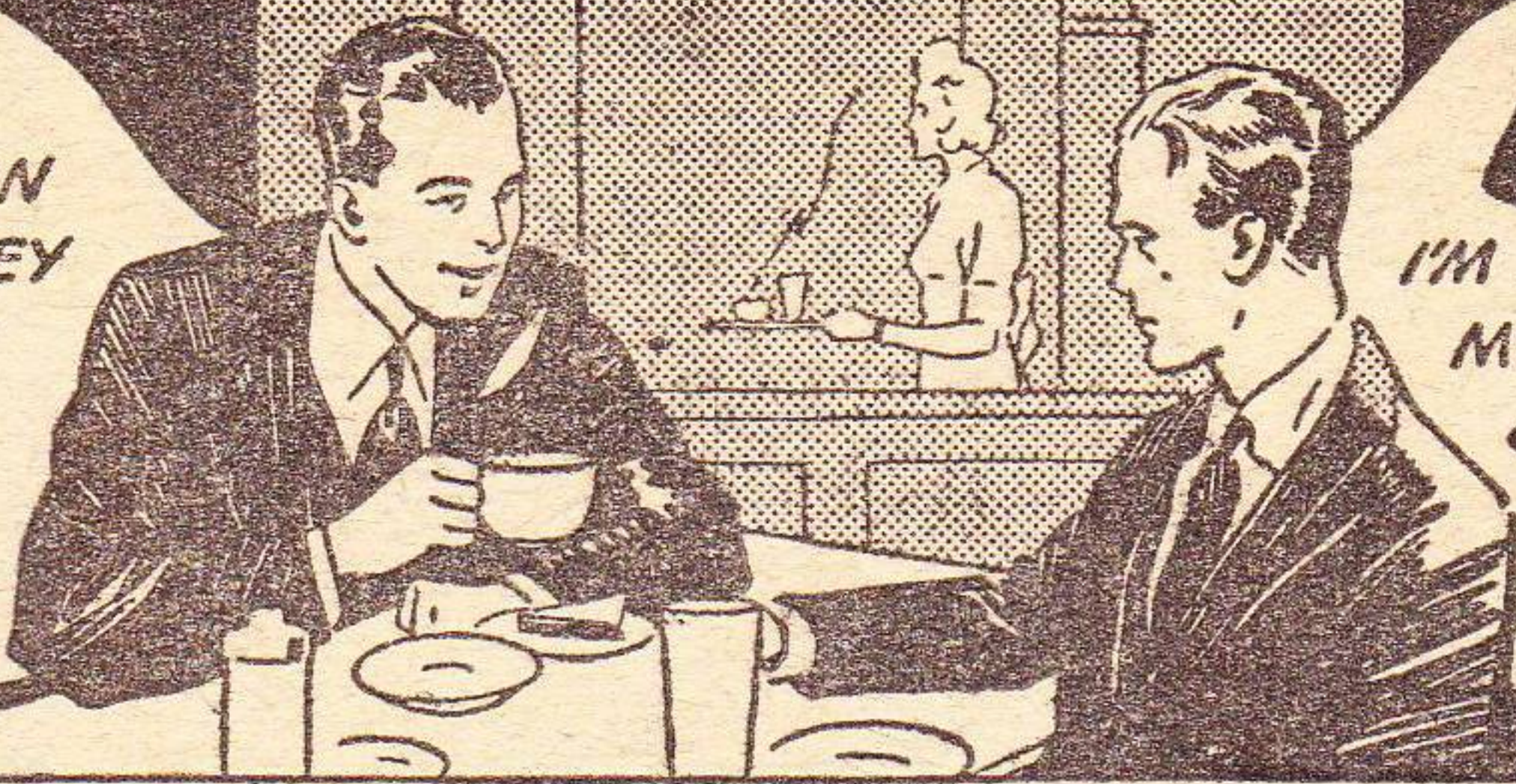
- I DIDN'T DO IT!.....By Cliff Campbell 33**  
How can a guy be guilty if the court can't prove he committed the crime?
- FRIENDLESS CORPSE.....By Arthur Mann 36**  
Lew Curry made a bad mistake when he reported that trunk to the cops—but then, how could he know there was a body inside?
- MURDERERS MUSTN'T POINT.....By T. W. Ford 45**  
All the evidence pointed to a clear case of murder and suicide . . .
- CONCRETE EVIDENCE.....By Wilbur S. Peacock 53**  
Of murder was what John Shook's partner thought he was evading!
- RX TO HOMICIDE.....By John A. Saxon 56**  
It might have been a tired druggist's slip—and the only way Ken Thomas could save his reputation was to find a criminal's slip!
- DEATH OF A RAT.....By Stephen J. Lynch 61**  
Retribution can wait as long as twenty years sometimes.

Cover by Leo Morey

Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

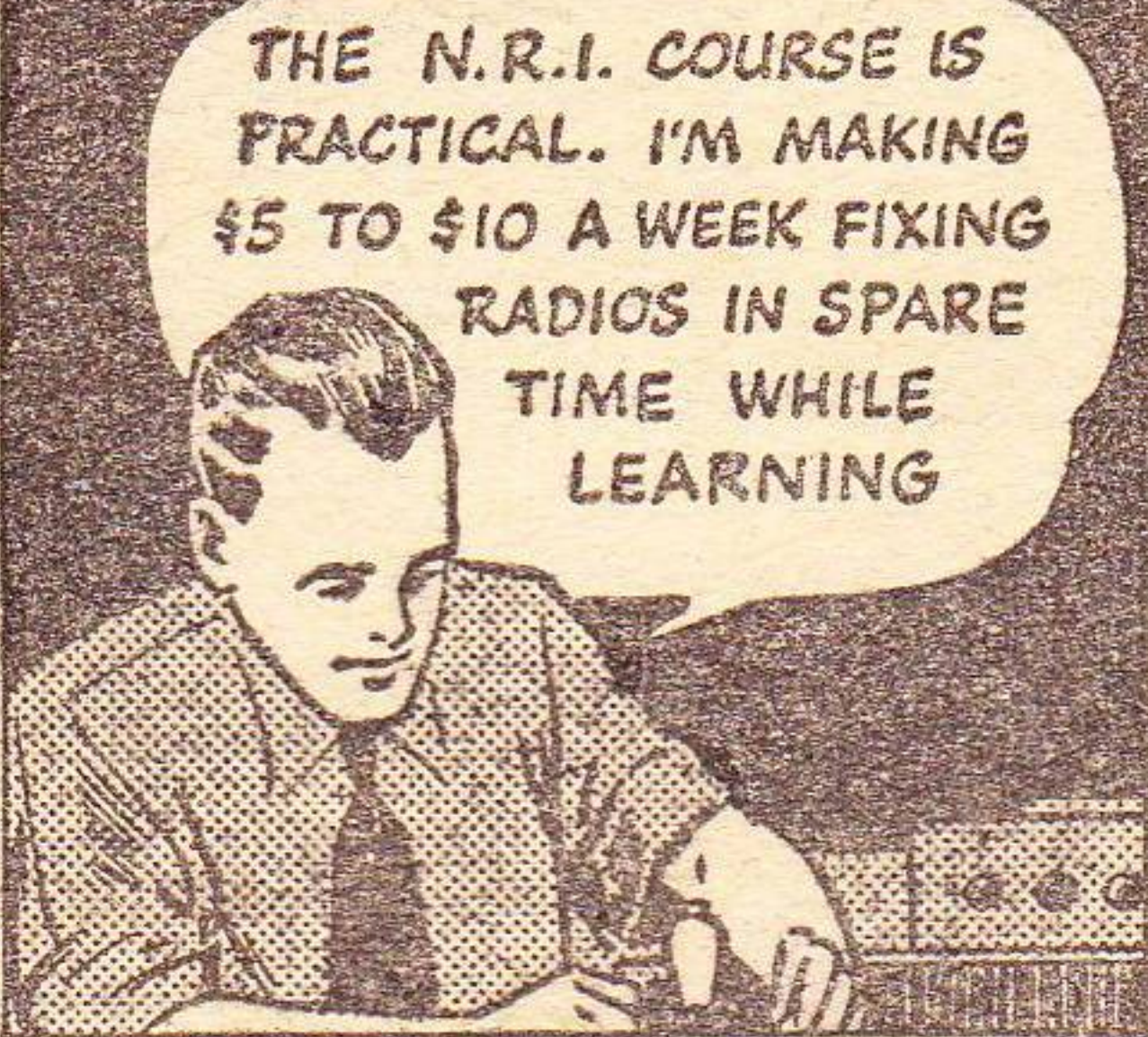
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**YES-** RADIO MEN ARE MAKING GOOD MONEY NOW AND HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE. I'M GOING TO START LEARNING RADIO RIGHT NOW!



**NO-** NOT ME. I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY TIME. SUCCESS IS JUST A MATTER OF LUCK AND I WASN'T BORN LUCKY.

BILL SAID "YES" HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY IN RADIO NOW



THE N.R.I. COURSE IS PRACTICAL. I'M MAKING \$5 TO \$10 A WEEK FIXING RADIOS IN SPARE TIME WHILE LEARNING



YOU SURE KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THANKS. I'M A FULL TIME RADIO TECHNICIAN NOW. N.R.I. HELPS A FELLOW JUMP HIS PAY



BILL, I'M SO PROUD OF YOU. YOU'VE WON SUCCESS SO FAST IN RADIO

YES! I'M MAKING GOOD MONEY THANKS TO N.R.I. AND WE HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE

TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"



BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME



SAME OLD GRIND - SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE - I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO



GUESS I'M A FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A FAILURE UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. WISHING AND WAITING WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE



## BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN I Will Train You at Home

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Coupon. Get my 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio," FREE.

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The day you enroll I start sending you EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that help show how to make EXTRA money fixing Radios in spare time

while still learning. You LEARN Radio fundamentals from my easy-to-grasp lessons—PRACTICE what you learn by building Radio Circuits with parts I furnish—and USE your knowledge to make EXTRA money.

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MAIL COUPON to get my book. Read details about my Course—"50-50 Training Method"—6 Experimental Kits—EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS. Read letters from men I trained telling what they are doing, earning. No obligation. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or pasted on a penny postal! —J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 4MA2, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.



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By the time you've conducted 60 sets of Experiments with Radio Parts I supply — have made hundreds of measurements and adjustments — you'll have valuable PRACTICAL experience. The superheterodyne circuit shown here is just one unit you build. It will bring in local and distant stations.

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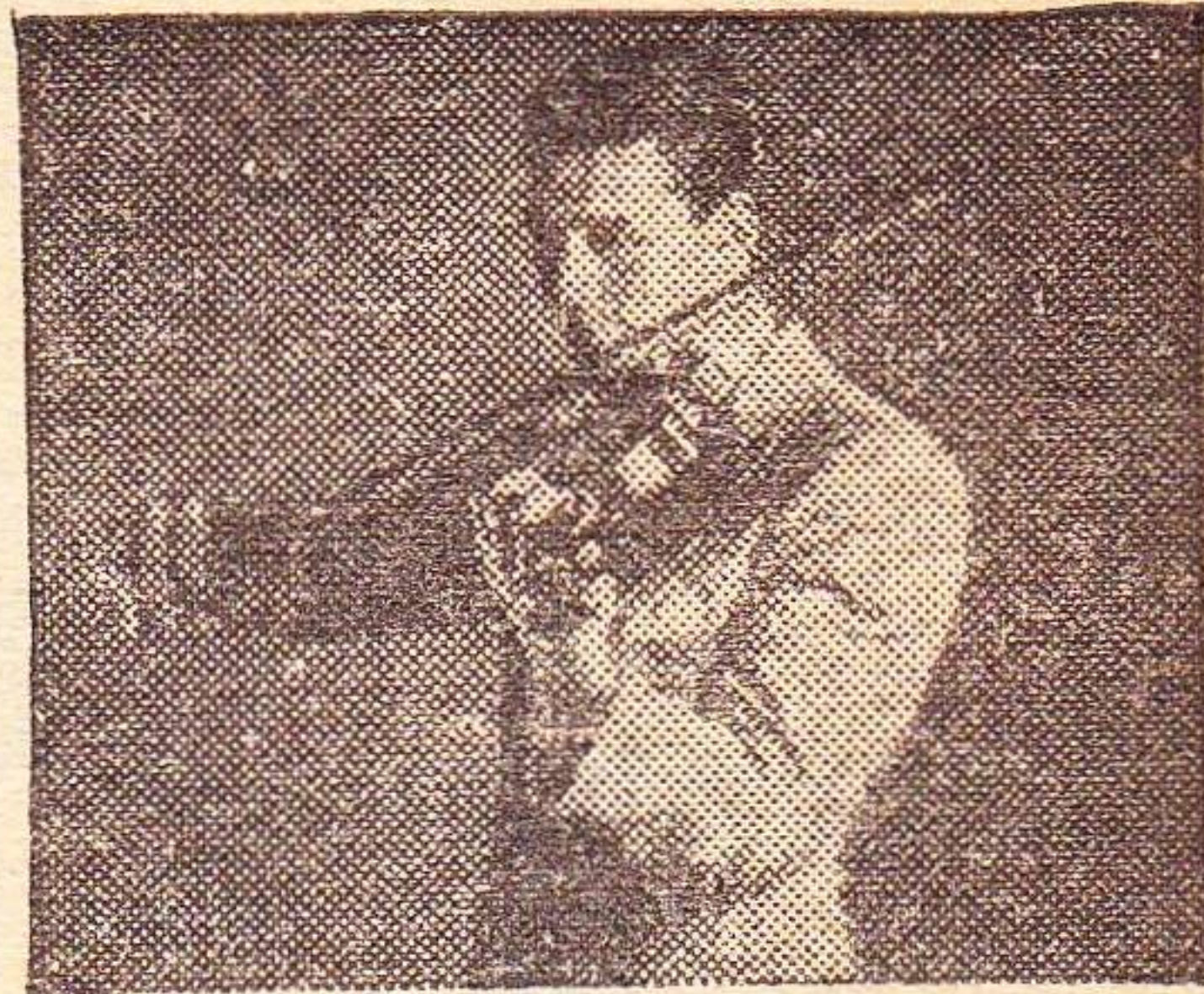
**FOUND ACCORDION EASY**

"I've always wanted to play the piano accordion," writes \*H. E. from Canada. "But thought I'd never learn it. Then I read about your lessons. I don't know how to express my satisfaction."



**PLAYS ON RADIO**

"I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your institution for such a wonderful course." \*W. H. S., Alabama.



**WOULDN'T TAKE \$1,000 FOR COURSE**

"The lessons are so simple. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course." \*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

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Then here's grand news for you! You can learn to play your favorite musical instrument, any instrument, for less than SEVEN CENTS a day! That's ALL it costs. Not a penny extra for sheet music or anything else. And it doesn't take years, either.

**Play a Tune in One Lesson**

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You learn to play by playing—just as you learned the English language by speaking it. There is no lost time, no waste motion.

You learn by a remarkable short-cut method! A modern, simplified method that skips all the tedious old-fashioned study and practice. A method that has literally swept the world, enrolling over 750,000 pupils. It's actually FUN to learn music this easy way.

**Here's the Secret**

"A picture is worth a thousand words," says the ancient Chinese proverb. And that is the secret of this easy way to learn music at home in spare

time. Your lessons come to you in print and picture form. Large, clear illustrations show you every position, every move.

See for yourself how easy it is to learn your favorite musical instrument this modern, short-cut way. And how inexpensive. Mail the coupon below for booklet and Print and Picture Sample, checking the instrument in which you are interested. Do it now. U. S. School of Music, 12310 Brunswick Bldg., New York, 10, N. Y. Forty-sixth year. (Est. 1893)

**NOTICE**

Please don't confuse the U. S. School of Music method with any system of teaching music "by ear" or by trick charts. Our method teaches you to play by actual notes—not by any trick or number system.

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Look at the notes above—they are F-A-C-E. Could anything be simpler? You are already learning to read music. And it's easy to play, too, for a remarkable invention, the "Note-Finder," tells you just where each note is located on the keyboard.

\*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional Models.

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NOTE! If you are under 16 years of age parent must sign coupon!

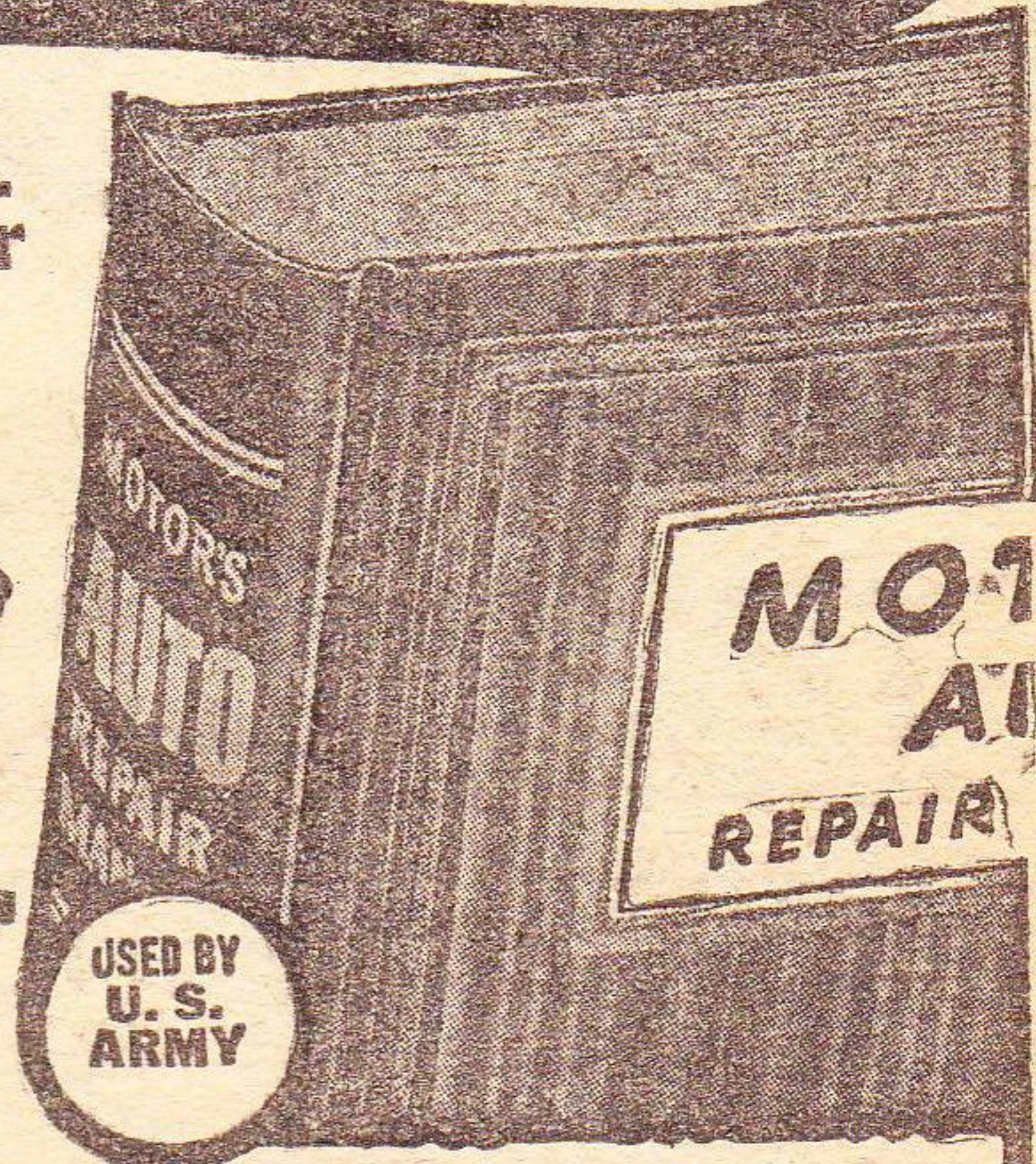
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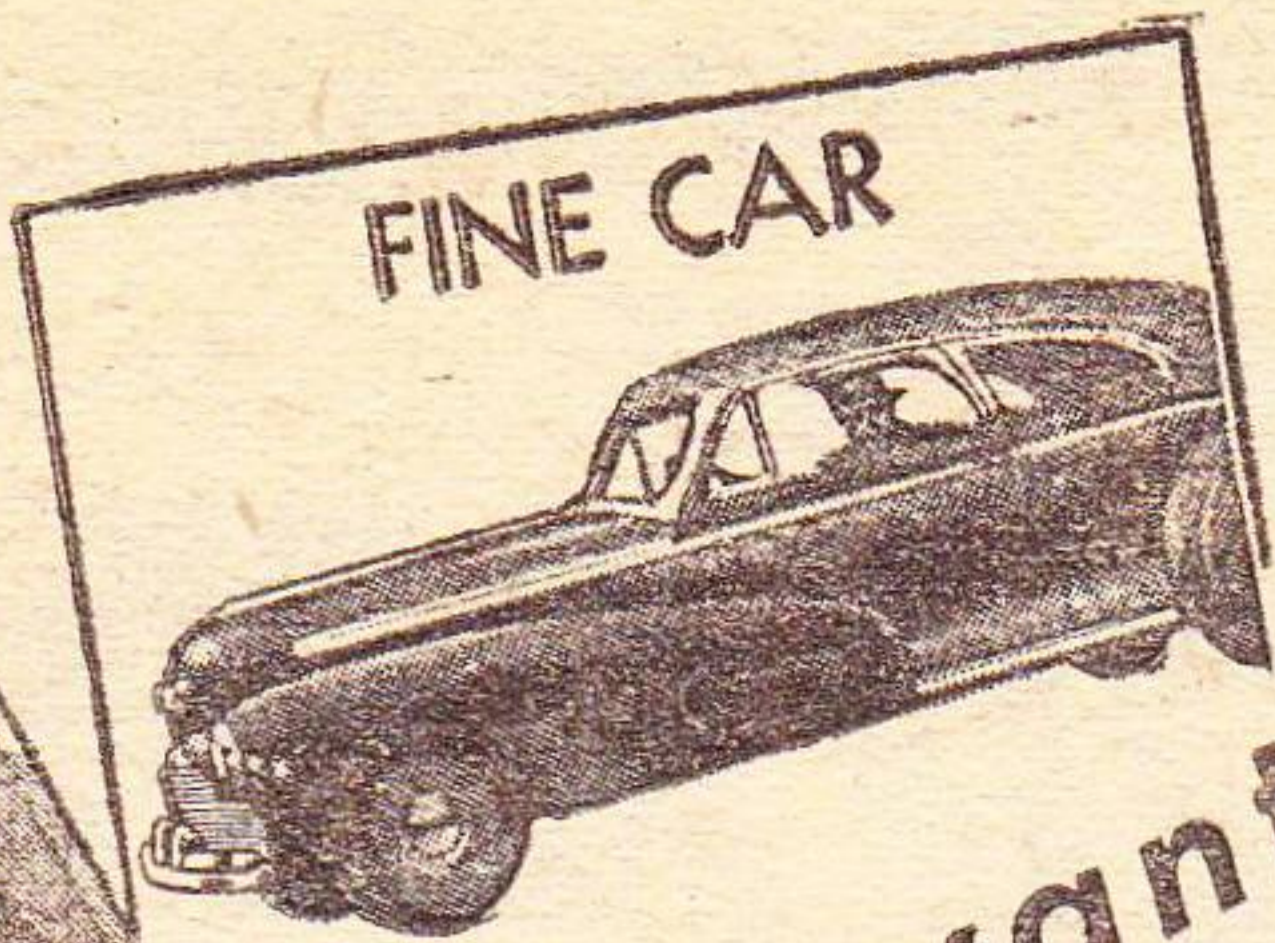
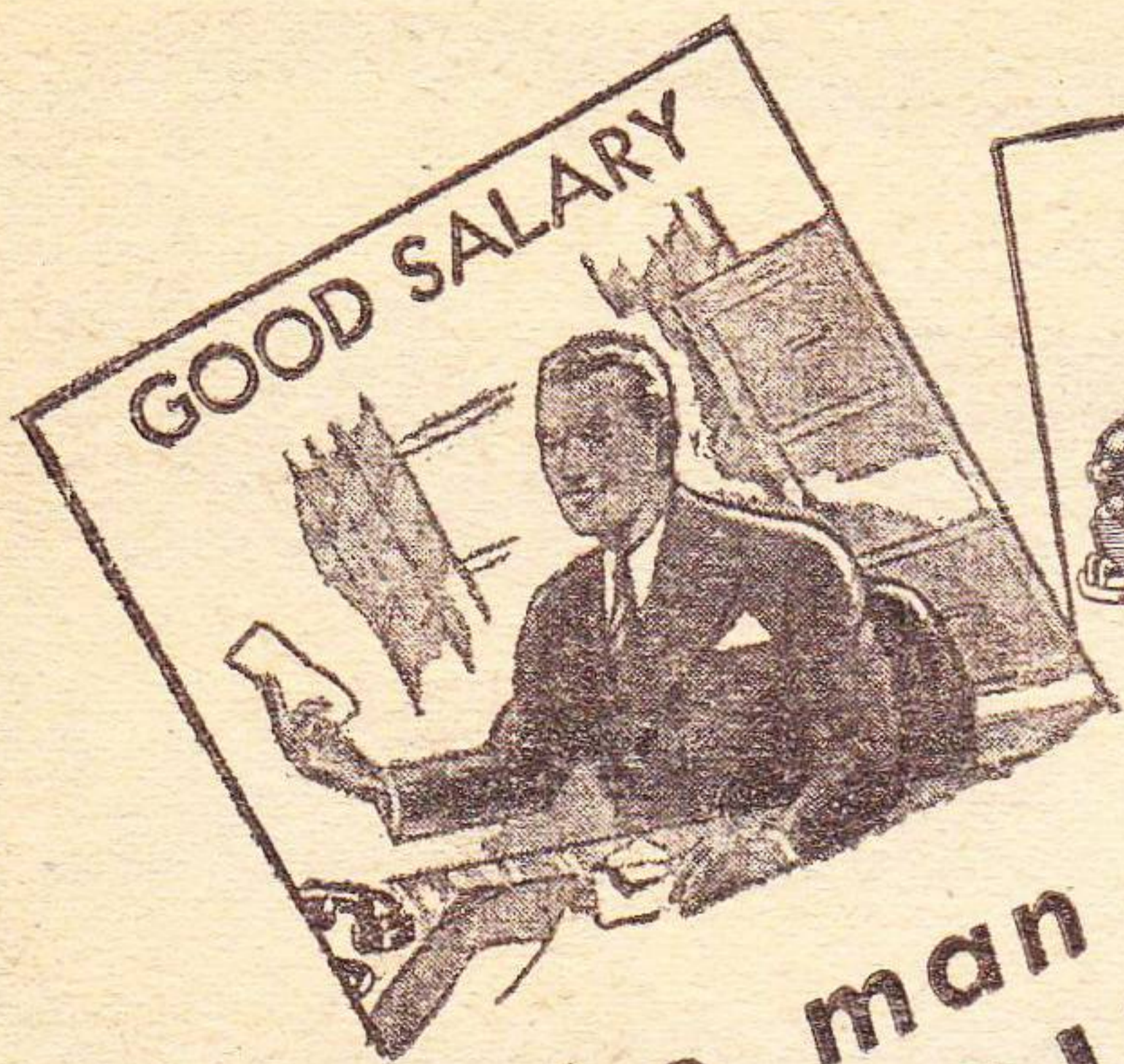
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To the man who wants to enjoy  
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Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of \$2,000 to \$10,000?

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Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

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Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

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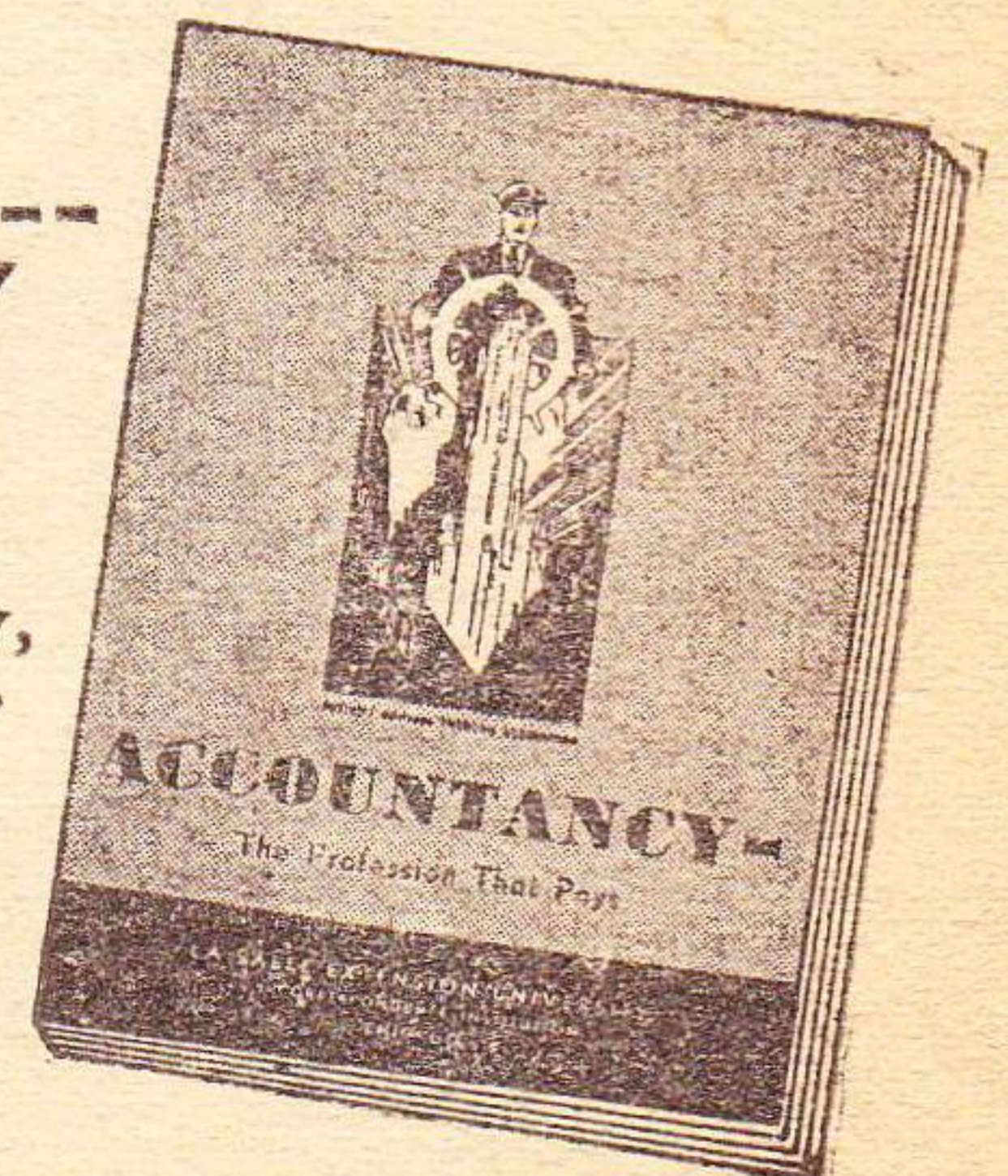
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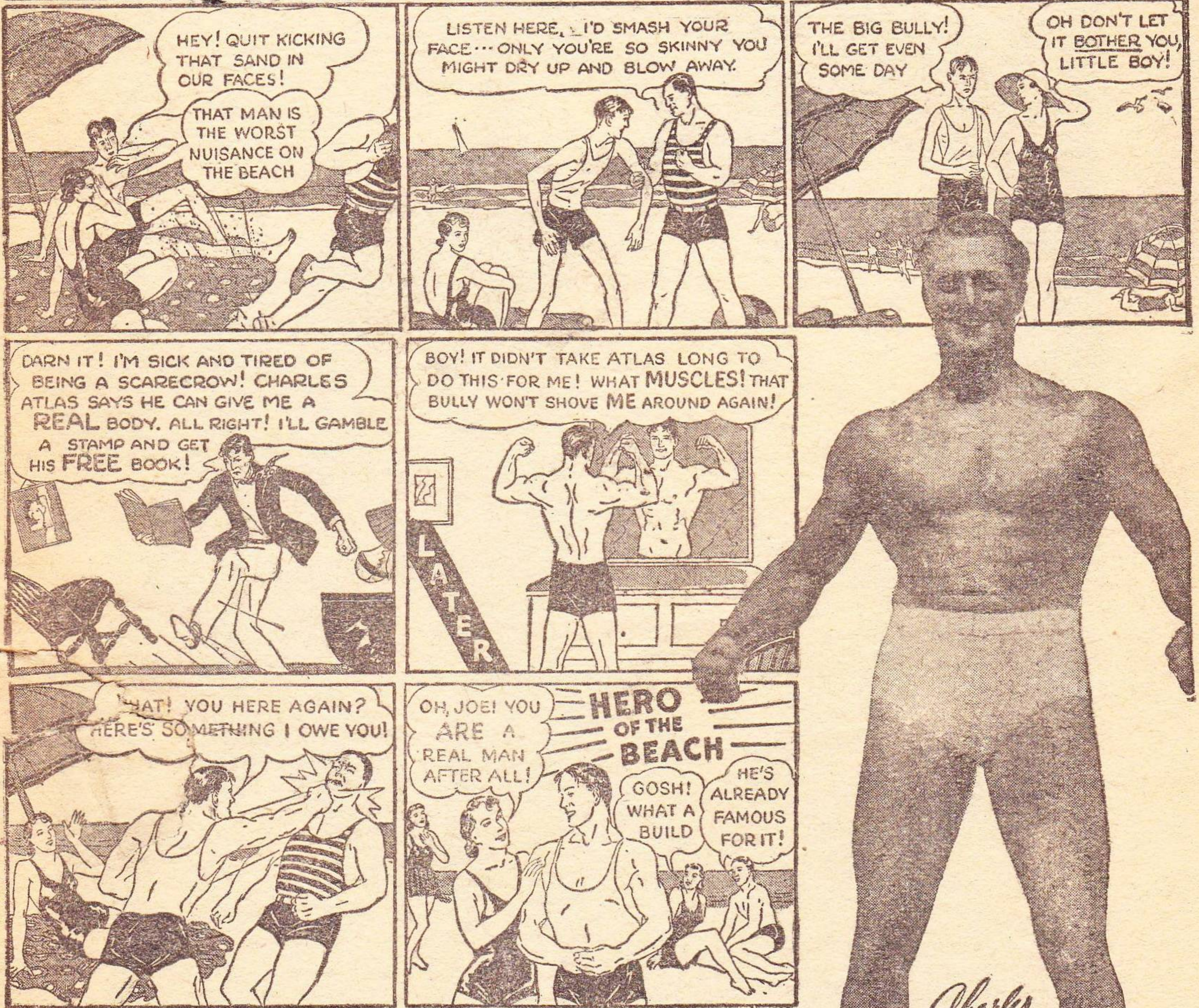
Position .....

Age .....





# HOW JOE'S BODY BROUGHT HIM FAME INSTEAD OF SHAME



## I Can Make YOU A New Man, Too in Only 15 Minutes A Day!

If YOU, like Joe, have a body that others can "push around"—if you're ashamed to strip for sports or a swim—then give me just 15 minutes a day! I'll PROVE you can have a body you'll be proud of, packed with red-blooded vitality! "Dynamic Tension." That's the secret! That's how I changed myself from a spindle-shanked, scrawny weakling to winner of the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

### "Dynamic Tension" Does It!

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

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

### FREE BOOK

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

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



*Charles Atlas*

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

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

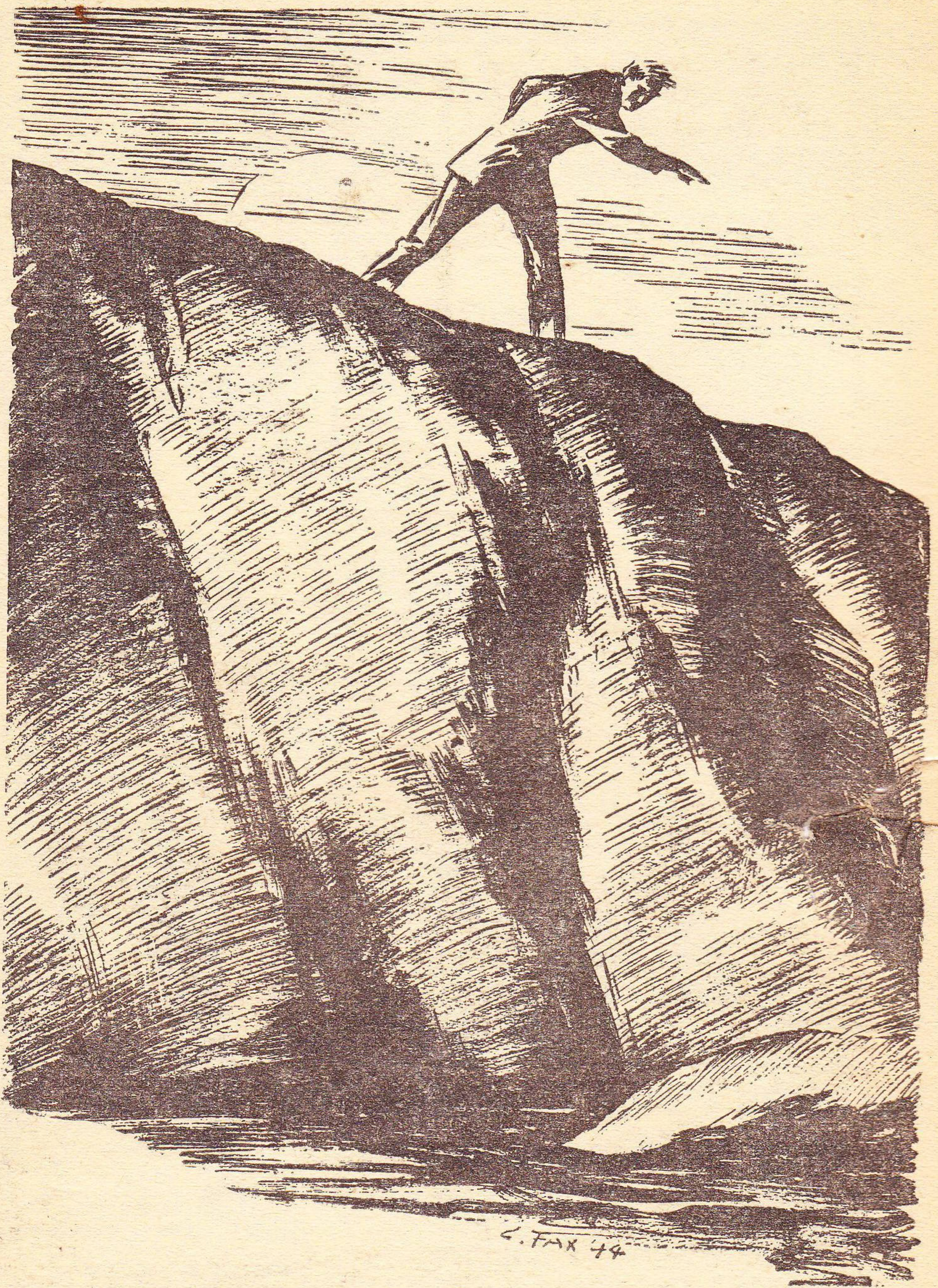
I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....  
(Please print or write plainly)

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

Check here if under 16 for Booklet A



The killer had it all reasoned out. People in murder stories go in for needless complications, and leave telltale evidence that traps them. But murder in real life needn't be that way, not if you keep it simple. Only, once he started killing, there didn't seem to be any end to it!

# KEEP IT SIMPLE

**By Mel Watt**

*(Author of "Try and Prove It!")*

Complete Mystery Novelet



## CHAPTER I

**H**E MUST have money; he was desperate. In his ruthless mind, he had explored every possible avenue and knew there was only one way he could get it, in the amount he needed.

It meant murder.

He didn't relish that, but neither did he recoil from the idea. You had to be tough or go under. He had always shown a pleasant front to people, but they had never meant very much to him. If they got in your way, either they had to step aside, or you did. He had never stepped aside, and he had no intention of doing so now—not as long as there was a solution, no matter how grim.

He left his dark bedroom, and in the space of a minute he was in another dark bedroom. His heart was thumping so hard he could feel the blood pressing against his eardrums, but he could hear the soft breathing of the form on the bed.

He knew this was risky business, but when you were playing for big stakes you had to take big risks. It was all or nothing.

He tiptoed soundlessly to the bedside. On the bed lay the elderly woman he had to murder. Sarah Kendall Coad, mistress of the Kendall millions. She suffered from a heart ailment; she might live a day, a month, a year, or several years. He could not wait for nature to decide.

He knew that in the drawer of her bedside table lay a box of heart tablets. Nitro-glycerin tablets, he believed they were. Whenever she felt an attack coming on, she was supposed to slip one of the tablets under her tongue.

There was, of course, always the possibility she might pass away in her sleep. She had steadfastly refused to have a nurse. "Nonsense," she had said, "I couldn't stand someone fussing around me all the time; I can take care of myself." So she had had her way.

Ordinarily, she could take care of herself. And if the thing ever got so bad she couldn't take care of herself,

then it would be too late for a nurse or anybody else to do any good.

It would be very simple to make it look like a natural death. Sometimes the attacks were in her chest, but more often they constricted her throat—as if she were choking, or strangling.

It wouldn't take long; she had so little resistance.

He picked up a pillow, and gently pressed it down over her face. There was some struggle, but it was very weak.

Minutes later, he took the pillow off. He listened; no sound at all. He replaced the pillow carefully where he had picked it up and tiptoed from the bedroom.

It hadn't been a pleasant job. But where was the sense, he told himself irritably, in a useless old woman holding on to all that money—when he could make much better use of it.

## CHAPTER II

**A**FTER the funeral of Sarah Kendall Coad, the bereaved group of people returned to Sea Cliff, the old Kendall mansion on a cliff above the sea. They sat around, silent, in the huge old living-room with its nautical decorations. They had the somewhat lost look of people who have just witnessed the burial of one of their own. One of them was pretending, of course, for one of them was a murderer.

None of them looked in the least like a murderer. They all looked like pleasant, civilized people—people of breeding, used to money and privilege.

It was Sam Coad, the dead woman's husband, who broke the awkward silence. Sam Coad looked like the movie conception of a senator, with his distinguished face and flowing hair. But the face was haggard now, and the hair had lost its careful brushing.

He covered his face with his hands, and groaned in deep despair: "Oh, God, what will I do without her?"

It was the tragic cry that has been repeated millions of times by the human race. It brought to his side a lovely girl whose tear-swollen eyes were filled with compassion. Sun-

light coming through the window, and dancing on her fair hair, was startlingly incongruous with the sorrow on her white face. She was Caroline Kendall, the dead woman's niece.

She put a hand gently on Sam Coad's shoulder, and said: "I know, Sam dear; it's terribly hard. But Aunt Sarah wouldn't want you giving way to despair. She used to say the greatest thing in life was courage. . ."

He took his hands away from his face, and stared straight ahead at nothing, and recited as if he had memorized it:

"I went from my bedroom to hers that morning, the minute I got up, the way I always did. I called to her: 'Arise, my lily maid of Astolat.' I always greeted her with some silly little thing like that. She loved it. Something silly and gay. She didn't answer, and I looked, and went closer. I touched her and she was cold. . .and I shook her and called to her. . .and she was dead. . .she was dead."

It was the third time he had told it. They all tried not to look at him. Caroline appeared silently to Doctor Hall. The doctor was a grayish little man with a thin, ironical face; a distant relative of Sam Coad.

Doctor Hall took Sam by the arm.

"Come along, Sam; I want you to rest. I'll give you a sedative. You're completely exhausted."

**W**HEN the two of them had gone upstairs, the tense silence settled down again on Caroline and the three men who were left with her: Bill McCune, her fiance; Ted Kendall, her cousin, Andy Matson, a distant cousin often referred to as "forty-second."

Ted Kendall broke the silence with a nervous sigh. "A drink would do us all good," he suggested. Andy Matson seconded the motion.

But Caroline and Bill McCune excused themselves, and went out and walked slowly along the cliff path.

"Pretty broken up, isn't he?" Bill said. He was about a foot taller than she, and his lean, hard body—made that way by building railroads in hard parts of the world—stooped towards her. His tough, brown face was grave;

and the goodhumored mockery usually at the corners of his mouth had given way to pity. That was the nice thing about Bill McCune, Caroline had found: he looked so hard, yet he could be so gentle.

Caroline said quietly: "They were awfully fond of each other." A reminiscent smile eased the solemnity of her lovely face. "The middle-aged way of love, Bill. Aunt Sarah used to say: 'Maybe it isn't as exciting as young love, but it's a lot more comfortable.'"

"Sounds just like her; she was a grand old girl."

They walked a little way in silence, then Caroline spoke again: "You know, I always thought Aunt Sarah married him out of gratitude. He was awfully good to her at the time of Uncle John Kendall's death. She often said she didn't know what she would have done without Sam."

"It must have been pretty tough on her," Bill said. "I mean, the way John Kendall died."

"Terrible. She heard the explosion out there in the bay; she saw him drown from her bedroom window."

"Did they ever find out what caused the explosion?"

"No," Caroline said. "The little outboard motor sank. They said it must have been a spark from Uncle John's pipe or cigar that got into the fuel somehow. He always smoked when he was out fishing."

"Yes," Bill McCune said. He walked along with a faintly puzzled frown. "Yes," he said, noncommittally, "that was probably what happened."

**B**ACK in the livingroom at Sea Cliff, Doctor Hall had rejoined Andy Matson and Ted Kendall. He sat down with a sigh and lit a cigar, and Andy mixed a highball for him.

"Here," Andy said. "You need it. How is he?"

"Thanks. His nerves are all shot. Sam's one of those people who go all-out with their emotions, but they usually snap back just as quickly. He'll be all right."

Andy Matson—Andrew Howard Matson, industrial tycoon, if you in-

sist on the formalities—stood, legs apart, looking down thoughtfully into his glass. He was a stocky, muscular man, and bushy black eyebrows on his broad face made him look somewhat beetle-browed when he frowned, which he did often—but the expression scared no one who knew him. A friend had described him once as having “the eyes of a philosopher and the face of a saloon bouncer.” Perhaps his business had put its iron stamp on his features. He had been a manufacturer of hardware, whose factory had turned to the making of artillery for national defense.

He said, thoughtfully: “I knew they got along well together, but I never thought it would hit him this hard. Somehow, Sam never gave me the impression of very deep emotion toward others.”

Doctor Hall’s grayish, ironic face turned up to Andy, and he said dryly: “In a long career of handling people, the only thing I know for certain about people’s emotions is that they are completely unpredictable.”

Ted Kendall chuckled. He remarked, with friendly derision: “Andy knows more about machines than about people. I agree with you, doctor. Come down to my office during a market upset if you want to see just how unpredictable people can be.”

Ted Kendall, the dead woman’s nephew and Caroline’s cousin, was the head of Theodore Kendall Securities Company. He had the trim, well-dressed appearance of men in that business; his straight, athletic figure gave proof that he took a great deal of pride in keeping fit. There was a suggestion of the coiled spring about him, a spring under control. It was a control attained from observing the disgusting panic of other men in the money markets.

The three of them drifted into a desultory discussion of business and world affairs, the way a group of men do, no matter what the occasion or circumstances.

Ted finally yawned, and stood up. “I think I’ll go and change clothes. Abbot’s coming tomorrow, isn’t he?”

Abbott was Sarah Kendall Coad’s lawyer. He had sent word that an at-

tack of influenza prevented him from attending the funeral.

“Probably the day after, if his doctor permits it,” Andy said. “He said he’d wire as soon as possible.”

**T**HE lawyer arrived in the afternoon of the second day. Josiah Abbott was a bald, fat man who wheezed when he spoke.

They all gathered in the big living-room to hear him read the will; it did not take long.

It left everything to Sam Coad. After his death, the fortune was to be divided equally between Caroline Kendall and Ted Kendall.

After the lawyer had left, Sam spoke quietly: “Everything will go on as before, just as if Sarah were here. I’d like you all to stay for the summer, just as we’d planned. She’d want it that way, and so do it. You will stay, won’t you?”

They stayed, of course. After the first shock of bereavement had passed, life at Sea Cliff returned to normal. A little more subdued, of course, but still pleasant. Sam had been hit hard; but gradually, on the surface at least, he seemed to become more his old self again.

Everyone was extremely kind to him. They made a concerted effort to pull him out of the dark brooding well into which he had sunk himself. All of them, Sam included, were probably thus too preoccupied to notice the questioning look which Bill McCune turned on Sam several times, when he thought no one was watching.

### CHAPTER III

**S**AM COAD couldn’t sleep. Sleepless nights were pretty frequent. He got up and left the house quietly, so as not to disturb the others, and went for a walk. He hated walking, and avoided it as much as he could, but he had to admit it usually made him sleep better. Continuing the sleeping pills would have been simpler, of course; but Doc had called a halt on that, warning him that it was a bad and often dangerous habit to acquire.

There was a half moon behind a thin

haze; it was like light filtering through gauze. A mild but steady wind drew streaky clouds across the sky.

He walked towards the cliff path, purely from habit; he always took the same walk. His morose thoughts walked with him.

Why, he asked himself wearily, couldn't he shake this dark, brooding mood that had been on him ever since Sarah went? Why couldn't he shake this unreasonable sense of guilt? It was true, he had played on Sarah's helplessness at the time of John Kendall's death, and he had married her for her money. But, just as true, he had come to be fond of her, really fond of her; he had given her a lot of happiness, he thought. That was what counted, wasn't it? Then why this sense of guilt?

Perhaps it was because she had left him everything. It wasn't so much the money itself, as what leaving it to him meant. It meant her complete trust in him, her faith, and her gratitude. It left him feeling somehow cheap and ashamed. . .

And yet he *had* made it up to her. He had been good to her and given her happiness.

He walked on, brooding, arguing with himself, trying to convince himself. He was scarcely aware of it when he turned to walk back along the cliff path; he acted purely from habit. His mind wasn't on the walk at all. He wasn't even conscious of the sound of the breaking waves on the rocks far below.

His head bent, his thoughts turned inward, he wasn't aware of the figure coming along the path from the opposite direction until he was only a few yards from it. He saw the faint glow of a cigar. It startled him a little, until he saw who it was.

"Oh, it's you," he said. He added, a little apologetically: "I couldn't sleep. I thought a walk would help."

The other chuckled and said: "Two of a kind. I had the same idea. Better than sleeping pills, anyway."

They walked along in silence for a short way.

Sam said, with a selfconscious laugh: "Truth is, I sneak out like this

often. I hate walking, but it does help. . ."

He never finished. Something heavy came down on his head, and the blackout was instantaneous. He had no chance to cry out.

**T**HE murderer threw the iron wrench as far as he could out into the water. It was only a few yards to the cliff edge. He picked up the limp form, took it to the edge and threw it over. It was a long drop. The only sound was the pounding of the waves against the rocks.

He, the murderer, shivered a little from the reaction. This time, it had been harder to do—especially having to face Sam and speak to him first. But what else was there to do? A bare path, along flat table-land. No jutting rocks; nothing to hide behind and spring out and get it over with quickly. But it was over now, and safely. Even if the night were not hazy, no one could possibly see from the house. Tall pines and spruce around the house cut off any view of the cliff path.

The reaction didn't last long. His egotism, his scorn and impatience of obstacles, soon brought back his cold nerve.

Confound Sarah's will, anyway! Leaving everything to Sam like that; everything—until his death. . . He had nothing against Sam personally; it was merely necessary to eliminate Sam. Time was getting shorter, and his desperate need was closer. There would still be exasperating delay about the will—probating it, and all such legal red tape.

His thoughts turned, with a sudden detachment that somewhat amazed him, to the act of murder. As long as you kept it simple, you were safe. It was only when you cluttered it up, with a lot of fancy scheming, that you were in danger of being found out. People in murder stories always went in for needless complications, and left telltale evidence that got them caught. Murder in real life needn't be that way, not if you kept it simple.

He turned from the cliff path up through the trees to the house. He noted that the wind was rising; it

swirled around the cliffs and swished through the trees. A dark cloud blacked out the hazy halfmoon.

He went back into the house the same way he had come out: through the front door, quietly but not furtively. The downstairs part of the house was dark. He slipped into the coat-room, and exchanged the lightweight coat he was wearing for his dressing robe, which he had left there when he went to meet Sam. This had been a precaution—and a minute later it was to prove a good one.

The house was still, except for the heavy ticking of a grandfather clock near the foot of the stairs. He walked up the heavily carpeted stairs soundlessly. He made no haste. Haste, at the wrong time, was foolish.

**T**HERE was a small night light in the upstairs hall. He glanced quickly at all the bedroom doors, and moved smoothly along the carpet to his own door. His hand closed over the knob and turned it gently. It made no sound. He pushed the door.

And then he heard the click of another doorknob! Across the hall, a door opened!

In that moment of time, when a split-second decision must be made, he showed the cool audacity of what fiction writers call the "master criminal." If he had given way to panicky animal instinct—the instinct to run and hide—he would have scurried into his room. But he did not give way to animal instinct; a lightning flash of reason warned him that he had already been seen—and to try to hide now would be stupid.

So instead of darting into his room, he deliberately pulled the door shut, as if he were just coming out. He looked around, casually, as if he had just become aware of the opening of the other door. His self-control was magnificent.

He smiled and spoke easily to the man coming out of the other doorway.

"Hell, Bill. You, too? I couldn't sleep. I thought I'd go down and have another nightcap."

Bill McCune grinned. "Swell. I'll join you. Got any cigarettes?" The other handed him a pack of cigarettes

out of the pocket of his robe. They walked down the carpeted hall together. Bill chuckled, and said: "I guess you must have got forty winks in. I couldn't find any cigarettes anywhere, and I rapped on your door, knowing you're a night owl. But I couldn't rouse you."

An icy chill ran up the murderer's spine and burst at the base of his brain. Think fast! Watch yourself. Act! Act as you never acted before!

His careless, apologetic laugh was a masterpiece of self-control.

"Yes. I've been dropping off for a few minutes at a time, but it doesn't last."

He couldn't remember, afterwards, what they chatted about while they had their nightcaps. His mouth emitted words, but his eyes and his mind probed McCune. He recalled, with grim humor, a famous cynical remark: "Speech was given us to conceal our thoughts."

He could see no sign of suspicion in McCune's face. That casual remark of McCune's—"I rapped on your door but I couldn't rouse you"—must have been made innocently. Of course it must! What was there for McCune to suspect?

But what about tomorrow, when they found out about Sam? The simple explanation of Sam's death would be suicide due to despondency and melancholia; everyone knew he had not really succeeded in shaking off his morbid mood. But would this satisfy McCune, too?

Or would McCune start wondering about the unanswered rap on the bedroom door? Wondering about the obvious fact that he, the murderer, must have looked remarkably wide awake for a man who claimed to have been dozing on the edge of sleep? Wondering—and growing suspicious.

But what of it? What could McCune prove? Nothing. Nothing at all.

Only, this: if his suspicions were aroused, he might start inquiries on the quiet. He might start a ball rolling; a ball that could inevitably grow to the proportions of an avalanche. An avalanche that would expose the motive for all this.



That would be disastrous. Even if murder couldn't be proved, it would be ruinous.

The nightcaps and cigarettes finished, they went upstairs again. McCune said, in his friendly way: "I hope we can sleep now. Good night."

The murderer entered his room, and took off his robe, and lowered his dark-pajamaed body to the bed with a sigh. Nice chap, McCune; he liked him, and Caroline was very much in love with him. They made a fine pair.

But if McCune made a nuisance of himself and got in the way. . .

A momentary feeling of weariness, almost of despair, clutched the murderer. Was it always this way? Was there no end to it, once you started?

#### CHAPTER IV

**T**HE elements decided that Sam Coad was to get his burial on land. The sea did not take him and carry him out. His body was between two rocks: like two guards holding him.

It hadn't taken much time to find him. He wasn't in his room, nor anywhere in the house. None of the cars nor boats were gone, and he certainly wouldn't have walked to the village of Sea Cove, four miles away.

It was then, knowing Sam's dark mood, that they became alarmed. They went all over the grounds, but the cliff edge drew them like a great magnet. It seemed to pull them towards itself, with a terrible inevitability.

It was Bill McCune and Caroline who first saw the body, far down below. They hadn't wanted Caroline to come, but she had insisted. Bill had a bad moment when she swayed with a sudden nausea, dangerously close to the cliff edge. He struck her roughly with his arm and knocked her back, just in time.

Bill called out to the others. They came running.

Andy Matson whispered thickly: "Good God!"

Ted Kendall turned away abruptly, a sickly gray, and covered his face with his hands.

Doctor Hall sighed and made a ges-

ture of resignation. "I can't imagine Sam doing anything like this."

Ted Kendall sneered with sudden bitter anger: "I thought you said he'd be all right?"

Caroline said: "Please, Ted."

"It's all right," the doctor said quietly. He shook his head sadly. "Unfortunately, you can't help a man much unless he's willing to help himself."

With the air of men from the village, they got the body out. The village constable came along, and with him the village doctor. They found no cause for official action. They ruled out accident, because, even though it had been dark, Sam knew the path too well to get off it very far; and besides, there had been some moonlight. So the conclusion was: suicide.

Caroline, with wet eyes and deep pity in her voice, said to Bill McCune: "Poor Sam. He must have loved her more than we knew."

#### CHAPTER V

**H**E COULD take no chances. True, he could observe no suspicion on McCune's face or in his actions, but that didn't mean it might not be there. McCune had a poker face.

The vital point was this: even if McCune was not yet suspicious, there was forever the danger that he might get suspicious, might start connecting things up. The situation was packed with dynamite.

So he could afford to take no chances; time was running fast.

They were closing up Sea Cliff. They wanted to get away from the scene; away from the oppressive atmosphere of death that had settled over the place and over their minds.

He knew he had to act promptly, but it did not panic him. He prided himself on his cool head. His life and work had schooled him to keep a level head in emergencies, no matter how great his inner tension.

He saw, perhaps foresaw is the better word, his opportunity the day after Sam Coad's burial.

They had taken the speedboat and

the fishing-launch down to the village, where an old sailor took care of them between summer seasons. But there still remained the sailboat. The day was warm and very still, and there was no breath of wind to carry her.

He knew, however, that no matter how still the day, after the sun went down a brisk breeze invariably arose. He looked up the weather report, and found it to say: cloudy towards night-fall with some rain, intermittent winds moderate to gusty.

He said to the others: "I'll sail her down this evening. My car's in the village being serviced, and I've got to go down and get it anyway."

The breeze rose with the last reflections of the setting sun.

He maneuvered until he could get McCune alone. They strolled in the direction of the private pier.

He smoked calmly, and remarked: "Good time to sail her down now. Want to come along?"

He was tense inside, waiting for McCune's reply. He was banking on McCune's agreeable nature.

"Okay," McCune said. "If you're sure I won't be in your way. I'm a pretty clumsy sailor."

He could find no hint of suspicion or reluctance in McCune's friendly reply.

"Let's go," he said.

**H**E RAISED sail and settled himself at the helm. He took the little boat out into the bay, where he could lay her on a straightaway for the village.

Presently McCune said to him: "Quite a trick, handling that tiller. Makes me realize what a landlubber I am."

He said to McCune, jokingly, knowing what the reply would be: "Like to try it?"

McCune shook his head emphatically. "No thanks! I've seen what happens when a clumsy landlubber tries it. I'd very likely land us both in the drink!" He grinned. "And I'm no fish."

He peered at McCune and a queer little chill ran up his spine. No, McCune was no fish. *McCune couldn't swim at all*; he had confessed that

when he first came to Sea Cliff; he wouldn't even get into swimming trunks.

They sailed on in silence for a little while. They had covered about half the distance to the village, but the irregular coastline was less than a nautical mile away.

The light was beginning to fade. Clouds were riding in on the wind. The wind had risen—not in steady force; but gusty blows, tricky and mean, which required a skilled hand at the helm.

One sudden jerk, one twist of the rudder, and the little sailboat would go over like a shot seagull.

Now was the time.

He stared at McCune, and a sudden cruel urge, which surprised even himself, made him say: "Too bad you can't swim, McCune."

McCune grinned at him, said: "Oh? Why?"

He was staring into McCune's eyes when he jerked over the helm. The little boat gave a violent lurch.

McCune cried: "Hey, look out! What are you trying to do?"

McCune was holding on for dear life.

It happened very quickly.

The wind, like a suddenly unleashed beast leaping upon a helpless thing, struck the sail of the little craft a full broadside. Rudderless, she reeled a little, shuddered, and started to flop over.

He had kicked off his shoes and sprung up from the helm. As he poised to leap free, he called to McCune:

"Sorry, McCune. You might be a nuisance."

As he jumped, he heard McCune yell: "You crazy fool—!"

Then the sail smacked the water.

He swam around the floundered boat, to make sure. There was no sign of McCune. He was either trapped in the boat or under the sail.

Satisfied, he took off in an easy crawl. He was an expert swimmer. Dusk was deepening as he made for the shore.

He was about halfway to shore when he heard the sound of a speedboat, coming from the direction of the

village. A wave of anger, not fear, swept through him. Confound their ever-prying eyes! The anger, however, left quickly. It would be quite possible for the villagers, even in the half-light, to have seen the sailboat go over. It didn't matter. For, at that distance and in that light, it would be quite impossible to see how the "accident" had been accomplished.

In the deepening twilight the speedboat glided cautiously around the overturned boat. She had turned on her foglight and was playing it over the water. He shouted at them. The wind was blowing in to shore and he had to shout several times before they caught it. The speedboat streaked towards him.

They picked him up and started back towards the private pier at Sea Cliff. He pretended more exhaustion than he actually felt. He cried at them: "Where are you going? Turn back! There's another man. . .!"

One of the boatmen spoke, tersely: "No sign of him. He's gone. Here, drink this." He drank the liquor, and heard the boatman speak again: "Too dark to search now. Probably wouldn't do any good anyhow."

They were waiting on the pier at Sea Cliff. Caroline ran up before the boat had stopped, peered with desperate eyes at every man in it, and cried: "Bill? Where's Bill?"

The boatman remained silent. He dragged himself onto the pier, and stood before her, and spoke humbly: "I tried to find him, after we went over. I—I couldn't."

He caught her as she fainted.

## CHAPTER VI

**I**N THE library at Sea Cliff, he sat before a blazing fireplace. He had changed to dry clothes, and he had a hot drink in his hand. He was alone. The others were busy; taking care of Caroline, and accompanying the village boatmen who were towing the wrecked sailboat into the village.

On the way up to the house he had told them, in a choked voice: "I should never have let Bill take the helm, but he insisted. It slipped from

his hand when a strong gust hit us, and we were over before we knew it."

At the house he had said: "Look after Caroline, and take care of things. I'll be all right. All I need is a drink and a rest."

He had kept it simple. Everything was all right. Yes, everything was all right now. He fingered the revolver in his coat pocket. He wondered just why he had taken the precaution of putting it there. Was this the way of murderers? Even when you felt quite safe, quite sure everything was all right, was there still a dread in your mind?

With the onset of darkness the wind had risen higher. It rattled the French doors of the library, and beyond them he could hear stray leaves and twigs swishing across the cement floor of the veranda. He got up suddenly and went over to look out. He didn't know why; he cursed himself softly for acting like a jittery fool. He despised jittery people. This feeling of contempt promptly brought back his egotism and his cool self-control; he returned to the fireplace.

He was in a half-doze from the warmth of the fire and the drink when he heard a car drive up. One of the others returning from the village, very likely. Or possibly the constable come to get a report of the accident. Very painstaking fellow, Constable Dodds.

But when the library door opened, and he looked up to see who it was, he was surprised to see the constable standing there.

"Oh, it's you, constable," he said, adding, in mild rebuke: "I didn't hear you knock."

"Sorry." The constable was polite, but stiffly official. "I'll have to hold you on the complaint of William McCune, pending inquiries. The charge is attempted murder."

He jumped from his chair. Beside the constable was his deputy. And advancing into the room with them—Bill McCune!

**F**OR a half dozen moments he stared at them, frozen in his motions like a man caught by a still camera. Then, in sudden rage, his hand

streaked for his pocket — but not quickly enough. "Take it easy," the deputy warned. There was a gun in the deputy's hand; the deputy walked up to him and took his revolver from his pocket.

Abruptly he shrugged, and assumed a scornful expression. His flash of rage had been only a flash. In his vain mind, he felt quite proud of himself; it fed his egotism to think that he was acting like a superior being. He prided himself on being a realist; and the reality of the situation was that they had him in a trap—temporarily, at least. But he would not give them the satisfaction of seeing him act like a panic-stricken animal.

He gazed with curiosity at McCune. He said: "For a man who couldn't swim, you did pretty well. Why the pretense?"

"I'll come and tell you in prison," McCune said mockingly. McCune's smile was grim. His hard eyes never blinked. He said: "Seeing the jig's up, suppose you tell us the big idea behind all this?"

He eyed McCune disdainfully. "Suppose you go to hell? The next scene, I believe, is where the villain is taken away. Shall we go, gentlemen?"

McCune said: "Still the superman, eh?" McCune's mockery for a moment roused sudden anger in him, but he controlled it, and feigned a bored yawn: "You're still a nuisance, McCune."

As they took him outside, Constable Dodds unbent a little to say: "You're being very sensible, making no fuss."

"I'm a logical man, constable," he said. "If I lose, I lose. What would I gain by making a fuss?"

They put him into the back of the constable's ancient open touring-car, and the constable got in beside him. McCune sat in front with the deputy, who drove.

So this was the dismal end! It was incredible. His careful plan of murder, perfect in its simplicity, perfect in its execution, success and safety in his grasp—and then this man who said he couldn't swim comes back, and pushes the whole thing over on top of him!

His thoughts raced on, while the car

swung down the drive to meet the cliff road. No one spoke.

They couldn't prove murder, but that no longer mattered much. They *could* prove attempted murder of McCune, and the other thing—the tremendous theft that was the hidden motive for all this. It would mean disgrace, his life wrecked, and years in prison.

A brief bitter smile passed over his lips as he recalled something he had told himself at the beginning of all this: it was all or nothing. So it was nothing.

The car turned onto the cliff road; a road of turns and steep declines that did not permit much speed.

Disgrace. Ruination. Prison. The three words beat like hammers on his brain. Disgrace. Ruination. Prison. Long dreary years, perhaps the rest of his life, in prison, without hope.

The three words made his decision for him. They made it quite clear to him that his egotistical pride could never tolerate that.

Before they knew what he was doing, he had vaulted over the side of the touring-car, and streaked into the outer edges of trees that covered the estate. He heard the car squeal to a stop, and their loud cries raised behind him. The long beam of a flashlight lanced through the trees. He kept on running. Towards the cliff edge.

When he was clear of the trees, and on the cliff path, the flashlight beam caught him. Above the pounding of their feet, he heard McCune's shout: "Stop, you fool! What does this get you? You can't get away!"

He could not resist a moment of bravado, so typical of all his kind. He paused for just a moment, to turn and call back defiantly: "That's where you're wrong! This is where I get off!"

He left the path and ran towards the cliff edge. He did not stop at the edge. He kept on going. . .

The flashlight beam caught him for a moment in mid-air. He looked like some grotesque, floundering bird. Then he dropped from sight. . . It was an eerie scene that the three

shocked pursuers were never to forget.

## CHAPTER VII

**I**T TOOK several days for efficient investigators to bring all the dreadful facts to light.

His theft of a staggering sum in negotiable securities, held in trust, from the vault of the Theodore Kendall Securities Company.

His failure to make a big killing in the market, and the loss of the securities, which he had used as collateral.

His knowledge, first, that the owners would call up those securities—held in trust by the Kendall Company—sooner or later. And second, his later knowledge that, due to the tax situation, all owners of securities would make a check of them before the next filing date. This left him in a fearful situation. Drastic action was urgent.

What followed was, to his ruthless and desperate mind, logical and necessary.

He couldn't ask Sarah for such a tremendous loan. She would want the details, and that was out of the question. Whether she died from a heart attack or whether he killed her, the investigators had no way of proving. But she left everything to Sam Coad, and the same obstacle to a huge loan was in the way; so Sam Coad had to go. Again, no proof. But it was a logical inference, because Sam Coad had to be eliminated before the fortune could come into hands who could make the necessary use of it. This "necessary use" was the re-purchase of the securities—it was apparent he knew where he could get them—and their return to the Kendall Company vault.

In her apartment in the city, Caroline said in a horrified voice: "I can't believe it! I just can't believe it! I'd always looked upon him as a successful man, a captain of industry, pillar of society, and all those things!"

"It was to preserve the appearance of those things," Bill said, "that he did what he did. When he was caught, and knew he was about to lose those things, it was too much for his egotistical pride."

**C**AROLINE said, incredulously: "Andy Matson, of all people!"

Bill nodded slowly. "Right. Andy Matson, of all people. Yet, being what he was, it was all somehow inevitable. His gambling had got him and his factory in desperate straits, but he couldn't tolerate failure and ruin. So, being a silent partner of Ted's in the Kendall Securities Company, he took the securities from the vault. Later, he got government contracts for his factory, but money didn't come quickly enough nor in large enough sums for his needs. So, when things went wrong, he turned to murder, knowing that a large part of the fortune would come to Ted. He knew he had an ironclad hold over Ted—because Ted, as head of the firm, would be legally held just as guilty as he."

"But Ted knew nothing about it!" Caroline cried. "He's ill from the shock of it. It isn't fair!"

Bill smiled, and patted her hand. "I think that's going to be all right. Doctor Hall seems to have quite a bit of influence in this town, and he's been in conference with the district attorney. I think when the circumstances are known, and Ted makes full restitution, he won't have much to worry about."

A sudden shudder ran through Caroline, and she held onto Bill's hands and drew closer to him. "Thank heaven you could swim, after all. And will you please tell me why you pretended you couldn't? No more evasions."

With a somewhat self-conscious grin, he told her: "Well, you have to know sometime, I suppose. I got smacked on the back by a heavy piece of metal, on a rail-building job in South America. My back looks like a corrugated washboard. I'm a little bashful about showing it to the world."

It was good to see the healthy amusement that replaced the horror that had been in her eyes. She laughed at him, and said: "Bill, you idiot."

THE END

# KILLER'S ★ ★ ★

## ★ CURTAIN CALL

**By Robert Turner**

*(Author of "Bride and Doom," "Kill-o'-the-Wisp," etc.)*

*All Evan Molloy wanted was a few days fun before going into service — and perhaps he might find a girl to whom he could come home when it was over. But someone wanted more — wanted Molloy's scalp, nailed to a murder frame!*

**T**HE little furnished room was black. It was deadly quiet. The only sound was the roaring in his ears and as consciousness seeped back and he quit trying to get up from the floor, that faded. He sprawled, sobbing his breath, his head big with pain, his mouth cottony.

Suddenly, somewhere down hall a radio blared. Below, the front door slammed open and shut and people came in, laughing, talking. A distant telephone clanged for a few seconds, then went quiet as somebody answered it.

"What's the matter with me?" he whispered, thickly, into the darkness. "What happened?"

Strength flowed back into him slowly. He raised to his hands and knees, crawled, clumsy as a new-born colt, and bumped into a wall. He clawed his way up the wall, until his fingers fumbled at the light switch, flicked it on. But the sudden light made him dizzy. He leaned against the wall, his face and eyes tight against his arm and sucked in deep, hard breaths. Things came to him, then, in a flooding backwash of memory.

"No!" he said. "Hell, no! This couldn't happen to me."

It couldn't. There was no reason. It was crazy. He was Evan Molloy, a lanky, rawboned guy with an ugly face and an easy grin. He was just a bumpkin hired hand from an upstate farm, down in New York for a week's pre-induction fling. All he'd wanted was to see the big town, have a little simple fun—maybe meet a girl, someone to write him when he was in the Army. He'd never had a girl.

Some of the fun he'd had, the first few days. He had hopes for the girl, even as shy as he was. There was Betty Simmons, the landlady's daughter, with whom, if things worked right. . .

He stopped thinking about Betty, suddenly, as he turned away from the wall and glanced about the room. He stared down now at the man on the floor; Molloy must have been stretched on the floor but a few feet away from this man, in the dark. The man was big, bull-necked, with heavy brutish features. He was sprawled on his back, arms and one leg outflung. The other leg was doubled up underneath him. His large mouth was gaping wide and Molloy could see big white teeth, studded with expensive gold filling. His small brown eyes,

*Suspenseful  
Novelet*



As the  
paper in  
the waste-  
basket  
flared up,  
Molloy  
made his  
ploy.

close set under a low forehead, were wide open, too; they stared unblinkingly at the ceiling. Precariously

perched on the man's chest was what looked like a peculiar looking set of spectacles, with thick, different sized

rims. Around this, the man's shirt was sodden with blood.

**E**VAN Molloy leaned forward from the waist, staring hard at these spectacles. He saw then that they were not spectacles. They were the handles of a huge pair of scissors, the closed blades of which had been jabbed all the way into the man's chest.

Another dizzy spell shook Molloy and he staggered a few feet away from the wall. At the last instant he saved himself from sprawling on his face across the scissor-stabbed corpse. He stood there swaying, remembering that those shears were a pair that had been left in the dresser drawer of this room by the last tenant. He remembered that the landlady had joked about them when she'd showed him the room.

Just then the door of Molloy's room swung open. A girl started in, came to a sudden stop as though she had run up against a stone wall. She was a little on the plump side, with a round, heavily made-up face. Her masked eyes bulged when she saw the dead man on the floor. Her crimson little mouth made a perfect O.

"Evan!" she said, in a small frightened voice. "It—it's Big Mac! You—Evan—you've killed him!"

She didn't say any more. Her throat suddenly swelled and she let out scream after scream that turned Molloy's bone marrow to ice.

He stood looking at her, his big red hands writhing awkwardly in front of him. "Stop," he said to her, over and over. "Stop it. Stop that screaming. You're wrong; I didn't kill him. I don't know him. I don't know you."

He kept saying those things, but it didn't do any good. The woman kept shrieking until every tenant in the boarding house came running and stood clustered behind her in the doorway, gaping over her shoulder.

Then just as suddenly as it began, the screaming stopped. The woman ran to Evan Molloy and threw herself into his arms. She was crying now. She said: "You didn't have to murder

him, Evan. You didn't have to stab Big Mac like that."

"No," he said, dumbly. He braced himself, tried futilely to tug her arms from around his neck. "Big Mac," he repeated the name several times. Then he said: "This is all wrong. The three little men said *he* would kill me, if I didn't stay away from—" He broke off, looked down on the carefully coiffured blond hair of the woman sobbing in his arms. "Patricia," he said, speaking in soft, stilted tones, like a man mesmerized. "You're Patricia. They said—the little men—that if I didn't stay away from you, Big Mac would kill me. But I—but I don't know you; I don't know Big Mac. I never saw either of you before."

**H**E LOOKED around, beseechingly, then, at the faces of the people gathered in the doorway. He knew them all, from mealtimes downstairs in the big dining room. There was horror, morbid curiosity and accusation in the eyes of all of them—mostly accusation. Mrs. Simmons, the landlady, and her daughter, Betty, were there. Tears were already filling the big blue softness of Betty's eyes as she saw the woman clinging to him, her arms about his neck.

Betty Simmons suddenly started shaking her head. She pulled her full lower lip between her teeth, pushed her hands up into her reddish-brown hair at the temples, turned and fled from the doorway, down the hall.

"Well, I guess the big town got to be too much for our country cousin," Mike Flannigan said, over the heads of the crowd in the doorway. "Big Mac must've found out Molloy was getting friendly with his wife, Patricia; they had a fight and Molloy killed him."

Flannigan, an old-time burlesque comedian, had his broad mouth pulled back in a wide grin. He placed a finger alongside his red, bulbous nose, and his tiny, bloodshot eyes twinkled happily. Flannigan was enjoying this; this was for him. He'd made it a point to let everybody know he didn't like Evan Molloy since Molloy had come to the rooming house, three days ago. Right from the first, Betty



Simmons had seemed to shine up to Molloy, and Flannigan didn't like that. Flannigan had ideas about Betty, so this was made to order for him.

"Why don't you keep that subway mouth of yours closed, Flannigan?" another man spoke up. "Maybe it isn't as bad as it looks. Maybe Evan couldn't help it; maybe he killed the guy in self-defense."

Molloy sent Marty Cameron a grateful look for this; he liked Marty. Cameron had the room across the hall and had been friendly to him from the start. His first night in town, Molloy and Cameron had sat up late drinking bottled beer and Cameron had told him a lot of things about New York.

"Thanks, Marty," Molloy said. He removed Patricia's arms from around his neck, led her still weeping and wailing, toward a chair. He turned back to the crowd in the doorway. "Listen, Marty, I didn't kill him at all. You remember, when I came in, this evening, downstairs, I told you about the three little men who had been bothering me all day?" He paused, and gestured toward the dead man on the floor. "Well, this must be the man they were warning me against. But there's been a terrible mistake; I don't know this—his wife." He glanced at the sobbing woman in the chair. "I—"

He broke off, confused, unable to express himself, further. Marty Cameron, a handsome young man with close-cropped light brown hair and a quick smile full of small, beautiful white teeth, was staring at him curiously.

"Oh," Marty said weakly. "Then you weren't kidding about that, Evan? I—well—I didn't take you seriously. I thought that was some kind of a gag."

**T**HE woman on the chair suddenly drew everybody's attention. She had stopped sobbing, now. She was dabbing at her eyes with a soggy ball of handkerchief, smearing her already streaked makeup.

"I—I didn't mean any real harm," she whined. "Evan was just a—just a friend. It was just a casual flirtation.

I didn't think Big Mac would ever find out. And then—and then I come up here tonight to see why Evan was late for our date and I—I find my husband lying there dead on the floor and—"

She broke off and started crying again. For a moment there was utter silence in the room. Several times Evan Molloy opened his mouth to speak and when he finally made it, all he could do was croak out hoarsely: "She's lying; we had no date. I don't even know her, I tell you!"

"You can tell that one to the cops," Mike Flannigan snorted. "First thing you know you'll be telling us you found the guy like that when you came into your room." He chuckled gloatingly. "Or maybe somebody hit you over the head and framed you for the crime," he added sarcastically.

"Yes," Molloy said. "That's what happened. Only they didn't hit me over the head. I came into my room and the lights didn't go on. Then somebody slammed the door shut, grabbed me from behind and clamped a damp cloth over my mouth and nose. Chloroform, it smelled like—or maybe it was ether. Anyhow, when I came to. . ." He let the words trail off, gestured toward the corpse of Big Mac.

"All I can say," a tall, stoop-shouldered old man with long, flowing gray hair, put in, "is that it's about time somebody sent Big Mac Blaine to the Great Beyond. I think the boy deserves a medal for the job."

Molloy looked quickly at the tall old man. Sam Larkin was a broken down old Shakespearean actor who was always drunk, always dramatizing everything he said. His leathery, sunken features were flushed now. His deep-set rheumy eyes held a crazy glitter.

"I guess you're glad to see him gone at that, Sam," one of the other roomers said. "I understand he threw you out of his tavern, last week, and refused to give you any more bar credit because you already owe him a small fortune."

"Bah!" Larkin bellowed. He thrust a long, bony finger ceilingward. "Death is far too good for the damned!" He wheeled and pushed

through the crowd at the door, staggered off down the hall.

The next moment the crowd of roomers scattered to both sides as a short, sweating policeman barged through them into the room. His gun was drawn, his jeweled face beet red. "Don't nobody touch anything in here," he bellowed, authoritatively. "Don't nobody leave this here house. Homicide men will be here in a short while."

He jabbed a pudgy finger at Evan Molloy. "You the guy who did it?" he demanded.

Molloy took a deep breath. He put both hands up over his eyes. "No," he said. "But if you—well—get some of those people out of the door and I'll tell you all I know about it."

"Just a minute." The fat cop pushed his gun toward Molloy. "Put your hands above your head. I'd better frisk you."

**M**OLLOY obeyed and while the cop pushed the muzzle of his Police Special into Molloy's stomach with one hand, he quickly dipped the other in and out of Molloy's pockets. He didn't find any concealed weapons. He found, instead, a carefully folded piece of feminine pink note paper in Molloy's right-hand jacket pocket.

"What's this?" the cop said. He stepped back, unfolded the paper with one hand and read aloud: "Dear Evan: Meet me in front of the drug store, tonight, as usual, at seven o'clock. Be careful, though, that nobody is following you. Big Mac is very suspicious. He'd kill us, if he caught us." It was signed, "Patricia."

The cop poked out his lower lip, nodded his head and looked wise. His eyes dropped to the corpse on the floor. "I thought I recognized that guy," he said, solemnly. "Big Mac Blaine, the guy who owns the Tavern in the middle of this block. Who's this Patricia, dame?"

"I am, officer." The woman in the chair stood up. With most of her makeup smeared off, it was obvious now that she wasn't so young, nor so pretty. Faint traces of lines showed around her mouth and at the corners of her eyes. "I'm Patricia Blaine."

Her full little lips quivered pathetically. "My husband must have learned that I was seeing Evan, here, and I guess—I guess he didn't understand. He was a very jealous man, Big Mac was. He must've come up here to beat up Evan, tonight. And in the fight, Evan killed him."

"You're crazy!" Molloy cried. He felt blood rushing through his face. A cord strained out in his throat. "You're framing me. You know damned well I wasn't having any affair with you. I never saw you before a few minutes ago."

Molloy started toward Patricia Blaine, angrily, his fist balled against his hips. The fat cop grabbed his arm, yanked him back. "Mind what you're up to," he growled. "Any more bad moves like that and I'll have to put the nippers on you."

Mike Flannigan stepped to the front of the little gathering in the doorway, now. His big, ugly comedian's face was wreathed in an evil grin. He knuckled his bald head.

"Don't let him pull that stuff on you, officer," Flannigan said, loudly. "He knows Patricia, all right. Why, she called him up at least three or four times, today. I answered the phone twice myself. Mrs Simmons, the landlady answered the other two times; she'll tell you. Does that sound like he didn't know her. And she came right straight to his room, here, tonight, didn't she, when he didn't show up for their date, without asking anybody which one it was?"

"You keep out of this!" Molloy stormed. He lunged toward Flannigan, but the cop grabbed him and held him back, once more. "You just hate me because you're jealous of me and Betty!"

**F**LANNIGAN laughed, bent forward from the waist toward Molloy, pinched his own chubby cheek. "Listen to the lover," he mocked. "You can't tell about these hicks. He sure made time in the few days he's been in from the sticks. Going after the landlady's daughter, gettin' into trouble with another man's wife, committing murder over her."

Molloy closed his eyes, held tight to

his temper. He stood there, rocking back and forth, head aching, his brain teeming with conflicting thoughts.

"Officer," Flannigan's voice went on. "Get him to tell you about the little men. I'd like to hear that one. Yes, indeed, get him to tell you. I overheard him handing that yarn to Cameron, here, downstairs, tonight when he came in."

"It's true," Molloy said. He didn't open his eyes. "There were three of them. They took turns at it. All day long they'd keep popping up next to me—in a crowded Automat, in the subway, in a bar down in Times Square where I was having a beer. Several times I tried to grab one of them, find out what it was all about, but they always managed to get away."

"Ah!" the cop wheedled, like he was talking to a child. "The little men, is it? Now tell us. What did they do to you?"

"Nothing," Molloy said. "Except that they'd suddenly slip up next to me and warn me to stay away from Patricia or Big Mac would kill me. That's all they said. And it must've been one of them who put that note in my pocket. It's the first time I ever saw *that*, too."

"Sure," the cop said, enjoying himself. He hefted his gun, confidently. "The funny little men. Getting ready to plead insanity, are you? And what did they look like? Tell me, m'boy, so's I can have a pickup order put out for them."

Mike Flannigan laughed until tears streamed down from his close-set little eyes.

"I can describe them," Molloy said. His face wrinkled in concentration. "They were all about the same height. They all wore flashy clothes and they all carried a brown traveling bag. But aside from that they were as different as night and day. The redheaded one had bushy hair like red yarn, and he wore thick-lensed glasses. Another one was black-haired, with beetling brows and a hooked nose. The third man was blond, with a wispy yellow mustache and large, protruding white teeth."

Everybody roared with laughter at the mocking, comic expressions Flannigan made as Molloy talked. But Evan Molloy didn't hear the laughter. He was listening to the keening of police car sirens, not far away. In a moment the rooming house would be swarming with police.

Thoughts tumbled through Molloy's tired brain. He suddenly realized that he didn't have a chance. Nobody would believe him. He was broke and he was a stranger here in the city with nobody to turn to. The frame against him was complete, and Big Mac Blaine's murderer could be almost anyone here in the rooming house. It could be Mike Flannigan. Perhaps Flannigan, himself, had been having an affair with Patricia and Big Mac had found out, and Flannigan had to kill him. The burlesque comedian hated Molloy enough to take great delight and special pains to frame him for it.

OLD SAM LARKIN could be the killer. The old actor had a grudge against Big Mac. Maybe the tavern owner had been threatening lately to take stern measures to collect his bar bill from the drunken Thespian. You never could tell what a crazy old coot like Larkin might do under certain conditions.

Perhaps Patricia Blaine had pulled the kill all by herself. There were all sorts of possible angles and Evan Molloy knew that none of them would be investigated by the police—not too thoroughly. They had a too clear-cut case against him. There was only one way in which the real murderer could be brought to justice. And that would be out in a few minutes, with the house swarming with police. Molloy knew if he was going to escape, he'd have to do it, now.

"Marty," he said. "Have you got a cigarette. I've got to have a smoke. I'm all jittery inside."

"Sure," Cameron said. He pushed through the crowd, pulling cigarettes and matches from his pocket. "But look, kid," he said, "why don't you forget all that crazy stuff. Why don't you just tell the cops the truth, and

maybe they'll give you a break. I'll help all I can. I'll get you a good lawyer, if you want."

"Thanks, Marty," Molloy said. He stuck a cigarette into his mouth and lit it. Over the flame, he looked at Cameron. "What happened to your face? It's all red and chafed around the mouth and nose and eyes."

Cameron got a little red and laughed. He put long, slim fingers to the little shiny, raw-looking patches of flesh around the features Molloy had mentioned. "Got a touch of skin rash," he said. "It's pretty much of a nuisance."

*This was the chance,* Molloy thought. While attention was centered on Cameron for that moment, Evan Molloy tossed the match, still lit, into a half full trash basket a few feet away, next to the dresser. Careful, now, not to look in that direction, he braced himself and waited.

It seemed minutes, but it couldn't have been more than thirty seconds before flames leaped from the metal basket and someone yelled "Fire!"

Molloy was ready as several people rushed to put out the flaming trash basket. For just an instant, the fat cop half turned away from Molloy. *Now!*

He lunged forward savagely with his bony shoulder and knocked the cop out of the way, then did a football spinner through the others. He was out of the room, into the hall before anyone knew quite what had happened.

Behind him the room resounded with screams, and the angry bellowing of the officer; as Molloy raced along the hall toward the back stairs he heard people coming in the front door below. That would be the Homicide Squad.

He hit the rear stairs at full tilt, half fell, half jumped down them; he darted through the dining room and kitchen, ignoring the frightened squealing of the cook, and burst out the back door into the yard.

In the stygian darkness of the yard, Molloy stopped. He heard voices and thundering footsteps racing through the kitchen behind him. He took a

desperate chance and decided against trying to run for it. He knew that there was a row of ashcans lined up right next to the back steps. He fumbled his way quickly toward them, found an empty one and climbed inside of it. He jammed his long lean body down inside the can and placed the lid back on top. He crouched there, holding his breath, his heart thundering, listening to the cop and some of his fellow roomers as they burst out into the back yard.

**P**EERING out through a slight slit where the top of the ashcan didn't fit properly, Molloy saw vague figures milling around in the darkness. Then he saw the cop's flashlight go on, splash its thin white beam all around the yard.

"There's an alley over there that leads through into the next block," the cop said, finally. "He must have lit out that way."

Then the fat cop and a couple of men from Homicide, who had come down to join him, chased across the yard, and down the alley mentioned. As Molloy watched, breathlessly, from his hiding place, he saw several of the roomers who had come downstairs with the fat cop, turn around and go back into the kitchen.

The last one to go back inside was Sam Larkin. In a thin slice of light that came through the partly opened door from the kitchen, Molloy saw the old actor, distinctly, saw his tall, stooped frame and the long flowing mane of dirty gray hair. He also saw Larkin, quickly, furtively, snatch a small piece of white paper from his pocket, tear it into tiny pieces which he let go fluttering to the ground. Then, Larkin, also, went back into the house.

Evan Molloy waited for about ten minutes, until after the fat cop and the others came back down the alley, bemoaning the fact that he had escaped them, and went back into the house. He waited another ten minutes, while everything was quiet in the back yard and then as silently as possible, he eased up out of the ash can. He stretched on tiptoe for one moment, getting the cramped numb-

ness out of his limbs. Then with one of the packets of matches he had obtained from Marty Cameron, cupped carefully in his hand, Molloy found and picked up the little pieces of paper that Sam Larkin had torn up, dropped them into his jacket pocket.

It took another five minutes for Molloy to find and quietly pry open a cellar window. He dropped down inside, made his way cautiously through the gloom toward the coalbin at the other side of the cellar. Half-way, he tripped over something that skittered between his legs, fell heavily and knocked over a packing box with a clatter of sound. The cat over which he had tripped let out a squeal of anguish.

Half crazy with fear and anger at this twist of bad luck, Molloy rolled feverishly in what he hoped was the direction of the coalbin. He just about made it when the cellar door from the kitchen opened and a slash of light poured down into the cellar.

In a frightened voice, the cook yelled down: "What was that? Who's down there?"

Molloy held his breath, waited, expecting any moment for the cook to start screaming for the police on the upper floor. He'd be finished then. He would never be able to get out of the cellar before they caught him. But just when Molloy thought he couldn't stand the silence and the suspense another moment, the cat let out a series of *meows*, and went loping up the cellar steps into the light.

"Oh," the cook said, letting out a sigh of relief. "Just the cat chasing a mouse or something. He must have knocked something over. Get up here, you, before you scare me completely out of my wits."

**T**HE cellar door slammed shut again. Molloy crawled further back into the coalbin, behind its protecting partitions and swabbed the sweat from his face. In a few seconds when his hands stopped trembling, he pulled the little pieces of paper he'd picked up in the backyard and spread them out on the coalbin floor. Then, with the help of a dozen, carefully cupped matches,

he put enough of the pieces together, to see what the original piece of paper had been.

It was a tabulated bar bill covering a three months' period, from Big Mac's Bar & Grille and was signed by Samuel Larkin. The total amount was \$152.

Molloy thought about that. He realized that Larkin must have gone back to the murder room and searched Big Mac's pockets to retrieve this I. O. U. The old actor had been afraid that it would be found and Big Mac's widow would force him to pay. It wasn't much of a clue, but it was something for him to think about. To a brokendown old has-been like Martin, that was a lot of money. Men had been killed for less than that.

Sitting there, then, in the dusty, dirty blackness of his hideout, Evan Molloy went back over all the details of the murder and the frame-up, in his own mind. He realized now, that in some ways, the thing was a lot simpler than it looked on the surface.

Some other man, here, in the rooming house, he decided, had been having an affair with Patricia Blaine. He and Patricia had suddenly feared discovery and the wrath of Big Mac. Between them they had decided to kill Big Mac and frame Molloy for the crime. As additional motive, Patricia would inherit her husband's profitable business, and come into any cash or life insurance that he might have in the bargain.

All the details of the frame-up, Molloy realized, had been easy to work out. Patricia had made the damning telephone calls. Tipped off as to time and room number by her murdering accomplice, Patricia had come busting into Molloy's room at just the right moment. Just a little before Molloy had come home, they had gotten Big Mac up to Molloy's room, with an anonymous phone call, or by some similarly simple trick.

Patricia's note could have been slipped into Molloy's pocket by the killer, himself, after he had knocked Molloy out with the chloroformed rag. Or that could have been done,

as Molloy told the fat cop, previously, by one of the little men who had been hounding him, all day.

Those little men were the one angle Molloy could not figure out, though. Who were they? How had *they* got the mistaken idea that he had been seeing Patricia? There didn't seem to be any answers to those questions. They didn't make sense.

For the next two or three hours, Molloy huddled restlessly in the depths of the coalbin. He tried to think, to work out his murder problem, but got nowhere. It could be anybody in the rooming house. He didn't know; his head ached fit to burst, and his stomach felt hollow with hunger.

All he knew was that the first and only vacation he'd had in four years had suddenly turned into a nightmare. All the things he'd planned. . .

Molloy stood up, suddenly. The hurt and anger began to boil over inside of him. He realized now, that he couldn't hide out forever like this, a hunted thing. He had to do *something*; there was nothing to lose. Even being caught again would not be as bad as this. And the answer to his problem lay somewhere within this house; he was going to find it.

Cautiously, he made his way toward the stairs. He knew that dinner was long over and the cook would be cleaned up and out of the kitchen. There had been no sound from up there now for about fifteen minutes. He knew that most of the tenants would have gone to their own rooms, by now, or out for an evening's entertainment. With a little luck, he could search some of the rooms, perhaps find some evidence that would hook Patricia Blaine up with one of the other roomers. If he could do that, Molloy would have his man.

He got up and out of the kitchen, through the dining room into the hall without bumping into anybody. He could hear Mrs Simmons and Betty talking in the big living room. Betty was telling her mother that no matter how things looked, nor what the police said, she didn't believe that nice

Molloy man was guilty. He wasn't the type, she told her mother.

Molloy felt a warm glow run through him, at that, for the first time this night. He knew then, that if he ever did get out of this, he'd have a chance with Betty.

But the next instant, he had to make a wild leap for a hiding place behind a big hall grandfather's clock, as someone suddenly came noisily downstairs. Peering out, Molloy saw that it was Marty Cameron, his slim little figure all dolled up in a brand new pin-striped suit of a gaudy purplish tinge. How he envied Cameron, with nothing on his mind, nobody hunting him, free to go out for a date.

As soon as the door closed behind Cameron, Molloy came out from behind the clock, ran upstairs on tiptoe and gained the second floor, safely. The first door he came to was Mike Flannigan's room. Remembering how the burlesque comedian hated him, how he'd gloated over his predicament, Molloy figured his room was as good a starting point as any. He stood listening outside a few minutes and when he heard no sound of movement inside, eased the door open. The room was dark.

**M**OLLOY slipped in, closed the door behind him. He flicked the light on and thoroughly searched Flannigan's room, but nowhere did he find any evidence that Flannigan had been courting Patricia Blaine. He was just about to give up the search in disgust when he came to a dresser drawer crammed full of theatrical disguises that Flannigan used in his profession. Most of them were humorous gadgets, wild looking wigs, and battered hats and celluloid ears of gigantic size, artificial noses, flesh-colored putty and comedy mustaches. Molloy was just about to slam the drawer shut in disgust when an idea split his brain like flash lightning.

A vision of the three little men who had plagued him with warnings, all day, came to him. He remembered that they were all the same size, all wore flashy looking suits and he

realized now, why each had carried a little brown traveling bag. It had to be that way. Why else would they be lugging that bag? There were not three men. There had been only one, wearing different suits and disguised with different colored wigs, fake glasses and artificial celluloid teeth and other props just like these in Mike Flannigan's drawer. He had changed his voice each time he'd spoken to Molloy. He'd carried the extra suits and disguises packed into the brown traveling bag. It hadn't been too difficult to spot where Molloy would be liable to stay put for fifteen or twenty minutes, after following him around—places like restaurants and bars. Then the guy had simply entered a public men's room and changed clothes and disguises, appeared as another character.

Hardly before Molloy had finished summing all that up in his mind, and he heard footsteps pounding along the hall toward this room. He flung himself away from the dresser, snapped out the light and stationed himself on the other side of the doorway, where he would be hidden.

Mike Flannigan's big, chunky figure slammed into the room. Flannigan snapped the light on and stopped stock still, looking around at the wreckage left by Molloy's search, at the opened drawer full of wigs and other disguises.

"I'll be damned," Flannigan said.

That was all he said, right then. Evan Molloy stepped out as the door slammed shut. He pulled a fountain pen from his inside pocket, rammed it against Flannigan's back.

"Don't get jumpy, Mike," Molloy said, softly. His heart was thundering like a battering ram against his ribs. "You know who this is. You know I'm desperate. And this is a gun gouging against your spine."

"M-M-Molloy!" Flannigan stammered. "What are you doing here? You crazy? They'll catch you. There's a detective staked out right

across the street, waiting, in case you decided to come back here."

"Thanks for the information," Molloy said. "And I'll take a little more of it. Now, I want to know who—"

"I know what you want to find out," Flannigan cut in. "I recognized your description of the little men, but I didn't let on, because I wanted to see you stay in your jam. The way you described those guys, they were wearing stuff that was stolen from my drawer of make-up and disguises.

"Stolen?" Molloy echoed hollowly. His eyes traveled up and down the man in front of him. Flannigan was wearing a shiny, plain serge suit. "Yeah. I guess you're right, at that, Flannigan. I guess it wasn't you." His voice suddenly got tight with temper, and so low it was hardly audible. "But don't get your hopes up, Mike. I think I know who stole that stuff. . . Now, you just keep your hands up and turn around."

**A**S THE chubby burlesque comedian did that, Evan Molloy balled his right fist. His knees bent and the backs of his knuckles brushed the floor. He brought them up from his socks like that in a beautiful uppercut that caught Flannigan flush on the chin.

"That's for a lot of things," Molloy said, huskily. He watched the comedian's little pig eyes roll back into his head. He saw Flannigan's big mouth seem to spread all over his face. Even the big bulbous nose went pale as Flannigan did a little crazy dance step and crumpled to the floor.

Molloy leaped to the dresser drawer, then, hurriedly yanked out a curly black wig and jammed it on his head. With a dab of makeup glue he swabbed a fake walrus-like black mustache, and pasted it on his upper lip. Then he left Flannigan's room. He entered another room two doors down the hall. He walked right in, positive that there was nobody there, moved straight to the clothes closet.

# YES!

## THE RED CROSS STILL NEEDS BLOOD DONORS

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It took only a glance to see the three suits, hanging on racks, flashy and loud, that the "three little men" had worn. The brown traveling bag was hidden behind other luggage in the back of the closet. The wigs and other disguises were not there. But Molloy couldn't wait to look for those. That could come later. He had to get out of this house and finish up the last act of this murder drama as soon as possible. Already he had stretched his luck too far.

The wig and false mustache got Molloy out of the rooming house and past the detective stationed across the street. It got him the half block down to the building that housed Big Mac Blaine's tavern, without being intercepted. But Molloy didn't go into the tavern. He went into the house entrance of this tax-payer building, instead. He saw the name Blaine, in one of the two doorbells, but he didn't ring.

Two at a time, he went up the one flight of steps, stopped in front of one of the two apartments upstairs. He listened for a few seconds, heard a man and a woman's voice laughing and talking, recognized both of them. He didn't knock. He just stepped back and flung his whole lanky, big-boned one hundred and eighty pounds against the door.

The door slammed open, the cheap latch lock broken. Molloy careened against a wall, but didn't stop his running lunge into the apartment. He didn't stop when Patricia Blaine gave vent to one of her ear-splitting screams and knocked a bottle and a half filled glass from the cocktail table in front of the sofa. He didn't stop when Marty Cameron leaped up from the couch, grabbed the bottle of whisky up off the floor.

**W**ITH HIS young, handsome face twisted into a maniacal mask of fear and fury, Cameron swung the bottle murderously at the charging figure of Evan Molloy. But he was a little slow; Molloy got in and under the swing. The bottle slammed over Molloy's shoulder, and flew from Cameron's hand. It caught Patricia Blaine's screaming, heavily

made-up face just as she, too, got up from the couch. She fell back down again, out cold.

Cameron and Molloy fell back across the cocktail table to the floor. Cameron fought hard, slamming his fist into Molloy's face like pistons. But his slight, boyish frame was no match for Molloy's work-hardened sinews and muscle. After a while Molloy's own big-knuckled fists got to work. He kept throwing punches long after Cameron was unconscious. He kept saying:

"My friend! Posing as my friend, and all the time you were railroading me right to the chair!"

A little later Molloy told the police his whole story. It had not taken much to break Patricia Blaine down after she came to, and she confirmed most of Molloy's previous theories about the murder and the frame.

She and Cameron had tired of carrying on in secret. They wanted to be free, to go away together. They had to get Big Mac out of the way, and to get his money. Molloy, a stranger, green, fresh from the sticks, struck them as a perfect fall-guy.

Molloy explained to the police how he realized that Flannigan couldn't have been the one using the disguises, because of his build and his clothes. And then, Molloy had remembered the red raw spots on Cameron's face, earlier in the evening. He had figured that they had come from too-frequent ripping off of glued disguises.

The idea of that business, Cameron told the police, was to give Molloy a crazy story to tell and to confuse the police—lead them on a false trail just in case anything went wrong with the frame-up on Molloy.

Evan Molloy was a little impatient with all the police red tape it took to clear the case up. He was in a hurry to get back to the rooming house. He had a lot of things to tell Betty Simmons. There were still four days of his vacation left, before he went into the Army, and he wanted to make the best of them.

He and Betty did just that later.

THE END



# I DIDN'T DO IT!

By Cliff Campbell

(Author of "Finger From The Grave,"  
"Body, Body, Who's Got The Body," etc.)

*The guy kept on repeating his story, over and over, like  
a phonograph record.*

**L**ASGOTZ'S voice started again in that awful whining sing-song. "I didn't do it, I tell ya," his voice led off. It was like a phonograph record, I'd heard it so many times. "Ya gotta know that—that I didn't do it," the voice went on.

I didn't even look over at the bunk; didn't so much as encourage it with a nod. That didn't deter him though, not him and his bellyaching alibiing endless tale. Never varying, always the same, like an accurate echo of the time he'd told it before. His voice went on, scratching dully at the walls of the cell. Somewhere in the prison block above a gong sounded dully. He said again:

"But I didn't do it. It was this way. Just like I told it in court but they wouldn't believe me. It was this way."

God Almighty, how that voice could repeat itself. I knew what he was going to say before the sounds formed on the air, just like I was saying it all myself in my own mind.

"It was this way," the voice went on again. "We'd cased this job perfect—this bank in this little whistle-stop burg."

There it was again. "This little whistle-stop burg." Just as he always told it, by rote, word for word, parrotlike even to every last inflection. As if a whistle-stop burg could be big.

"We had everything worked out right down to the switch of cars ten miles out on the turnoff from the State highway. It couldn't fail. Just couldn't; and it wouldn't of if that dizzy teller at the cage hadn't been

such a crazy jerk. Crazy—pure crazy, that's what he was."

I still didn't turn my head to the bunk across the way. Maybe if I did I'd choke that voice off forever. Yet somehow I felt I never could do that. Somehow—it would have been impossible. Still, each and every time, did that bank teller have to be *pure crazy*?

The voice went on with it. "We walks in. Everything and everybody was covered. Links was on the sub-machine gun. And then that crazy teller, wit' death looking him right smack in the kisser, he has to give the alarm. Not that anything happened in the bank itself; nothing did. He touches off the foot button that tells 'em down at the police headquarters. We didn't guess nothing was wrong till a dame screams out in the street and we look around to see the police cars turning the corner.

"We had to fight our way out. Me, I'd already gone around behind the cage. And when I see Links go down, I figure it's time to make tracks. I found a door out the back and slammed it behind me. There was the blank wall of the building backing from the next street just a few feet away. No way out there. I ran around to the side and jumps into the alley—and plump into the arms of a copper."

That inane dry little laugh rattled around the cell; I tried not to hear it. It always made me want to open my mouth like I'd made the laughing sound myself. Out through the tiny grille of the door I could see a faint refracted beam of wan sunlight that somehow had made its way in

through the barred door at the end of the corridor.

The voice continued, just like I knew it would, as if it were something unreal, beyond control. I knew I could never stop it. But I gave no sign to that opposite bunk.

It said, "Gees, it was funny. That copper was sneaking around to get us from the back. Maybe he was more surprised than I was. I don't know. His shot went by my ear. I swung at him with my gun but he grabbed my wrist and I dropped it. Me, I got a knee into his belly but he was a dumb flatfoot—dumb and tough. The dumber they are the tougher they are. That's what I always say."

**T**HAT is what he *did* always say. Somehow, I'd been listening just hoping this time he would forget that line. He didn't. It was always the same. The dumber they are the tougher. . .

"He stayed up," the voice went on. "He tried to bring his gun up level. I grabbed it and we wrestled around. Then I put my shoulder into him and smacked him back against the wall so his head banged it and bounced. It was just as he slapped me over the ear with his billy and I couldn't see straight." That dry laugh again. "Gees, when his head hit that wall it made a sound like when you slap a big watermelon to see if it's ripe."

It always had to be a watermelon. Always had to start me going inside, wondering how a big thick slice of watermelon would taste now. They don't feed you watermelon in State Prison.

I didn't move an inch, but the voice picked it up again. You'd think he'd get tired, never getting an answer, never a "Yeah" or "Ya don't mean that." But not him. Him and his voice, they never get tired.

"So he goes down," the voice went on. "I jumped over him and starts up the alley. Gees, I'm running like a guy on a ten-day drunk. He sure clipped me a tough one with that blackjack. Inside that bank, it sounds like somebody's bowling with

hand grenades. Ever'thing's blowing off.

"Right then, I wouldn't of bet a five-cent slug on my chances. But just as I get to the front of the alley, Links goes running down the steps of the bank, holding in his guts with his hands. He ain't got a prayer but he's running, running crazy, this a-way and that, like a chicken with his head cut off. And they can't seem to hit him, them cops who're shooting. He gets across the street and flops behind a car there. And some of the cops begin to move out, spreading, to come around both ends of that car. So ever'body is watching that and I slip outa the alley and around the corner with nobody noticing. That's where we got a second car planted just in case something went wrong with the getaway. See how smart we was? See?"

I didn't answer him yes or no. I gave him nothing.

"Some dumb Joe sticks his head outa the door of a store and starts to yell. But I hit him over the head with my gun—I'd been smart enough to grab it up after I laid out the copper in the alley—and shuts him up. Bingo, like that. Then I jumps in the car and gets the hell outa there.

"Well, ya know the rest. How the alarm was out. And that storekeeper's kid is watchin' all the time from an upstairs winda. And how he seen me leave and checks the license plate number. Ya know the rest. . ."

I was tempted to give some sign then, to admit I did. Only I knew it wouldn't do any good. God, how I knew the rest! But saying, yes, I knew it, that wouldn't stop that voice.

"Well," it went on, as I knew it would, "Well, I left that burg behind me but State troopers take up the chase out on the main highway. I hit dirt side-roads. I even busted through one road-block they'd thrown up. One of the motorcycle guys on my tail, he left the road on an S-turn. It was right a'ter that it began to rain. And I came out on that macadam. There was a bridge straight ahead and I seen the county coppers waiting on that. So I tried to make it into the side road."

I didn't say I saw. Maybe that voice might dry up in the throat, but it didn't.

"Gees, the wheels skidded out from under me on that macadam like I was on a hot greased griddle. The side of the car bounces off a big rocky bank. Then I try to straighten it out but the wheel don't work. And there's that big tree comin' right at me. Smacko—like that.

"Only I didn't hear it hit. Next thing I know I'm coming outa the fog and one of them State guys is saying, 'Yeah, this must be the rat that killed the cop outside the bank.' I wanted to laugh in his face but my head hurt so I couldn't. And the trooper, he says, 'Yeah, here's the cop's gun.' That gives me a laugh again.

"Well, I'm in the hospital for a few days. Then they lock me up and when I hears it's murder, I wanta laugh some more like hell. Only it always hurts my head to laugh now. I can't any more."

**I** COULDN'T either; I tried to. I thought it might break off that monotonous hundred-times-told tale. But I couldn't seem to get the sound out. Something stopped me.

The voice picked it up again with the indefatigability of a bulldog. "So they gets me inta court. That copper in the alley died all right. Fractured skull. But they can't pin it on me; that's what I tells myself. There was no witnesses. See? So how the hell can they tell who fractured that lousy cop's head? They can't; they can't fool me; I ain't scared a bit. Then the State trooper gets in the witness chair and he swears that when they pulled me outa the wrecked car, I had the copper's gun in my lap. Can ya beat that?"

I didn't say I couldn't. It wouldn't have done any good. I tried not to think at all. I tried to forget how lonely I was, but that damn voice beat at me.

"How the hell could that cop's gun get on my lap? That's what I wanta know. How could it? That's what I never could figure out."

I had no answer for that one either; couldn't figure it out from the first time he told me the story. Maybe there was no answer.

"So there's the State's case. See? Their proof I killed that cop rested on that I had his gun when I was captured. It don't make sense! How the hell could I get it? Ya tell me. How could I?"

I still couldn't answer.

"So ya see how it is. Here I am. But it ain't legal. Technically the State never proved I killed the cop. How could they? How could that cop's gun get in my lap? Ya tell me."

My head ached. Maybe the very compulsion of that voice had caught up to me by then. I never could understand how the cop's gun got where he said they found it.

"So here I am," the voice said again, bitter now, running down on a descending scale. "In for life. And I didn't do it—I didn't really do it—because they can't prove I did. Ya see how it is? Ya see?"

I almost gave a sign then. I saw his point. In our game, you didn't do what you did unless they can hang it on you. The court ruled guilty. They said he'd done it. But they hadn't really proven it. Because how could—

The voice said the rest of it for me. "—could that copper's gun got on me? Huh? You answer me that and I'll plead guilty. But till ya show me how, I ain't guilty. I didn't do it—not—not—"

The voice stopped. Then I realized one of the guards had his face glued against the grille of the door. I turned my back, saying nothing. The voice had stopped but my head ached like blazes.

On the other side of the door, the guard turned to his companion. "You know, Bill, I think that Lasgotz is going stir-crazy—if he wasn't screwy when he came in here. The warden oughta take him outa solitary. He's always talking to himself. . ."

THE END

# FRIENDLESS CORPSE

By Arthur Mann

*Introducing Lew Curry of the Daily Star, and a corpse nobody loved when it was a living man, and nobody wept over now!*

“THE trunk wasn’t there when you went over,” Inspector Wolfe echoed. “But it was propped up when you came back from the cafeteria?”

There was nothing to do but nod, and so Lew Curry nodded a thatch of brick-colored hair. The inspector’s attitude indicated that he had undoubtedly been roused from heavy sleep in the headquarters dormitory. He was unnecessarily severe and suspicious. Lew had done nothing more than observe a sizeable trunk leaning up against one of those candy and soda-water booths that jut onto the sidewalk from big-city buildings. Had he known it contained a body, he’d have gone about his business like a good reporter, for good reporters leave macabre discoveries like that to the patrolling police. Evidently he had made a sorrowful mistake in bringing a headquarters detail back to look at a strange trunk in a stranger place.

“What do you do, Curry,” Sergeant Raymer asked with a strong suggestion of sarcasm, “go along Canal Street checkin’ things to see if they’re the same as when you passed last time?”

“Lay off, Sarge!” the reporter muttered testily. His face turned as red as the hair above, and his chin jutted with rising belligerence. “I notice things, that’s all. Anybody’d notice a big trunk like that leanin’ against a candy booth—”

“At two-thirty in the mornin’?” the sergeant sneered. “Sure, everybody but me an’ Webb who are assigned to

patrol the area, an’ who passed there only fifteen minutes before!”

“Well, what’s the idea of the heat an’ excitement?” Curry exclaimed, and lighted another cigaret. “I did you a favor by findin’ the body before the street cleaners swept it up as garbage. Anybody’d think I bumped off the guy.”

Inspector Wolfe cleared his throat. He peered at a preliminary report again, just delivered from downstairs by Patrolman Costigan, of the headquarters detail.

“Curry, you got a peek at this corpse, didn’t you?” he asked.

Lew nodded.

“And you didn’t recognize him?”

“Nope. Should I have?”

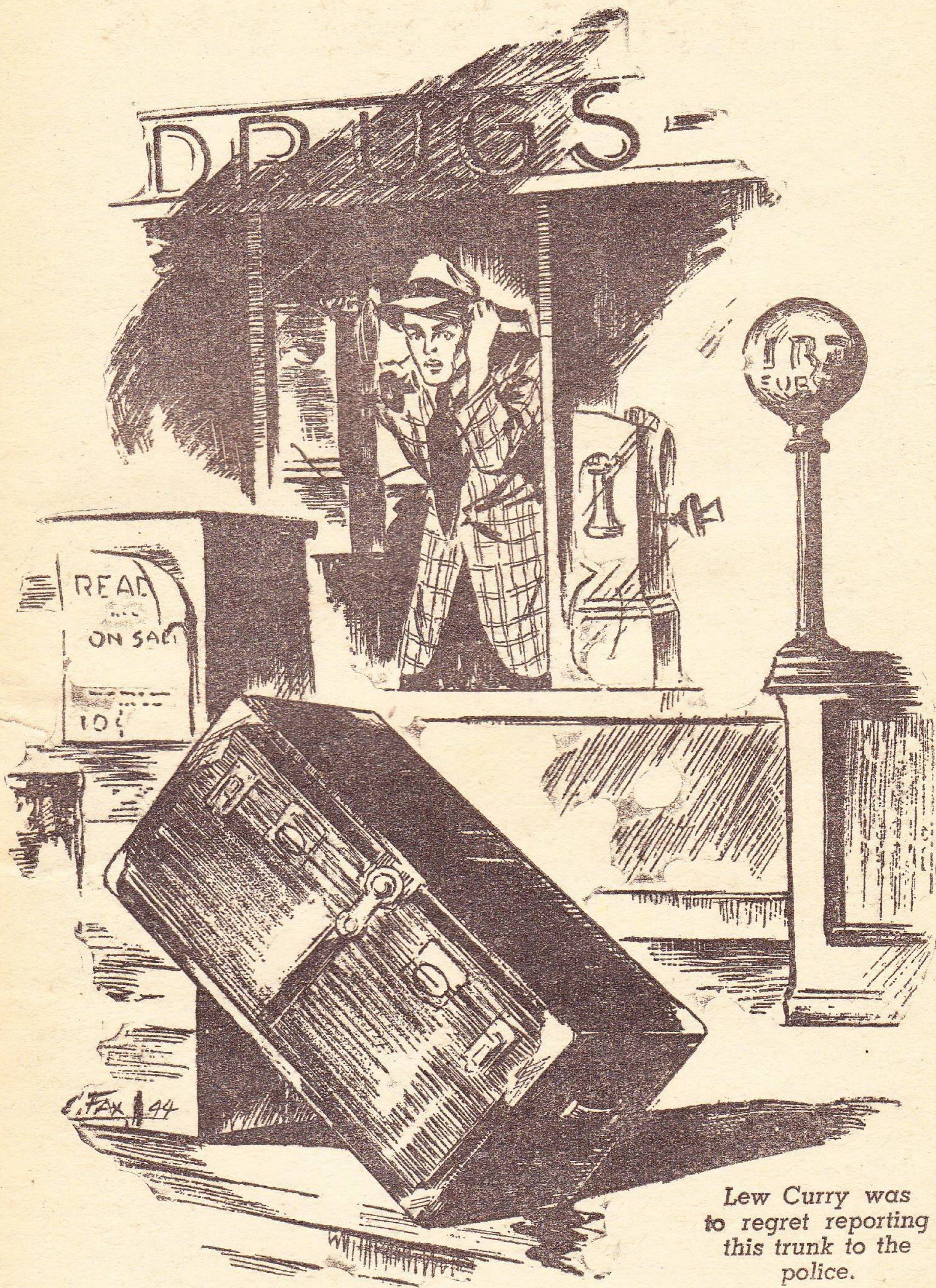
The Inspector shrugged. “All right. Identity is established—”

“Who is it?” Lew asked. “I got to phone the *Daily Star*. After all, it’s my corpse. I found it.”

“News will be on the slips for everybody,” the inspector said coolly. “I’m going back to sleep. The autopsy will be ready by noon, Sergeant. I think we’ll be able to support the D. A.’s indictment at that time. Good night. And Curry, thanks for finding the body.”

Inspector Wolfe departed to resume his slumber. The sergeant and Costigan returned to their headquarters posts. Lew Curry followed in the direction of his office across the street, there to take on the duties of what ordinarily was a quiet lobster trick—midnight to 8 a. m. The slips would report one more murder—

A patrolman had followed him into the elevator, and his hand was slapped



*Lew Curry was to regret reporting this trunk to the police.*

from the push-button. The slapping hand then pushed, not *G* for ground, but *R* for roof.

"Costigan!" Lew greeted.

**T**HE patrolman, recently demoted from assignments and plain-clothes, nodded a florid, but sober face. Reaching the roof, he cut off

the current by pressing the red emergency button, and spoke.

"Lew, it was a mistake not to recognize that corpse."

"How could I?" the reporter protested. "The face was purple. . . eyes closed. . . mouth distorted. I only peeked. Who was the stiff?"

"A guy you lost four hundred an' eighty bucks to Saturday night," Costigan confided. "Hugh Maxon!"

"Hugh Maxon!" Lew gasped. "That's impossible. I didn't—"

"Shot with a thirty-eight automatic," Costigan went on. "Plenty of identification in his pocket. . . an' a raft of stuff, bad stuff, besides. He had a small book with a list of reporters an' slip boys across the street who reported ambulance cases to him, along with a rough idea of collections an' how much he paid."

"Well, don't worry, Costigan," Lew comforted. "My name wasn't in that book."

"But the I. O. U. was, Lew," the patrolman murmured. He switched on the current and pressed the G button. "Signed with your signature. That's a lotta dough for a reporter to lose. An' Lew, in the side pocket of his top-coat was your paper. . . *this mornin's* marked 'Office Copy.'"

"But if I did it, Costigan," Lew argued, "wouldn't I take all that stuff out first, especially that phony I. O. U.?"

"Inspector Wolfe said no," Costigan whispered. "That's what made him so ornery. He says it looks too much like a plant, an' your noticin' a trunk in a dark side street. . . thought you oughta know."

"Gee. . . thanks, Costigan."

"I haven't forgot what you tried to do for me in that conduct unbecomin' an officer case. They doubted you, but you *did* go to bat."

"Sure. Well, I didn't want to see an innocent guy pilloried."

"Neither do I," Costigan whispered. "That is. . . if. . ."

"Costigan!" Lew chided. "You know I wouldn't kill a guy."

"But you *did* lose the money. The I. O. U.'s dated Saturday."

"On Hotel Royale stationery," Lew added. "I played some stud in a guy's

apartment. That's another story. . . a good one, too."

They reached the ground floor. "Don't worry about me, Costigan. I'm thinkin' of the guys named in that little book. My slip boy, Tony Mascheri, an' drunken Dave Potter. The *Standard* swore to jail Dave before the police did, if they caught him feedin' ambulance-chasers again. An' Martin Thentic, of the *Gazette*. He hates ambulance-chasers in general, and Hugh Maxon in particular, enough to kill. I've heard him say he prefers the rats across the street. See you later, Costigan, and. . . thanks for the buggy ride."

Lew hurried to the basement, but an elderly, dignified figure with quiet, dark eyes and a set mouth was already pawing through the batch of slips that reflected police news of the past few hours. Fights. . . contusions. . . abrasions. . . fires. . . false alarms. . . slight concussions sustained during altercation. . . auto collision, driver DOA (Dead on Arrival). . . body recovered from river. . . unknown girl found wandering, apparently amnesia victim. . . body of man in trunk, still warm, apparently choked, identified as Hugh Maxon. . .

"Somebody seems to have nailed your friend," the veteran muttered, tossing the slip along the desk-like shelf. "I hear a reporter *discovered* the body."

"You're about as funny as these slips, Martin," Curry muttered, studying the last report. The veteran's deep voice sounded ominous, but he was a pessimist at heart—if he had a heart. Lew said, "This news'll make a lot of headquarters guys happy."

**H**E HASTENED from the big granite building, crossed the street and entered the tier of rooms which the city's newspapers used as offices. They were old, rat-infested, smoky and smelly, but the police history of several generations had been telephoned from these little rooms.

Drab and dimly-lighted, they contained a pot-stove for winter heating, a couple of desks and enough chairs for an exciting card game. The two telephones were connected to outside

bells loud enough to summon a reporter from across the street, or waken him from the soundest sleep on the couch in the corner. Still another bell relayed fire signals and the extent of alarms. And on the desk was a box of well-thumbed cards, containing the numbers and location of the city's fire-alarm boxes.

Heading for the third floor, two steps at a time, Lew paused at the first landing. Somebody's telephone. He listened. It was the *Gazette* office—Martin Thentic's. He was across the street. Lew opened the unlocked door and lifted the receiver. The *Gazette* undoubtedly wanted the slow-gaited veteran to speed it up. . .

"Hello!" he called.

"Hello. . . Martin Thentic?"

"No, I'll get him. Who's callin', please?"

"Rose. . . hurry. Tell him Rose. He'll understand. *Please hurry!*"

Lew lowered the receiver. He listened for approaching footsteps. This was no ordinary call, and Martin Thentic was a widower. The voice was almost hysterical. Why would a hysterical woman be calling the suave, holier-than-thou Martin Thentic—?

"Hello. . ."

Lew had held the mouthpiece of the old-fashioned instrument to his chest. The resonance simulated the low pitch of the veteran reporter's voice.

"Martin!" the woman gasped. "This is Rose Maxon. . . they've killed him. They've killed Hugh!"

"How. . . how do you know. . .?"

"Some one just telephoned me from where you are. . . police headquarters," she exclaimed, though lowering her voice. "They suspect a newspaperman. Martin. . . I'm half-crazy with worry."

"Who called you?"

"A policeman. Said he was shot. . . and pushed into a trunk. A newspaperman found him. Martin. . . what'll I do. . . what?"

"Don't do anything," Lew said with great composure. "Meet me at nine o'clock. . ."

"Where?"

"What's nearest. . . most convenient for you?"

"What a question!" she gasped.

"The usual. . . Liggett's. . . Forty-ninth. . . Nine o'clock. Don't be late."

Lew replaced the receiver and ducked from the office. He rushed up to his own office, called the city desk and relayed the facts of the discovery, including his own part, though he omitted the police's willingness to suspect a newspaperman.

"Got any dope on him there?" the re-write man asked.

"Yes, just a minute," Lew replied. "Got a little stuff here in the drawer. Hold the phone."

He opened the drawer, and lost all interest in the facts of Hugh Maxon's discolored life. Mechanically, he shouted, "Call you back, if I find it. You must have somethin' in the morgue."

**H**ANGING up, he stared at a corner of the drawer where the paper's 38-caliber automatic usually rested. It was missing and, for the first time, Lew Curry began to worry. The day man had no use for it, and the night man, Mefford, had specific ideas about never removing the gun, except in emergency. And so Lew's thoughts naturally flashed to Tony Mascheri, the slip boy, who had been lured on to Maxon's payroll for telephoning accident cases as soon as the slips arrived.

Lew consulted a list of telephone numbers and called Tony's home. A sleepy, feminine voice replied. Lew explained, with apologies, that this was the office, and was Tony there.

"No," the wife replied. "Tony phoned just before midnight. Said he'd be detained down there. He's not home. . . is. . . is there anything wrong?"

"No, Mrs. Mascheri," Lew assured her. "He went out on a. . . a story. Guess it took him longer than we realized. Go back to sleep. And, when Tony comes, tell him to call me—Lew Curry—at my hotel before he reports to work. Good night."

"Wow!" Lew exclaimed aloud. He leaned back in the swivel chair, but bounded up again.

He dashed from his own office, and into the *Standard's* office.

"Dave!" he called.

There was no reply, which wasn't unusual, but the lack of a drunken snore was. Lew pushed back a portiere in the rear of the office, and, for the first time, saw no prostrate figure of the dissolute reporter. And that was bad, for the missing gun could mean that Dave Potter might have suddenly decided to remove the millstone from his red neck by doing away with Hugh Maxon, even though it might mean wearing a larger millstone, plus a ball and chain. Lew was on the phone again. He asked for the *Standard* city desk, and relayed the Maxon story. Finished, he prevailed upon the operator to reveal Potter's address. He had a furnished room somewhere.

"It's near headquarters," the operator said, "unless he's been thrown out since we wrote it down. One thirty-seven Marberry Street. No phone."

A few minutes later Lew Curry received still another shock, because he was back at the spot where he had discovered the trunk. One thirty-seven Marberry was a doorway off Canal Street, only a few feet from the candy booth. He entered a dark vestibule, and struck a match.

Peering along the mail boxes, he found Potter's. Top floor, rear.

Two steps at a time, and Lew reached the top landing with scarcely enough breath to negotiate the rest of the distance. He knocked on the door, but again there was no response. He entered and heard the familiar snore of the habitual inebriate. Lew turned on some lights. The place smelled of human sweat and whiskey, and Potter was dead drunk.

Lew searched the place for signs of the .38-caliber automatic, but failed to uncover it. He did, however, uncover something almost as good. It was a list of scrawled telephone numbers, and under the initials, "H. M." was Mu-9-0031.

**T**HE gray of dawn was lighting the city streets when Lew left Potter's flea-bag of a hideout. In less than eight hours, according to Inspector Wolfe's promise, the murder would be broken with enough evidence to support an indictment. The

reporter hurried back to his office, searching his conscious thoughts for some kind of hint as to who and exactly why.

Through his office telephone, he called Maxon's number, as listed in Potter's collection. No one would be at the number around five in the morning, but Lew was leaving no stone unturned—

"Office of Hugh Maxon!"

The voice of a girl. It came clear and awake over the wire.

"Ah. . . is Mr. Maxon there?" Lew stammered.

"No, he isn't, I'm sorry. May I take a message or have him call you?" the girl asked.

"Never mind," Lew said. "I'll call after nine o'clock."

Beads of perspiration popped out among the freckles of his brow, for the whole thing was crazy. What kind of a law office did Maxon run to have a girl answer at five in the morning? Recalling his promise to supply some data on the murdered lawyer, Lew found the memorandum of facts in the drawer and called the re-write. There wasn't much, but it would help pad out the story in the first evening edition. The day man could follow up with more. There would be developments anyway.

"So, I'm leaving," Lew told him. "It's quiet here. I'm all in. I'll be at my hotel, if you want me."

He was most anxious to learn if Tony Mascheri had called, because Tony must know something about the gun. Lew hoped against hope, because the kid was married and had a family. It was tough enough to be on an ambulance chaser's payroll, violating the law of the city as well as his own newspaper, without having a murder hung on him. It would be hung on some newspaperman. Of that Lew was certain, yet he hadn't considered Costigan's warning. He was too busy with the other developments.

There was the date in Liggett's at nine o'clock with Rose Maxon. What was she like? How long had Martin Thentic known her, and to what extent? How could he learn where she lived?

The hotel had no word from Tony.



Lew trudged to his room, wishing that time would stop, so that he could think. Had Potter been drunk all evening? He sat on the edge of the bed, removing his shoes, when his eyes froze their gaze to the number he had copied from Potter's list. Not exactly, but one almost like it.

Mu-9-0050! Printed on the edge of the telephone directory.

"Twenty-four-hour service. Let us be your secretary. Kind-Courteous-Accurate. 20th Century Secretarial Service."

Lew called the number. He sweat for ten seconds, and then heard the same voice.

"You have service for Hugh Maxon," the reporter said.

"Yes, we have," the girl replied. "May I take a message?"

"I'd like to reach him personally. Can you give me his address?"

"I'm sorry, but we take only incoming calls for Mr. Maxon on another trunk. You may leave a message and we'll have him call."

Lew hung up with a chuckle. "That'd be the trick of the week, sister," he muttered, and stretched his angular figure over the bed.

Nice business, he reflected, staring into the darkness beyond the glow of the night lamp. Maxon covered himself and his law office, wherever that was, by routing accident reports through a telephone-answering service. Tony and Dave Potter made their calls from public booths, and from so many different booths that tapping was impossible.

And thus a conscienceless lawyer was able to get first-hand information on automobile and street-car accidents, rush to the victim post haste and fill the city's courts with damage suits.

But even that nefarious business, long since outlawed as a racket, wasn't enough to prompt or justify cold-blooded murder. Or was it? Tony Mascheri had often sworn to break loose, yet was blackmailed into continuing each time he tried to sever the ever-stronger cord. Dave Potter was too weak, or needed money too often, to break, though in his sober moments

he had often muttered that "death of either him or me is the only way."

Martin Thentic had openly promised dire reprisal against anyone who used his *Gazette* office, or any reporter or slip boy connected with the office, to obtain news of accidents. Suave, smooth Martin, veteran of headquarters, was, however, hooked up somehow with Maxon. . .or the woman. . .or. . .what?

LIGGETT'S was busy from 8.30 on, with a parade of breakfasters moving on to the stools and off. It was awkward, trying to keep track of those who went in and check against those who came out, but Lew managed by a process of elimination to reduce prospects to a half-dozen. As they left the counter one by one, his hopes sank.

But they bobbed up at one minute to nine when a smartly dressed blonde of perhaps thirty-two entered with an impatient step and hurried to the last stool. She ordered coffee, and peered anxiously at the door, through the window to the street and back at the door again. It was obviously Rose Maxon.

She left the drug store at 9.20 and walked across-town. Lew followed at a discreet distance. Wherever she was headed couldn't be far, because such dames always are shod for sitting, not walking. And he was right, for a block farther on, she turned south and entered the Hotel Royale. So, this was where the Maxons lived. Fine, except that it made matters worse. It lent a sinister significance to the Saturday night poker game, wherein he had dropped a neat pile and left an I. O. U. with the bank at cashing-in time.

Oscar Traub. . .Mike Farrelly. . . Sam Drosch. . .three strangers, but friends of Joe Abelard, who covered the Tenderloin district for the *Daily Star*. It had been a good game, though unlucky most of the way, especially after the limit had been raised—

Rose Maxon disappeared into the elevator. Lew went to the desk and asked the number of Hugh Maxon's

room. The clerk scowled, consulted his list and returned, asking:

"When did he register?"

"I . . . I guess he didn't arrive yet," Lew murmured coloring.

He turned away, paced the lobby a few minutes, and then made up his mind. Soon the papers would be on the street with the news. The killer would run to cover. Or would he brazen it out? One thing was certain: That I. O. U. would have to be explained. Of all the dirty tricks. . . But it wasn't too late to clear up that angle!

He dashed for the elevator. . . eighth floor. . . hurried along the corridor and knocked on the door of 832. A woman's voice called, "Who is it?"

"Window cleaner," Lew replied. "Sorry. . ."

As the door opened, he thrust his foot through and forced it against pressure from within. He closed it, turned the lock and stood face to face with Rose Maxon. In Oscar Traub's room. . .

"Who are you?" she gasped. "What do you want?"

"Friend of Oscar Traub's," Lew replied. "I was here the other night playin' cards. I left somethin'. He said I could pick it up. He didn't tell me about *you*, though."

"I don't believe you," she gasped, backing away. Her pretty face though a bit hard around the mouth, had paled beneath heavy make-up. Lacquered fingernails ground into her trembling palms.

**L**EW waved her away, and then pawed through the top drawer of the bureau. He found two decks of cards, and pocketed them. Then he bowed, but as he started to speak, the telephone bell rang.

"Wait a minute!" Lew exclaimed. "We'll do this together."

He picked up the French phone from the cradle, pulled her head close to his, so that he could listen and she would be in a position to reply. Her blond hair smelled of dye and perspiration. At a nod from Lew, she called, "Hello."

From the other end came the unmistakable low voice of Martin Thentic.

He was calling from the lobby. Lew motioned for her to tell him to come up.

"Come on up, Martin," she whispered.

Lew pressed his thumb against the phone-cradle before she could say anything else. He replaced the instrument, and made for the door. Gaining the corridor, he headed for the red light that pointed to the stairway. Then he raced down the seven flights, through the lobby to the street and into the first public telephone booth. An instant later he was talking to Inspector Wolfe.

"Get a quorum up to the Hotel Royale, Inspector," he called. "You can break the Hugh Maxon case wide open.

"It's already broken," the inspector replied coolly. "What's more, a detail is out to pick you up. We have your thirty-eight automatic, turned in from the Fourth Precinct. And we have your slip boy, Tony Mascheri. He's just about ready to spill the whole business to save his own skin. You can save the city a little expense by surrendering—"

But Lew was already fishing out another nickel, preparatory to making a second call of the same number. If the inspector was too narrow, or perhaps too sleepy, to pay attention, Costigan would. And if Costigan wouldn't—

Lew caught the patrolman in the locker room, washing up to go home, after changing to street clothes.

"Don't ask questions, Costigan," Lew pleaded. "Come up to the Hotel Royale. Get a couple of uniformed men off the sidewalk and bring in what you find in Room Eight-three-two. Don't miss it, eight-three-two, and whoever you find, and don't be surprised at what or *whom* you find. Cuff 'em an' bring 'em down to headquarters. I'm on my way down there now. Make it snappy, Costigan!"

It was almost ten-thirty when Lew appeared before Inspector Wolfe, and he was immediately taken into custody on a suspicion of murder. Tony Mascheri was held as a material witness, and Dave Potter, still fuzzy from a hangover, had the same status.

"If this doesn't end ambulance chasing," Inspector Wolfe muttered, "I'll be willing to call it quits."

"Ambulance chasing has nothing to do with it, Inspector," Lew declared, peering out the window for signs of Costigan. "It happens to be a murder. The ambulance-chasing, if any, will come later. Tony—"

"I've tried to tell 'em I didn't do it," Tony protested. "This guy said he was a friend of yours, Lew. It was just before midnight. He said you wanted the mornin' paper, an' to bring the gun, because the new license was bein' issued. Then they took me—"

"All right, all right, Tony," Inspector Wolfe ordered. "That's all in your statement, and it'll be typed and ready to sign in a few minutes. Curry, you'd better come downstairs and start talking."

"In the stories I phone to the paper," Lew parried, "it always says that the wise prisoner remains silent till he talks with his lawyer."

"And if we put him in a room and just ask questions till he's ready to rot," the inspector sneered, "he sometimes never sees his lawyer. Come on. Don't be rugged about it."

Lew patted Tony Mascheri's head of black curls, and followed the inspector under guard. It wouldn't be long. It couldn't be long before Costigan arrived—

"What about Potter?" Lew asked suddenly.

"He's already admitted that he let you use his room to meet Maxon in," the inspector lied. "Very convenient, I must say."

"You haven't enough bait on your hook to catch a minnow," Lew challenged. "If you had paid some attention to me, Inspector, you might have received credit for breaking the case.

As it is, every bit of the credit goes to George Costigan."

"Costigan!" Inspector Wolfe echoed, whirling to face the prisoner. "Costigan's home sleeping. His tour ended at nine."

"Costigan happens to be bringing in the murderer—or murderers," Lew laughed, for he heard the new commotion in the receiving room. "Yes, sir, Inspector, he has the killer. . ."

THE party detoured into the large receiving room, where Costigan and two uniformed patrolmen stood with Martin Thentic, an abashed Rose Maxon and a tall, swarthy man of about forty, whom Lew greeted as Oscar Traub.

"Costigan!" Inspector Wolfe gasped. "What is this?"

The patrolman's florid face went a shade deeper. He nodded to Lew. "With. . .with a bit of help from Curry, sir—"

"Look here, Curry," Martin Thentic protested. His low voice trembled, and his face had gone ashen. "If you think I know—"

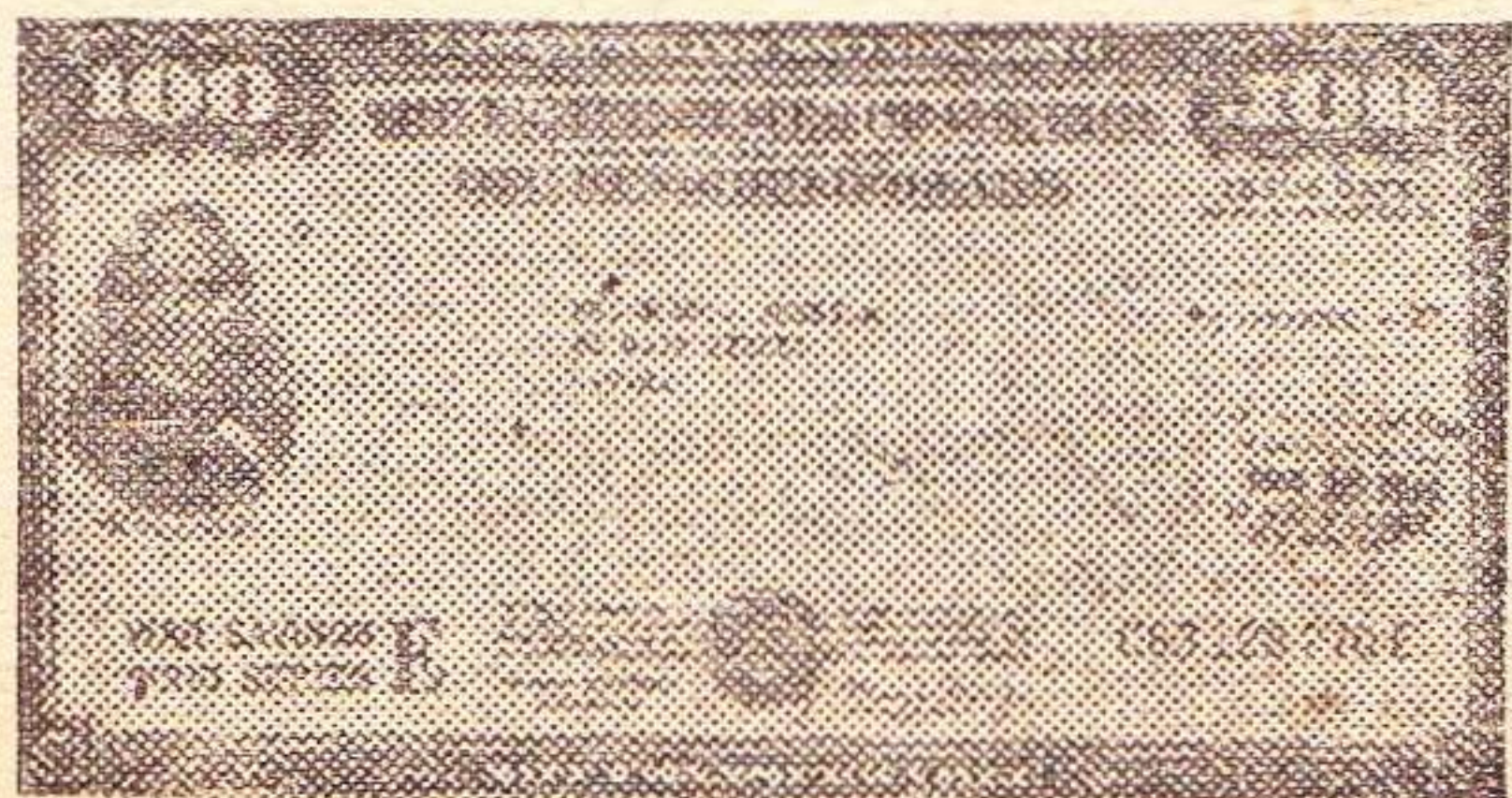
"We all know very little," Lew muttered, "when we think we know a lot. Oscar Traub killed Hugh Maxon—"

"Why, you confounded idiot!" Traub screamed.

"This is a trap!" the woman exclaimed. "He came into the hotel room a few minutes ago—"

"Pipe down, Rose," Lew ordered, "or maybe I'll believe that you pulled the trigger. As it stands, Inspector, this woman is bad medicine at best. She fell for Traub and vice-versa, and they decided to get rid of Maxon. That was a good idea, but their method was a little nasty. Traub and two stooges named Farrelly and Drosch, do the strong-arm work on Maxon's ambulance cases, to make sure nobody

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else gets the damage suits. So Traub doped out the perfect method of implicating a half-dozen newspapermen here at Police Headquarters to make sure that at least one would get the rap. He trapped Tony, then involved Thentic and me."

"You seem too positive, Curry," Inspector Wolfe challenged.

"Rose Maxon knows her husband is not only dead," Lew said, "but she knows *how* he died. Ask her how she knew he was choked—"

"I . . . I was told he was shot," she exclaimed. "Somebody called me . . . from headquarters . . ."

**S**HE began to sob. Lew looked at the inspector and shrugged.

"That's just a starter," the reporter laughed.

Inspector Wolfe's eyes narrowed. He began to study faces.

"No one knew Maxon was shot," he muttered. "Only those who examined him. The slips still read 'apparently choked.'"

"Martin Thentic called me," the woman sobbed. "He hated Hugh, because I . . . I turned him down for Hugh several years ago . . ."

Defeat seemed to hang Martin Thentic's sober face. His erect figure seemed to crumble, until Lew spoke.

"That couldn't be," he said with a shrug of his bony shoulders. "The papers on the street now say Maxon was choked. Thentic phoned it that way to the *Gazette*. I phoned it that way to the *Daily Star* and *Standard*. I covered Dave Potter. Martin Thentic didn't know Maxon had been shot, until he talked to Rose Maxon at about nine-thirty when she called him at his apartment and told him to hurry over to the Royale Hotel. That was a trap."

"A trap for what?" the inspector asked.

"Something went wrong," the reporter muttered. "Rose Maxon suspected it when Thentic made a date to meet her in a drug store, and failed to show up. She didn't know that I had made the date when she telephoned his office at three o'clock this morning. And she told me that Hugh Maxon had been shot. That's how I knew it!"

A tremendous sigh escaped from Patrolman Costigan.

"I also realized the whole thing was a terrific plant," Lew went on. "Especially the I. O. U. I lost a hundred an' eighty dollars Saturday night . . . with a deck of phony cards. Here they are . . . diamond backs . . ."

He produced the decks just recovered from Oscar Traub's room. He riffed them, exposing the backs, and the pattern jumped like nests of fleas.

"So, not only does he work the oldest sucker game in the world, but he made a four out of the one, an' stuck it in Hugh Maxon's little black book. He tricked Tony Mascheri into bringing my paper and the office gun to him last night. Then he did away with Maxon and planted the body right in line where he knows I go for coffee and a plate of eggs every morning at two-thirty—"

"Costigan!" Inspector Wolfe commanded. "You better manacle both of them."

The two, Traub and Rose Maxon, protested volubly as Costigan cuffed both prisoners.

"And by the way, Inspector," Lew reminded, "Costigan is in plain clothes. He not only looks better, but he seems to do better work in them, don't you think?"

"What I think can't be printed," Inspector Wolfe muttered. "But I get the point. You'd better come upstairs, all of you. Curry you'll have to identify the gun, which the killer threw away in a nice conspicuous spot . . . and make depositions on the I. O. U., the newspaper . . ."

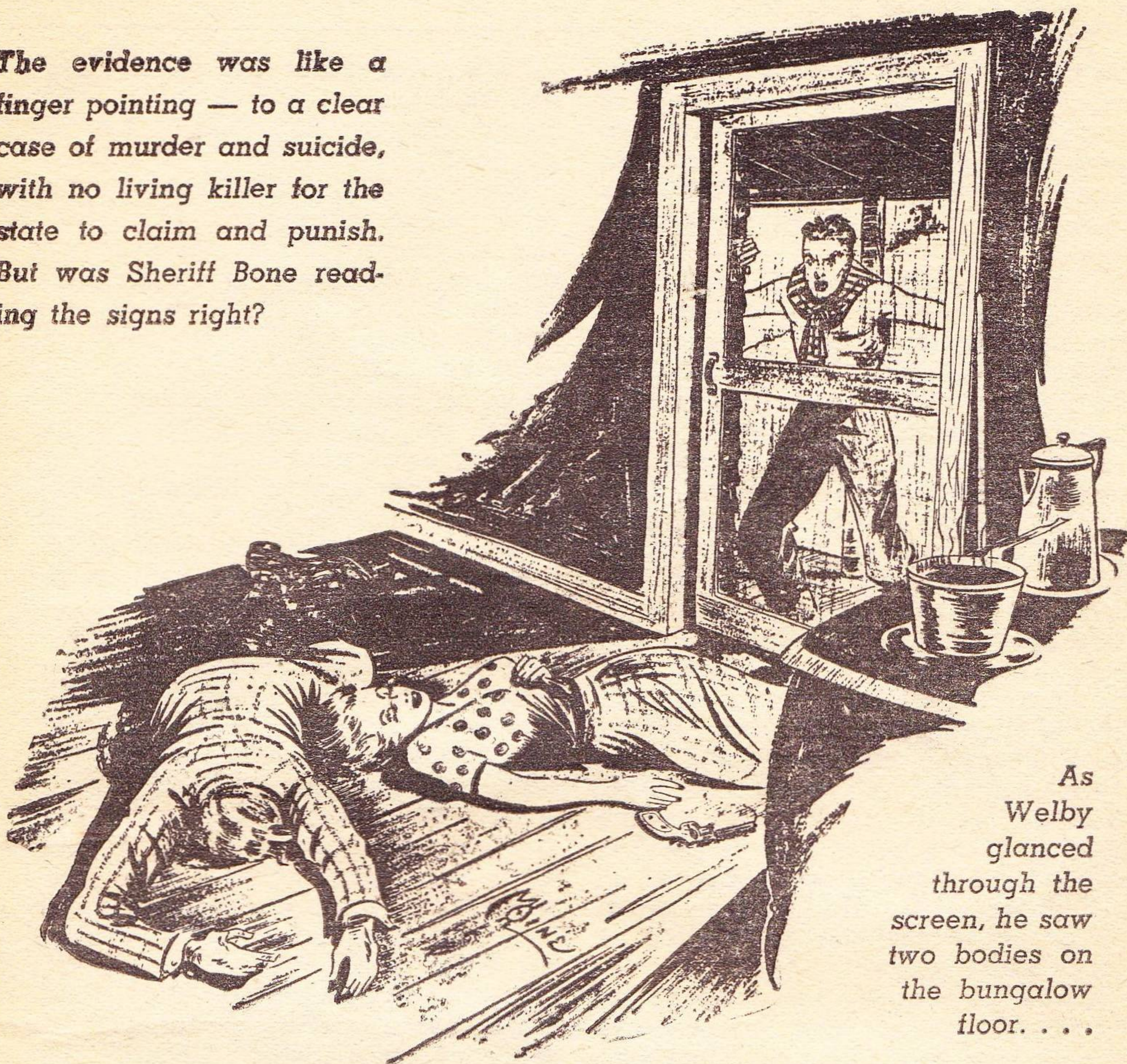
"Not until I talk with my lawyer," Lew laughed.

"If you could wriggle outa this mess," Costigan muttered, jabbing his ribs good-naturedly, "you don't need no lawyer."

"Thanks, Costigan," Lew said. He turned to Martin Thentic. "Come on, Martin, don't take it so hard. Secrets are made to be discovered. Besides, this may be the end of ambulance chasin', an' it may make you realize that the more you look down on people, the less you see above. Let's go."

THE END

The evidence was like a finger pointing — to a clear case of murder and suicide, with no living killer for the state to claim and punish. But was Sheriff Bone reading the signs right?



As  
Welby  
glanced  
through the  
screen, he saw  
two bodies on  
the bungalow  
floor. . . .

# MURDERERS MUSTN'T POINT

By T. W. Ford

(Author of "Who Me?", "No Alibi," Etc.)

**W**ELBY came up the unshaded path from the river beach in plain sight, with the bright yellow beach-sweater slung over his shoulder. He paused to wave it clearly to Dad Johnson sitting up on the farmhouse porch. Old Dad was always out on the

porch at that hour smoking his cigar after an early dinner. He could see the faint plume of smoke rising from the cookstove of the three-room summer shack down there on the high bank over the river. They were just cooking dinner, obviously. Dad waved back from the porch and Wel-

by trotted up the steps of the summer cabin, onto the small roofless front stoop. Dad Johnson saw him peer through the screen door, then jump back as if struck. Welby ran back down the steps, gazing around wildly.

His next move was to wave excitedly and beckoningly to Dad up the slope at the farm. "Hurry down here, Dad! Quick! Come here, Dad!" he yelled. There was intermixed panic and terror in his voice.

That was the way Dad Johnson told it afterward to Inspector Bone of the County Police. He had seen Joe Welby coming up from swimming; Welby had not been in the cabin, and did not enter it until after Dad himself came hustling down the long path across the field and went in first. Then Dad saw the two bodies sprawled on the floor of the main room in the peculiarly awkward attitude of death. Malcolm Vinders lay in the doorway to the kitchen with a bullet hole in the side of his head. Powder burns showed on his graying hair. He had been plainly taken by surprise and killed at point blank range.

Old Dad was so taken aback he stumbled rearward and bumped into Welby who held him up. Then Dad saw the woman's body—Alice was the only name he knew her by. She was stretched in the kitchen in front of the oil stove with the pots bubbling merrily above her. Flies were already around the body. She lay on her back with a bullet hole in her breast that had obviously found the heart immediately. The gun, a .32, lay on the cracked linoleum a few inches from her hand.

It was like an open book, clear as a red bull in a field in daylight. The woman, Alice Duray, had apparently slain Vinders after an argument, then taken her own life a few minutes later. The radio was blaring away like crazy. With the wind blowing from the farmhouse toward the river it was easy to understand how nobody at the farm had heard shots that had been fired close up. And Joe Welby had been down at the river swimming.

"We gotta notify the police," Dad had said, as he told it later. "I'll phone 'em from my house. Let me go, Joe!"

For Joe Welby had been clinging to him in something akin to a paroxysm of terror. They had gone out together, Dad clumping up the path. Welby had dropped down on the stump outside. He had stayed there; glancing back, Dad had seen him. Then he had seen the county police patrol car come around the curve and signalled them. In a matter of moments the car was bumping down the rocky lane to the summer cabin. One of the officers remained on the scene. The other drove back to the main farm to notify headquarters.

In less than ten minutes Inspector Dexter Bone arrived in a patrol sedan with siren a-howl. The report had been transmitted to him out on duty on the county police short-wave beam and he had headed for the scene. He was a short pudgy man with drooping eyelids and a slow voice one degree above a loud whisper. He walked in through the screen door and took a long look, rubbing his empty black briar pipe.

"About the only thing they didn't leave was a motion picture of the act," he said drily. "That's that Vinders from the city, isn't it?"

Dad Johnson nodded as the medical examiner bounced up outside. "Yep. Owed me a week's rental on the place, too."

Bone remained in the background until the medical examiner had completed his chores. It was pretty open and shut. The M. E. was fairly certain both had died of mortal wounds from the .32 on the floor; an autopsy would confirm that. Death in both cases had been almost instantaneous. It looked as if the Duray woman had shot Vinders and then finished off herself.

"She wasn't married to him, was she?" asked Bone.

Little lithe Joe Welby shook his head as he smoothed his black hair, still damp and uncombed from swimming. "No," he said. "She—well, Vinders was married to somebody else. That was one of the things

they'd been arguing about lately. Alice wanted him to get a divorce and marry her, they had a row last night about it."

One of the county police picked it up as Welby paused. "That was down at Ed's Tavern in the village," he said. "I stopped in to check up. Ed Wasotski, the boss, told me he'd had trouble with these summer folks and had to ask 'em to leave, the dame was crying so."

Welby nodded. "Yeah. Alice got a crying jag on."

Bone nodded wearily. "Okay, Charlie," he told the officer. "Pick up Wasotski and bring him up here. Fast." He walked out on the back porch that overhung the river. It was screened and practically walled in by the heavy green foliage. The latter stretched down steeply to the edge of the little river about forty feet below. No steps gave off from the porch; nobody was expected to attempt to go in and out that way.

**D**EXTER BONE poked at the flimsy badly-made screen frames before he returned to the kitchen. He looked as if on the verge of a yawn as he nodded at the stove with the burners still alight. "Just about set for dinner, eh. . . . Franks. Boiled potatoes. Coffee. Beans," He indicated each pot and the percolator with a negligent finger as he checked them off.

Then he led the way out of the kitchen. The photographer was about to go to work. Bone nodded at him.

"Might as well go through the routine," he said. "Gun is by her right hand."

"How about finger-prints, inspector?"

"Check for 'em if you want. You'll find the woman's on the gun, of course. All cut and dried." He kept on walking out onto the front stoop with Dad Johnson who owned the cabin. As he started to question the farmer he waved the pale flustered Welby out, too.

"You might as well listen to correct any false impressions or mistakes, Welby."

Welby had pulled on the yellow

sweater. He looked Bone squarely in the eye. "Am I under suspicion, inspector?"

Bone shrugged his hunched shoulders and rubbed at a spot on his shiny suit. "Don't see how anybody outside of that Alice Duray could be under suspicion, do you?" Then he got the background from Dad Johnson.

For two summers Johnson had been renting the cottage to Malcolm Vinders from the city. Vinders was a smalltime lawyer with a sideline of real estate. In the beginning Johnson had taken it for granted Alice was Mrs. Vinders. One time, when he was having a drink with them, there had been a slip and he had learned she wasn't.

"What did you do about it?" Bone asked as he thumbed at the bowl of his pipe.

Johnson admitted he had done nothing. Vinders always paid up and he took the place for the summer, coming up on weekends. Often he stayed over a full week. He was a cheerful man, quick to offer a drink. "My wife won't allow the stuff around the place, so . . . well . . ." Dad Johnson ended weakly.

"I see. Where does Welby fit in?" Bone asked, actually patted down a yawn that time.

**J**OE WELBY, Johnson said, seemed to be a good friend of the murdered man. He gathered they were associated in business. They always came up to the camp together. Bone glanced at Welby. The latter toed the stoop with a bare foot, it had left a wet track where he stood.

"Vinders was the renting agent for a small apartment house out in the suburbs that I managed. We worked pretty close," Welby said. He was plainly upset, speaking slowly. It was a natural reaction for a man whose friend has been murdered.

"You managed the place?" Bone said. "Mean you were the janitor don't you?"

"Yeah," said Welby.

"What about the row between the woman and Vinders last night, Welby?"

Welby shrugged inside the loose yellow sweater. "Anything I said might be prejudiced. Alice was insisting on a marriage. Mal had said something about getting a divorce last winter. But—well, you better let Wasotski tell you what he heard."

"Uh-huh." Bone shoved his pipe in his pocket. "We know they've been dead about half an hour—not much longer anyway. Where were you all that time?"

"Swimming," Welby said. "They were having another argument, so I got out."

Dad Johnson corroborated that. Welby had dropped up to the farm and told him they were going to it hot and heavy, that he had had a bellyful of it and might want to go back to town. He wanted to know if Johnson would drive him down to the station. They talked it over a while and Welby decided he might stay over if they cooled off. He arranged a signal with Johnson. If when he got down opposite the cabin things seemed better, he would continue on down to the river to swim, which would mean he was staying over night, at least.

"I can see all the way down this path," Johnson said. "I saw him stop here in front of the place—no, he didn't go in. He went on down the path to the river. I saw him all the way till he disappeared over the bluff to the beach."

"Then?" Bone said.

"I sat out on my porch. Had an early dinner already. Saw this path all the time. Welby didn't come up it till he looked in and saw them dead like I already told you."

**B**ONE stood nodding, head bent. His eyes slid over to Joe Welby's hands a couple of times. Then the police officer suggested they take a look at the swimming beach down at the river. "I've got to cover everything just so's I can answer all the dumb questions when I get back to headquarters," he told Welby almost apologetically.

The three of them went down the path and dropped over the bank to the beach. Bone looked around and

spat lazily into the water. There was a cove there with little current. Out in the center of the stream, the water ran much faster around the point that extended on the right. Bone looked upward, turning around. Through the thick foliage they could see a corner of the cabin that backed into the stream.

"You heard no shots down here, Welby?"

Joe Welby smiled at the police officer and squared his shoulders with a degree of pride. "I pride myself on being a pretty classy swimmer, inspector. Do an Australian crawl, the racing stroke, you know. My head is half buried in the water most of the time, so it was better than a fifty-fifty chance against my hearing any shots or anything."

"Sure, that's right," Bone agreed. When they returned to the death cabin, the patrol car was bouncing down the lane with Ed Wasotski, the tavern owner, beside the officer. Watching them approach, Bone drawled: "Either of you ever hear or see anything that might lead you to believe she would kill him sometime?"

Dad rubbed his jaw and nodded reluctantly. "One day I drove her up from town—and I guess she'd had quite a few snorts. . . . Anyway, she saw Vinders talking to some girl at the head of the lane. It got her all excited then. She said something about how he needn't think he could throw her over and . . ."

"Then," Bone prompted.

"Well, then she popped out with that if she couldn't have him, nobody else would either. I tried to quiet her down, told her not to be foolish. She slammed her handbag down. I remember it cracked the glass on one of my dashboard instruments. And she yelled that she'd never want to live without him!"

"Oh," Bone said, nodding to Wasotski who came walking across the grass. He was a stout man in slacks and a sweaty sports shirt, constantly mopping his three chins. Yes, he admitted, there had been an argument between the two dead people down in the back room of his place last night.



Yes, he knew the trouble was because the dame kept insisting Vinders marry her. And he had finally had to ask them to leave because they were shouting so.

**B**ONE went "Hmmm" and plucked a leaf from a small tree and turned it over and over in the palm of his hand. He looked at Dad Johnson and Welby and shrugged.

Wasotski cleared his throat and his whiskyish breath pervaded the group. "Yep, she was real mad. Said it was an insult that Vinders offers her a stinking little sum like thirty-five hundred to get rid of her," he added.

Welby jerked around on the portly tavern owner. "I didn't hear her say that! I didn't know—"

Wasotski remained stolid. "Maybe you didn't hear her say it. But she did—in the ladies room. My wife heard her shooting off her mouth, the poor dame. I guess she was pretty crooked and didn't know anybody was around. That's what she said."

Bone rubbed his pipe some more. "Hmmm. Thirty-five hundred smackers, eh. . . . Nice little sum for some people, at that."

Dad Johnson, mouth pinched, was staring hard at Wasotski. "Crooked, eh?" he suddenly burst out. "That's funny, because when they came home, she was driving. I know because they stopped at the farm first for fresh milk and eggs for this mornin'. And I'd have sworn she hadn't had a drink at all. She—"

Wasotski hunched up his heavy shoulders antagonistically. "You'd swear, huh? Well, what the hell does your word mean, I'd like to know? You claim you was sitting out on your porch for the hour after dinner when this stuff takes place. But when I went up the road a while back, there was nobody on your porch! There!"

Dad Johnson wetted his lips as he slowly crimsoned. Welby was scowling. He started to expostulate, then broke off weakly with: "Well I was down in the river." He turned his head slowly as Dad did too, to face Bone. The Inspector wasn't with them.

He was sitting on the cabin steps some ten feet away, regarding them with mild interest like an unattached bystander. Lazily he rapped the bowl of his pipe against a plank. He finally put his eyes on Dad.

The old farmer wiped his hands on his jeans nervously. "Well, I did leave the porch, but just for a few minutes. Just a few minutes."

Bone nodded. "Undoubtedly stepped inside for a drink of water, eh," he offered helpfully.

"A drink—" Dad broke off. Then he spat into the grass and faced Inspector Bone squarely. "It was a drink I was after, all right. But not water, whisky. I traipsed down here; I admit it. Didn't see nothin' nor hear nothin'. I called out and there was no answer so I figured maybe they wanted to be left alone and— and went back." He knew it sounded weak.

Bone said, "Never went inside?"

Dad shook his head. "Nope. I didn't. Didn't even go up the steps." He looked around, then added as his eyes rested on Welby. "But I looked around several times. I could have seen anybody coming up from the river."

**W**ELBY smiled slightly; Wasotski snorted. "Well, I said you wasn't on your porch. Not that I figure you did it, Dad, but—" ?

Bone's lazy voice cut through. "You said he wasn't on it when you went up the road past here, Ed. What were you doing—"

Wasotski picked it up quickly and easily. "Just ran over to Clinton on some business, Inspector."

Bone patted at another yawn. "That was some fire in the lumberyard over there, wasn't it, Ed?"

"Well, I was only there a few moments. In a hurry. I—I heard the engines, of course. My old lady's jealous as the devil. If I'm away from the place too long, she—"

Bone nodded with a tired smile. "Don't blame her, Ed; not with a liar like you. Wait! . . . You see, there was no fire in Clinton today."

The tavern owner went tomato-hued, started to sputter, eyes twist-

ing around at the county officers as if looking for an avenue of escape. "Well—uh—I had a little business. Sorta a personal matter and—and if my old lady found out—uh. . . ." He tried to grin sheepishly.

Bone didn't seem to have moved, but his coat had been hiked up on one side so the butt of the automatic protruding from his back pocket was visible. "The dead woman—Alice Duray—wasn't drinking when she was at your joint last night, and you didn't go to Clinton when you passed up the road." Bone's gaze abruptly flicked to Welby. "Where did Vinders meet her?"

Welby hesitated only a moment, obviously trying to recall. "Gosh, he never said exactly. First I heard of her was when he returned from a vacation—yeah—up here. That was before we had the cabin."

Bone glanced lazily back at Wasotski. "You and your wife knew Alice Duray from before, didn't you? Old friends, weren't you? A friend of hers before you met Vinders, I'll bet." He heaved himself off the steps with a grunt. "Maybe we better take a ride down and ask your wife about it, Ed."

**W**ASOTSKI mopped at his chins with a greasy handkerchief. "I—I was up here today too . . . maybe about an hour ago, Bone. I went around the curve and came in by the old trail through the woodlot." He nodded down toward the rear of the cabin. "There's a path from the woodlot that comes in back there. I—"

"Talked to him and had an argument and—" Bone let it hang there. One of the county officers dropped a hand to his holster, but the inspector wasn't even looking at Ed Wasotski. His eyes were on Welby as the latter calmly pulled out a stick of gum and unwrapped it.

Wasotski shook his head so the drops of sweat flew from his face. "I didn't talk to him because he was already dead. So was—Alice. I saw 'em—and got the hell outa here as fast as I could. But—they was both dead then. I knew if I reported it it might look as if—"

He panted. Bone only looked at him with mild curiosity; Wasotski spilled out the rest of it in desperation. Yes, Alice Duray had been a friend of his and his wife's before she met Vinders. When Vinders offered her the thirty-five hundred, they wanted her to get more. It was a mild form of blackmail; he had slipped in here this afternoon to put the heat on Vinders to up his offer.

"They was dead when I got here," Wasotski repeated dully.

Inspector Bone shrugged wearily. "You were down here. Dad Johnson was here too. . . . Welby, he was down at the river all the time. . . . I'd sure hate to believe you, Ed, or Dad, did this thing. Let's go inside for one more look around. I wanta be awfully sure." He turned toward the door, stepped aside suddenly to let Welby lead the way. Welby reached for the screen door and pulled it open. They went around Vinders' body and back into the kitchen. The burners had been turned off but the pots still sat untouched atop the stove. Dexter Bone stared at them a long moment.

Then he bent over the dead woman. He pointed at the first and middle fingers of her right hand. "Heavy smoker, wasn't she? Nicotine clear up to the knuckles of her hand."

**N**OBODY said anything. Bone's mouth was abruptly flat lipped. The atmosphere of the place, despite the cool breeze building as the evening closed down, had become somehow tense and charged as if with electricity. Bone suddenly wheeled, holding out a package of cigarets.

"Have a smoke, Welby? I guess you'll want to get out of this as soon as you can, eh? You can remove the bodies, boys. We won't need 'em any more."

"Don't smoke much—but I can use one now, I'll admit," Welby said, accepting a cigaret. "Don't know how I'll break it to his wife."

Bone snorted. "Why not just tell her you killed 'em both."

"What-t?"

"Sure. You slipped in here from the back. You swam around the point, out of sight of the farm, then

you came up the steep back slope—got in—probably knocked her out with a blow of the gun here in the kitchen. . . . She did have a scalp bruise, you know.”

“You’re crazy,” Welby said steady-voiced. “She could have gotten that in falling after shooting herself and—”

“Could have—but didn’t. You knocked her out, stepped into the other room and killed Vinders, then came back and finished her off, making it look like suicide. Then you went down the steep slope and swam back around the point and came up in full sight of Johnson on his porch.”

Welby put his cigaret to his face and inhaled slowly. Then laughed, shaking his dark head. “Yes, I could have; but I didn’t, inspector. Or can you prove it?”

“Why not?” Bone looked very bored again. “Dad Johnson says you didn’t come in till he got here, that

you didn’t touch anything. Which means you must have been in before—just before they got dead. Look at the pots on the stove.”

Welby peered, frowning. “Officer, I think maybe you oughta get your head examined.”

“Not me. You may claim insanity at the trial. But you made one slip, Welby. When you shot the woman and she fell, she must have banged up against the stove, maybe upset one of the pots. Because you handled them to make everything look all right before you got out. You—were—too—careful!”

Welby shook his head again. His eyes were set and guarded now. “Think you found my fingerprints on the pot handles?”

“Don’t need to. But look at those pot handles. All three and the coffee percolator handle are turned to the left—the way a left-hander would leave them. The Duray woman was right handed.”

“But—”



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"Look at the hand you're smoking your cigaret with, Welby! Your left. Nicotine marks around the nails are on your left hand too. When I let you open the door to come in this last time, you used your left again."

"That's right—he is a southpaw!" Dad Johnson exploded.

"A right-handed woman wouldn't have left those pot handles pointing in that direction—to the left, Welby. So you were here—*after they were dead.*"

**O**LD DAD JOHNSON saw it coming and tried to back away. He struck a chair with his boot and it banged against the county homicide inspector, shaking his arm as he went for his automatic. He missed the grab for it and Welby sprang. In a standing leap he cleared the corpse, striking one of the county officers as he landed. The officer pitched back against the kitchen cupboard. Welby, lithe as a small ape, was over a chair in a hurdle. He streaked from sight onto the back porch.

Bone, with surprising agility for a pudgy man, went out after him, automatic clearing his coat. The veranda above the river was empty. A segment of screen lay on the floor, mute testimony to how the killer had gained his entrance before. Bone shouted loudly back to the other officers:

"Get down to the beach and out in that boat there with your flashlights! He may try to cross the river!"

He himself remained on the veranda, eyes scouring the dusk. Dad Johnson called something from the kitchen. Bone gave no answer. Down the precipitous bank foliage stirred slightly. It might have been the night wind. Then a shape moved in the shadows ten feet from the porch.

Bone bit off, "Give yourself up, Welby, or I'll shoot!"

The answer was three shattering reports from the gun Welby had. The bullets hissed through the screens and chunked wood from the wall of the ramshackle place. "Too bad!" Bone shouted through the reports. Then his own gun roared twice,

hesitated a couple of seconds, and sent another piece of lead across the night. There was a screech of agony. Bone's flashlight speared the gloom. It spotlighted Joe Welby leaning against a tree out there, a gun at his feet. His left arm was held up, but his right hung limply against his side with a widening crimson splotch on the beach sweater.

"I just winged him," Bone announced as one of the officers came running around the outside of the place. "I don't think he's got another gun on him, but look around for the thirty five hundred he killed them for. He probably had it cached down there on the slope with the gun."

**I**NSIDE of half a minute, the cop yelled that he had found it. They brought Welby in, sullen and swearing through his teeth at the pain of his wounded arm. He nodded discouragedly when Bone asked him if he wanted to give a full statement. One of the officers carried the money wrapped up in brown paper.

"It was pretty neat, all around," Bone summed it up. "He used Johnson as an unwitting alibi for himself. Johnson saw him go swimming and return from the river as well. Of course, he counted on Johnson sitting out on his porch after early dinner—as he always did. Welby simply meant to cash in on this fight between Vinders and the woman. The first break came when Wasotski told about the settlement Vinders offered. I saw that Welby was excited when that came up. It gave me a hunch Vinders had the money here in cash—no checks, to protect himself—for the settlement. Then I watched Welby and caught him left-handed—and red-handed."

"Why he even thought to put the apparent suicide gun by the woman's right hand," Dad Johnson husked, still amazed.

"Which as good as started the finger of suspicion pointing at him when I realized what those pot handles meant," Bone concluded. "Let's get headed home...."

THE END

*A perfect crime is possible providing there is no*

## CONCRETE EVIDENCE

**By Wilbur S. Peacock**

*(Author of "Mr. Bingle's Murder Maze")*

**T**HE murder of John Shook was not premeditated—that is, not in the sense that hours of concentration and preparedness preceded his violent demise.

The murder, itself, was comparatively simple; simply the packing of clay into the barrel of his sporting gun, so that the barrel would explode when he made his first wing shot at a speeding goose.

I remember that six months before I actually murdered John Shook I had toyed with the idea of removing him by means of a faked accident. But always the thought of other perfect crimes that failed came stealing into my mind with foreboding emphasis.

I discarded plan after plan for killing him, seeing the flaws in each, knowing that any method used must be so innocent appearing and fool-proof that it could never be traced to me.

I don't remember when I first started hating my partner; I think the emotion just grew within my mind with a steady swelling that I sensed rather than felt. I do know that I hated his superior knowledge and his prominence which, because of my background, I had never been able to attain.

I killed him because I wanted the business we had started on a shoestring during the depths of the depression. I had seen the business growing from a one-room affair in the basement of a building to a forty-thousand-dollar-a-year business nine years later. We manufactured awnings and window-blinds and canvas-covered yard chairs, and the demands for our products grew steadily as the years passed.

Then the war-emergency plans of the government brought us orders

that made both of us comparatively wealthy overnight—orders for tents and leggings and other needs of the growing army.

But I did not want to share the profits with the man at whose side I had worked at a stitching machine for hours at a time so many years ago; I wanted the business and its profits all for myself.

I had no reason for thinking that there would be much of an investigation—for both John Shook and myself were bachelors, and without close relatives. But I knew of the natural suspicions that would be aroused, so I tried to find a plan that could never be traced back to me.

I became an omnivorous reader of all the cheap detective magazines, prowled the dusty shelves of libraries, concocted plan after plan, seeking the proper method to use. I read of other murderers who were trapped by simple things—and the knowledge of how air-tight a murder method had to be brought cold sweat to my body time and again.

Finally, I had almost given up the idea of actual murder, for I had no wish to die in the electric chair because of some trifling clue that I might overlook in the commission of murder.

And then, two days after we were on our annual shoot at the lake, I found my opportunity.

I murdered my partner with the same brutal callousness that I had seen so many murderers display in fiction.

**T**HERE were five of us in the party, all business men who had formed a shooting group about five years before. Each Fall, we drove to

the lake and stayed in our club cabin for several days.

This year, we were late in going, because of the increased business, and it was in reality early Winter before we left the city. The weather was dreary, with a fine drizzle that seemed to permeate every bit of our clothes and that seemed to make the grayness of the sky even darker.

"Cold snap reported in the next day or so," I remember John Shook saying, as we cleaned and oiled our guns by lamplight that first night, "I hope it comes quick."

Someone else answered, and then the conversation became general. I remember that I was more or less left out of the talk, and I recalled thinking that the only reason I was permitted to be a part of their group was because I was John Shook's partner.

I hated John Shook then as I thought it wasn't possible for one human to hate another. I withdrew to the kitchen, mixed drinks, staying until I was absolutely certain that my agitation could not be detected.

I was awake most of the night, unable to sleep because of the pounding thoughts that threatened to drive me insane.

The next day was raw and cold, and even the tiny portable heaters in the blinds could not keep the chill from us. We had missed most of the flights of birds, and John and I had less than five shots the entire day from our blind. The others' luck was just as bad, and that night we found that we had bagged but four birds.

We sat around a hot supper, taken mostly from cans, and discussed the day's shoot. One of the men said he had talked with a stranger who had seen a huge flight of birds twenty miles north of us, a flight that was certain to cross our lake the next morning.

I listened dully, scraped at the yellow clay on my boots.

And I knew then the exact method I was going to use in murdering my partner. I got up casually from my bunk, walked over to the window. The rain had stopped, and a cold brisk wind was coming in from the lake. The window thermometer was going

down by the minute, and the barometer promised stormy weather. And even as I looked, I saw the first puffy flakes of snow come drifting silently down.

I went back to the bunk, rolled the bits of clay I had scraped from my boots into a soft ball. I hid the clay beneath my bunk, undressed and was asleep before the discussion had broken.

The next morning, while breakfast was being prepared, I packed the still-soft clay several inches down into the muzzle of John Shook's shotgun.

Three hours later, my partner was dead.

**WE** SAT for those three hours without saying a word, our bodies becoming stiff from the icy wind, our eyes glued to the north sky. At nine o'clock, the first flight of geese swung and settled over our blind. Shots sounded flatly from the other blinds, and three birds crumpled in mid-flight. John Shook and I sank back to our seats, our guns still unfired, watching the flight speed away.

I was utterly unnerved by then. I almost made a pretext of looking at my partner's gun, intending to find the clay plug. Then I thought of what I had to gain, and I sat silently, waiting for the second flight of birds to cross our blind.

Five minutes later, the second flight arrived. John Shook came to his feet, the balanced gun swinging to his shoulder, the muzzle leading the leader-geese by a short way. I cowered away.

I saw my partner's ungloved finger squeeze the trigger—then hell erupted in his face.

John Shook never knew what hit him. The gun-barrel split almost its full length, a strip of metal curling like a blade of withered grass. The breech exploded, and the hammer was driven like a bullet into my partner's right eye.

I screamed then, screamed with panic and fear and horror. And within seconds the rest of our crowd was bending over John Shook's body. One of them offered me a drink, and I sucked greedily at the flask, avoiding

the sight of the crumpled body at the blind's floor.

"He pulled the trigger, and the gun exploded," I said unnecessarily. "He must have had the barrel plugged!"

There was utter silence.

I looked up, saw the men examining the frozen plug of clay that had fallen from the shattered barrel. I saw the horrified wonder in their eyes, and for a moment I almost laughed in their faces.

"We've got to get the sheriff," I suggested.

One of the men nodded, the one who held the chunk of clay in his nerveless hands. His gaze flicked knowingly about the blind.

"Yes," he said quietly, "we've got to get the sheriff."

And then I was fighting the three of them, trying to kill them with the three shells still in my gun. I didn't feel the clubbing blow that smashed me to the floor, I didn't feel anything but the numbing horror that crushed at my senses.

I lay there, held by two of the men. And I knew that the sheriff would not be long in finding out whose finger had tamped the clay into the gun barrel—whose fingertip had left a perfect print in the moist clay before it had frozen into the concrete evidence that was sending me to the chair.

THE END



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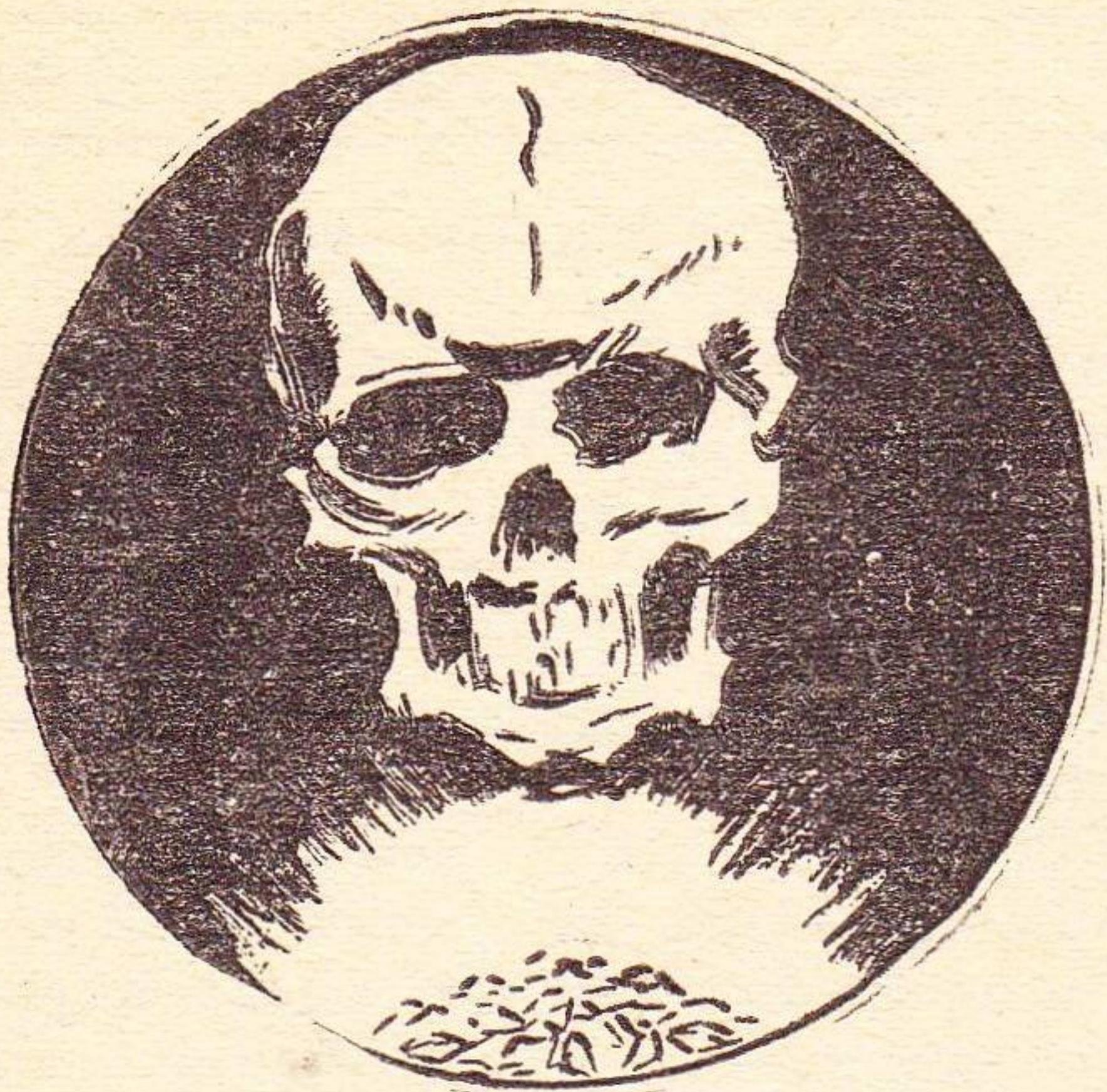
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# RX TO HOMICIDE

By

John A. Saxon

*It might have been an accident, but Druggist  
Ken Thomas knew better!*

**K**EN THOMAS groaned wearily, fighting back from the depths of sound sleep. Confound Alexander Graham Bell and everybody else who ever had anything to do with the development of the telephone.

"Br-r-r-r! Br-r-r-r!"

It had been his employer's idea, having the 'phone in Ken's bedroom connected with the one in the drug store so that they both rang together. "In case of emergency," Grandin had said.

As if it were not enough to put in fourteen hours a day in Grandin's Inter-City Company, without being awakened in the middle of the night every time somebody's kid got a tummy-ache.

Ken rolled over, the rickety bed creaking under his weight. Fifteen years a pharmacist. He guessed he was getting old.

He shoved his fingers through graying hair, sat on the edge of the bed and bent over a protuberant stomach to grope for a pair of slippers that eluded his grasp.

He put his bare feet down on the cold floor, shivered a little, and uncradled the 'phone.

"Inter-City Drug," he said, sleepily.

"Confound it, Ken, *wake up!*" The voice was Grandin's. The boss himself.

Ken swallowed hard. He had thought it was some physician wanting an emergency prescription filled.

"Y-yes, sir," he stammered. "Is anything wrong?"

"Plenty," Grandin snapped. "Grace Merrill died an hour ago. Right after she took a dose of a prescription you compounded for her on Dr. Dolan's Rx. She died of an over-dose of atropin. Get your clothes on and hurry down to the store. The Chief of Police wants to get a look at that prescription."

The fear that hangs constantly over every pharmacist of some day misreading the scribble of a doctor and compounding a lethal dose instead of a benign and helpful one, gripped at Ken's vitals.

"Yes, sir," he said, unsteadily, and hung up the 'phone.

He remembered that prescription—or did he? He had been pretty tired when he filled it. It had been a hard day, and that was the last thing he had done before leaving the drug store.

Ken Thomas didn't like Dr. James Dolan, although the young physician had always acted very friendly toward him. He guessed the reason why he felt as he did toward the doctor was because of the way Dr Dolan had come into town and taken over most of the high-priced practice from men who had been physicians while Dolan was still in swaddling clothes. That was particularly true of Mrs. Merrill, one of the richest women in town—and a physician's dream. As a hypochondriac she took all the prizes.



Then too, Ken guessed he didn't exactly approve of the way Dr. Dolan had taken over with Jean, the old lady's attractive daughter. Jean was just a kid—too young for Dolan.

**H**E JUMPED into his clothes, got his old Chevy out of the lot back of the house and was on his way to the store in less than five minutes. The lights were on when he got there and the place was full of people.

In one glance he recognized Chief of Police Hudson, Dr. Dolan, Grandin, Ken's boss, Tom Merrill, the old lady's son by a former marriage, Fred Batson, the Merrill attorney, and Jean.

"Where's that prescription file, Thomas?" Grandin shot at him the minute he came in the door. "We can't find it."

"I was late getting away," Ken answered, "and I didn't put it in the safe. It's under that bunch of papers on the lower shelf."

"Fine place for it," Grandin barked. "Damned carelessness—"

"Carelessness is right," Tom Merrill said. "The old fool—"

Tom Merrill was about twenty-five, sallow cheeked and anemic in appearance.

Ken Thomas looked at the prescription over Dr. Dolan's shoulder. He wondered if he could have misread it. It called for one-eighth of a grain of atropin, but the symbol wasn't exactly clear.

"Suppose you tell us just what happened at the time you filled the prescription," Chief of Police Hudson directed.

Ken's throat felt dry. "Miss Merrill came in just at closing time," he said, trying to keep his voice steady. "She was in a hurry, said her mother had had another attack of stomach trouble and that Dr. Dolan had written the prescription. Dr. Dolan was outside, she said, waiting for her, in his car."

"Dr. Dolan did not come inside?" Hudson asked.

"No."

"Anybody else in the store?"

"No."

"You talk to Jean while you filled the prescription?"

"Some. I filled the prescription and

gave it to her; she put it in her coat pocket and went out."

"Suppose you take it from there, Jean," Hudson ordered.

Jean Merrill was about nineteen. Her pretty face was tear stained and her usually sleek blonde hair in disarray.

"Dr. Dolan took me home, told me to give my mother a dose of the medicine immediately. He didn't come in. I went directly upstairs. My room is next to my mother's. I gave her a tablespoonful—and—that's all I know—until—"

Her voice broke and she began crying again.

Dr. Dolan patted her shoulder. There was something in the gesture that Ken resented. Why, he didn't know.

"Was there anyone in the house other than you and your mother?" Hudson insisted.

She shook her head. "The servants live in a separate house on the grounds, as you know. Tom was out for the evening. Mr. Batson had been there, I was told, but left immediately without seeing my mother."

**A**TORNEY BATSON cut in. "I called to talk with Mrs. Merrill about some legal matters," he said, his double chins bobbing, "but I was informed that she was indisposed and left without seeing her."

"Was that after Jean had left for the drug store?"

"Yes. One of the servants came from the rear of the house and told me."

"Isn't it possible," Ken Thomas asked, his voice husky, "that she died of something else? That she—"

"A preliminary test shows that the bottle contained approximately six or seven times the amount of atropin that it should have," Hudson countered. "Instead of a simple stomachic, there was enough atropin in the bottle to kill several people. We realize, Thomas, that you made an unfortunate mistake but—"

"I didn't make a mistake," Ken asserted. "I've filled thousands of prescriptions and I—"

"Partly my fault, I suppose," Gran-

din said in a loud aside to Hudson, "for keeping a man of his age—"

That riled Ken Thomas.

"Because you couldn't get anybody else to work the hours I did for the money you pay," he shot at Grandin.

"You won't have to complain about that any longer," Grandin shouted, testily. "You're fired—as of now."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Grandin," Hudson cut in. "There is more than that to be considered. Even though it was a mistake, the district attorney may file a charge of involuntary manslaughter."

Ken's heart sank. Manslaughter! He would go to jail. He'd never be able to get another job—

"I tell you I didn't make a mistake," he said. "Somebody tampered with that bottle—"

Tom Merrill's face blazed with anger. "That's a rotten thing to say, Thomas," he blurted. "Who could have tampered with it—and why? My mother had no enemies who would desire her death."

Ken Thomas didn't answer; he wasn't so sure about that. Old lady Merrill held mortgages on half the property in town. She even held one on both of Grandin's drug stores, and Ken knew Attorney Batson had been pressing Grandin for payment, even threatening foreclosure.

"We can't do anything more until we have the autopsy report," the chief said. "I'm not going to arrest you, Thomas—yet. But don't try to leave town."

Dawn was breaking when the group reached the curb.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Thomas," Jean said, kindly. "I know you didn't mean—"

She sobbed and got into Dolan's car.

Tom Merrill got in with them, saying something that sounded like "stupid old fool."

For a long time Ken Thomas stood on the curb watching the disappearing lights of the cars as the group broke up. He was wondering why anybody would want to kill Grace Merrill.

He had heard lots of gossip—a druggist always does. Mrs. Merrill had been married twice. Tom Merrill was the issue of her first marriage; Jean of the second. Common rumor was that

upon her death the children would divide the estate equally. That, he thought, let both of them out as suspects.

**B**UT supposing Dr. Dolan wanted to marry Jean for the inheritance she would get from her mother? She wouldn't get it until her mother died. It was hard to believe Dolan would have engineered Mrs. Merrill's death. He could have tampered with the prescription on the way to the Merrill house—but that was pretty far fetched.

He couldn't fit Tom Merrill into the picture either. What would have been the motive, and what opportunity had he had? It was common knowledge that he was never home at night, and undoubtedly he would have an iron-clad alibi covering the entire evening.

Grandin? Well, no doubt the druggist had more reason than most to want her out of the way. The probating of the estate would take months and that would give him time to try and raise the money to pay off the mortgage.

Batson? That old fogey? He had almost as much money as Mrs. Merrill.

Yet some one of that group, he felt sure, had accomplished Mrs. Merrill's death. Who, and why, he had to find out or else—He walked the streets for hours, pondering the question and getting nowhere.

The morning paper made quite a spread of the affair, but referred to it only as an "unfortunate error."

At nine o'clock Ken called old Dr. Johnson who had been Mrs. Merrill's physician for years. He asked just one question. "Dortor, did you ever hear of a fatal case of atropin poisoning?"

"A few," the medico said. "Atropin isn't usually fatal unless complicated with some other condition. Ordinarily the system throws atropin off almost as fast as it can be absorbed by the stomach. The books have cases where people have recovered from an overdose up to two grains. But, it's pretty powerful stuff. Why?"

Evidently he hadn't read the morn-

ing paper. Ken made some excuse and hung up the 'phone.

He dialed the number of the Merrill home. When one of the servants answered he asked first for Jean and then for Tom. They were both out. The servant said she thought they had gone to the undertaker's.

There was no better place to start his investigation, Ken thought, than where Mrs. Merrill had died. That remark of Dr. Johnson had started a train of thought. He remembered the various prescriptions he had filled for Mrs. Merrill—mostly anodynes and diuretics.

He drove to the neighborhood of the Merrill home, left his car a block away and approached on foot.

He could see Wendover, the gardener, and his wife Mary, who was the housekeeper, out in the back yard. He jumped the hedge, went through an open window on the side of the house. It was his first experience at entering unlawfully and he felt like a burglar.

He knew where Mrs. Merrill's room was. He went straight to it. There was just one thing he wanted to find out—those other prescriptions!

He felt a little queer about going into the room where Mrs. Merrill had died. It seemed sort of creepy. The bed was in disarray, just as it had been left when the undertaker removed the body.

But Ken went straight to the bathroom and opened the medicine closet.

He caught his breath when he saw what he was looking for—the diuretic eliminative prescription which he himself had compounded.

He picked up the bottle with fingers that trembled, pulled the cork and touched the compound to his tongue.

Water!

Mrs. Merrill had died not because of the prescription he had compounded the night before and which she had taken—but because of the one he held in his hand—which she had *not* taken.

The killer had made a slip.

**H**E SLIPPED the bottle into his hip pocket and went out into the hall. He went downstairs and through the library, intending to leave by a different door.

He never got to it. Something crashed against the side of his head and he went out. Stars danced before his vision in brilliant blues and greens. He seemed to be falling into an abyss of darkness and he remembered nothing more.

When he regained consciousness he was bound securely and a piece of tape was over his mouth. His head felt as if he would never again be able to wear a hat.

As far as he could tell, he was in a closet. He worked himself around so that he could get his heels against the door and kick at the paneling, but decided against it. The killer might still be around.

Whoever had put him where he was, had done so only as a temporary measure. He might be back any moment.

He heard voices. He recognized them as those of Jean and Dr. Dolan.

Dolan was urging the girl to take something, a sedative perhaps,

Dolan was saying: "But Jean, if you are going to help me go through with this thing—"

Go through with what?

A third voice came into the conversation. It was Ken's.

"What are you trying to give my sister," the boy protested. "By God, Dolan, I believe you are the one—"

Ken knew he had to risk it now. His feet banged against the door. He heard Jean scream: "What's that?"

"We'll soon find out," Dolan said.

"Oh no you won't," Tom shouted. "You killed my mother. You tampered with that prescription on the way home with Jean. You're not going to marry my sister. Keep away from that door until the police come or I'll shoot—"

It was Jean who opened the door while Dolan and Tom struggled for the gun.

She ripped loose his bonds and the tape from his mouth.

"Ken Thomas! What in the world—"

Ken threw himself into the fight, but he fought with Dolan against Tom Merrill.

"You fool," Tom shouted. "Don't you realize he—"

There were heavy steps in the hall and Chief Hudson pounded into the room.

"So, you're here all right," he said to Ken. "You were seen entering the house. I've got a warrant for you—"

"Wait a minute," Ken interrupted. "Jean, when you came home last night did you stop anywhere before you went to your mother's bedside?"

"Why, yes," she answered, a puzzled look creeping over her face. "I stopped to hang my coat up in the downstairs closet. I *always* do that. Then I came upstairs and I remembered—"

"You remembered that you had left the prescription in your coat pocket and went back?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because that was just long enough for somebody to open that prescription and put in six or eight grains of atropin," Ken said slowly. "Somebody who knew you would put your coat in that closet and who took a chance that you might forget the bottle. If you hadn't he would have waited until another time—"

"He's crazy," Tom shouted. "Dolan could have done it on his way home with Jean."

A POLICE officer came up behind Hudson and handed him something. Ken recognized it for what it was.

"Where did you find it officer?" he asked.

"In the glove-box of Tom's car. We had to break the lock—"

"Dolan could have, but he didn't," Ken went on. "You did, Tom. You took a chance that Jean would forget that bottle just long enough for you to get at it. You killed your mother, Tom. Why?"

"I didn't—"

"Yes, you did, and you planned it pretty carefully. You studied up on atropin because you knew Dr. Dolan used it in his prescriptions. You found out how it acted and you wanted to be sure it would be fatal. So you emptied the bottle that contained the eliminative she had been taking, and filled it with water. You blocked the natural action of the body in protect-

ing itself against poisons — but you forgot to remove the bottle when you worked the switch on the prescription Jean brought home last night. That bottle—and I have it in my pocket—will have three sets of fingerprints on it. Yours, your mother's and mine."

"All right," Tom shouted, almost beside himself. "I did do it. She kept me on a niggardly allowance. She wouldn't let me do anything I wanted to do. And it was my father's money—not hers. Then when I found out Jean was going to marry Dolan—"

Jean and Dolan both looked blank.

"That's not true," Jean said. "Dr. Dolan is going to marry a girl from the east next week. I've been helping him arrange for it—"

Somehow Ken was glad of that.

Tom jerked away from the officer holding him and made a break for it down the hall. There was a shot, and the footsteps ceased.

"How'd you figure out about those fingerprints?" Hudson asked Ken.

"I didn't," Ken answered. "I was darned fool enough to wipe the bottle before I put it in my pocket. A druggist always does that from force of habit—"

"But you told him—"

"I know I did; that's what broke him. I'm sorry he tried to get away—"

A FEW days later Ken Thomas was trying to find another job. He knew he'd never work for Grandin again under any circumstances.

He met Lawyer Batson and Jean Merrill on the street.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Thomas," Jean said. "We were just talking about you. Mr. Batson is going to have to foreclose on the Grandin stores. He isn't satisfied with the management. You know a lot about those stores. Do you think you could run them for us?"

"I'd like to, Miss Merrill," Ken said, "but—I'm pretty old—"

"You're old enough to be smart, Mr. Thomas," the girl said.

Ken said "Yes" but he wasn't agreeing to her last statement. He was answering her question.

THE END

# DEATH OF A RAT

By Stephen J.  
Lynch

*"One of you three murdered my wife twenty years ago. Tonight I'm going to find the guilty man."*

**I**T WAS a squirming little white rat that died. But its death—at the time I witnessed it—was so horrible, so utterly incredible, it convinced me that Doctor Kerby was more devil than master toxicologist.

None of us had seen Kerby for twenty years—not since the night of that ghastly farewell party which we, Joe Webb, Tom Harwell, and myself, held for him previous to his departure here to California to establish his now-famous toxicological laboratory.

Laura, Kerby's wife, had been there with us, carefree, laughing, friendly, breath-takingly lovely in her white, trailing evening gown. And it was that same night that she took her own life.

We'd heard how the suicide had turned Kerby into more of a machine than a man, how he had buried himself in his chemical laboratory during the following years. He'd turned into a scientific genius, doing phenomenal work with poisons and antidotes, yet living solitarily in this low sprawling building he built for himself in the San Bernadino hills.

It was an evil night, the night we visited him in his mountain shack, with rain torrenting down and drumming against the windows. After making a tour of his fantastic laboratory, a jumble of test tubes and beakers, we settled about his stone fireplace, smoking and talking over old times.



And like the old days, Kerby brought out a bottle of chartreuse, the same French liqueur he always served us back East.

There was a drastic change in all of us, but Joe Webb was still the same skinny, nervous scarecrow he'd always been. Tom Harwell had put on a lot of weight and looked a lot like Eugene Palette of the movies, only more bald.

Doc Kerby had changed shockingly; gaunt, bony, sharp-eyed, as though working with obscure and dangerous chemicals had affected his well-being.

"To Kerby, our dear friend, who is making chemical history," Harwell grinned, holding aloft his glass. "We are all proud of you, Doc. Proud of what you've accomplished."

Kerby stared at us queerly as we downed our drinks, stared with a kind of satisfaction. But he did not drink with us. I should have been warned by that, but I wasn't. I was too fascinated by the squirming pair

of little white rats he held so gently in his long, thin, chemical-stained fingers.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said in his low quiet tone. "I have always tried to do my best for science."

Joe Webb, the shyster lawyer, spoke up then, curiously: "You invited us all up here to show us some new tremendous chemical discovery you've made, and we're rather keyed up about it. When you going to spring it on us, Doc?"

Kerby looked at us long, searchingly. It made me uncomfortable, because it was as though he were searching out our very souls.

"I have made two tremendous discoveries, gentlemen. One in chemistry, and the other—" His thin lips tightened slightly. "I know conclusively now that Laura, my wife who meant more to me than life itself, was not a suicide twenty years ago. She was murdered, brutally, unfeelingly, by *one of you three men!*"

**H**E COULD not have shocked us more had he struck us in our faces. We were on our feet as one man, staring in horrified astonishment. We all began chattering at him at once.

"Quiet!" he snapped, his voice cutting into us like a whip-lash. And he added softly, much as though the accusation of murder were dismissed from his mind: "Now, in regard to my other discovery. It's a remarkable neural toxic element I managed to stumble upon by accident to isolate from Molybdic acid, a deadly poison which has irrespirable powers when introduced into pure air."

"Which makes no sense to me," replied Harwell. Though Tom was a dentist, I doubt if he was familiar with poisonous chemicals.

"It will soon enough," Kerby scowled, then treated us to a smile. "The chartreuse you drank was dosed with this new chemical!"

"My God!" cried Webb, frantically. "You mean you've poisoned us; murdering all of us to be sure you can have your revenge for your distorted belief that—"

Kerby put up his hand to stop the attorney's words. "None of you need

die, gentlemen. But this poison will point out which of you murdered Laura."

"You're utterly mad!" exploded Harwell. "How can a chemical, introduced into our bodies, prove murder?"

"You gotta prove it to me," I said.

"You'll see, Benson," he nodded to me, quietly, as he fondled the two white rats in his hands.

"Nonsense!" cried Webb. "You're merely trying to frighten us. For that matter, tell us the proof you have that Laura was murdered twenty years ago."

"Why should I dwell upon facts that are known to the killer? We all courted Laura, and you three were deeply envious when she accepted me. One of you believed that you would rather see Laura dead than lose her; an utter madness that drove you to senseless murder. And for the details of how she died from a stab wound to fool the police into believing it was suicide—well, each of you had ample opportunity to commit the crime. Need I say more?"

"Nonsense!" Webb cried again. "I don't believe you fed us any poison. You're completely out of your mind! You're mad, Kerby. And I'm going to get to hell out of here!" and he stepped purposely toward the door.

Kerby transferred the rats to one hand. His free hand, with a quick motion, dipped into his pocket and came out gripping a revolver. He pointed it at Webb.

"None of you will leave here before the guilty man has confessed. Understand?" he said rather dangerously.

We stood staring helplessly at this man, and I was more convinced now that he was mad, a madness that had made him imagine his wife had not died by her own hand, and that one of us was responsible. There was something frightening about the gleam in his eyes, and I grasped at the straws in an effort to get his mind from the gun.

"The poison you placed in the chartreuse, Kerby," I said. "Will it kill us?"

"If any one of you walk out of this house, you'll drop in your tracks," he told me. "I mentioned that my formula has irrespirable features. The first lungful of cold air will kill you!"

"You're crazy!" snorted Harwell, sweating like an ox. "There's no poison with such peculiar features!"

I'm an architect, and this chemical hooley was all Greek to me.

"You continue to disbelieve?" Kerby laughed lightly, rather madly. He walked to his table, where a thin-glassed vial stood in a small wooden rack, filled with colorless liquid. A small medicine-dropper lay beside it. "Harwell, pour out another glass of the liqueur and bring it to the table."

Harwell stared at him, mopped his bald spot, then looked helplessly at Webb and me. Finally he shrugged his fat shoulders and did as ordered. I thought for a moment that he meant to jump Kerby's gun, but he didn't. Setting down the glass of chartreuse on the table he retreated again to rejoin us, his eyes steady on Kerby.

"Watch carefully, gentlemen," said Kerby. He laid down his gun and filled the medicine-dropper from the liqueur glass. Quickly, with the efficient moves of a laboratory expert, he injected a few drops of chartreuse into the mouths of both of the rats. The little creatures sputtered and choked, but hopped around the desk top, none the worse for the experience.

**K**ERBY looked up at us and smiled crookedly. "Both are still very much alive, just like you gentlemen. But watch closely. . ." Picking up his gun in one hand, one of the rats in his other, he stepped to a small window across the room.

He opened the window slightly, thrust his hand gripping the rat outside for an instant, then brought the creature back into the room. He closed the window, walked back to his desk and flung the rat at our feet.

Cold snakes seemed to run up and down my spine as I stared at the pitiful creature on the floor. It was mo-

tionless as a stuffed toy, unbelievably stone dead!

I glanced at Harwell and saw his fat fingers pulling in nervous horror at his collar. Webb stood like one stricken, his jaws working with convulsions.

"You note," spoke up Kerby, softly, "that the rat on the desk is very much alive. But the other, from breathing in cold air, is dead—even as each of you will die if you venture out of this house."

"Lunatic!" cried Harwell. "Do you intend—"

"What I intend is perfectly planned, Tom," Kerby cut in. "You see, I know who the killer is, but lack in proof that will stand in court. Therefore, I am giving him five minutes in which to confess. If he refuses within that time," his voice turned harsh again, "he must take the consequences!"

"And the consequences?" asked Webb tightly.

Calmly the scientist picked the vial from its rack on the desk and held it to view. "This, gentlemen, is a derivative of amyl nitrate. It has a counter effect on this chemical formula in the chartreuse, rendering the deadly poison inert."

"An antidote?" I gasped hopefully. Kerby nodded. "A very effective one. And the instant the murderer admits his guilt before witnesses, I will give each of you men a suitable dose. But if he refuses and remains silent—" He paused momentarily, his sharp eyes lancing us.

"Remember, gentlemen, I know the identity of the murderer. If he refuses to speak in five minutes, I will administer the antidote to the other two men, and the guilty man—" His eyes stabbed at the marble clock on the mantel. "Then I'll open the windows so that the wind will sweep this room. And the result, gentlemen—well, you remember how the rat died!"

We stared at him in horrible fascination, watched him place the gun on his table and seat himself behind it. He seemed like a devil, some terrible god who held life and death in his hand in that moment.

"I note, gentlemen," he added quietly, "that the clock over the fireplace says five minutes to ten. When it strikes the hour, the time will be up."

There was a grim silence, and I could hear Webb's harsh breathing beside me. The small clock ticked ponderously, hammering like a sledge on my raw nerves.

The truth was doubly plain now, the fact that his lonely brooding over his dead wife had engendered madness in Kerby's brain. He had finally, over the years, convinced himself she had died of murder. He had chosen insanely which of us totally innocent men had committed the imagined crime.

"Benson!" Webb suddenly gritted out beside me. "If you killed Laura, or if you did, Harwell—"

"No accusations, gentlemen," Kerby cried. "Let the guilty man confess. You three were in love with Laura. I have letters to prove it. So you see—"

**W**EBB glared at me sharply. "Why don't you own up, Benson? You made passes at Laura at the party, kept feeding Kerby fancy drinks to get him tight. You had to kill Laura to keep her silent, when she threatened to tell your wife!"

"You lie! You're just trying to pass the buck, Webb," I shot back at him. "How about the time you asked me to lie to your wife, and say you were with me on business till four in the morning, and the next day I found Laura's purse in my car?"

"Yes," Harwell exclaimed. "And why did you ask me what I used to dope my patients with. The police said Laura was doped before she was stabbed. Kerby's right; she couldn't have taken her own life while under a drug."

"But don't you know something about opiates, Tom?" I asked.

"Please, gentlemen," Kerby snapped. "No bickering."

"Why should we accuse each other?" I retorted.

"The time is flying, gentlemen," Kerby said tauntingly. "All that is

needed is that the murderer admit his guilt. He knows his own identity. Why wait?"

"Damn you, Kerby!" burst out Harwell in rage. "You can't take justice in your own hands like this! You can't—"

He choked off his brassy voice when he saw the expression on Doc Kerby's gaunt face, and fell grimly silent. Kerby sat motionless, leaning back in his chair, his slender hands interlaced on one skinny knee, his gaze steady upon us.

The thunder had died away and only the flash of lightning flickered on the windows. And with a wheeze that made my temples throb in horrified anticipation, the old mantel clock began striking . . . once . . . twice . . . three times . . .

Then all hell exploded in our faces. With the spring of an enraged tiger, Webb flung himself at the table, snatching up the revolver. He thrust the muzzle at Kerby, snarling: "Not a move now, you fool, or I'll blast you!"

Kerby smiled without fear. He came to his feet slowly, the smile still fixed on his thin face.

"So you decided to admit your guilt, eh, Webb?" he said in that same quiet tone.

"I admit nothing!" raged Webb. He motioned us with a threatening gesture of the gun. "Okay, you two. Get back of the desk along with Kerby. And no wrong moves!"

His words made me go cold with dread. Up to that instant I had believed he had merely grabbed up the gun to outwit Kerby so we could overpower the madman. But forcing us to join Kerby told the bitter, unbelievable truth. Webb had actually murdered Laura Kerby twenty years ago!

"Wait a minute, Webb," Harwell blurted nervously, as we carefully obeyed him, but Webb wasn't listening. He snatched the bottle of antidote from its rack on the table, flicking off the stopper with his thumb.

Plainly, Webb's emotional stability had broken down. The fact that his perfect crime of two decades ago had



suddenly been brought to light, made him lose all sense of proportion. It seemed, as he stepped nearer Kerby, that he had only one thought in his disordered mind, the flaming urge to kill this man who had exposed him.

"Laura played me for a sucker, Kerby! And I'm not going to be a sap twice—" Webb madly squeezed the trigger of the gun.

There was no explosion, no spurt of flame. The hammer fell on an empty chamber. Webb kept jerking the trigger and uttered a sobbing breath of defeat as only metallic snicking came from the empty gun.

In rage, he flung the revolver into Kerby's face. Then with a quick move, he swallowed the contents of the vial he held, turned to the door, unlocked it and raced out.

I grabbed Harwell, dragging him deep into the room as the cold air of the open door swept into the little room.

I yelled to Kerby. "Stop him! Stop Webb, you fool! And close that door before we—"

There was the sound of a motor coming to life outside, the bark and cough of the cold engine as Webb started driving furiously away. But Kerby did nothing but stand in the open doorway, watching the killer's escape.

"For God's sake, Kerby!" cried Harwell. "You—"

His voice choked off as the sound of a crash came from outside, and from the window beside us we saw how Webb, apparently in his anxiety to get away, had skidded the car off the road into a gully of jagged boulders.

**K**ERBY didn't go outdoors. He merely closed the door and turned back to us.

"My God!" Harwell cried. "Aren't you going to go out there and help him? Even though he murdered Laura—"

"There's no need going out there to learn if he's dead," replied Kerby, quietly. "I know that he is. He died before he got fifty feet from the house."

"But why should he die?" I asked. "He took the antidote, didn't he?"

"Yes, he took the antidote." Kirby sighed deeply. "I'll tell you gentlemen the truth now. All I did know was that one of you did murder my wife. I've known it these twenty long years, yet was unaware as to which of you committed the crime."

His eyes were alive with fire, a gleam like smouldering garnets. "So I brought you here to place you under a terrific psychological pressure. There was no fantastic poison in the chartreuse. I snuffed out the white rat's life merely by the pressure of a finger on its heart. It was all a bluff to force the real murderer to grab up the gun. And finding it empty, he would swallow the antidote and attempt escape."

"But why did you place such importance on the antidote, if we did not drink poison?" I cried, bewildered.

"The vial, Benson," he said simply, "contained *deadly hydrocyanic acid!*"

I stared at him, horrified by the grim satisfaction I saw on his thin face. For the first time in my life, I realized what a terrible thing vengeance can be.

THE END

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# DEAD BLOOD RUNS PURPLE

By Frank Kane

(Author of "Sometimes Money Talks," "Murder at Face Value," Etc.)

*There was a higher-up behind the jewel-snatching racket at the Tropical Club, which culminated in a slashed throat for lovely Marie Marlin. And Johnny Liddell's throat was ripe for the murderer's knife, unless he could sift through the mass of conflicting evidence and nail Number One pronto!*

**J**OHNNY LIDDELL leaned on the bar at the Tropical Club with the grace born of long experience. He fondled a jigger of what the bartender proudly called brandy in his ham-like hand. He was only slightly longer than he was wide, but most of the bulk constituted muscle rather than fat.

Behind him, six bored chorines were pounding out the last few steps of an uninspired routine. The faces of the ringsiders looked ghostly through the pall of smoke that seemed part of the atmosphere of the Tropical.

Johnny Liddell poured the brandy down his throat and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Seen Marie Marlin around tonight, Jack?" he asked the bartender casually.

The man behind the stick scooped up the empty glass, swabbed the bar with a wet rag that left large, greasy circles and shook his head.

"She ain't due to go on until 12:45." He indicated a clock on the back bar with a nod of his head. "It's only 11:30 now."

Johnny Liddell grunted. "Let's have another shot of that Brooklyn varnish you call cognac."

He spilled a handful of silver on the bar. The bartender grinned, showing the yellowed stumps of his teeth. He poured a dark brown liquid from a bottle bearing a foreign label. A few drops spilled over the side of the glass onto the bar. He lifted the glass and swabbed the bar.

"Don't look now, Johnny, but here comes that female newshawk pal of yours," he whispered.

Johnny Liddell raised his eyes to see the trim figure of the Trib's Sally Herley bearing down on him and groaned. Under other circumstances, a chance to have a couple of drinks with her might be intriguing, but tonight—

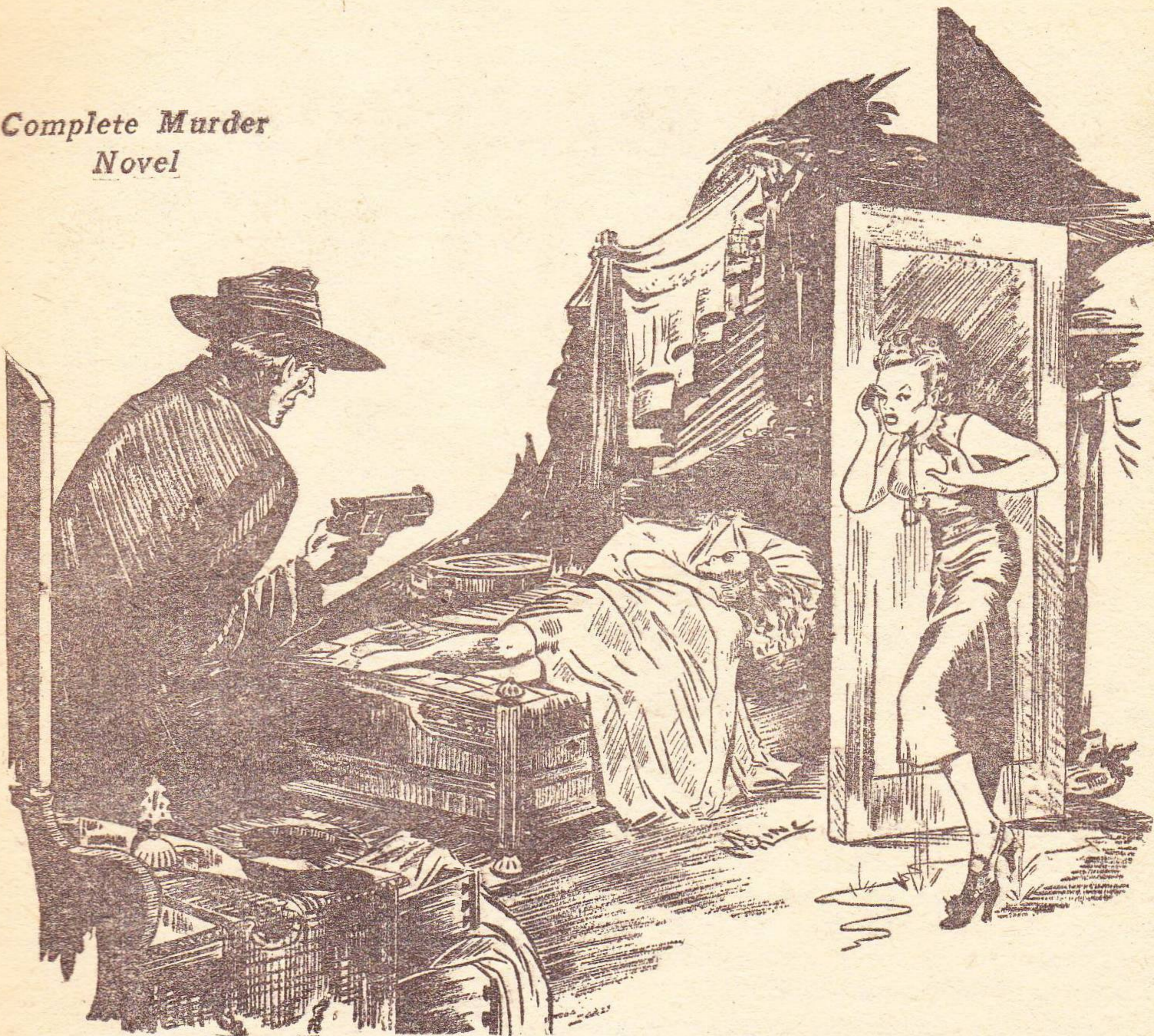
"Hi, Sherlock," she greeted him. "Got the solitary drinking habit, eh? That's bad."

Johnny Liddell nodded. "With any luck I'd be able to cultivate it, Sal. Get too many interruptions. Where are you heading for?"

The girl shrugged, then grinned, showing a gleaming set of teeth. "No place in particular, Sherlock. I'm never too busy to spend a little time with my friends. Rye and ginger, Jack."

She leaned over and helped herself

*Complete Murder*  
*Novel*



to a cigarette from the battered paper pack in front of the private detective. He scraped a match along the sandpaper strip of a box, held it to the end of her cigarette, watched stolidly as she exhaled a long, blue feathery tendril of smoke ceilingward.

"You're wasting your time shadowing me tonight, Sal," he told her. "This is strictly social."

A man in a tuxedo that fit too snugly at the hips and showed obvious signs of padding at the shoulders approached Johnny Liddell.

"Mr. Liddell?" he asked in a low voice. "Miss Marlin would like to see you in her dressing room."

Sally Herley pursed her red lips. "Marie Marlin, no less. When you go social, you go the whole way."

Johnny Liddell emptied his glass, slid off the bar stool and chucked her under the chin. "For a little fat guy, I manage to get around," he grinned.

He followed the tuxedoed man through the crowd to a small, unmarked door that led backstage. Marie Marlin's dressing room was third one down the unpainted corridor. He knocked.

"It's open. I'm decent."

**M**ARIE MARLIN sat on a straight-backed chair in front of a littered make-up table. A brightly colored dressing gown hung carelessly open, revealing much of the reason for the Tropical's popularity with out-of-town buyers. Her long, metallic red hair hung down over her shoulders, in startling contrast to the whiteness of her skin.

"You the dick the Gardener Agency sent over?" Her voice was unexpectedly harsh.

Johnny Liddell noticed that she had just painted her mouth a striking red

and had smeared three fingers doing it.

"Yeah. Johnny Liddell's the name. Understand you're having some trouble."

The girl turned back to the mirror and started working on her eyes with a mascara brush.

"Not yet, I'm not. That's what I want you for—to see that I don't have any trouble. Anybody see you come back here?"

Johnny Liddell shook his head. "Only that waiter you sent out after me."

The girl shrugged. "That's Mario. He doesn't matter."

Johnny Liddell rummaged through his pockets came up with a fresh pack of cigarettes. He stripped it of its cellophane jacket, offered one to the girl.

"Mind telling me what kind of trouble you're expecting?"

Marie Marlin ran incredibly long, graceful fingers through her thick hair. She shook her head. "I haven't got time. It'll keep. I want to see you tonight at my place—Denton Towers. Make it about 2:30."

Johnny Liddell grunted. "Why didn't we set the date for there in the first place?" He scratched a wooden match along the jamb of the door and lit it. "I don't get any particular thrill from hanging around this upholstered sewer."

The girl swung around and faced him. "You're getting paid for it, ain't you?" Her eyes were hard, unblinking. "Besides, I had a reason for having you meet me here." She pulled open the top drawer of her dressing table, took out a paper-wrapped packet. "I want you to keep that in a safe place for me until I ask for it."

Johnny Liddell nodded. He fingered the packet curiously.

"Okay," he said. "Tonight at 2:30. Denton Towers."

Sally Herley was still perched on the bar stool when he got back. She studied him with a critical eye.

"Well, Casanova. You didn't hold the royal attention very long."

Johnny Liddell grinned, then winked. "Don't tell anybody, but we

just arranged the terms for a return engagement." He ordered a brandy, settled back on his favorite bar stool. "Why don't you run along now, kid? It's getting late."

Sally wrinkled her nose in a grin. "You're too anxious to get rid of me, Shamus. I think I'd better go along to take care of you."

**G**OOD to her word, two hours later, the girl followed Johnny Liddell into a cab in front of the Tropical.

They jumped two lights on Madison Avenue, veered east at 48th street and weaved across town.

"This driver sure is patriotic, Johnny," Sally gasped. "He makes his tires wear twice as long by taking turns on only two of them."

Johnny Liddell grunted. "Do what he does. Close your eyes when he comes to a corner."

The cab skidded to a stop in front of an ornate canopy that announced "Denton Towers."

"Is this where we're going?" Sally peered upward at the apparently endless tiers of windows stretching skyward.

"This is where I get out," Johnny announced. "You're going home."

"Nothing doing. Something's cooking and I smell a good story coming up. Me for that."

Johnny Liddell put his hand on her shoulder and pushed her gently back on the seat. "All kidding aside, Sal. I couldn't take you with me if I wanted to. Besides," he brought the paper-wrapped packet from his side pocket, "you can do me a real big favor."

Sally Herley was unimpressed. "Here it comes."

"I was supposed to get this thing into a safe place before I came here," he told her in a low voice. "Kidding around with you, I clean forgot about it—"

The girl reporter cocked an eye. "You levelling?"

"So help me, kid. I wouldn't kid you." He dug into his pocket, came up with a Yale key. "Here's the key to my place. Take it up there for me, will you?"

"I will on one condition. If there's

(Continued On Page 70)

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(Continued From Page 68)

any kind of a yarn on the fire, I get first crack at it."

Johnny Liddell nodded. "It's a deal. He handed her the package and closed the cab door. "The Highland, just off the park," he told the driver.

As he waved her good-bye from the curb, he could see her through the back window of the cab as she placed her thumb to her nose—and waved back.

**M**ARIE MARLIN had apartment 3A. It was set around the corner from the elevator, off the main corridor. Johnny Liddell rapped softly at the door. He caught the faint rustle of movement from within, then silence.

He rapped again, then tried the knob. It turned in his hand. He pushed the door slowly open. From the hall he could command a view of the entire living room. It was empty.

Johnny Liddell eased a .45 from its shoulder holster into his fist. He stepped cautiously through the open door, swung it shut with his heel. His eyes covered the room quickly. There were plenty of evidences of a hasty search—desk drawers stood open, papers littered the floor.

The door leading into the bedroom was half ajar. Johnny Liddell crossed the room slowly, pushed the door open, the .45 at ready.

It was a large, ornately decorated room. A yellow light burned feebly in a center socket. Drawers and a cedar chest against a far wall had been ransacked in here, too.

Marie Marlin lay on her back on the pink silk coverlet on the bed. One arm dangled to the floor, the other was thrown across her face, as though to ward off a blow. Her throat had been cut from ear to ear, a dark pool formed on the rug under her head.

Johnny Liddell's eye flashed to the windows. They were all closed. Whoever had made the rustling noise was still in the apartment. The bathroom door was open, offered no hiding place. He settled for the closet near the window.

"Okay, you in the closet. You got a count of three before I start blasting. Come out with your hands way up."

In the brief silence, Johnny Liddell thought he could hear his heart pounding. His finger tightened on the trigger—

The closet door swung open. A girl stepped out.

She was slight, weighed about an even 100 soaking wet. Her blond hair was piled high on her head, exposing shapely little ears that snuggled close against her head. Her face was drained of all color, she kept her eyes averted from the bed.

"Okay, sister. Out here where I can get a good look at you."

The girl complied. Her hands were shaking visibly. "Please—put away the gun. I'm not going to run away."

Johnny Liddell grinned. She didn't look as though she was going to be able to walk, let alone run. He walked across the room, carefully avoiding the slowly congealing puddle near the bed, picked up the telephone.

He dialed the number of police headquarters.

"Hello," he barked. "Lieutenant Stack in Homicide."

When Stack answered, he gave him the facts briefly.

"Yeah," he answered a question. "I'll keep her here for you. Hop to it, will you, Stack?"

**H**E SLIPPED the .45 back into its shoulder holster and ushered the girl out into the living room. "If I were you I'd start talking and talk fast," he advised. He selected a cigarette and hung it from his lower lip. As he talked it waggled.

"Could I have one of those?" the girl asked. He held the pack out and she speared one with a shaking hand. Johnny Liddell lit it for her and she filled her lungs gratefully.

"How about it, blondie?" he persisted. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

The girl turned a pair of clear blue eyes on him. "I'm Alma Woods. I live here. Marie Marlin is—was my roommate."

Johnny Liddell digested that piece of news slowly. "That why you were ransacking the drawers? What were you looking for, Alma?"

The girl hesitated a moment. "I—"

"Don't answer that, Alma," a hard voice cut in from behind Johnny Liddell.

The private dick, cursing himself for leaving the door unlocked, pivoted around, hand streaking toward his right lapel. It froze with the tips of its fingers brushing the butt of the .45. He was looking down the wrong end of a .38 barrel.

"That's smart, buddy." The guy holding the .38 stared at him with unblinking, cold slate-colored eyes. His spotless grey fedora was tilted over one eye, a thin, lipless mouth clenched a cold cigar. "Come over here, Alma. Who is this guy?"

The girl was shivering perceptibly. "I don't know. He walked in here and pointed a gun at me. Then he called the police—"

Slate Eyes stared balefully at Johnny Liddell. "Called the coppers, eh? I oughta let you have it right here." He turned his attention to Blondie momentarily. "Did you find it?"

The girl shook her head. "He broke in before I could finish looking." She shrugged helplessly. "Anyway, I don't know where she'd hide it."

Johnny Liddell suddenly decided why Slate Eyes looked familiar. It was a jewel snatch that the Gardener Agency had worked on several years before. Slate Eyes had been in it, even though they hadn't been able to pin it on him—

"The cops won't be here for a few minutes. Give a last-minute look around," the hood ordered. He shifted the cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

Johnny Liddell's mind went tumbling back over the years. Slate Eyes' name eluded him. Harry Eastman? Harry Ester? Harry Esterbrook! That was it! He studied the hood's face again. What was the connection between this jewel thief and Marie Marlin's murder?

For a split second, Slate Eyes' attention wandered as he stared past Johnny Liddell toward the thing on the bed. The private dick had no time to weight the consequences. He threw his entire 170 pounds at the gunman in a flying tackle.

He never even saw the blow that

floored him. It couldn't have travelled more than ten inches. He was conscious only of the streams of white hot pain that seemed to split his skull, of the multicolored lights that flashed brightly as the gun butt connected with his skull.

He descended into a bottomless pit of darkness.

## CHAPTER II

CONSCIOUSNESS seared its way back into his brain. Dimly he made out voices. He tried to raise his head, groaned and let it fall back to the floor.

"Well, well. Sleeping beauty is coming back to life," a familiar voice boomed in his ears. Johnny Liddell winced, tried opening his eyes.

The familiar voice jangled his supersensitive nerve again. "Take a good look at him, sergeant. There's one dick that really used his head."

The sergeant laughed. "Looks like too much wear and tear on the skull, lieutenant." The both guffawed.

Johnny Liddell's eyes stopped rolling long enough for him to focus them on Lieutenant Ray Stack. He tried to grin, but the result was more like a horrible grimace.

"Imagine meeting you here, lieutenant," he croaked.

The homicide dick grinned. "Nice work, Johnny. Think you're going to live?"

Johnny Liddell made the mistake of trying to nod his head. He groaned. "I'm afraid I will. The dame's gone, I suppose?"

Stack nodded toward the bedroom. "That one isn't, but the one you were going to hold for me is." Lieutenant Stack affected a broad-brimmed, western type hat. His square jaw was chomping noiselessly on a wad of gum and he didn't miss a beat as he talked. "You're slipping, Johnny, when a dame can conk you and take a powder."

Johnny Liddell tenderly massaged the sore spot of the top of his head. Mentally he debated the advisability of holding out on Slate Eyes' part in the evening's festivities. He decided against it.

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**Crack Detective**

"Right after I spoke to you, I was questioning the girl in here, when some guy slips up behind me and beans me."

Lieutenant Stack brushed his mustache from the middle outward with the nail of his thumb. "A guy, eh? Know him?"

Johnny Liddell nodded. "I think so. Remember that Walton robbery the agency worked on a couple of years ago?"

Stack nodded. "A jewel job wasn't it?"

"We thought the guy that pulled that job was a mug named Harry Esterbrook." Johnny Liddell pulled himself stiffly to his feet, went through the motions of brushing himself off. "He's the guy."

The lieutenant's eyes narrowed. "Esterbrook, eh? Sure of that, Johnny? Murder's not in his line. He's too yellow for that."

**A** WHITE-COATED representative of the M. E.'s office handed Stack a receipt to sign, which he initialled and handed back.

"That was a pretty nifty dish there, lieutenant, until somebody decided to make hash out of it," the guy in the white coat grinned.

He signalled to the two men from his office. They rolled the body from the bed onto a stretcher, covered it with a sheet and followed him out.

"Nice guys," Johnny Liddell grunted. He stepped back to let the stretcher bearers pass. "So long, kid," he told the covered figure softly. "We'll pay off for you."

Stack sat watching him, his jaws methodically crushing the large wad of gum. "You're pretty sure about Esterbrook, Johnny?" he asked.

Johnny Liddell nodded, then regretted it. "I never forget a face, Stack. His is one I'm going to particularly remember."

The uniformed copper at the door opened it in response to a knock. A tall, carefully tailored man stood in the hall, a grey Stetson in his hand. He looked around curiously at the sight of the uniformed policeman.

"U'm, Harry Connors of the *Dispatch*," he told no one in particular.

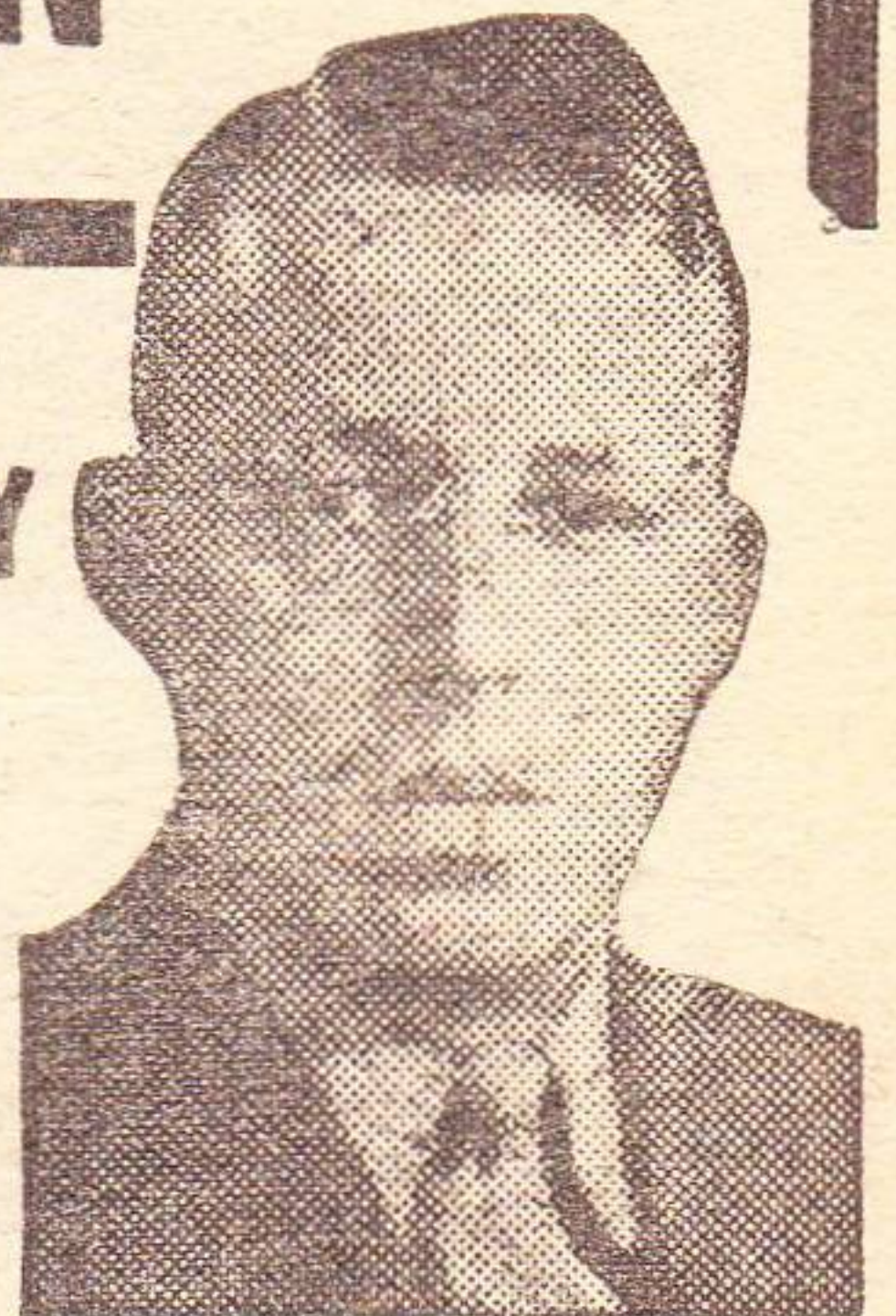
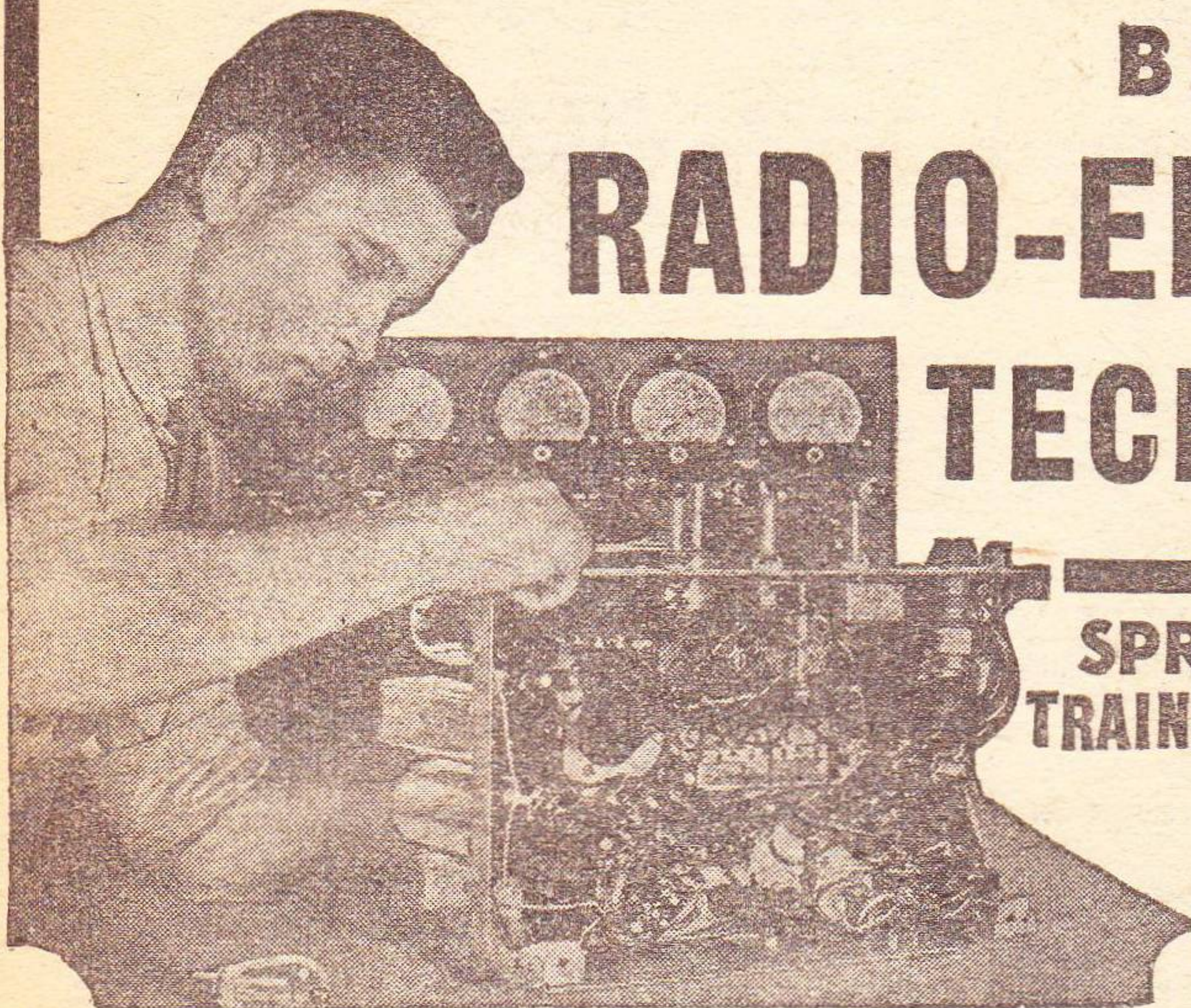
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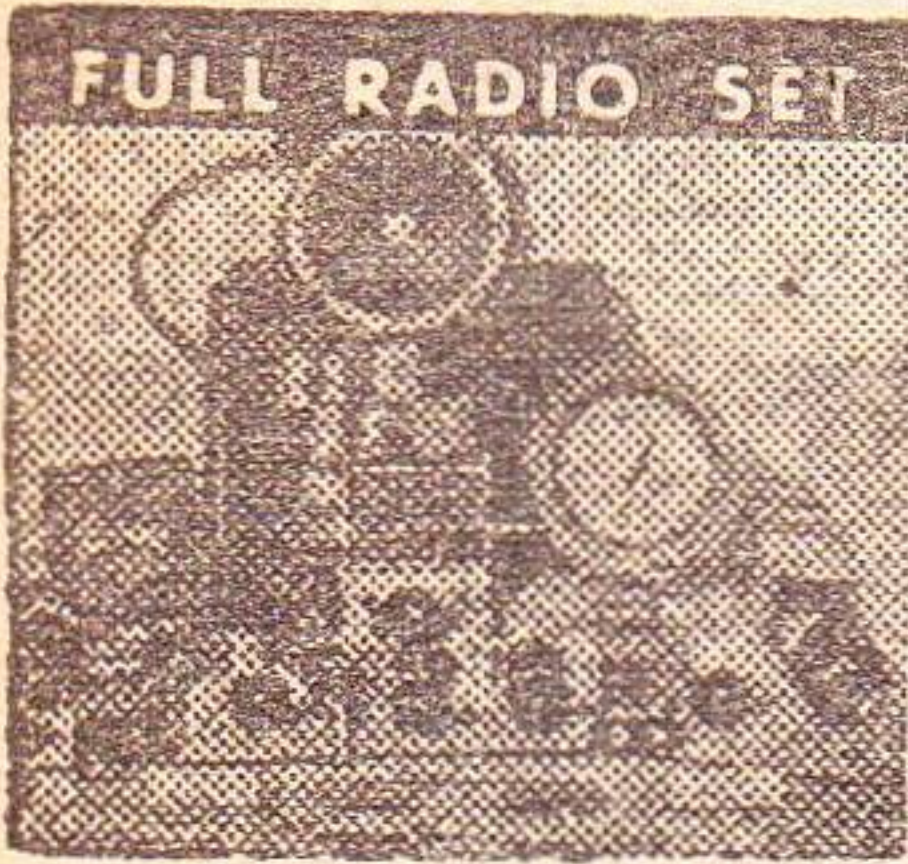
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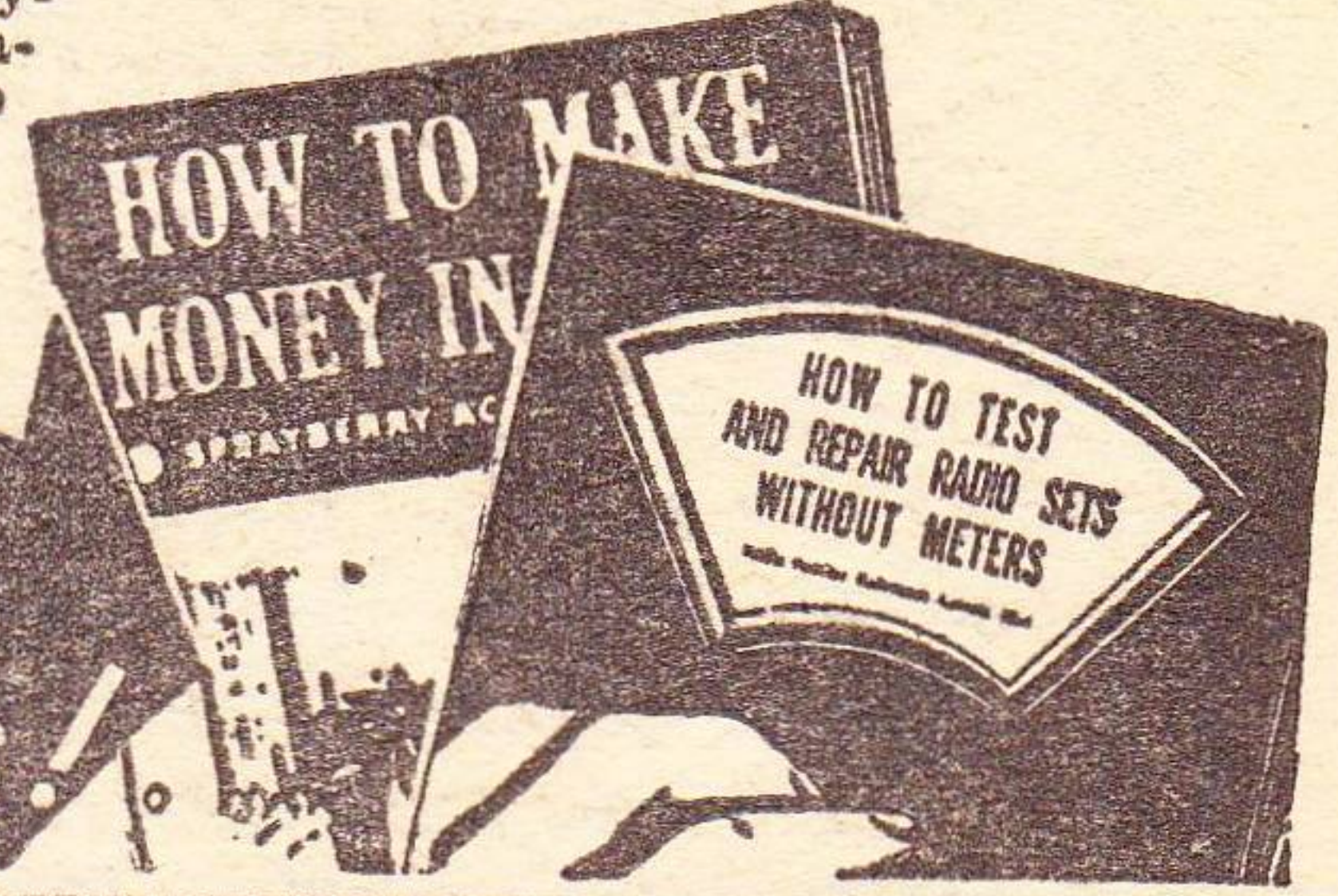
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 72)

"I have an appointment with Miss Marlin."

The police lieutenant motioned him in. "Harry Connors, eh? You write that Broadway gossip for your sheet, don't you?"

Connors nodded. His bright little eyes roamed the room, missing nothing. "Yeah. That's what I came to see Marie about. She said she had a story for me."

Johnny Liddell scowled. "She wasn't kidding."

The lieutenant regarded the private dick soberly. "I don't suppose you know what the story was about, do you?" he asked Connors.

The columnist shook his head. "No, I guess it was some stuff for the column. She often came through with some hot stuff."

"Did you usually get it here or at the club?"

"Here," Harry Connors grinned. "If anybody saw us with our heads together she would've got blamed for everything I printed." His eyes took in Johnny Liddell. "You're Johnny Liddell, the private dick, ain't you?"

Johnny Liddell nodded glumly.

"I don't want to appear curious, lieutenant," the columnist grinned, "but is it too much to ask what's cooking? After all, it's not usual to come up to keep a date with a babe and find half the police force plus the town's best-known private dick playing chaperone. Where's Marie?"

Johnny Liddell cocked one eye as though he were figuring. "Just about now, she's getting loaded on a nice marble slab down at the morgue."

The grey Stetson fell from Harry Connors' fingers, rolled on the floor. He picked it up, dusted it mechanically with the palm of his hand.

"Is that on the level?" he appealed to Stack.

The homicide lieutenant nodded.

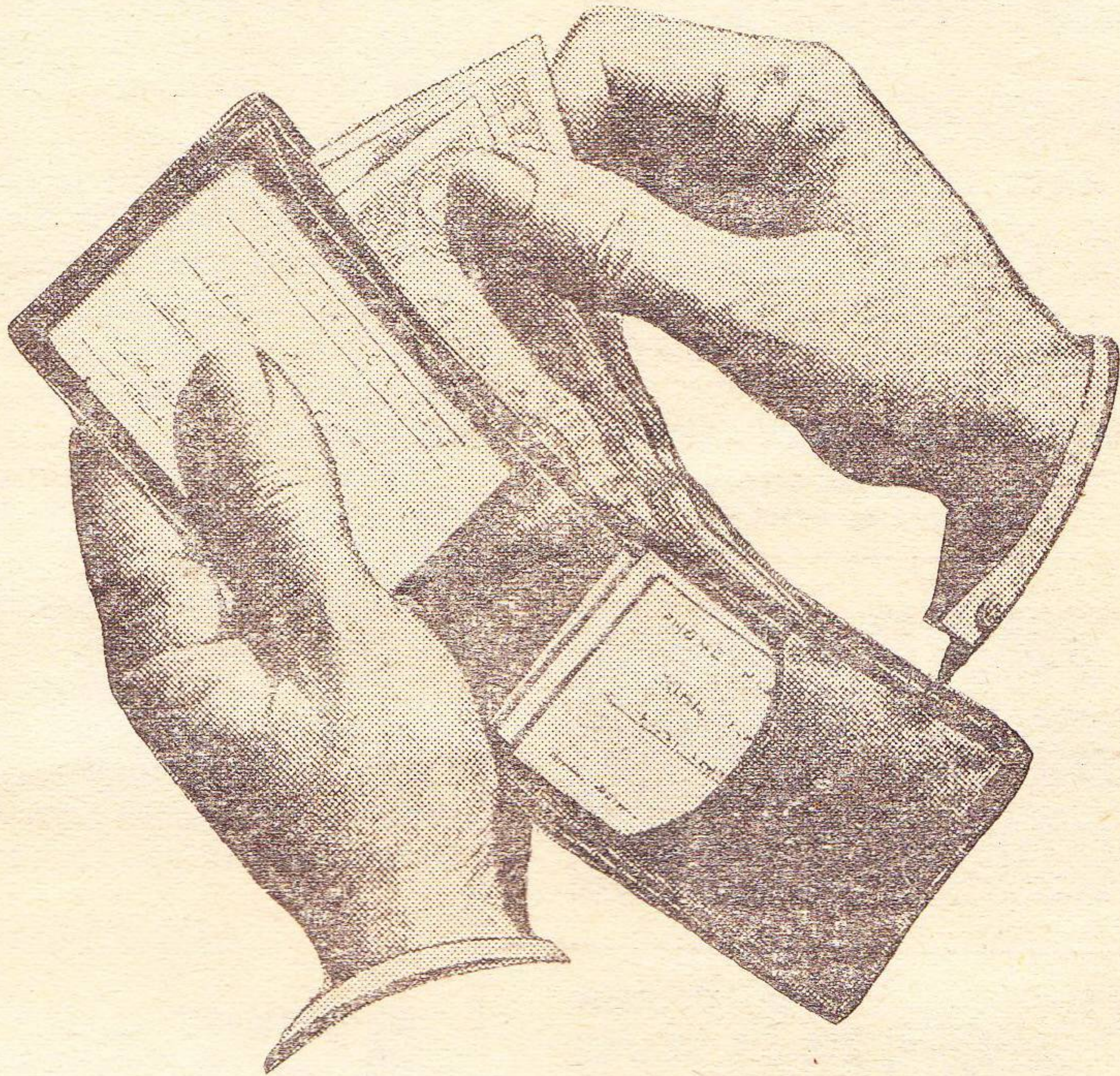
"Who did it?" Connors asked. "Got a line on the killer?"

Johnny Liddell ignored the question. "Ever hear of a mug named Esterbrook? Harry Esterbrook?" he countered.

Harry Connors nodded. "I know him slightly. Hangs around several

(Continued On Page 76)

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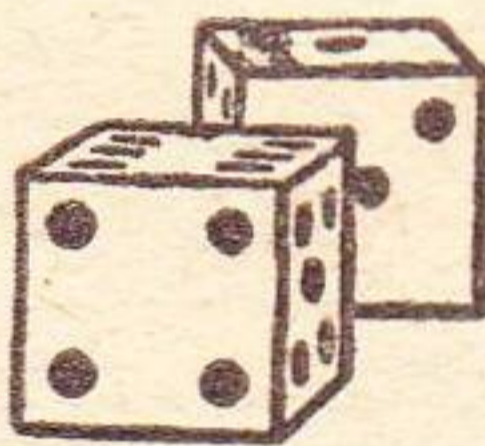


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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 74)

of the clubs. Bit of a petty racketeer, I'd guess."

"How about this blondie, this Alma Woods?"

"I know her a little, too. She was in the line at the Tropical Club. Lived here with Marie. That's all I know about her."

Johnny Liddell grimaced. "Ever hear of her and this Esterbrook teaming up and working together?"

Harry Connors shook his head. "Can't say I have. She didn't seem to do much mixing. Sort of played it lonesome."

Stack stopped chomping away at the wad of gum, shifted it to the other side of his mouth.

"Anything else you'd like to know, Johnny?" he asked.

"Yeah." The private dick perched his hat carefully on the side of his head. "Where can a guy get a drink around here—and how long is it going to take me to get there?"

## CHAPTER III

**J**OHNNY LIDDELL had the sensation that this was all happening all over again, that it had happened before. Many times before. He tried to remember what had happened.

He had left Stack and the others at Marie Marlin's. He had entered the lobby to his building—

A pain started somewhere under his left ear and shot to a spot somewhere behind his eyes. He tried opening his eyes.

Sally Herley was bending over him. The rag she held in her hand was dripping onto his jacket. Over her shoulder he could see the face of Lieutenant Ray Stack.

Stack grinned. "He's not going to die, Sal. You can't kill a private dick by pounding him over the head. Got any brandy around?"

The girl nodded, started for the chest of drawers across the room.

Johnny Liddell groaned. "This is getting monotonous." He tried to pull himself to a sitting position, fell back on the couch.

"Who was it this time, Johnny?" Stack asked.

## Dead Blood Runs Purple

Sally came back with a jigger filled with a brown liquid. She got her arm under the private dick's neck, helped him to a sitting position, and poured a warming shot of brandy down his throat.

"I didn't even see the guy, Stack, and that's straight." Johnny Liddell wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He came up behind me and let me have it."

"Think it was the same guy?"

Johnny Liddell shrugged his shoulders. "Could be, but I don't know for sure. All I know is he packs an awful wallop."

Sally Herley glared at the lieutenant. "Let him catch his breath, lieutenant. That poor head of his has more lumps than a sugar bowl."

The lieutenant ignored her. "How about letting us in on it, Johnny. What've you got that these mugs want?"

Johnny Liddell tenderly touched portions of his head and winced. "The skull they love to touch, I guess."

Sally Herley snapped her fingers. "Maybe it's that packet Marie Marlin gave you to mind—" She caught a baleful glare from Johnny Liddell and clapped her hands over her mouth.

Lieutenant Ray Stack pushed his western-style sombrero off the back of his head, glared at the private dick. "Trying to hold out on me, Johnny?" he asked.

Johnny Liddell grinned weakly. "You know me better than that, Stack. It just sort of slipped my mind."

The homicide lieutenant glared at him. He held out his hand. "Okay. Give."

Johnny Liddell looked at the girl reporter glumly, then nodded his head. She tapped her way across the room on her high heels, disappeared into the kitchen.

Johnny Liddell fumbled through his pockets fruitlessly, finally accepted a battered cigarette from a pack Ray Stack extended toward him. "Guess they cleaned me out, lieutenant. Even my wallet's gone."

**S**TACK held out a match, and watched the private dick gratefully fill his lungs. "They didn't get

(Continued On Page 78)



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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 77)

that. We did. It's down at Identification being tested for prints. Whoever slugged you had it out and was going through it. He must have been scared off and dropped it out front."

Johnny Liddell sent a stream of blue grey smoke ceilingward. "How'd I get up here to the apartment?"

The lieutenant hung a cigarette from the corner of his mouth where it wagged when he talked. "The super found you stretched out in the lobby. Guess he thought you were out on another tear, so he lugged you up here. It was Sally who found out you'd been conked."

Johnny Liddell scowled at the glowing end of his cigarette. "How long have I been out?"

"A long time, Johnny," Stack told him. "I was beginning to get worried." He reached over to the library table, picked up the private dick's dented fedora. "That hat of yours probably saved you. It must've been an awful wallop."

Johnny Liddell's eyes were glued to Sally Herley as she swivel-hipped her way back across the room. He stared at the fresh loaf of bread in her hands.

"What's the idea of the bread?" he asked.

The girl reporter winked. She slid the bread from its waxed wrapper. "You just don't have any imagination, Sherlock," she twitted him. The top half of the loaf of bread lifted off, revealing the packet nestled in a scooped-out portion. "See?"

Stack and Johnny Liddell exchanged bewildered glances.

"Now I've seen everything," the lieutenant murmured. He took the packet, cut the string. "Let's see what all this shooting's about."

The brown paper wrapper peeled off to reveal what looked to be a canvas purse. It was loosely basted across the top. Stack ripped the thread with his fingernail and tipped the purse over Johnny Liddell's hat.

A cascade of unmounted diamonds of all sizes flowed out into the battered fedora.

Johnny Liddell was the first to speak.

"I'll be damned," he said softly.

## Dead Blood Runs Purple

Lieutenant Ray Stack chewed thoughtfully on the wad of gum that bulged his right cheek out. "This makes sense in more ways than one," he said. He crushed out his cigarette, stirred the little pile of diamonds with his finger. "It not only explains why they were so anxious to get them back, but it gives us a pretty good idea where Harry Esterbrook fits into this picture."

The girl reporter closed her mouth. It had been hanging open since the diamonds first poured from the canvas purse.

"I don't follow all this. What's this got to do with Marie Marlin?"

Johnny Liddell pursed his lips, cocked one eye at her. "You know that Marie Marlin was murdered tonight?"

"Yes. Lieutenant Stack told me all about it." She tossed her head angrily. "Wasn't that a fine thing? Here I sit on my fanny while a first-class murder breaks and they have to send a leg-man out to cover it. Isn't that just fine!"

"Don't get peevish, Sal," the private dict soothed her. "This is a much better story—and you're in on the ground floor."

The homicide lieutenant poured the stones back into their canvas sack. "Tie these in the same way I do, Johnny?"

Johnny Liddell nodded. "The epidemic of jewel jobs?"

"Right. Marie Marlin must have been fingering the jobs. Who'd be in a better spot? When she strutted around that floor, she could have gotten a swell slant at the jewelry some of those dames were wearing. She probably signalled to somebody in the club—"

"Esterbrook?" Johnny Liddell suggested.

Stack shook his head. "No. It'd have to be somebody who was there every night. It couldn't have been Esterbrook. He's an ex-con. If he hung out there every night, one of our night club squad would have tagged him."

**J**OHNNY LIDDELL flipped his cigarette butt in the general direction of a waste basket in the cor-

(Continued On Page 80)

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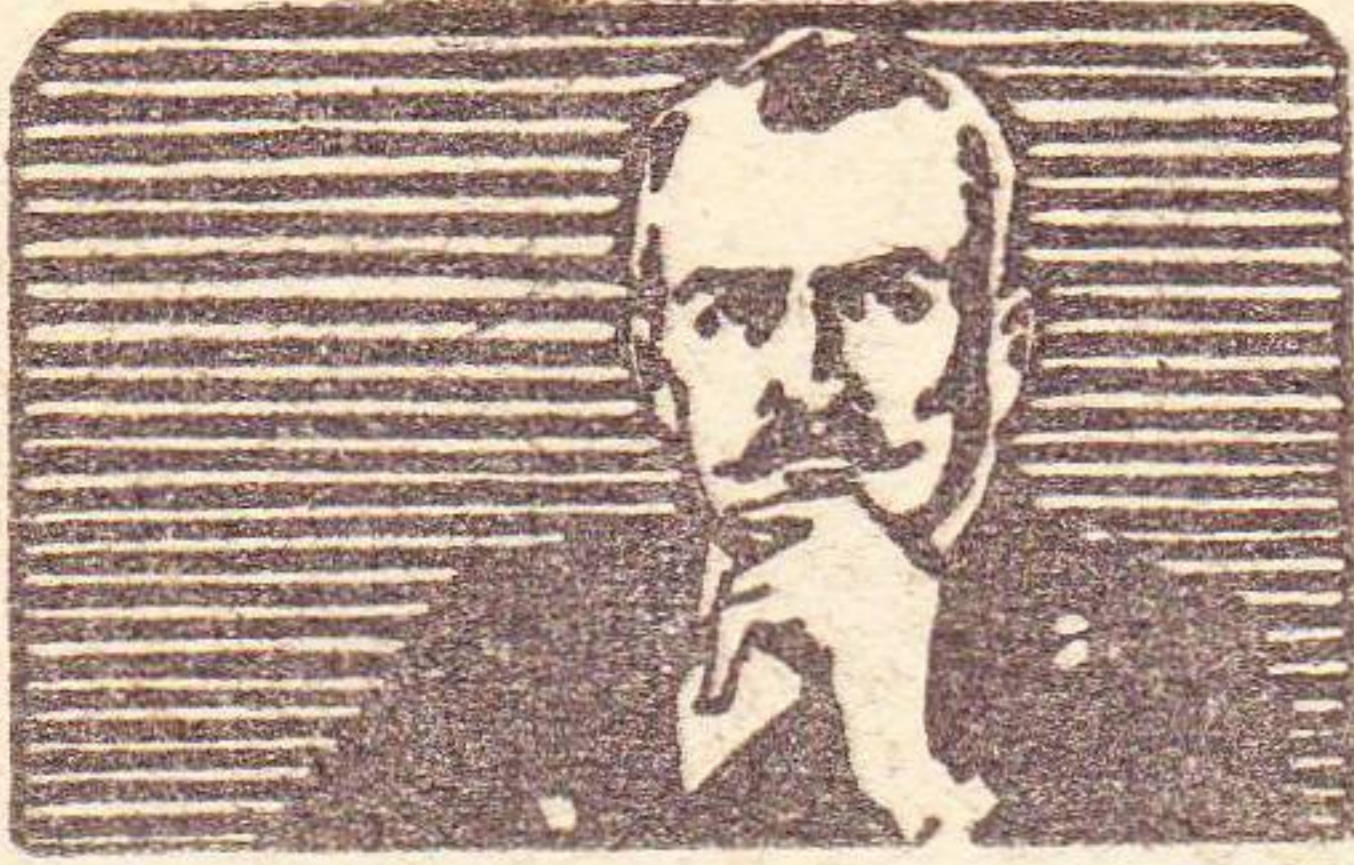
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 79)

ner. It hit the wall, fell to the floor in a spattering of sparks. "I guess you're right. By the way, did anybody see anybody going into the Marlin apartment last night?"

Stack denuded another stick of spearmint, added it to the already considerable wad. "Nope. Some guy spotted that columnist guy, Harry Connors, but we already knew about him."

Sally Herley wailed. "So. You've been giving my competition exclusive stuff while you've got me cooped up here?"

Johnny Liddell put up his hands placatingly. "Wait a minute, Sal. We're giving you an exclusive right now, aren't we?" He pointed to Stack. "All the lieutenant's got to do is find somebody who spends a lot of his time in the club, and who knew I had the stones—"

He paused, then started to say something but the girl beat him to it.

"The headwaiter! The headwaiter at the Tropical Club," she exclaimed. Stack looked from one to the other.

"That's it." Something of the girl's excitement had translated itself to the private dick. "He brought me the message that Marie wanted to see me. Far as I know he's the only one that knew I'd been talking to her."

"Right." Sally's voice broke with the excitement. "Then, after he'd killed Marie and couldn't find the stones, he remembered about you and came up here to wait for you."

"Whoa. Whoa. Let's figure this out," Stack counselled. "Let's say Marie Marlin was fingering for a jewel gang. She decides for some reason to cross them and hold out these stones. Would she let the top man know who she was giving them to for safekeeping?"

Johnny Liddell frowned. "But even if the headwaiter was only a member of the gang, he'd tell the big bug anyhow."

Stack shook his head. "I'm not sure about that. Maybe he was figuring on a double-cross of his own—and maybe he didn't even know who the big shot was."

"How about Blondie and Esterbrook?" Johnny Liddell reminded



## Dead Blood Runs Purple

him. "Were they in with him, or were they working a pitch of their own?"

"The only way we'll ever know that for sure is to ask them," Stack said. "I've got a call out for them. We'll get them—and when we do, we'll ask them. Just to ease your mind."

### CHAPTER IV

**B**USINESS at the Tropical Club had doubled since the news got out of Marie Marlin's death and the disappearance of her roommate. Sally Herley's exclusive, hinting at the connection of the headwaiter with the events of the night before, caused many out-of-towners to invest the substitute headwaiter with a glamor and a menace that he had never enjoyed in his more placid days as checkroom concessionaire.

Johnny Liddell perched precariously on the edge of his favorite bar stool and studied the alterations in his appearance with a morbid interest.

He barely looked up as Lieutenant Ray Stack slid onto the stool next to him.

"Whiskey and soda for me," the lieutenant told the man behind the stick. He turned to the private dick. "Well, Johnny. Anybody else playing Ravel's Bolero on your skull since the last time I saw you?"

Johnny Liddell found nothing humorous in the salutation. He scowled as he emptied his brandy glass.


"Don't be peevish, Johnny," the lieutenant grinned. "We're beginning to make some progress. We've definitely established that it was the headwaiter that conked you." He pulled a brown leather wallet from his inside pocket. "You can have this back now."

Johnny Liddell pocketed it without examining it. "Found some prints on it, eh? That was mighty careless of him." He motioned for another brandy, then groaned. "Oh-oh. Here's that woman again!"

Sally Herley had a new sparkle in her eye. The little sport cap perched on the back of her thick copper-col-

(Continued On Page 82)

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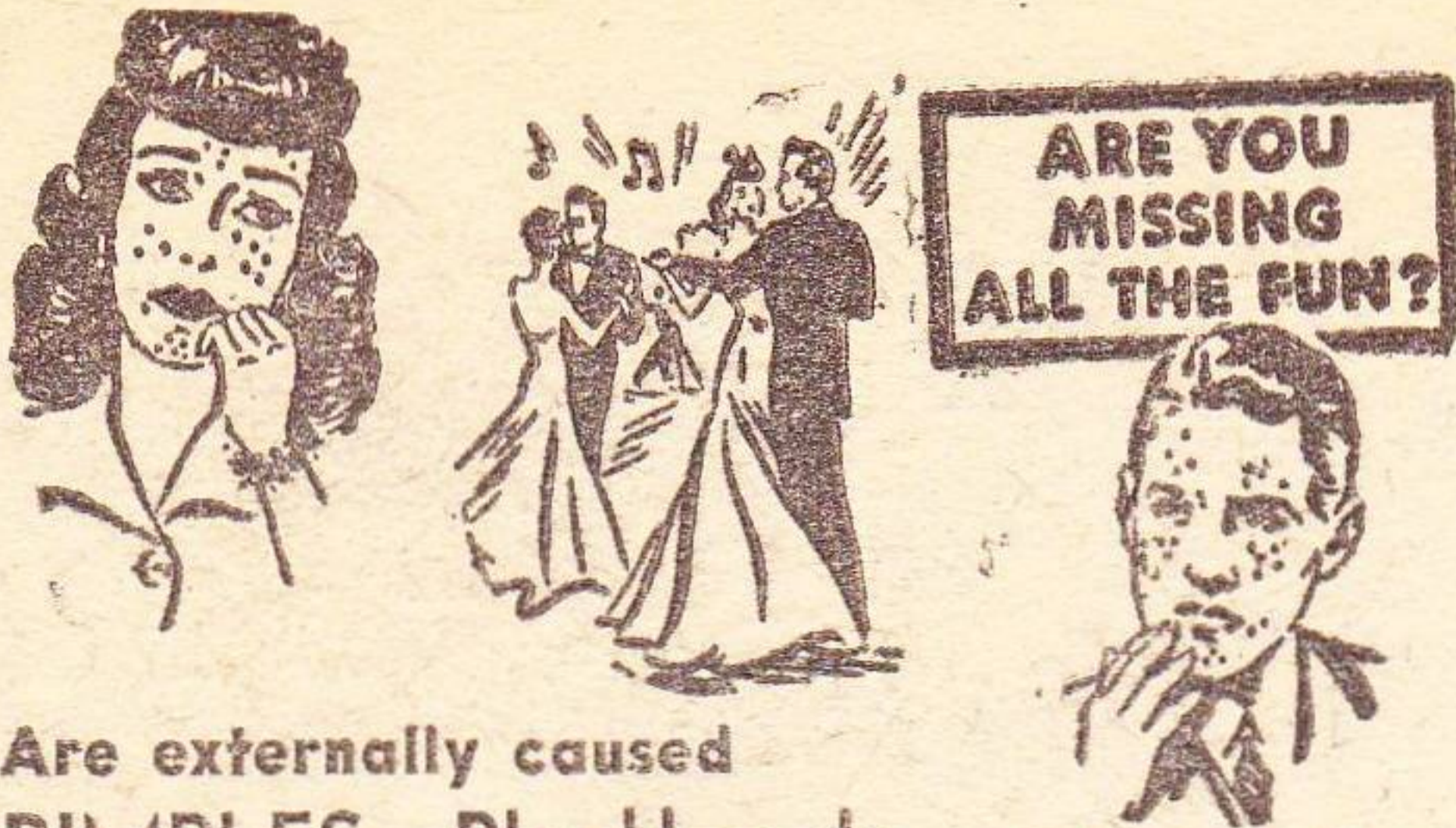
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 81)

ored hair matched the green in her well-filled sweater.

"Hi, Sherlock. Hi, lieutenant. Well, have you lovely boys cooked up another exclusive for me for tonight? My editor was very—ver-ry happy about last night."

Stack grinned.

Johnny Liddell closed his eyes in anguish. "Go away, Sal, go away. I can't bear to hear about anybody being happy today. Be a good girl and go spread cheer into somebody else's life."

Sally plopped her bag on top of the bar, winked at the bartender. "He just doesn't want to admit how glad he is to see me, Jack," she confided. "Make mine rye and ginger."

Johnny Liddell sipped his brandy, then emptied his glass. "You got the by-line, and I'm getting the fan mail," he grunted. "Matter of fact, I've got one fan letter you kids might like to see." He pulled a yellow telegraph form from his inside pocket. "From my boss."

Stack smoothed out the wrinkled paper, read it and passed it along to the girl with a grin.

She whistled softly. "You really are in the dog house."

"Dog house ain't the word for it," Johnny Liddell grunted. "Read it to me again, Sal. I'm beginning to feel too good."

Sally took a deep sip of her drink.

"Congratulations," she read. "That's one way of getting rid of a client. Let them get murdered. Swell advertisement for the agency. What kind of business are you expecting to go into next? Signed Ed Gardener."

Johnny Liddell nodded. "See what I mean? He's not kidding when he says I'm washed up."

Sally Herley drained her glass, made wet circles with the bottom of it. "Everything will be all right if we find the killer, won't it, Johnny?"

Johnny Liddell grinned. "That's a cinch. All we've got to do is find the killer."

**S**STACK, whose attention had wandered to ogle a barelegged chorine who hurried from the backstage door through the bar to keep a date,

## Dead Blood Runs Purple

returned his gaze reluctantly to Johnny Liddell's less handsome face. "Maybe we can do that, too," he offered.

Johnny Liddell nodded. "Maybe we could—only there happens to be three round holes and three square pegs to put in 'em. It just doesn't make sense—I can't make it come out right."

"For instance?"

Johnny Liddell hung a cigarette from the corner of his mouth, offered one to the others. "Let's take for granted that we're right and that Marie was the finger girl and Esterbrook did the strong arm stuff. Then Esterbrook couldn't have been the top man. Why should he lift the stones, then give them to her to give back to him?"

Sally looked puzzled. "We ought to have a drink on that one, Johnny." She signalled the bartender and indicated the three empty glasses.

Stack ignored the interruption. "I follow that. Your idea is that Marie was the only contact to the top man, and that Esterbrook handed the stones to her to pass along. Right?"

Johnny Liddell moved his elbow off the bar so that the bartender could move the refilled jigger over to him. "Now, we're already agreed that Esterbrook couldn't hang out in the club every night like he'd have to if he was going to take Marie's instructions. I figure that's where either the headwaiter or Blondie comes in—"

A uniformed page came over. "Lieutenant Stack?"

Stack nodded.

"An important call, sir. Police headquarters they said it was."

Stack slid off the barstool, dug through his pockets for a quarter, flipped it to the page. "Thanks, son," he said. He turned to Johnny Liddell. "Here's where we test that day-dream of yours, Johnny. The call's from Murray down at my office to tell me they've got Esterbrook and Blondie."

Johnny Liddell watched the lieutenant's departing back with bleak eyes. He tossed off the brandy, shuddered, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Well, Sal," he said, "I guess your next exclusive will be the story of

(Continued On Page 84)

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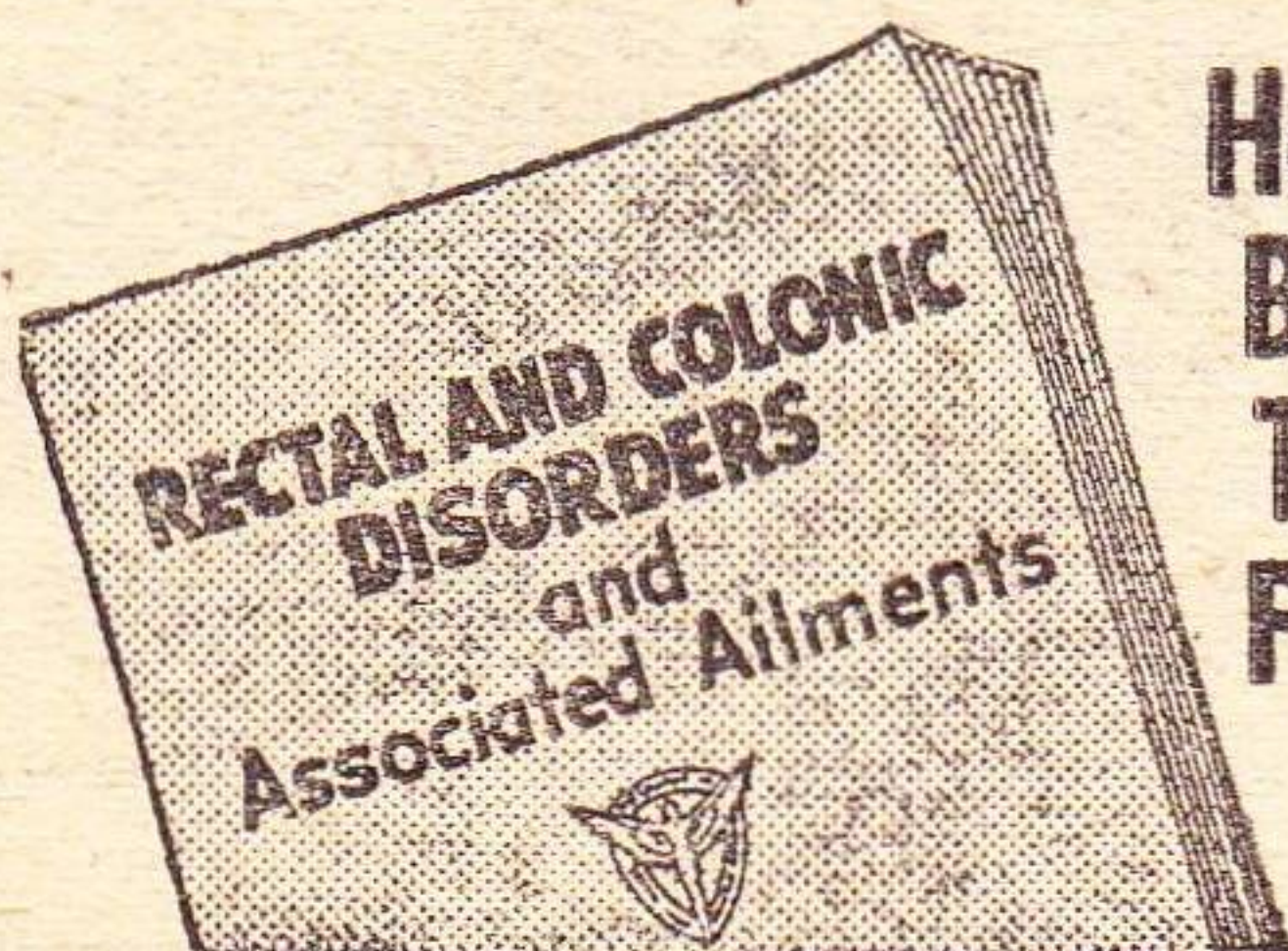
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 83)

Johnny Liddell's retirement—by request."

The girl was sympathetic. "You're taking it too hard," she said. "It wasn't your fault. And besides, if Stack catches Esterbrook and Blondie—"

"Then the case is solved," Johnny Liddell grunted. "But by the police. Ed Gardener doesn't count that. He's going to say I should've broken the case myself. After all, she did come to me for help— Hey, here's Stack back already."

Sally swung on her stool. "He doesn't look any too happy for a copper that's just picked up two murder suspects."

The lieutenant stamped to the bar, took his glass and drained it.

"We got Esterbrook, Johnny. Just like I said we would. Only—he was dead. Throat cut from ear to ear!"

**S**ALLY Herley watched the broad back of Johnny Liddell going through the motions of shaking a cocktail. She stretched luxuriously on the couch and yawned.

"See what Harry Connors did to Stack and you in his column this morning, Johnny?" she asked. "He took it as a personal insult that Esterbrook decided to die too late for the early edition."

Johnny Liddell found two clean glasses behind the curtains over the sink, caught the shaker under his arm and walked over to the couch. He swept two books and a magazine off the low table near the head of the couch and put the shaker and glasses down.

"Can't say I blame him," he grunted. "The way you've been getting all the breaks in this case it looks like there's something fishy being pulled."

The girl grinned. "Can I help it if I happen to be around at the psychological moment?"

Johnny Liddell filled the two glasses. "You know, that guy could probably help us plenty. In that job of his he knows all these characters that hang around the Tropical Club. Don't forget, he drops by there every night." He tasted one of the drinks, made a wry face, put it down. "I prefer mine straight."

## Dead Blood Runs Purple

Sally Herley's eyes followed him as he re-crossed the room to the sink where he emptied his glass, then re-filled it from a bottle. He dropped into the big chair near the window and draped one leg over the arm.

"My feminine intuition tells me you've got something up your sleeve besides a hairy arm," she said. "Open up. What is it?"

"Soon as I get to know what time it is, I'll tell you in plenty of time for you to set your watch—"

He was interrupted by a frenzied rat-a-tat on the door. Loosening the .45 that hung in its usual shoulder holster, he pulled himself to his feet. As he turned the latch, he was almost thrown off balance by the force with which the door was pushed inward. A girl ran in and slammed the door behind her.

Johnny Liddell locked the door behind her.

"Well, well. The last time we met, Miss Woods, your boy friend was busy parting my hair with a .38."

The girl tried to tuck in some stray blonde hairs that had escaped from under her hat. It was a purely automatic gesture. "Is it true? Harry's dead? Like the papers said?"

Sally Herley sat bolt upright. "Holy Cow! Alma Woods!"

Johnny Liddell nodded, motioned the reporter to silence. "Yes, Alma. Esterbrook's dead. Know who did it?"

The girl sank into the big chair by the window, buried her face in her hands. Johnny Liddell poured her a stiff drink from the bottle on the sink. She drained it in one gulp.

"Just like Marie, the papers said. Don't let them do that to me, Mr. Liddell. They're looking for me. I know they are!"

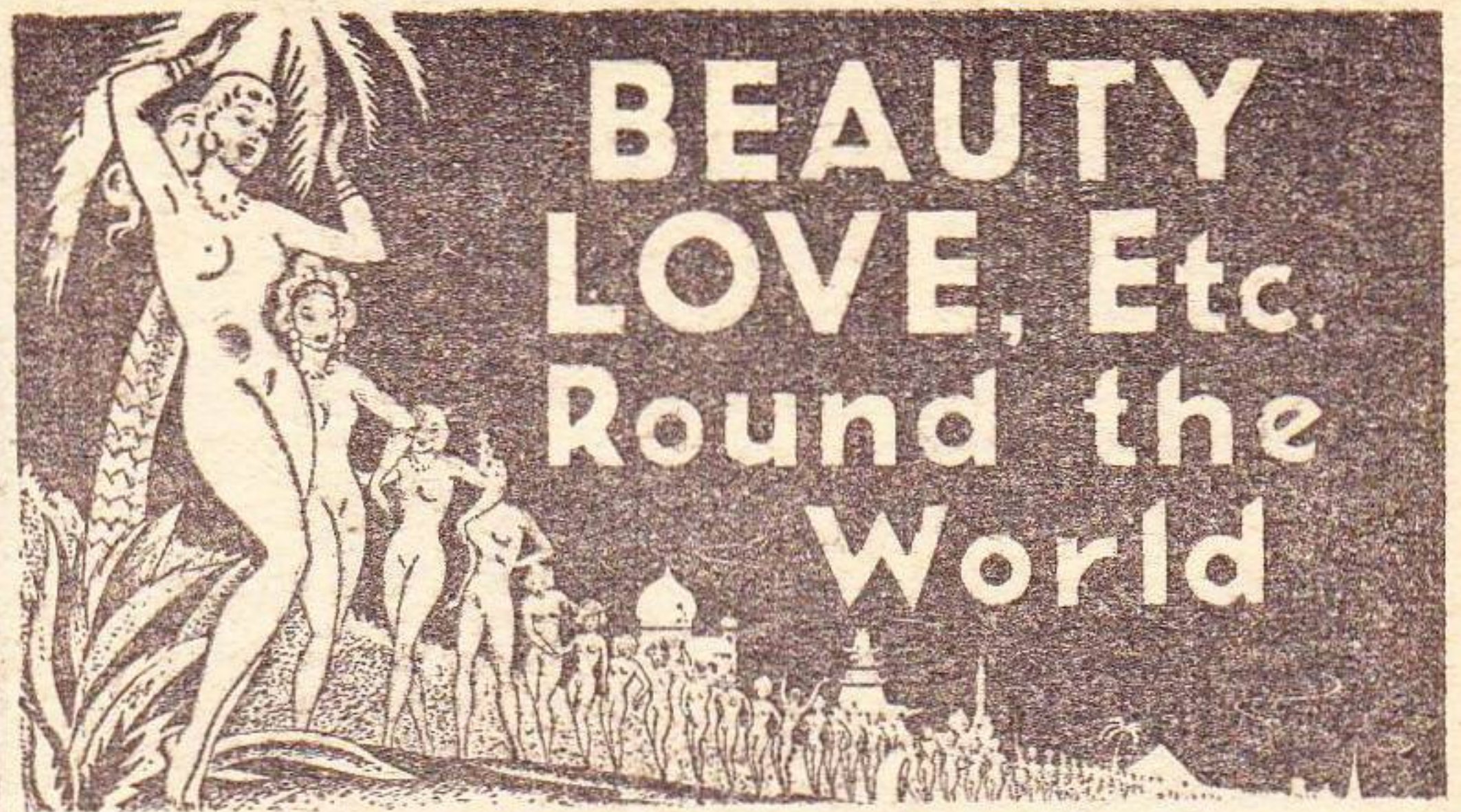
Johnny Liddell patted her shoulder. "Who's the top man in this little set-up, Alma?" he asked gently.

The girl raised her tear-streaked face. "I don't know. God help me, I don't know. Only Marie knew him—"

"Only Marie knew him, eh? How about Esterbrook?"

"No," the blonde shook her head emphatically. "He just did the actual stick-up. The head man signalled to

(Continued On Page 86)



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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 85)

Marie which ones were to be taken—”  
Sally refilled the girl's glass.

Johnny Liddell made a face. “Sure. I should've known Marie couldn't spot the real stuff from the floor. Of course somebody had to finger it for her. But then—” A puzzled frown ridged his forehead. He shook his head. “Never mind that now. What happened then?”

The girl took a deep drink from her glass. “Then Marie would tell me which ones were to be taken. I'd wait until the party was ready to leave. Then I'd beat her to the street and be standing on the curb when she came down. Esterbrook would be parked in a car up the street. When the right one came down, I'd fix my hat. That was the signal.”

Johnny Liddell poured himself a drink. “Suppose there were several women in the party. What then?”

The girl's hand was still shaking as she raised it to her mouth. “I'd fix the left side of my hat. That meant the one on the left side. If I fixed the right side that meant the one on the right.”

Sally Herley leaned back. “Was the headwaiter in on it?”

“Mario? Not really. Marie got a kick out of stringing him along. She used him to signal Esterbrook a couple of times when I wasn't around.” The girl leaned over and helped herself to a cigarette from a pack on the end table.

Johnny Liddell leaned over with a light. “How about the night Marie was murdered?” he asked softly.

The blonde put the cigarette to her mouth, dragged deeply several times. “I got home that night and found her that way. The only thing I could think of was to call Esterbrook. He told me she must still have the pile of stones he gave her early that night, that we ought to get them before we beat it—”

Johnny Liddell ran a finger reminiscently over one of the still tender bumps on his head. “I have a pretty good idea of what happened from there on in.” He emptied his glass, set it down on the floor at his heel. “This is really going to burn Harry Connors up. If you keep getting scoops like

## Dead Blood Runs Purple

this dumped into your lap, that poor guy's going to join me on the bread-line. Maybe we can get you his job."

Sally grinned. "No thanks. I'm doing all right in my own shop. A lot better than I could ever do at the *Dispatch*."

She indicated the white-faced blonde. "What are you going to do with Alma?"

"Hide her out," Johnny Liddell told her.

"Where?"

The private dick grinned. "At your place." He got up, crushed out his cigarette butt on the end of the sink. "She sure wouldn't be safe here. After all, she found out where I lived. Mario was able to lay for me in the lobby. What's to prevent Mr. Big from looking for her here?"

Blondie shuddered. She turned wide, scared eyes on Sally.

**T**HE girl reporter shrugged. "Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea. That's one way of being sure you didn't drag my exclusive over to the opposition to get him to call off his feud. Okay, Alma. It's no palace, but it's home. Let's go—"

Johnny Liddell let them out, carefully locked the door after them. Then, sitting down at the telephone, he dialed the number of the *Dispatch*.

"Let me talk to Harry Connors," he told the metallic-voiced operator. In a moment he heard the columnist's voice. "Hello, Connors. This is Johnny Liddell."

The columnist's voice lacked any great amount of enthusiasm. "Hello, Liddell. What can I do for you?"

Johnny Liddell grinned. "You've already done plenty with that column this morning. To prove there's no hard feelings, I'm going to do something for you."

Connors' voice still lacked expression. "Maybe I got a little rough on you and Stack today, but you leave me no other alternative. If you persist in playing ball with the *Trib* exclusively I'm going to hit back the only way I know how."

"I'm not beefing, Connors," Johnny Liddell told him. "I'm just calling

(Continued On Page 88)

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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 87)

to prove I want to play ball with you."

Connors nodded into the phone. "That's fine. When does all this co-operation start?"

Johnny Liddell grinned. "You're a suspicious sort of a guy. Maybe you got reason to be. Anyway, I'm starting right now. Alma Woods, Marie Marlin's roommate gives herself up to the police at 10 tonight—in plenty of time to make your early edition."

Harry Connors gasped. "If that's on the level, it's a dream. Who else is in on it?"

"Just you and me. Your paper comes out six hours before Sally Herley's, so you'll beat the pants off her on this one. That'll make up for some of those she beat you on."

There was a vast change in the columnist's voice. "Thanks, Johnny. I'll make it up to you. Anything else?"

Johnny Liddell hesitated for a minute. "I'll probably make an enemy for life for this, but I want to prove to you that I'm levelling with you—"

"What is it?"

"I know where I can lay my hands on positive proof as to the killer's identity. The Woods gal spilled it without realizing its importance—"

The columnist's voice cracked with eagerness. "Let me in on it, will you? What'd she spill?"

"I'm letting you in on the ground floor, Connors. It's over at Marie's flat. I'm going over there now. Want to come?"

"Do I? I'll pick you up in ten minutes and drive you over!"

**HARRY CONNORS** drove a Buick, a late '42 convertible, with all the skill of an expert. He weaved the big car through the heavy East Side traffic and pulled up at Denton Towers exactly twelve minutes after leaving Johnny Liddell's apartment.

Johnny Liddell led the way to the elevator, got out at the fourth floor. He looked up and down the hall, then inserted a key he took from his jacket pocket. The door opened noiselessly. He motioned the columnist in, and closed the door behind them.

Johnny Liddell produced a flash-



## Dead Blood Runs Purple

light, ran it around the room, came to stop at the bedroom door. He motioned for Connors to follow him and led the way into the room where the body was found. He seemed sure of himself, walked directly to the bottom of the bed. He played the flashlight over the ornamental frieze and bent down to examine it more closely.

He straightened up. "She was right. There are a couple of fingerprints there. The cops missed them in all that ornamental stuff—"

Harry Connors was hoarse with excitement. "How can you be sure they're the killer's, though?"

Johnny Liddell put his finger to his lips, listened for a moment. Then, as if satisfied, he whispered. "My guess is that the killer wiped off all the prints he could find, but he must have missed these. The Woods girl told me that when she found the body, she leaned over to see if Marie was really dead. In order to do that, she grabbed hold of the foot of the bed. I did the same thing myself. So, it's reasonable to believe that the killer did, too—"

"Oh." The columnist shivered. "What do we do next?"

"I'm going out to call Stack, then I'm going over to get the Woods girl—"

"What for?"

Johnny Liddell led the way back to the living room. "There'll be some of her prints and some of mine on that frieze. We'll want to eliminate those. The other prints will be the killer's."

Harry Connors drew a whistling breath through his teeth. "This is the hottest story I've ever handled." He paused a second. "But what'll I tell Stack when he gets here?"

Johnny Liddell grunted. "That's right. He may get here before I do." He pushed the fedora to the back of his head and rubbed one of the sensitive spots. "I'll leave a note for him. Got a pencil?"

He took the copy pencil the newspaperman offered him.

"Sit down here and make yourself comfortable." He picked out a large easy chair with the beam of the flashlight. "I'm just going in to get an idea of about where on that frieze he can start looking. Like that, we won't

(Continued On Page 90)

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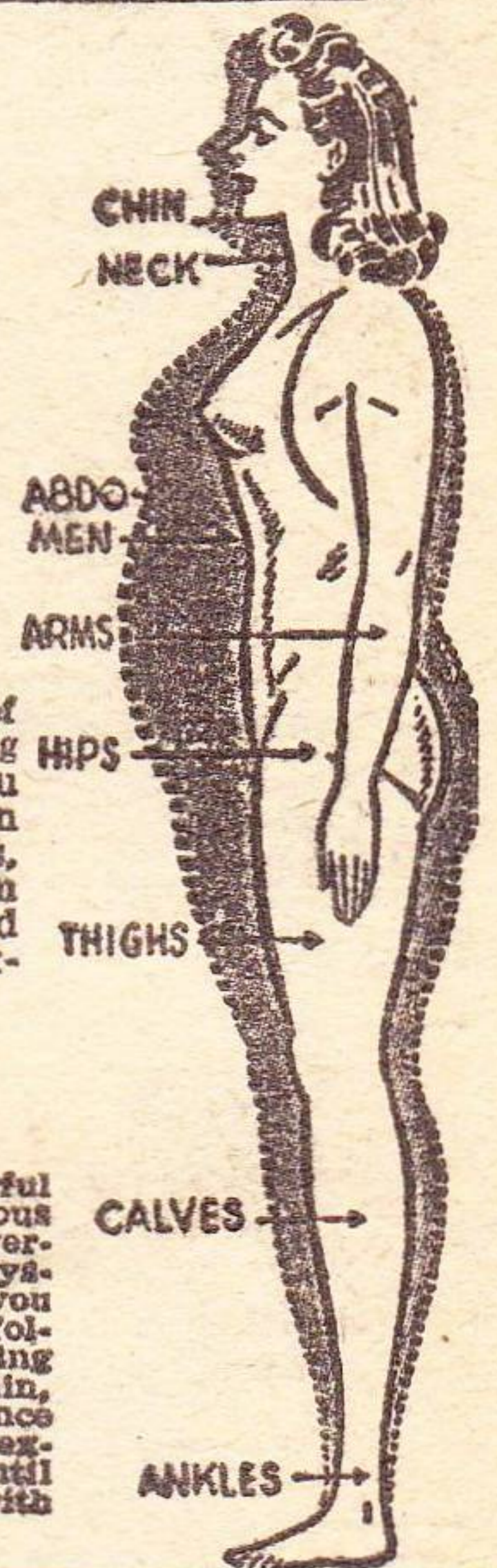
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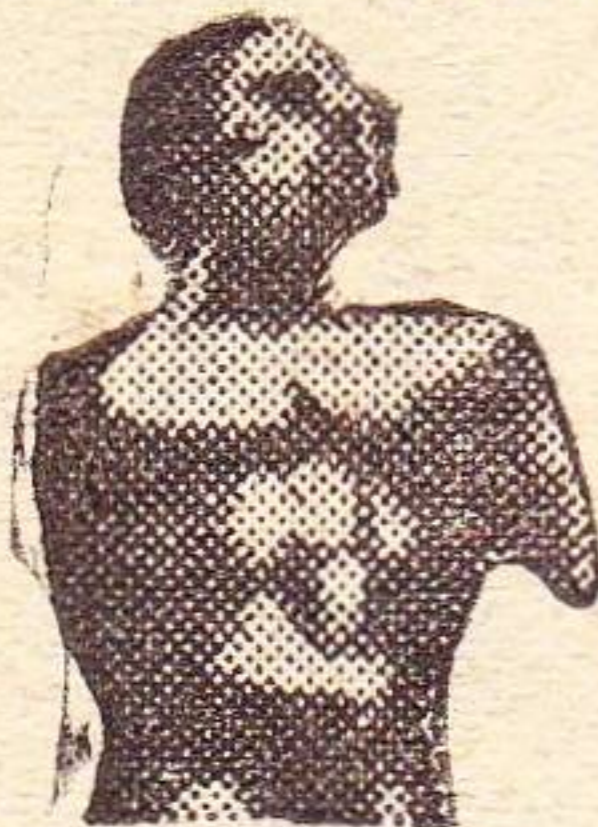
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 89)

waste any time, and we'll have the information in time for your deadline."

"That's a swell idea. You know, that deadline is only about an hour from now."

Johnny Liddell grunted. "We'll make it." He disappeared into the bedroom and returned a few seconds later with a folded piece of paper. "Give that to Stack when he gets here, will you, Connors. I'll be back as soon as I can."

The door closed behind him, leaving the columnist with no light save for Johnny Liddell's flashlight.

## CHAPTER V

IT WAS twenty-five minutes later that the knock came on the door. The columnist opened it to admit the lieutenant and two plainclothesmen.

"What are you sitting here in the dark for, Connors?" the lieutenant growled. "Expect Marie's ghost to come and tell you who did the job?"

Connors scowled. "Liddell gave me the impression that the lights had been turned off. I never thought to try them."

Stack grunted. "That crazy private dick and his games. Where is he, anyway?" He turned to one of the plainclothesmen. "Let's have some light, Hennessy."

The room was lit up with a sudden brilliance that made the columnist blink.

"He said he had to go someplace, lieutenant. He left this note for you."

Stack took the folded piece of paper, read it. "Prints of killer on ornamental frieze at bottom of bed, third row from top. Going for Alma Woods. Right back, Johnny." The lieutenant looked at the shorter of the two detectives. "How about it? Was that frieze checked for prints?"

"I thought it was," the plainclothesman muttered. "We might have missed it."

Stack growled. "Get it now."

The plainclothesmen started for the bedroom. Stack dropped into a chair with a sigh, offered a cigarette to the columnist. He refused.

Johnny Liddell used his key to get

## Dead Blood Runs Purple

in. He had Sally Herley and Alma Woods with him. Sally grew white around the lips at the sight of Harry Connors. Alma drew back at the sight of Stack.

"What is this, a double-cross?" Connors roared. "I thought the *Dispatch* got this exclusive?"

"What's he doing here?" Sally yelled. "I should've known better than to trust you, you chiseller!"

Lieutenant Stack got to his feet. "Cut out the yelling. What is this, Johnny? A gag? I don't see anybody laughing!"

Johnny Liddell wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. "It's no gag, Stack. And if anybody laughs it won't be me, because this either makes it—or breaks it!" He looked around. "I know the murderer of Marie Marlin. I don't know if I can prove it."

Lieutenant Ray Stack pushed the broad-brimmed sombrero-type fedora to the back of his head, chewed on his gum a little harder and growled. "That's fine. Who is going to prove it?"

Johnny Liddell took a deep breath. "The killer himself."

Harry Connors stood up. "Okay. I know when I'm being taken for a ride. This two timing shamus kept me here just long enough so his sweetie could score another beat on Alma Woods' capture. I'm not forgetting this, gentlemen."

Stack groaned. "He's right, Johnny. If you're ever going to start pulling rabbits out of that hat—now is the time!"

"You asked for it, Stack." Johnny Liddell walked over to Harry Connors, jabbed him in the stomach with his finger. "Put the cuffs on this guy, Stack. He's your killer. He killed Marie Marlin because she was running out on him and he killed Harry Esterbrook because he tried to cross him. Harry Connors is your Mr. Big in the jewel ring."

Sally Herley's breath whistled through her teeth. "Johnny! Have you gone crazy altogether?"

"I'll show you how crazy I am, Stack," the private dick retorted.

(Continued On Page 92)

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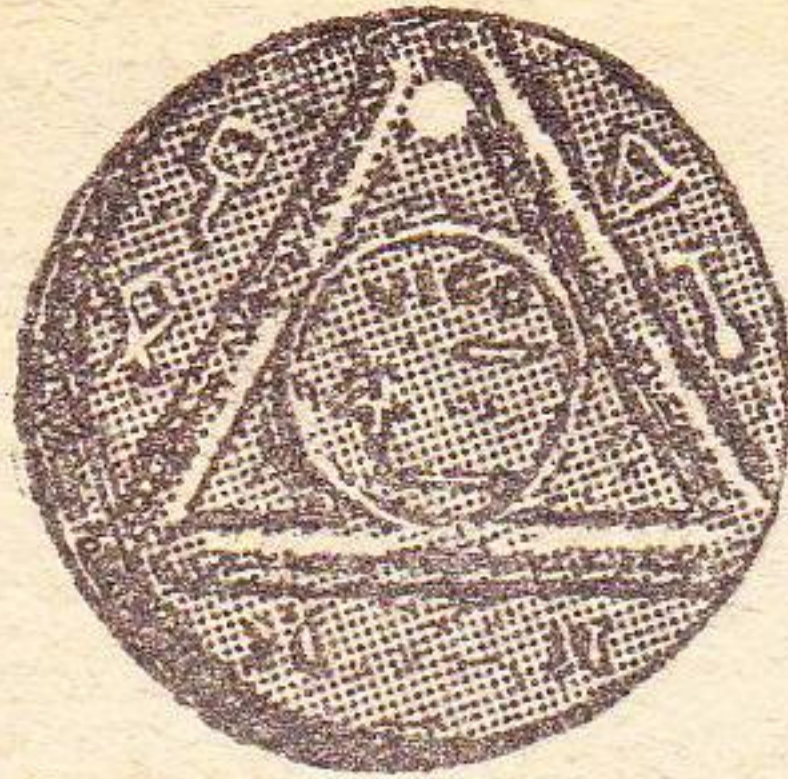
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 91)

"Have one of your men bring me a wet towel from the bathroom."

**S**TACK gave the order, handed the wet towel to Liddell. "This is your show, Johnny. It better be awful good—or awful funny!"

Johnny Liddell roughly seized one of the columnist's hands, wiped it with a towel. It turned deep purple.

The columnist growled, struggled to his feet. His first blow caught Johnny Liddell alongside the ear. His second blow never landed. Johnny Liddell caught him flush on the jaw. The columnist staggered, wilted at a hard overhand to the stomach, then folded up under a steaming cross. He hit the floor with a thud and didn't move.

Lieutenant Stack stepped in. "Don't rough him up. We've got special facilities for that. I hope you've got some proof to back this all up?"

Johnny Liddell grinned. "I couldn't prove it. He had to do it for me."

Sally Herley was frantic. "Never mind the bows, Sherlock. Take them after the show. We've got a paper to put to bed."

Johnny Liddell bowed, tapped a cigarette on the arm of the chair.

"It had to be somebody who'd be at the Tropical Club every night. Right?" Stack nodded, motioned for him to continue. "As you said, your night club squad would have noticed anybody who spent night after night there—anybody, that is, but a columnist who had a legitimate reason to be there. They never gave him a second thought!"

Stack grunted, looked down at Connors who still lay sprawled over the floor.

Johnny Liddell lit the cigarette, blew out the match. "Then again, Connors was the only one who knew that Esterbrook was trying to cross him. He was here when I mentioned that Esterbrook and Blondie here had teamed up. He saw the place all pulled apart, put two and two together—and got a split throat for Esterbrook—"

Stack looked up. A thoughtful frown ridged his forehead. "One thing I don't get—why did he show up that night at the apartment. We

(Continued On Page 94)

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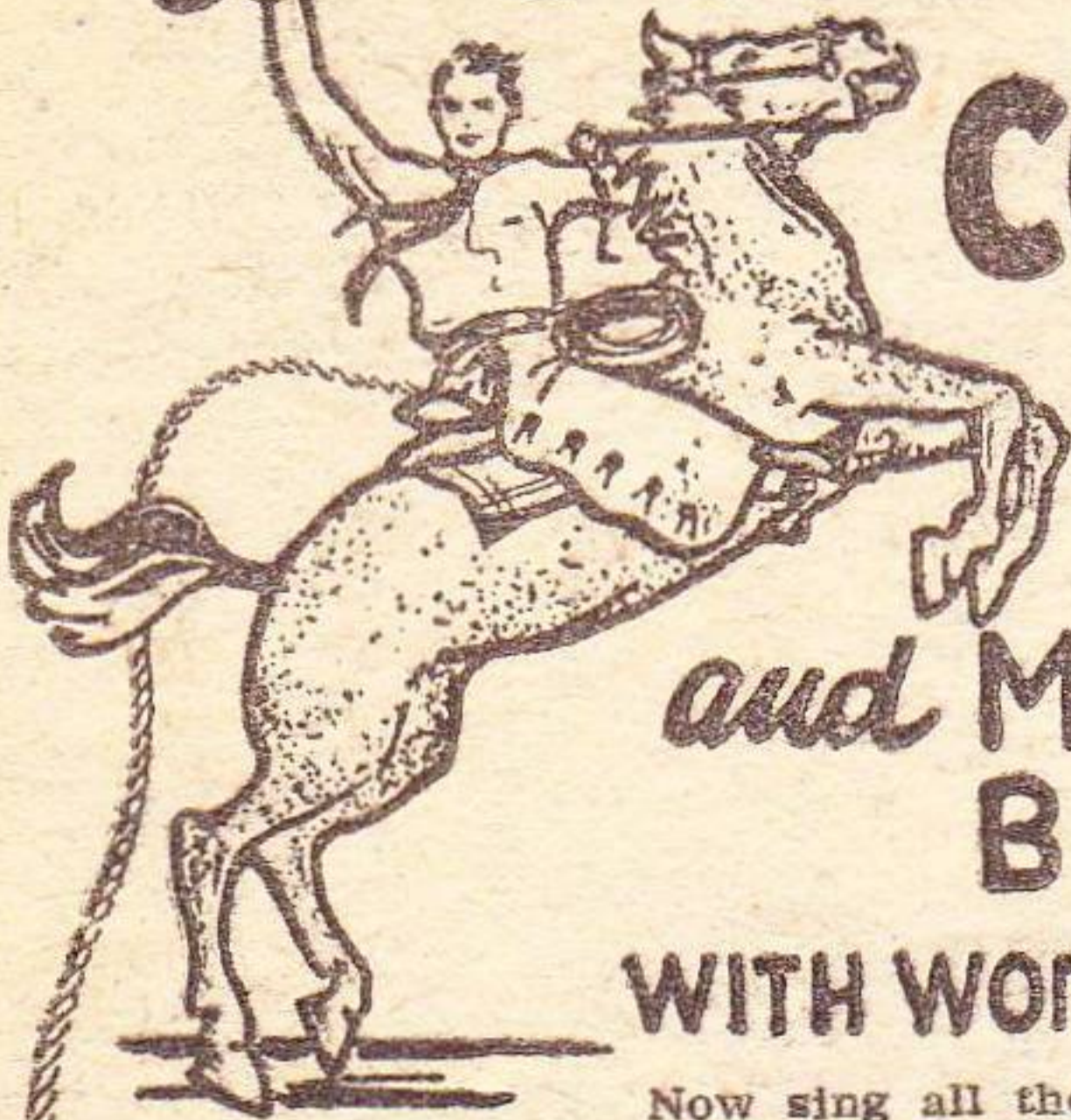
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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 92)

wouldn't even have known he was involved."

Johnny Liddell sent a mouthful of smoke ceilingward. "That was one of his many touches of genius. You remember that your men dug up somebody who reported Harry Connors around there that night." Stack nodded, started to say something, clamped his jaws shut on his gum. "Well, we took for granted that the time he saw Connors was when we saw him there—"

Sally Herley looked up from the page of notes she was laboriously inscribing. "And it wasn't?"

Johnny Liddell shook his head. "No. It had to be the time he came here and killed Marie. He knew somebody had seen him, and he figured that if he came back we'd take for granted that's when he was seen around and not go into it any further. We fell into that one—"

Stack scowled.

Johnny Liddell turned back to the girl reporter. "When I began to suspect him, I asked you in a roundabout way what kind of dough he made at the *Dispatch*. You said it was poor dough, that you were doing better at your job at the *Trib* and didn't want to change places," Johnny Liddell reminded her. "Yet, he drives the latest model car, wears plenty expensive clothes. So, he was getting plenty of money from some other source."

STACK signalled one of the plain-clothesmen, whispered something in his ear. The detective reached into an inner pocket, brought out a pair of handcuffs, clicked them on the wrists of the still unconscious newspaperman.

Johnny grinned. "So you'll buy my theory, eh?"

Stack motioned for him to continue.

"Well, lieutenant, I knew that Connors was the killer but I also knew it was going to be a tough one to prove. So, I laid a little trap. I told him the killer had been careless, that he'd left some prints. It was a wild story, but he fell for it.

"I got him here, and gave him a cock-and-bull story about prints be-

(Continued On Page 96)

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## Crack Detective

(Continued From Page 94)

ing on the frieze. I was depending on the fact that if he was the guilty one that he'd have been so excited right after the killing that he wouldn't remember too clearly what he'd done and what he hadn't done."

Stack nodded. "Nice work. Then what?"

"I borrowed his pencil to leave you a note. I'd noticed that Connors, like many newspapermen, used an indelible copy pencil. I made an excuse to get back into the bedroom, then wrote you a note telling you where to look for the prints and left him here alone."

Stack grinned. "Plenty slick, Johnny. You can make Ed Gardener eat crow on the strength of this one."

Sally Herley broke in. "I don't like to cut in on the bouquets but I don't get it. You left him alone. So what?"

Johnny Liddell patted her gently on the head. "Listen closely, my sweet. Here sits a killer. He doesn't remember whether he touched the place I'd indicated in my note or not. What would he do?"

Sally chewed the end of her pencil. "Rub them off as soon as he was alone, I guess."

Johnny Liddell grinned. "Right. And that's why I grated plenty of indelible pencil lead right at that point. When he tried to rub it off, those grains settled on his hands. Because I kept him sitting in the dark, he had no real opportunity to see that it was on his hands, but even if he had it wouldn't have made much difference—he couldn't have washed it off without them turning tell-tale purple—"

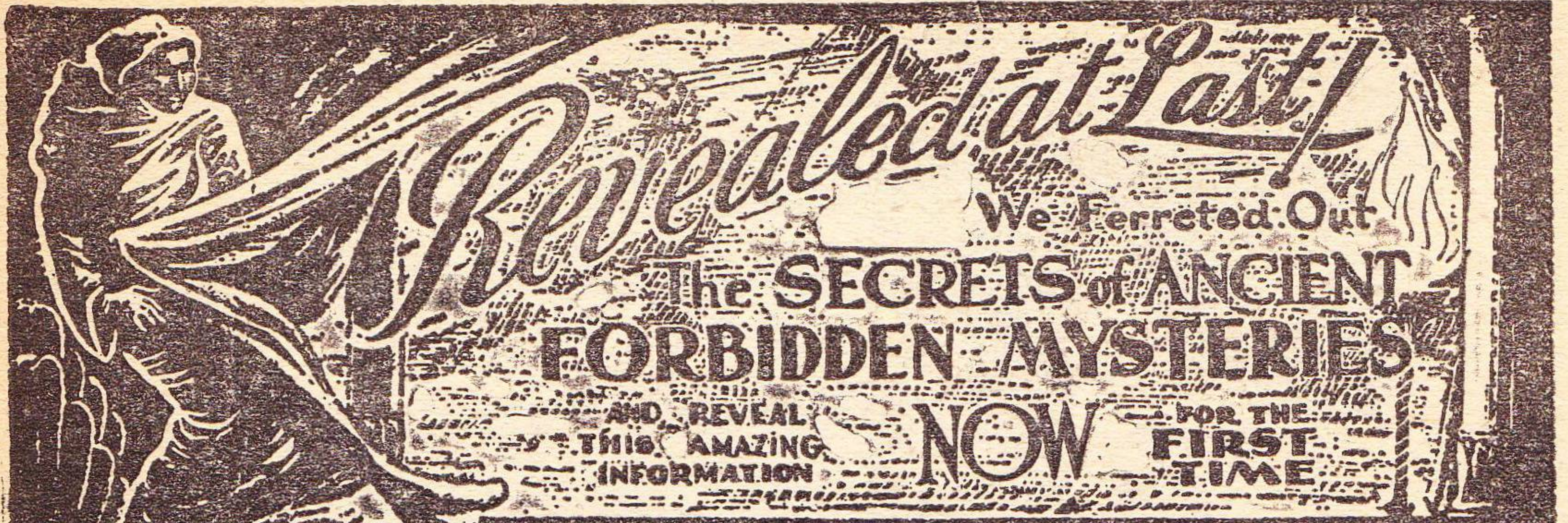
Sally Herley jumped to her feet, kissed the private dick on the forehead.

He grinned. "Very nice, but not very nourishing." He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "A man sure can raise a thirst doing the Homicide Bureau's work for them. What do I have to do to deserve a drink around here?"

Sally Herley linked her arm in his. "Johnny, this is one time drinks are on the Trib. I know the nicest gin mill—and it's got the nicest telephone with connections straight to Sal's City Desk. My editor will be very happy—ver-ry happy about the whole thing!"

THE END





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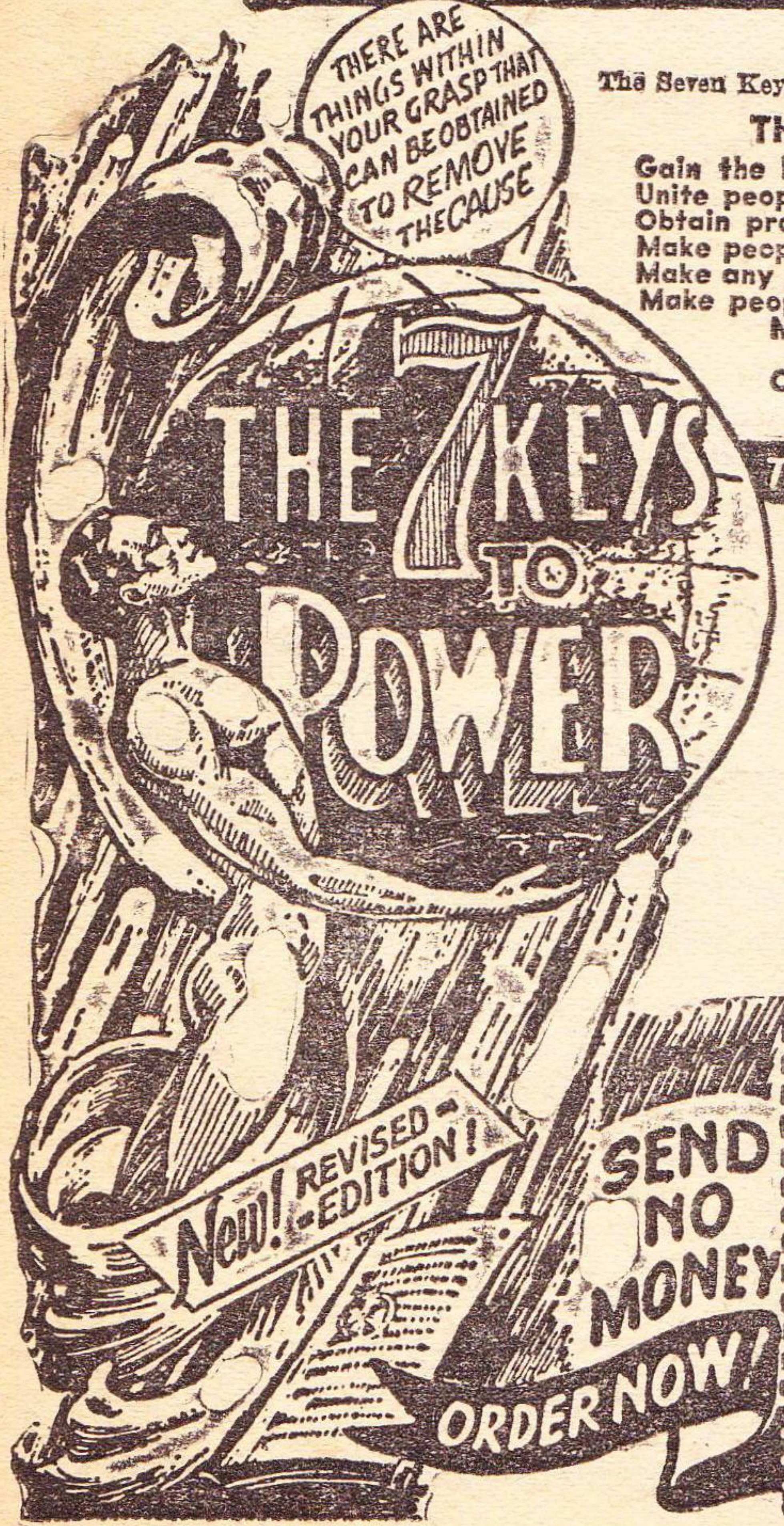
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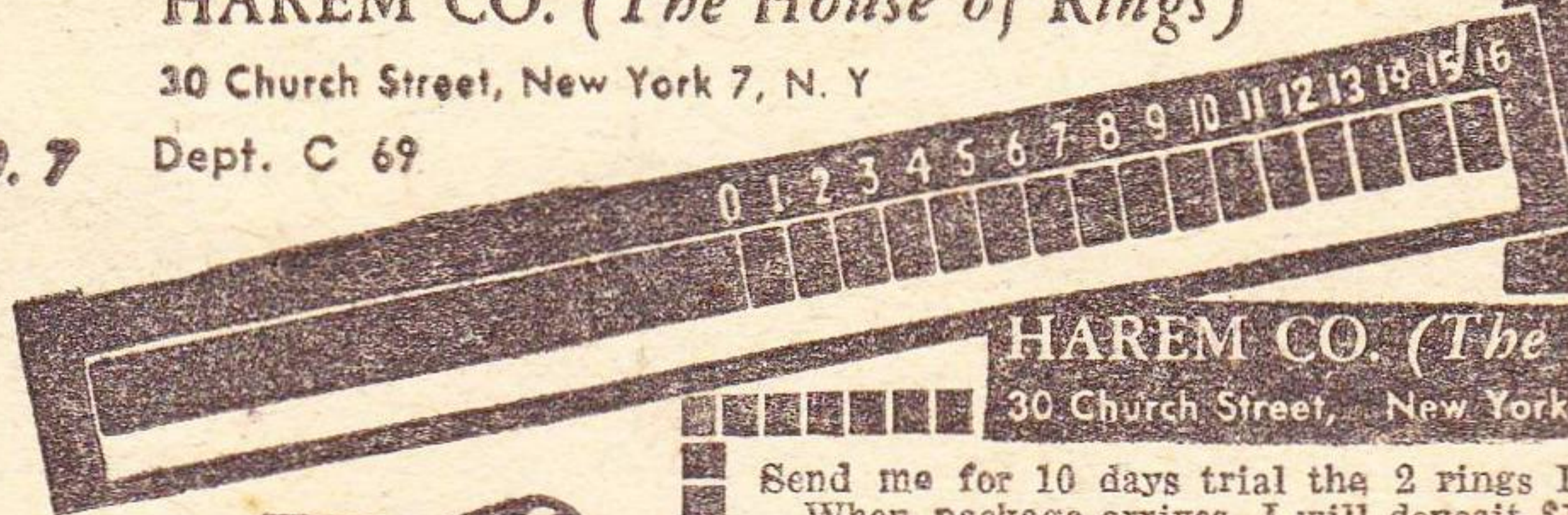
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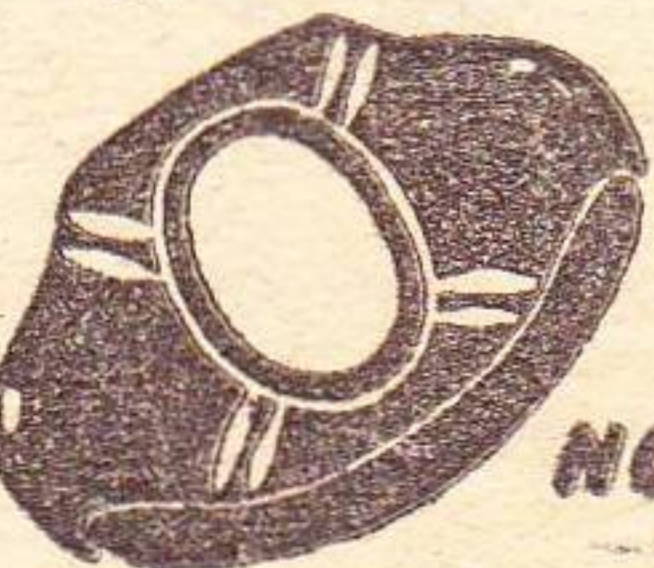
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