

The TWO-IN-ONE Magazine

ALL  
NEW

AUG.  
15¢

# DOUBLE DETECTIVE

CORNELL WOOLRICH  
CLEVE F. ADAMS  
RICHARD SALE  
HUGH B. CAVE  
DALE CLARK

And Other  
Detective  
Aces





# Sensational Scientific tests prove LISTERINE CURES DANDRUFF

*First Science discovered the dandruff germ...then, that Listerine kills it. 76% got quick relief in New Jersey clinic.*

If dandruff has you in its grip, if you have tried remedy after remedy in vain, here is the most welcome news you could possibly read:

Listerine has been scientifically proved a positive cure for dandruff.

Once or twice a day, just douse full-strength Listerine on your scalp; massage vigorously and persistently until every hair is bathed in soothing, health-promoting antiseptic. Listerine

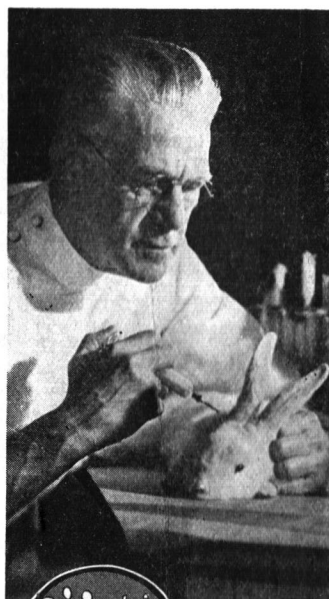
attacks and kills that queer, bottle-shaped germ—*Pityrosporum ovale*, which causes dandruff.

## *Here is proof*

When Science discovered the dandruff germ, an astounding series of experiments immediately followed. Rabbits infected with dandruff. When treated daily with Listerine Antiseptic, they were cured within two weeks on the average.

In a great midwestern skin clinic, a group of dandruff sufferers applied the daily Listerine treatment. A substantial number of these Listerine users obtained marked relief within the first two weeks on the average. In many other cases scalps were found to be free and clear of dandruff in from three to eight weeks.

In another recent test, 76% of the dandruff patients of a New Jersey clinic who used the Listerine treatment twice a day, showed complete disappearance of, or



*Pityrosporum ovale, the germ that causes dandruff, magnified many times.*

marked improvement in, the symptoms within 30 days.

## *Listerine treats dandruff for what it really is*

Why use old-fashioned remedies which merely wash away the surface symptoms of dandruff temporarily? Listerine Antiseptic actually cures dandruff, by killing the germ itself.

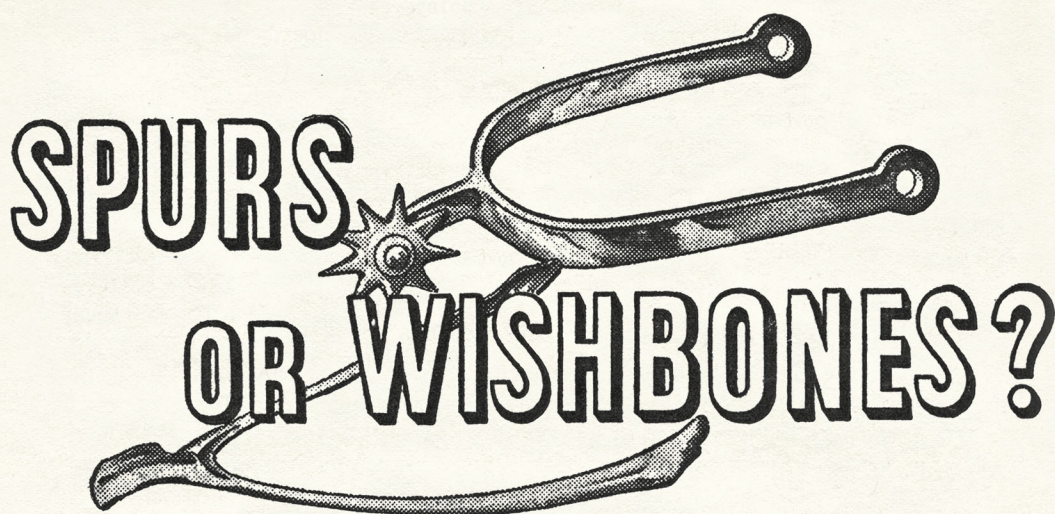
Start ridding your scalp of dandruff today. Stop the gnawing, burning dandruff itch. Get back the natural health and vigor of your hair. Remember—only Listerine Antiseptic, so far as we know, has a clinical record of such positive dandruff cure.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL CO.  
St. Louis, Mo.



**LISTERINE** the **PROVED** treatment for **DANDRUFF**





• Overcoming obstacles on the path to success is something like "busting" bronchos. A man has to have nerve, determination, and courage. Above all, he must know how! And this is truer today than ever before.

I. C. S. can't supply the first three qualities. But it can—and will—provide

the knowledge and training needed to get ahead!

You may be one of those fortunate few already prepared to step into a really big job. If not, I. C. S. is literally "at your service." Mail the coupon below—it may be your passport to a more abundant future!

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Name.....Age.....Address.....

City.....State.....Present Position.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention DOUBLE DETECTIVE.



Vol. 2  
No. 3

# DOUBLE DETECTIVE

AUGUST  
1938

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

The TWO-IN-ONE Magazine

A Magazine  
of Novelettes  
**1.** and Short  
Stories

## I AM THE ALIBI

.....Dale Clark 6

The case of the unmeltable doll, and the confidence man who got too hot under the collar

## OVER THE WALL

.....John K. Butler 25

Beyond those barriers of steel and stone lay wine, women—and the gong

## THE WOMAN'S TOUCH.....Cornell Woolrich 36

The skin-game you love to touch—with asbestos gloves

## SHOAL WATERS.....Richard Sale 43

A navigator of murder piles up on a reef

## THE RIDDLE OF THE GILDED GIRL.....John H. Knox 50

The Wooden Indian thought the show too fantastic to be make-believe

## THE FORGOTTEN MAN-KILLER.....Hugh B. Cave 61

Death-house watch—by one who knew a crime worse than murder

## THINGS TO COME.....The Editors 66

A preview of the season's best in detective stories

A Complete  
**2.** Book-Length  
Detective  
Novel

## SONG OF HATE by Cleve F. Adams

It began at a strip-tease show, with an "artist" who knew her way around a stage but who couldn't get around a murderer. It ended when Detective Bill Rock stripped the sheep's clothing from a wolf—and he wasn't teasing, either. Gals, gorillas, grafters and goofs in a crime adventure so full of fight that it'll have you hanging onto the arms of your chair before the end of the first round. The second *Double Detective* novel by the author whose return engagement was demanded by readers of *This Is Murder*.

—Please Turn to Page 67

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# For Kidney And Bladder Trouble

## Stop Getting Up Nights

Here's one good way to flush harmful waste from kidneys and stop bladder irritation that often causes scanty, burning and smarting passage. Ask your druggist for a 35-cent box of Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules—a splendid safe and harmless diuretic and stimulant for weak kidneys and irritated bladder. Besides getting up nights, some symptoms of kidney trouble are backaches, puffy eyes, leg cramps, and moist palms, but be sure to get **GOLD MEDAL**—it's the genuine medicine for weak kidneys—right from Haarlem in Holland.

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 Let me send you this fine all-wool Union tailored suit **FREE OF EXTRA COST**. Just follow my easy plan and show the suit to your friends. Make up to \$12 in a day easily. No experience—no canvassing necessary.  
 Send for Samples—**FREE OF COST**  
 Write today for **FREE** details. **ACTUAL SAMPLES** and "sure-fire" money getting plans. Send no money.  
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**One Spot Flea Killer**  
  
 Kills ~ Lice ~ Ants ~ Fleas ~ Aphids ~ Bedbugs ~ Crab Lice ~ Potato Bugs ~ Leaf Hoppers ~ Cabbage Worms ~ Mexican Bean Beetles  
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 Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied—Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.  
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Get free booklet about Zo-ak Tablets—the formula of well-known New York physician created especially for men. Zo-ak contains quick-acting vegetable stimulants plus essential vitamin concentrates in adequate amounts to build up health and strength. Ask for Zo-ak (blue box) at any good druggist, and write for free booklet by registered physician. Sent in sealed envelope by Zo-ak Company, 56B West 45 St., Dept. A, New York.

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● The Skeet-er Double Gun is a sports leader in the complete line of Iver Johnson line of arms. A product of 67 years of expert gunsmithing, it is a masterpiece in balanced construction for marksmanship. Designed in different gauges in both plain extractor and automatic ejector at shooter's option; special boring and stock dimensions without extra charge. Priced at \$45.00 and up, it's the Skeet-er for skeet! And there is an Iver Johnson Shot Gun, Rifle, or Revolver for every sport—game or target. Write for complete list of firearms—Folder 20-A.

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We pay big cash prices for thousands of different titles. We bought over 7,500 books in past twenty-one months, paying as high as \$500 for a single book. For example, we will pay you cash for the following books as described in our price list:

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| Tamerlane & Other Poems .....  | 5,000.00   |

These are but a few of the many thousands of books we want. **DON'T SEND BOOKS** until you have checked our latest list giving full information. Don't delay—a single old school book, story book, bible, poetry, history, travel, almanacs, newspapers, letters, etc., may bring you \$25, \$50, \$100, \$500 or even \$5,000 cash for certain books. Better investigate **NOW**. Send 10c to the **American Book Mart, 140 S. Dearborn St., Dept. 325, Chicago**, and we will send you latest list of old books we want to buy and cash prices we will pay.

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### CANDID CAMERA INCLUDED FREE

Precision-Built Candid Camera with powerful Wollensak Miniatur lens and spyglass view-finder. Takes 16 pictures on a roll of standard film.

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Include Free of Extra Charge with any GOLDEN JEWELLED WATCH purchased and paid for on our easy plan. Golden Jeweled Watches are new 1938 Models, cased in charm and color of natural yellow Gold with raised gilt dial and numerals. Mirror-polished movement with Red Ruby in center wheel for accuracy. All can be yours for only 2 easy payments of \$3.50 each.

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NO CHARGE FOR CREDIT—NO RED TAPE—WE SHIP AT ONCE. Rush your name and address with 25c for packing, etc. First payment guaranteed. Money-Back Guarantee. YOU TAKE NO RISK. Specify Model! GUARANTEED. SAFE DELIVERY GUARANTEED.

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Powerful—Accurate—Economical—Practical—Adjustable Shooting Force—Amazing Maximum Velocity—cal. 177 or 22 and B3—For Target and Small Game—the only Genuine Compressed Air Pistol for shooting BB on the market—Single Shot with Bell Action—Hammer Flip-Hair Trigger—Safety. Price \$7.50. Holster \$2.00. Also 177 and 22 Single Shot Air Rifles \$7.50—Single Shot BB Air Rifle \$6.00—25 Shot BB Repeater Air Rifle \$7.50 at Dealer or Direct. No license required. Safe for indoor use.

**FULL DETAILS—TARGETS—FREE—WRITE TODAY**  
Benjamin Air Rifle Co., 587 Marion St., St. Louis, Mo.

**\$7.50**

## PAYS Up To \$30 This MAGIC-DISC HEATS WATER INSTANTLY!

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# DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY

# YOUR YOUTHFUL SKIN A MASS OF PIMPLES?

Take steps now to help keep your blood free of skin-defiling poisons

Stop being an object of shame and scorn among your friends. Find out what often causes those repulsive-looking pimples . . . and get rid of them.

Between the ages of 13 and 25 your body is changing rapidly. Important glands develop. These gland changes upset your system. Waste poisons from the intestines are often thrown into the blood stream and are carried to your skin, where they may bubble out in ugly, shameful hickies.

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| 28x4.75-36    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-37    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-38    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
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| 28x4.75-40    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-41    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
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| 28x4.75-44    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-45    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-46    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-47    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-48    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-49    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-50    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-51    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-52    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-53    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-54    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-55    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-56    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-57    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-58    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
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| 28x4.75-61    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-62    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-63    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
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| 28x4.75-68    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-69    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
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| 28x4.75-74    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
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| 28x4.75-79    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-80    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-81    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-82    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-83    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-84    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-85    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
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| 28x4.75-91    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-92    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-93    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-94    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-95    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-96    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-97    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-98    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-99    | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |
| 28x4.75-100   | 2.55   | 1.25  | 32x4.5 | 3.35               | 1.45  | 38x4.5 | 3.95   |

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Brady had a gat  
in his fist as he  
plunged into the  
garage



# I Am the Alibi

by Dale Clark

I  
With Love, for Eve

**T**HIS blonde should have worn a sign: *Dangerous! Dame at Work!* She didn't, of course, and how could Brady know? She was dressed quietly in a tailored outfit, she kept her sea-green eyes level and businesslike.

"I want a man shadowed."

Brady told her she'd come to the wrong firm.

The blonde did a puzzled act with her brows, and said, "I don't understand. This is a detective agency, isn't it?"

She seemed reasonable enough, and Brady tried to explain it to her in a reasonable way.

"Miss Loring," he said, "we have a very small agency here. There's just Dr. Walter Judson and myself, and we don't regularly employ any other operatives. Judson's field is limited, and we don't try to tackle every case that comes along. You'd better contact one of the big general agencies. I'd recommend—"

He didn't recommend; she cut him short with, "What's wrong with my case?"

"Not a thing in the world," Brady said. "It just isn't up our alley."





Pethwick stood framed in the doorway and he was shooting

"Then you can come and play in my alley. I'm willing to pay your fee, whatever it is. Isn't that the main thing?"

She was one of those kind, Brady thought. He didn't like it. He didn't like any woman who argued.

"Listen, Miss Loring," he said. "It ain't the main thing. Now, you look. You wouldn't go ask an eye specialist to take and operate on you for appendicitis. Well, there's different kinds of detectives the same as there's different kinds of doctors. Your case just ain't the kind of case we specialize in here."

The blonde said, "Don't be silly. You can surely shadow this man for me. That doesn't require such a high degree of specialization."

Brady was a big man, and his chair creaked protest as he leaned forward.

"All right! All right!" he said, and the hell with trying to dress it up

nice for her. "Lady, you hit the nail right on the head," he told the blonde. "Doc Judson is the best criminologist in the city—everybody admits that. A lot of people think he's the best in the United States. Me, I figure he's the best in the world. He's a homicide expert—a murder specialist. Maybe that's news to you?"

Her green eyes sparked scornfully. "I know who Judson is. That's why I'm here. I want the best."

"You want the best!" Brady mocked. "And what makes you think the best criminologist alive is going to be interested in tailing this guy you want tailed?"

The blonde said, "He only takes cases that interest him?"

"Why, sure. He don't have to take the others. Why, he has his pick and choice out of dozens of cases a month," Brady said. "He's tops. Look, if you got accused for murder—and you was innocent—the smartest thing your lawyer could do would be to hire Judson to clear you. Or if you



was Chief of Police, and the papers were panning you on account of a big crime, you'd be smart to call the Doc in. And either way, you'd be lucky if you could hire him. Because, like I say, he's got to be interested in the case. Doc doesn't pick the easy ones, see?"

The girl opened her purse, got out a silver case and opened that, tapped a cigarette on the edge of Brady's desk, and said:

"I get it. Judson picks his cases. So I'm wasting my breath on you. I'll wait and see Judson himself."

The nerve of it took Brady's breath.

He gulped, "You'll wait—why, the Doc would be insulted to even consider such a nickel-and-dime case as yours!"

The ruled red line of the blonde's lips tightened on the cigarette. She didn't say anything. Brady could see she meant to sit there.

He said in a friendlier voice, "Any common ordinary dick could shadow this party for you. Why throw away your dough paying the Doc's fancy price?"

She still didn't say anything.

What could a guy do?

Brady did it. "Okay," he said. "I'll ask him. But I don't guarantee he'll see you."

**J**UDSON had the office back of Brady's. Brady went in there. It was a big room, with elegant windows from the floor to the ceiling. These windows were never open; there was an air-conditioning system. He also had a soft cork floor, and soundproofed walls. The Doc hated noise.

Two years ago, Brady thought the Doc was crazy. Then Judson solved a murder that had a whole Homicide Squad running around in circles. So Brady turned in his badge and went to work for the Doc. Brady liked to throw in with the best, and besides he wanted to see what made the Doc's wheels go around.

If you'd asked him then, he'd have said Dr. Walter Judson was three-

fourths fakealoo and the rest pure genius. If you asked him now, he'd have said it was three-fourths genius and the rest fakealoo.

He told the Doc:

"We got a sit-down striker here. It's a judy and she wants you should tail a guy. I showed her all the answers in the back of the book, and she don't believe any of 'em."

Dr. Walter Judson had his six feet two slung crosswise in a leather arm-chair—and he didn't weigh hardly enough to dent the cushion under him. He was the thinnest guy Brady'd ever seen. He wasn't good-looking, either. He had a funny sharp face, and what little hair he had left was gray, the same gray as his tooth-brush mustache.

"Well, Brady," the Doc wanted to know, "what is the answer in the back of the book?"

"Peanuts," grinned Brady. "I told her this agency can't be bothered with such small-change cases as she's got."

"What?" the Doc said in a tone of pity. "You gave her the wrong answer out of the wrong book. No wonder she wouldn't believe you. Here is the most important case that ever came into this or any other office."

Brady's eyes widened. "Ah-h, you wouldn't be feeding me."

"The most important," qualified Dr. Walter Judson, "to her."

"Oh, sure!" Brady's voice became enthusiastic. "Ain't it the truth, Doc? Ain't it just like a dame? Whatever she wants, that's the most important thing in a world! I never yet saw a dame that didn't figure it that way."

The Doc said, "Or a man, either."

"Now I don't agree with you," Brady came back. "A man has got some sense of proportion. But a judy, never."

The Doc's sharp features took on a slightly nettled expression. He explained patiently:

"It isn't a question of sex, Brady. It is a universal truth of human nature. It applies to men and women indiscriminately."



They had both forgotten about the girl in the outer office.

Brady said, "Doc, ninety-nine times in a hundred, you're right. But not always. And not now. It is a scientific fact that a dame thinks in a different way from a guy; she's more personal; she's got no sense of proportion."

Dr. Walter Judson said accusingly, "You've been reading those \$2.95 books that you get mailed in a plain wrapper! But I'm not going to argue the point. Your judy probably read the account of the Allworthy case in the Ledger this morning. That gave her the idea of coming to us. Though why this picture of you didn't frighten her off is a wonder. You look like a particularly motheathen mobster."

His bony index finger tapped the newspaper folded across his knees.

Brady said, "I just glanced at the headline. I saw your picture, but not—what the hell!"

He'd circled behind the Doc's chair. There wasn't any picture of Brady.

The doc laughed merrily. "There's the male sense of proportion for you!" he cried. "You 'just glanced' at the headline over the biggest murder solution of the year. I suppose you also just glanced at my picture. You wouldn't look at any of it twice, except to see your own photo in the paper!"

Brady's large face glowed a dull brick-red. He said, "Why should I read what the papers say about it? It ain't news to me. Why, I helped you crack that case!"

The Doc grinned. "Is your face news to you? You see it in your shaving glass every morning."

"Oh, uts-nay!"

"I'm serious," Judson said. "It makes no difference whether you're dealing with a man or a woman, their own personal interests are the most important to them. You erred psychologically with that young woman. You shouldn't have told her that her problem was too trifling for us to bother with. It would have been more diplomatic to have pointed out the

reverse. In short, her case is too important for us."

Brady waved his hands. "Let's all sing like the cuckoos sing. Cuck-oo! Cuck-oo!"

"It isn't cuckoo," the Doc said firmly. "All you had to do was tell the young woman that owing to the pressure of other cases we couldn't give hers the enormous attention it deserves. You tell her that, and she'll go away. Happy."

"Oh, sure. You know just how to handle her."

"Of course I do."

Brady suddenly grinned. "We'll see about that. I'll bring her in and you give her the spiel."

Dr. Walter Judson slid his legs off the arm of the chair, pushed his shoulders up, and said hastily:

"No, no! You know how I hate interviewing clients. That's your job!"

The newspaper fell at his feet. Brady looked at the newspaper, grunted, and said inexorably, "You had your little joke. Now I'll have mine."

"That wasn't a joke at your expense," the Doc offered. "It was a practical psychological demonstration."

Over his shoulder, Brady retorted: "Okay! This isn't any joke either. I just want to watch you demonstrate your psychology on the judy."

He hauled the door open, and announced:

"Come right in, Miss Loring. Dr. Judson's happy to meet you."

THE Doc didn't look happy. His narrowed gray eyes darted an angry stare at Brady. Blandly oblivious, Brady drew up a chair for the girl.

"Sit right here, Miss Loring," he invited. "You tell old Doc Judson all about it. Anything so important as this, the Doc naturally wants to have every single detail of it."

The blonde was businesslike, as she'd been with Brady—at first.

"The man I want shadowed," she announced, "is Eugene C. Pethwick."



He's the head of the chemical department at the Vitavešta Company, on Bank Street. His office hours are from nine to five. It won't be necessary for you to watch him except after business hours. This is his picture."

She got the photo out of her purse. It showed a plump, square-chinned face, and had written across the corner: *With Love, for Eve.*

"Eve," the blonde went on, "is my sister. She's infatuated with this man. She's fool enough to believe he'll divorce his wife, who's in the East, and marry her. Marry Eve, I mean."

The Doc said, "You don't believe that."

"Of course not. Besides my sister, Pethwick's playing around with a night club dancer, a Molla Lavine at the Blue Devils Inn. He's one of those foul professional Don Juans, and he'll end by breaking Eve's heart. She's only a kid, only eighteen."

"That's sad to think of," Doc Judson sighed sympathetically. "May I ask what a detective can find out that you don't already know?"

She said: "I've told Eve these things. She won't believe me, thinks I'm prejudiced. Pethwick has been clever enough to sell her the idea that private detectives are all sneaks, snoopers, blackmailers. But Eve has read newspaper and magazine articles about you, Dr. Judson. You know you have a perfectly tremendous reputation. I'm gambling on that—gambling that she'll believe your report on this man."

Her green eyes flashed. "I've five hundred dollars saved. I'll spend every penny of it to prevent my kid sister from throwing her happiness away on that scoundrel!"

Judson nodded. "A fine attitude, Miss Loring. You have my sympathy. It's one of the most interesting and unusual cases that ever came to my attention."

Brady didn't have a chance to rib the Doc often. He wanted to rub it in, now. "Yeah?" he sounded off. "What's so unusual about it, chief?"

"The human element." The Doc sat back in his leather armchair. He propped his chin on bony, interlocked fingers. He told the blonde: "Most of my cases are homicides. A murder is committed. It's all very well to punish the killer. I can do that, but in a larger sense I cannot really succeed. I can't restore the victim to life. No power of mine can give the mother her child, nor restore the husband to the widow. Sometimes I feel it's a dreary, sad business I'm in."

Brady said, "Somebody's got to do it."

The Doc ignored Brady; smiled at the blonde. "Your case is different. By acting at once, it is possible to rescue your sister from a terrible mistake. At the same time, Pethwick can be taught a lesson he seems to need badly. And finally, we can perhaps restore to Mrs. Pethwick a chastened husband. It will be a happy ending all around, and therefore a new experience for me."

Brady's jaw sagged. "Why, Doc! You ain't taking her case?"

"Why not?" Judson stroked his angular jaw. "Three human lives hang in the balance. Who am I to say that these lives are unimportant because they have not yet fallen under the shadow of violent death?"

The blonde cried, "God bless you, Dr. Judson!"

"No, I'm doing it for my own personal satisfaction," the Doc said. "Where can we reach you, Miss Loring?"

"The Bretonne Apartment Hotel," she said. "But I'm taking Eve out of town for a few days. That'll insure Pethwick rushing straight to Molla Lavine. You can't help getting the goods on him."

Brady didn't say anything. Not until he'd ushered the blonde out.

Then he turned to the Doc. "What the hell! That's a hell of a way you got rid of her!"

Doc Judson looked at his assistant a long moment. His mouth curled sardonically under the gray toothbrush mustache. His eyes were narrow, metallic.



"I'll teach you to play tricks on me! Your little joke has turned and bit your hind leg, Brady. Because you're going to get the goods on Eugene C. Pethwick—and like it."

## II

**The Phantom Bandit**

OF COURSE Brady didn't like it. He was an ex-Homicide cop, and that's tops. A big league ball-player would feel insulted if you put him on a girl's kittenball team, wouldn't he? That's how Brady felt about this business of tagging a man around, checking up on his love life. It was the lowest kind of a detective job—it was just common keyhole peeking. It hurt his dignity.

But he sat in a parked cab near the Vitavesta building at five o'clock. It was his case now, since the Doc had promised Miss Loring. A case is a case, and you can't lay down on one. Because without ethics, where would this business be?

Brady had no trouble spotting Pethwick—a guy of forty, square-chinned and square-shouldered. Pethwick had another fellow with him, a young fellow. Twenty-two or three, Brady cased the lad: nice looking, but he needed things like a haircut and a crease in his pants.

They made a funny pair, crossing the street to the parking lot and getting into a swank cream roadster. Pethwick did the driving. He tooted the roadster along Sheridan, then onto King's Lane, and braked in front of the Blue Devils Inn.

Brady knew the spot. You could find a very hot floorshow here later on in the evening. But now only the grill was open. Pethwick and this kid went into the grill, and Brady got the table right behind them.

He watched the young fellow fidget with the menu, and say he'd take ham on rye and a stein of the dark. Pethwick laughed, told the waiter:

"Two steaks off the charcoal, medium rare." He grinned at the young fellow. "I'm buying, Chanler. These steaks are damned good, too."

He ought to know, Brady figured, and ordered the same.

It wasn't hard to size up Pethwick. Brady'd been around—he knew the type. A big guy with a taste for high living, and enough jack to satisfy the yen. A show-off. Brady remembered the swank roadster, and he noticed the flashy diamond on Pethwick's hand.

He was the kind of guy would try to talk himself out of a traffic ticket by claiming he knew the Commissioner personally.

Brady wasn't impressed. Young Chanler was, though. Young Chanler had a thin, intellectual kind of face, and seemed smart enough, but it was all book-smartness. The kid had probably never sat down in front of a two-dollar steak before.

Their talk didn't mean much to Brady. It was all about chemicals and residues and annealing temperatures. Chanler got an old brown manila envelope from his pocket, and spread some papers on the table, and he'd point at figures on the papers while he talked.

Pethwick said yeah, yeah, and once in a while he asked a question. It was so much Greek to Brady, but even so he tabbed that the kid's Greek was better than Pethwick's.

Finally Pethwick said, "Later, son, later."

"I just wanted to explain—"

"It'll wait," Pethwick grinned.

"Here's a little lady, and she won't."

The little lady'd just come in. She'd looked around and spotted Pethwick before he waved his hand at her. The big guy didn't stand up, though, when she ankled over to the table. He just waved his hand again and said:

"Molla, meet Harold Chanler. Friend of mine."

Molla was red-haired, and looked to Brady like just the dish a guy like Pethwick would go for in a big way. A flash dame. Her figure included everything in the audit, and her blue evening gown—the kind without shoulder straps—didn't try to keep many secrets.



Chanler blushed when he stared at her.

The redhead laughed at him. "What's the matter, Harold?"

The young fellow said, "Nothing. Only I never met anybody like you before. Except in the movies. And that isn't really meeting people is it?"

"You never saw anyone like Miss Lavine in the movies, either," Pethwick told him. "The Hays office wouldn't pass her, ha-ha!"

This joke gave the big guy quite a laugh. It didn't hand Brady any merriment, though. He listened to a lot of this kind of talk, and he could make this much of it: Pethwick evidently got a large kick out of showing off this dame to the kid—Molla Lavine took a fancy to the lad, or pretended to—and Chanler was gooey about her.

The kid tucked his papers back in their envelope. They finished the steaks, and Pethwick ordered a round of drinks. With a couple of drinks inside him, the big guy began to take a more personal interest in the red-haired judy. He pushed his chair around, draped an arm around her shoulders, and asked her in a loud whisper:

"How's it about it? Glad to see your daddy again?"

This made the young fellow blush. He kept his eyes on the tablecloth, and it looked to Brady as if the kid resented this kind of familiarity.

Molla put up her hand, disentangled Pethwick's fingers, pushed his hand away, and said:

"Now, is that nice?"

So Brady decided Miss Loring's sister Eve must be an awful dumb dope. Or how else could she fall for such a guy?

Finally Pethwick signaled the waiter, paid the check, and made a large business of laying down fifty cents tip.

He said to Chanler, "Well, come on, sonnyboy. We'll go out to my place, and we'll really take that proposition of yours apart and see if we can't make something of it."

They went out.

PETHWICK drove along King's Lane to the canyon road, swung left, and started climbing into foothill country. This was suburb, with big houses pretty widely scattered along the hillsides. A lot of ravines slashed the hillsides, deep gullies overgrown with manzanita and acacia.

Pethwick's house stood on a triangle of ground, with the street in front and a fork in the canyon bordering the other two sides. The cream roadster headed onto a concrete driveway and pulled into a double garage. The garage was a hundred feet from the house, and had a thick hedge following both sides of the driveway.

The cabbie said, "You want me to wait again?"

Brady looked at the meter and grinned, "Sure thing." He thought maybe this joke wouldn't look so good to Doc Judson when the Doc saw this meter slip.

Brady decided it wasn't his business to worry about Pethwick and the kid. He'd just sit in the cab, and follow if Pethwick went anywhere else tonight.

Then he heard the gun-roar. From inside the garage, that was.

He dived out of the cab, and pounded up the driveway, fast. Some doves out of a cote on the garage roof made frightened sounds in the air over his head. It couldn't have been more than thirty seconds after the shot that he plunged into the garage himself. Brady had a gat in his fist, and ready.

It wasn't really dark outside yet; just twilight. But Pethwick had flashed his headlamps coming into the garage. The light bounced back off the front wall, and showed young Chanler sprawled, half out of the roadster's door.

The kid's legs trailed from the runningboard. By the looks of it, he'd been shot right through the heart. He'd been knocked back, it looked, and had been dead by the time he struck the cushion.

Pethwick had his back turned to Brady. There was another, small door at the back of the garage. Pethwick



was framed in that doorway, holding a gun in front of him.

The gun went *crash, crash!* Two shots. Afterward Brady remembered distinctly; he couldn't be wrong. Pethwick certainly blazed two shots from the back door of the garage across the yard.

But at the time, it didn't seem important. Brady said, coming up behind the big man: "What goes on?"

Pethwick swiveled around, stammered when he saw Brady, and let the six-shooter clatter on the garage floor. He pushed his hands high, said in a scared bleat:

"Who're you? Don't shoot, whoever you are!"

The first thing Brady did was pick up the gun—a .32 Colt New Police Positive. Then he flashed his private op's shield.

Pethwick exclaimed, "Oh, a detective!" and then, "He got away, officer! He jumped down in the canyon!"

"Who jumped?"

"It was a stick-up!" Pethwick cried. "The guy got away!"

Right then the cabbie came into the garage. "You stay here," Brady told the cabbie. "Don't touch anything, see?" He turned, plunged across the yard toward the canyon. Pethwick, close at his heels, panted:

"The guy was waiting in the garage, see? I just got out of the car when he hollered to throw up our hands!"

There'd been an epidemic of hold-ups like that. Lone wolf stuff. The wolf picked victims who flashed jewelry, and Brady thought the piece of ice on Pethwick's hand would be enough to show why he'd been picked. Especially as he'd worn the sparkler around places like the Blue Devils Inn.

The only thing was, these stick-ups were generally pulled later at night.

Brady stopped at the edge of the canyon. The manzanita and acacia grew farther down. There was a ten-yard slope of raw earth, washed bone-clean by the rains. Brady looked at this; his eyes narrowed.

Pethwick was saying, "Chanler foolishly tried to get my gun out of the glove compartment. The stick-up guy fired that one shot, and then ran out the back door. I got back in the car, and got the gun, and fired just as the guy jumped out of sight here. I guess I must've missed, though."

"I guess," Brady said. He broke his gaze away from the canyon; studied Pethwick. "Who was he—the kid?"

The big man wet his lips. "You mean Chanler. That's the funny part of it. He's just a kid, a student, out of a job. He thought he had some new kind of plastic process worked out. His idea really didn't amount to a damn, but I felt sorry for him."

"Yeah."

"So I bought him a square meal tonight, and then brought him out here. I wanted to give him the bad news easy, about his idea being impractical. And then I figured I'd offer him at least a bread and butter job."

"Nice of you."

"I was only trying to give the kid a break," Pethwick mourned. "And here he gets shot dead as a result. Now, isn't that a hell of a trick for Fate to play?"

It was a hell of a trick all right, but Brady had a hunch Fate didn't play it.

He said, "We better call the cops."

Pethwick nodded. "I'll get my keys from the car."

"Why? Ain't anybody in the house now?"

"The housekeeper," Pethwick said. "She's deaf, and she probably wouldn't hear if we rang the bell. I'll get the keys."

THEY walked back to the garage. Pethwick got his key ring from the roadster's dash, and Brady stooped over Chanler. He twitched back the kid's lapel. He wanted to make sure if the envelope was still in the inside pocket. It was.

The cabbie stayed in the garage. Brady used the phone to call Homicide; he asked for Sergeant Larnihan.



After that, he thought about calling Doc Judson, too, and then he thought, "Uts-nay! I got this one all wrapped up, anyhow. The Doc can read about it in the papers," and this idea made Brady grin.

So he didn't call the Doc. He waited for Sergeant Larnihan to get there, and for the deputy coroner to go to work. He let Pethwick tell his story over again. And then Brady said:

"Baloney, Sarge. He's lying! His story's a sieve for holes!"

Pethwick said, "Why—why—!"

Brady leveled his finger at the big man, jabbed the finger against Pethwick's vest.

"Look, Sarge! He hadn't switched off his headlights! He still had his keys in the dash. A guy doesn't get out of a car without first doing those things, and he lies when he says he just got out of the car when the stick-up started."

Pethwick cleared his throat. "Why of course. The bandit told me to get out of the car. I remember that now. Naturally I didn't stop to fool with the lights or the keys."

"You didn't tell it that way the first two times!"

"I was excited," Pethwick protested. "It's all kind of fogged in my head!"

Brady burned.

He said wrathfully, "Bandit! There wasn't any fog when you seen the bandit run across the yard and jump in the canyon, was there?"

"No," Pethwick said. "No."

"Come on," Brady told Larnihan. He marched across the yard and pointed.

"There," he said. "A bandit would have to leave some marks if he jumped down there. Do you see any marks?"

There weren't any. Just the ten yards of bare earth, washed clean, and not a scratch on it. Larnihan swept a flashlight up and down the canyon to make sure.

"Uh-h," the sergeant said.

"You get it?" Brady urged. "There wasn't any bandit!"

They went back to the garage, and Larnihan put this up to Pethwick. How could a man get down in the canyon and not leave a footprint—or did the bandit have wings?

Pethwick said, "By George, I know how it must have happened." He waved his plump hands at Larnihan. "The stick-up guy dropped flat down when I started shooting. That's what made me think he'd jumped into the canyon. What he really did, he must've crawled across the yard and got behind the hedge and sneaked back to the street."

It made Brady laugh.

Pethwick said, "You don't think I shot him? Only two bullets were fired from my gun, and you yourself saw me shoot twice."

Brady hadn't opened the gun, hadn't wanted to touch it more than he had to, not after he became suspicious.

Larnihan looked, and said, "Just two bullets used up—that's right."

The deputy coroner came over. "That's a thirty-two, anyhow," the deputy pointed out. "This man was killed with a forty-five."

Which gave Brady another idea.

"Sure!" Brady said. "That's it. The guy used two guns! All we got to do is find the .45. It can't be far off, because he didn't have much time to hide it."

And he hunted for the .45.

He explored the garage, inch by inch. He searched the cream roadster. He searched Chanler. He prowled the yard, and even got down into the canyon with a flashlight.

There wasn't any .45.

Larnihan said, "No, you're wrong. It's another of these garage stick-ups. Mr. Pethwick was naturally excited. Anyone would be, seeing the kid killed before his eyes like that."

Brady's hands were balled into helpless fists. He glared at Pethwick, and caught what looked like mockery in the big man's eyes. Brady felt baffled—felt that in some way he'd been played for a fool. He said bitterly:

"This guy's lying his head off."



"I'll admit he couldn't have killed the kid, but I'm betting he knows who did."

Brady didn't see the reporter standing just outside the door. The reporter had just come, and he didn't waste any time going. Without even knowing it, Brady'd bought a bushel of trouble.

### III The Doll

THE house on Sparrow Lane was old-fashioned red brick, two stories high. A pasteboard sign inside the glass front door advertised *Furnished Rooms for Quiet Adults, Rates by Week or Month. Ring Landlady's Bell*. Brady rang it, and a woman opened the door.

She was sixty, for Brady's guess. She wore black silk, and a black shawl around her shoulders, and had her white hair piled in a stiff pompadour. The gentlewoman-fallen-on-hard-times type.

Brady asked, "There's a party named Chanler lives here?"

"I'm Mrs. Chanler. Did you want to see a room?"

Brady said, "The Chanler I mean is a young fella."

"You want my son." The way she said it, Brady could tell the news hadn't reached her yet. "Harold isn't home. Come back tomorrow."

"No. If you're his mother, I've got to talk to you now."

Something in his tone startled the woman. She said, "Just one moment, please. You can wait in the hall."

Brady waited, and Mrs. Chanler went past him into her parlor. He heard her say:

"I'm sorry, Mr. Spanth. I don't care to sign anything without my son's advice. Besides, I have the policy in a safe deposit vault."

Spanth was big, bigger than Brady even. He wore tweeds, and looked as hard and burly as an oak knot.

He said, "That's all right. The company likes to make these adjustments as soon as possible. I'll stop by tomorrow morning."

Spanth came out, shouldered past Brady after one sharp glance at him, went through the front door.

Mrs. Chanler explained, "He's from the insurance company. We had a fire in the basement tonight. It burned Harold's work desk. . . . What did you want to see me about?"

Brady said, "I understand your son had some kind of a plastic process worked out?"

"He did, but why—who are you?"

"Sit down, Mrs. Chanler." Brady made it a command. The woman obeyed. Her eyes had grown large, alarmed.

Brady said, slowly and quietly:

"Your son is dead. He was with a man named Pethwick tonight. They were held up. The robber shot Harold."

It didn't register right away. There was that long first moment while the woman just sat and stared at him. After that she repeated, "Shot Harold!" and seemed to realize it when her own voice formed the words. She put both hands to her face and wept. Her shoulders trembled under the shawl.

After a while Brady told her:

"That's Pethwick's story about it, Mrs. Chanler. Me, I doubt it. I'm a detective, I'm investigating it, and I want you to help me if you can."

The woman looked at Brady, wet-eyed. She said uncertainly, "I don't know what you mean? How I could help?"

He said, "I want to know about this plastic."

"Oh. You mean the doll."

"Doll?"

Her voice got stronger. "That's how it began, with a doll. Mrs. Weaver—she's a roomer here in the house—gave her little girl a doll for Christmas. It was made of composition—one of those washable, flesh-colored, unbreakable dolls. Only Edie (that's the little girl) forgot and left it on the steam radiator overnight. So it melted, you see, and that's how it started."

"How what started?"

Mrs. Chanler said, "Harold studied



chemistry in college. He went through college, although it was a terrible struggle for us to even pay the tuition. And then he couldn't get a job after he graduated. He just stayed home and helped me with the housework while he kept trying to find work. When that happened to the doll, when Edie cried so, Harold thought perhaps he could change that composition so it would be unmeltable as well as unbreakable."

"Did he?"

"Not at first. He worked for a long while at it, fixing up a workbench in the basement and using old dishes and acids and things. Until a few weeks ago he succeeded in making a different, better plastic. So he went straight to those people, the Vitavesta Company. They manufacture those dolls and other things made of the composition material. And Harold hoped they'd buy his idea. He said it was better and cheaper than the plastic they were using."

Brady wanted to know, "He try for a patent on it?"

She said, "No, patents cost money. We simply couldn't afford it."

"But it was worth money, wasn't it?"

Mrs. Chanler said, "Harold wanted two hundred dollars in cash. And he hoped they'd give him a job."

"Only two hundred?"

She said, "Two hundred would be a lot for us, and I'm sure Harold would have taken that, gladly."

Brady's gaze fogged with misgiving as he considered this. The only plausible motive for killing Harold Chanler would have been this plastic angle. And Brady couldn't see Pethwick mixed up in a thing like that, with only two C's involved. Two hundred would have been chicken feed for a guy like Pethwick.

And if Pethwick wasn't mixed up in it, Brady's whole theory was cockeyed.

He said, "Harold had some papers in an envelope tonight. You know if he had any other copies of his idea written out?"

"He kept a notebook on his experiments," Mrs. Chanler remembered, "but that was burned in the fire tonight."

"What about this fire?"

She said, "He had a Bunsen burner on the table in the basement. Apparently he left it on, and the table caught fire. I smelled the smoke, and the firemen put the blaze out without much trouble."

"But his notebook burned."

Mrs. Chanler nodded. "Everything he had down there. But it doesn't matter. We have a small deposit box at the Third National. I remember now, Harold put a copy of his formula there for safekeeping."

"It's at least worth looking at," Brady decided. "I'll see you tomorrow, Mrs. Chanler." He got up slowly, walked to the door, and said from there, "Maybe I'm wrong. But I think that idea may have been more valuable than your son suspected. We'll submit his formula to a testing laboratory, and get an expert opinion on it."

The woman looked at him helplessly. "But why didn't they buy it? Why kill him?"

Brady couldn't answer that.

He said, "I'd like to look at the basement."

THERE was nothing in the basement he could make any use of. The worktable over in the corner of the room was blackened debris, watersoaked. The firemen had thrown water all over the concrete floors and walls, washed away any clue an arsonist might have left.

It'd happened an hour ago, the woman said. The roomers left the front door unlocked as often as not. Anyone could have walked in from the street, slipped through the front hall, and gone down the basement stairs. And got away just as easily.

When he got upstairs again, to the front door, Mrs. Chanler began to cry again. Something had gone out of her—she'd lost the temporary strength that had enabled her to answer his questions.



"Harold!" she mourned. "He was all I had left in the world. All I had to live for."

Brady was relieved to get out of the house of sorrow, and ashamed of being relieved. He decided the Doc was right. You couldn't give the mother back her child, the Doc had said. Judson was a pretty wise guy. And Brady thought with relief, maybe the Doc could make sense of this screwy angle.

He strode to the sidewalk. His eyes hadn't grown accustomed to the darkness yet. The woman was only a silhouette as she stepped close to him.

Her voice said huskily, "You!"

Brady stopped short. He caught a glimpse of her face. It was Molla Lavine, the red-haired dancer from the Blue Devils Inn.

Brady muttered, "Well?"

"I've got something for you, mister."

Her hand pushed out of her cloak. Brady saw the dull metallic sheen of a .25 automatic.

At the same moment, the man Spanth came up behind Brady.

He said, "You're going our way, fella!"

Spanth's weight leaned onto something bigger than a .25, pushed the gat against Brady's spine.

#### IV

#### In a Bathtub

MOLLA LAVINE drove the opera coupé. She had the wide front seat all to herself. Brady sat pinched in the smaller seat back of the driver. Spanth occupied the other small seat, and kept his gun focused on the detective.

"All you gotta do," Spanth said, "is be good."

Brady agreed, "Suits me."

He would have been a huge damn fool not to agree. Spanth's gun, he observed, was a .45. Young Chanler had been killed with a weapon of that caliber. Brady pushed this fact around in his mind. He made imaginary motion pictures flicker on an also imaginary screen.

It was quite a movie. Brady saw Pethwick's garage. The cream roadster pulled in. Pethwick and the kid got out. Simultaneously, Spanth stepped through the small rear door. "Hands up!" Spanth may have said. Or maybe he just walked up and shot the kid. Pethwick stooped over the body, whisked the envelope from the inside pocket, removed from it one or more papers. He handed these to Spanth, and Spanth slipped out the rear door. Spanth then ducked along the side of the garage, and sneaked behind the hedge to the street. Meanwhile Pethwick, by shooting at the canyon and by lying, distracted Brady's attention in that direction long enough for Spanth to escape.

Brady's private movie stopped short. He asked himself why it took the combined forces of Pethwick, Spanth, and a red-headed dancer to kill one harmless youth. Where did the redhead come in, anyway? And why, if they staged a hold-up, didn't they really make it look good? Spanth could have at least gotten away with Pethwick's ring; any hold-up guy would have frisked his victims.

The coupé followed residential streets, veered into an alley. The alley widened, and a sign on a brick wall said *Private Parking Only*. Molla Lavine parked.

Spanth said, "Keep on being good, fella."

"You bet," Brady said. "You bet I will."

The dancer unlocked a door in the brick wall. Inside, carpeted stairs went up. Molla Lavine walked ahead, stopping at each landing and watching Brady. Spanth stayed back of Brady all the time. They climbed four flights, and moved down a pink-plastered corridor.

Molla Lavine unlocked another door. Inside, the walls were also pink-tinted plaster. She jabbed a switch, brought on more lights inside of pink shades. The apartment was small, slick, and shiny; fifty dollars a month trying to look like five hundred.



Spanth said, "In there, you."  
The bathroom was pink tile.  
"Get in the tub," Spanth ordered.  
"What the hell—!"  
"I said, inna tub!"

Brady retreated as the .45 waved. He sat down awkwardly in the tub. It wasn't big enough for him. He felt ridiculous.

"Smoke?" Spanth asked.

"Yeah, thanks."

They smoked.

Brady could hear the girl knocking around in the kitchenette, stirring up a drink, by the sound of things.

He said, finally, "What's the idea, anyway?"

Spanth looked at him thoughtfully.

He said, "Listen, Brady. We're making this easy for you. At the same time, we're not taking any chances, either. Now it ain't easy to get out of a tub. You'd have to grab the side to do it. And if you grabbed, I'd swat you on the head. I could swat your brains out, easy, before you could half get out of there. Ain't it so?"

"I expect."

"And it wouldn't be any trouble to clean up the blood," Spanth said judiciously. "Suppose you was in a chair in the other rooms here, and you got tough. It'd be a job to wash the blood off the carpet, wouldn't it?"

"You're right there."

"Sure I'm right. When a guy cuts up a corpse, he always does it in a tub like this. It's the best and surest way not to leave any bloodstains around."

Molla Lavine came in with the drinks.

"Here's looking at you, boys," she said.

Spanth told her, "Here's looking at you."

She said, "Don't strain your eyes."

She'd pulled off her dress, and was in a negligee. She certainly had a figure.

Spanth drank with enjoyment, keeping one hand wrapped around the glass and the other wrapped around the .45.

AFTER a while a bell in the next room rang sharply. Spanth immediately became intensely interested. He put down his own glass, and took away Brady's. He said to the girl, "Get busy," and to Brady:

"Put this in your mouth. Put it all in, because I'll have to swat you otherwise. I'd hate to do that. It's hard to tell how hard a guy should be klonked with a gun. I don't know if you got a thick skull or a thin one, and if it's thin, who knows, it might be I'd kill you."

"This" was a washrag—blue, for a wonder. Brady stuffed it in his mouth. It'd been used, and it had a soapy taste he didn't like. But it was a great deal more to his taste than being klonked with the .45.

The redhead had yanked open the medicine cabinet, and was working fast with an eyedropper. She used glycerine, or something like that. The result, as it looked to Brady, seemed a pretty credible crying jag.

The bell rang again. Molla Lavine hurried out, and Spanth said to Brady:

"Just be quiet! You done fine so far. Now don't spoil it, see?"

He'd moved around to the end of the tub, crouching, with his big fingers white at the knuckles where they gripped the gun.

Brady stayed quiet. He heard the girl unchain the door, and then heard a voice:

"All right! Give it here!"

The voice sounded familiar, he'd heard it before.

Molla Lavine made sobbing sounds. "I haven't got it! It's gone!"

"It's—what?"

She said tearfully, "A detective named Brady! He took it away from me. He was just here!"

"Brady!"

"He saw the whole thing," the redhead said, in a tone of mixed misery and fear. "He noticed how you slipped that one paper away when the kid wasn't looking. And he saw when you folded it up small in your hand. And when you put your arm around me, and I pushed your hand



away, he saw you give me that folded paper."

She recited this glibly, and in a clear voice: Brady caught every word of it.

The other voice said hoarsely, "And you gave it to him?"

Molla said, "What else? He was going to put me in jail! What else could I do?"

There was a longish silence, punctuated by sniffing sounds from the girl.

Then the voice asked, "When was all this?"

"Not but about half an hour ago."

"Brady was alone? He didn't have any cops with him?"

"Alone."

Another silence. Then: "What did you give it to him for? He couldn't put you in jail. I thought you had some brains. And here you blow all to pieces because some private dick says *boo* at you!"

The sounds of crying got louder. Molla Lavine said, sobbing, "I'm afraid! I didn't know Chanler was going to be killed! If I knew that, I'd never have gone in this at all!"

The voice took an angry turn. "Well, I didn't know it either. How could I tell a thing like that?"

"Brady says you done it!"

"Brady's crazy! Listen, Molla! I'm going to get hold of that guy!"

After that, Brady heard the door close. And the redhead came into the bathroom. She seized a towel off the rack, mopped the fake tears from her face.

Spanth said, "Brady, you know who that was?"

"It sounded like Pethwick."

"It was," Spanth told him. "It was Pethwick."

Brady tried to push this idea into his imaginary movie of it. He cut out the part about Pethwick taking the envelope from young Chanler's body. According to this, Chanler hadn't been killed so the papers could be stolen. Pethwick already had the papers. So why—?

He said, "You brought me here to be in on this. Why?"

"You stick around with us a while," Spanth told him. "You'll find out a lot of things. All you have to do is be good and play ball with us."

"I don't get it at all."

Spanth said, grinning, "You'll get plenty when the time comes. We know more about this than you do. Just leave everything to us. Will you do that, pal?"

Brady considered the .45. He said, "Sure. Sure I'll play ball."

## V

### The Sisters

"**H**AVE him wait a minute," Doc Judson said into the phone. He then pulled open a drawer of his desk and took from it a cardboard easel, of the sort used to display photographs. It was empty. Brady had torn out this photograph and thrust it into his pocket. But there was still an inky flourish, where the inscription, "for Eve," had run off the picture onto the cardboard. Embossed letters in a lower corner said *Ferndon, Photographer*.

The Doc carried this into the small laboratory at the rear of his office. He inserted it in a metal frame, and switched on an ultra-violet light. Then he returned to his desk.

He said into the phone, "Pethwick can come in."

Pethwick came in. The big man was excited, and he flung a copy of the morning Ledger onto the Doc's desk. He said, "Where's Brady? This is outrageous!"

The headline announced, "Youth Slain in Garage Mystery." A neatly banked sub-head conveyed further information: "Private Detective Accuses Chemist as Accomplice."

Sure, that was the news angle. Young Chanler didn't count—nobody'd ever heard of him. Pethwick himself didn't count. But Doc Judson's righthand man had plunged up to his ears in a fresh murder sensation—and everyone knew about Doc Judson. The reporter had gotten himself a scoop story out of those few words he'd overheard.



Pethwick glared at the Doc angrily. "It's libel!" he said. "It's criminal libel, and Brady's responsible for it. I demand a signed retraction from him, or I'll sue for fifty thousand dollars!"

"Brady hasn't got fifty thousand," the Doc said, amused. "Besides, he isn't here. He isn't at his hotel apartment, either. I haven't heard a word from him since he went to work on this case."

Pethwick's jaw sagged. "You mean he has disappeared?"

"I mean just that."

The big man thought a moment. Then he said, "You're lying! You know that Brady made a fool of himself last night. You know that I'm entitled to a signed retraction. But that would be bad publicity for your agency. You're hiding Brady so I can't force him to apologize in public!"

"You're wrong."

Pethwick bent over the desk, breathing loudly. His throat constricted with some peculiar emotion.

"Listen! Brady hasn't got one thing on me. Nothing but a lot of bum guesses about lights and keys and junk like that!"

The Doc nodded. He said, undisturbed, "Brady is an ex-cop. He uses police methods. He likes to jump on the weak points in a suspect's story. That was his mistake last night—attacking the weaknesses in your story."

"You admit he was wrong!"

The Doc said, "His *method* was wrong. I believe in cracking the strong points in a case. When I crack the strongest point of a murderer's alibi, then I've got something. That's my theory of criminology."

Pethwick flushed and growled, "I didn't come here to listen to your theories. Brady has blackened my name. He's got to take it back, all this crazy attack on my reputation."

"When I crack this case," the Doc said smoothly, "I will have something. And it won't be a libel suit."

"You're just talking for time," Pethwick challenged. "You know

Brady hasn't a leg to stand on. He's your man, and legally you're responsible for what he says. I'll sue you, too! I'll run you out of business!"

"I'll answer that in two more words," said the Doc. "Beat it."

Pethwick strode to the door and turned, stared at the Doc.

"For the last time! Is Brady going to retract, or isn't he?"

"You'll have to ask him."

"Where is he?"

"In three words," said the Doc, "I don't know."

**P**ETHWICK slammed the door. Doc Judson strolled into his laboratory. He snapped off the ultraviolet and peered at the result of his experiment. Unquestionably the ink was very fresh.

The Doc's smile had the whetted sharpness of a knife blade. He returned to his desk, picked up his phone, and made an appointment with the manager of the Bretonne Apartment Hotel. The manager would see him right away.

The Bretonne was exactly like any of the hundreds of apartment hotels which line the streets of any American city. It had a gray brick front, a very small courtyard, and a lobby with mirrors. The manager looked like the fussy sort of man who would spend much of his time in front of those mirrors, arranging his cravat.

No one answered when the manager rang the Loring sisters' room. They went up, unlocked the door.

"Cleaned out," said the Doc, after a glance about the chamber.

"But they paid for a month," the manager said in wonderment. "They only came in this week."

"What did they look like?"

"Blonde, very attractive."

"Both blondes, eh?"

"I'm trying to think. I only remember seeing one of them," the manager pondered. "I think the younger sister wasn't well. She stayed in the room most of the time, I believe."

"Except," the Doc surmised, "when the maid came in to clean, eh?"



"I'll find out," the manager said.

It developed that the maid hadn't seen the younger sister, either. . . .

The Doc journeyed downtown in a cab and stopped at Ferndon's Photographic Studio. He showed his private operative's shield, said:

"You have in your files a negative of Mr. Eugene C. Pethwick. The picture was taken several years ago. Probably you have recently had a re-order on the item."

The clerk would look, and did. "That's right. We mailed half a dozen of these to a Miss Ryan last Tuesday."

The Doc said, "You mean just anyone can get pictures of anybody?"

"Oh, no. She explained, she was his aunt."

"I see," the Doc said. "Does his aunt live at the Bretonne Hotel, possibly?"

The clerk said, no, on Sparrow Hill.

Doc Judson copied off this address. "By the way, did the aunt also order pictures of Mrs. Pethwick?"

"No, but we do have—"

He brought a proof print from the files.

"Excellent," said the Doc. "Really excellent."

The clerk thought it was a good picture, too.

Doc Judson returned to his cab. "Drive me," he directed, to a playground. Preferably to one patronized by numerous boys, aged approximately twelve."

"Huh-h?"

The Doc said, "I am a wealthy eccentric. I am about to form an organization to be known as the Junior Private Cops of America. The initiation fee is one dollar, which I will pay in advance to each member. I'll make you vice-president, at ten dollars per day—if you hurry."

## VI

### Mrs. Pethwick

**S**PANTH said, "I'm a guy that likes a he-man phone. Damn these skirts!" He tore the pink flounces

off the French-doll phone in Molla Lavine's apartment. Then he dialed and said, "Missus Chanler? I'm reminding you to go get your fire policy from the bank. I'll be stopping in about a half an hour to pay for your damage last night."

He put down the phone, waited a quarter minute, and dialed again. "All right, Brady, my boy!"

Brady picked up the phone. Miss Lavine had written out in flowing longhand exactly what he was to say. With Spanth's gun behind him, Brady said exactly what had been written for him.

"Mrs. Chanler, this is Brady, the detective. I wonder if you could get those papers we talked about last night from the bank. I'm coming out to your place in about three quarters of an hour."

He hung up.

"Well?" Spanth asked.

"She said, sure. She was going to the bank anyhow."

Molla Lavine came out of the closet which was also her dressing room. Her freshly lipstick mouth gave Brady a smile.

"Mr. Spanth's awful smart," she said. "You won't make any mistake, Brady, by playing ball with us."

"You certainly won't make any more mistakes," Spanth said dourly, "if you don't play ball with me."

The redhead grinned. "Boys, no fighting. Besides, you got to shave. My, you look fierce."

"You sit in the tub, Brady," Spanth said. "Shaving is a nervous business with me. Don't make any wrong moves, because when I'm nervous I'm very apt to klonk people on the head."

Miss Lavine made cheerful breakfast sounds in the kitchenette. The three ate a leisurely way through sweet rolls, scrapple, scrambled eggs, and coffee.

"Molla here, she would make some man a good wife," said Spanth. "It's an idea for you, Brady."

Brady said, "I wouldn't want to beat your time."

The redhead laughed at this. "With



Mr. Spanth and me, it's just business," she said.

Brady asked, "What kind of business, though?"

Abruptly ugly, Spanth told him: "Never mind that, Brady! You do what I say. And like it, see?"

"Suppose I don't?"

"You had a good breakfast," Spanth said. "You want to digest it? Or you want it to be put in a pail when they do a post mortem on your remains?"

Brady looked serious. "You wouldn't kill me," he said. "You need me alive."

"Don't count on it," Spanth growled. He pushed back his chair. "Get this, Brady! The old lady will give you her papers, quiet and happy. Or I can get tough and knock her around, because she's got the stuff right there in the house. I'm a guy that hates to slap an old woman around, but if I got to, I will. It's up to you."

"And then what happens?"

Spanth said, "Plenty. I fix it so you get the guy that killed the kid. Ain't that enough?"

"I don't believe you," Brady said. "You could go to the pen for kidnapping me. My guess is, my life won't be worth a damn after you've got those papers."

Spanth hunched his huge shoulders.

"You won't turn me in," he said. "Why should you? Here you got a chance to be a hero. You're going to be the guy that cracked this-here murder case. What a dumb bunny you would be to admit you sat in a bathtub while I done all the detective work."

Brady laughed and agreed, "If you put it that way, sure."

Molla Lavine said, "We'd better go now."

**T**HEY went down the back stairs as before, and also as before, the girl did the driving. She braked the coupé in front of the rooming house, but across the street.

Spanth said, "I'll go in first. If she's been to the bank, if the coast

is clear, I'll move the window curtain."

Brady studied the girl. She had a hand on her .25.

"Molla," he said, "I don't really think you'd shoot."

She laughed softly. "And Mr. Spanth really thinks I would. If I didn't, he'd be sore about it. See?"

"You're afraid of him."

"Uh-huh."

"He's a bad egg, huh?" Brady said. "He was in the Chanler kill, wasn't he?"

Molla Lavine said, "The curtain moved."

They got out of the coupé. Molla now put the gun in her purse. It was a very thin cloth purse, and as she gripped it, her finger nudged around the trigger of the weapon. Its guard had been removed on purpose to permit this.

She told Brady, "This being awkward, it's twice as dangerous for you. Do everything the way Mr. Spanth wants you to."

Brady rang the bell. When Mrs. Chanler opened the door, he said:

"Good morning. This is Miss Smith, my assistant. She's working on the case, too. Did you get the papers?"

Stepping into the hall, he could see Spanth in the parlor. Some money, perhaps a hundred dollars in fives and tens, lay on the table before Spanth. The big man's hand bulged his pocket.

Molla Lavine stayed beside Brady, and slightly behind him. Her purse pointed steadily at his ribs.

Mrs. Chanler was saying, "Why, yes. They're right here."

She stepped into the parlor. Brady followed, and Miss Lavine came at his heels. Mrs. Chanler went to the table on which lay the money. Spanth stepped away, and thus kept Mrs. Chanler out of the line of fire. His bulging pocket was directed at Brady.

All this Mrs. Chanler missed. She opened a drawer of the table, got out a brown manila envelope, and handed this to Brady.



A voice in the doorway said: "Hands up, all of you!"

Molla Lavine's purse clattered noisily on the floor. Spanth's jaw, if it could have done so, would also have fallen to the floor. It sagged inches. With his mouth open, he pushed his hands high. Brady raised his hands, turned slowly.

Again, Mrs. Chanler missed the trick. She simply stood still, and said in an amazed voice, "Why, Miss Ryan!"

Brady had turned far enough to see the blonde in the doorway. This time she wore the *Dangerous! Dame at Work!* sign. Her hand waved a gun, kept it swinging from person to person.

Brady said, "Ryan! Why, her name's Loring!"

Another voice, behind the blonde, said: "You're all wrong. In two words, her right name is—Mrs. Pethwick."

THINGS then happened very fast. The blonde spun around. A hand appeared, as out of nowhere, and seized her wrist. Another hand twisted the gun from her fingers. Brady saw that, while his foot skated across the floor. He toed Molla Lavine's purse, and sent that into the farthest corner of the room. He jumped. Spanth's hand was at his coat pocket already. Brady punched Spanth's jaw viciously. Spanth stopped going for the gun, threw up his arms as Brady punched again. They slugged, toe to toe.

Molla Lavine sprinted toward the corner, and the gun in her purse. Brady thrust out his foot, tripped the red-haired girl. Spanth pounded Brady's face, started a trickle of blood at the corner of Brady's mouth. Brady put four knuckles onto the point of Spanth's chin. Spanth went over backward, went over the table, and lay still.

Brady scooped up Molla Lavine's purse.

Doc Judson pushed Miss Loring—or Ryan, or Mrs. Pethwick—into the room.

Brady said, "We got a nice haul here, Doc! Very nice!"

The blonde wailed, "I didn't do anything! I heard voices, and I came downstairs, and when I saw the money on the table I thought they were robbing poor Mrs. Chanler."

The Doc grinned.

"In three words, Mrs. Pethwick," he said, "you're a liar!"

"I'm not Mrs. Pethwick!"

The Doc told her, "You were. You divorced him a year ago. You told the judge he had a salary of five thousand a year and twenty thousand more in royalties from the Vitavesta Company. All that's on file in the newspaper morgue. You got five hundred a month alimony. You were afraid of losing it, and that's why you're mixed up in this."

She said, "You're insane! I'm not mixed up in anything! My name's Jane Ryan. I'm one of Mrs. Chanler's roomers."

"Never mind lying," the Doc said. "The police have arrested Pethwick."

AFTERWARD Doc Judson told the reporters, "It was a simple case of cracking the strongest point in a suspect's story. Now, what was the strongest point in Pethwick's favor? The point was that he had no chance to hide the gun. Less than thirty seconds after that shot was fired in the garage, Brady rushed onto the scene. Brady was the strong point! Brady was the alibi!"

Then Brady told the reporters, "It was the dame. She hired me to tail Pethwick, see? So he'd have an alibi!"

The reporters looked at each other. The Doc drew a long breath.

He said, "Eugene C. Pethwick didn't want the Vitavesta Company to get hold of young Chanler's idea at any price. He owned the patent on the plastic they were using, and if they stopped using it he'd lose his twenty thousand a year royalties. He had no trouble stealing the idea. The problem was to shut the kid up, permanently. He decided on murder, and he wanted to make it look



like one of those Garage Bandit jobs. Is that clear?"

The reporters said it was, and the Doc went on:

"He got his ex-wife to help him. She had no love for him, but she wanted to keep on collecting alimony. So she agreed to sic a private dick on his trail. Then Pethwick took Chanler to the Blue Devils and introduced him to Molla Lavine. The kid was too flustered to notice when Pethwick palmed the paper with the most important part of the formula on it. He folded that up, slipped it to the Lavine girl. He did that so the police couldn't find a motive against him—it destroyed the proof that Chanler's idea was valuable. And he was too cowardly to risk keeping the paper on his own person. Anyway, he was paying Molla Lavine for putting on her act with the kid."

A reporter said, "Why couldn't he slip the paper to the same confederate that carried his gun out of the garage?"

The Doc shook his head. "There never was a .45 in the garage. The shot Brady heard was fired by the .32. Then Pethwick reloaded, dropped the used shell in his pocket, and flipped it into the canyon later on. He fired two more shots, to account for the fact his gun had been used. Also, he had an idea of beating the paraffin test."

"But Chanler was killed with a .45."

"With a Colt .45," the Doc said.

"It had a silencer on it. So it jammed instead of throwing its cartridge. Pethwick killed Chanler on the canyon road and tossed the gun out of the car. It took fifty boys half an hour to find it for me."

Brady said, "While that was going on, Mrs. Pethwick set a fire to burn up the kid's laboratory and notebook at home. She'd taken a room there on purpose so she could do that when the time came. But she'd only lived there a week, and she didn't know there was a copy of the formula in a bank vault box."

A reporter wanted to know, "What about Spanth?"

The Doc said, "Chiseler. Molla Lavine figured that paper might be worth real money—so she kept it. She and Spanth made their play to get a copy of the whole formula. Why not? Pethwick's formula wasn't as good, and it netted him twenty thousand a year besides a nice paying job. They expected to sell the idea for a small fortune."

The reporters went away. Doc Judson looked at Brady. The Doc's eyes were sympathetic. He patted Brady's arm.

"You look tired," the Doc said. "You put up a great fight all the way through. You know what you need?"

Brady grinned. "A raise in salary."

"Not quite," the Doc said. "I've rented a room for you. I want you to go over there and spend the next hour just luxuriously soaking in a nice, hot tub."

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**PROBAK JUNIOR**



# Over the Wall

by  
**John K. Butler**

The kid took the high road, the killer  
the low road—and the killer forgot  
that there might be a ladder between  
the two

I WAS sitting there in the exercise yard, with my back against the wall. The sun felt good. Some of the cons had worked up a sweat over a baseball game, but I didn't feel like playing. I just sat there and watched them. I had four cigarettes—so I was in the money.

Old Puss Face came along and said to me: "What's the matter, Red? Don't you want to get in the game?"

I told him no, I had a headache.

"The game might cure it," he said. He grinned, and poked me in the chest with that short heavy cane he always carried. It was a friendly poke, but once I saw him slug a con's skull with that same cane, and it nearly took the con's scalp off.

He said to me: "You sure you don't want to get in the game?"

"I don't feel like it."

He shoved off, and talked to some of the other cons who were loafing against the wall. He told them they ought to get in the game. He kept grinning, in that friendly way, poking them with the cane.

I hated the guy. I'd hated him for seven years. Any time any of the cons started anything, he blamed it on me. He always had a beef. He'd thrown me in solitary a dozen times, and I can't remember how many times he took my privileges away.

And that time I tried to pull a sneakout, hiding in the back of the



supply truck, he caught me at the outer gate. He brought me back and gave me the water cure. It was a fire hose, with lots of pressure. He had them blast it in my face, full force, and for three days my puss was so swollen I couldn't open my eyes. Then he tossed me into the Black Hole, where I did ten days on bread



and water, in a straitjacket besides.

Cotter, his name was. James J. Cotter—Captain of the Yard. Plenty tough as long as he carried that cane. Plenty tough as long as he had all his screws around him, with canes; and more men up on the walls, in the turrets, with rifles and machine guns.

I watched him stroll among the cons. He had a big broad grin, kidding them. He also had a big broad back. And some day, somebody would stick a blade in it.

I flamed a match to light the first of my four smokes. I let the match burn down almost to my fingers before I put it against the cig. Know what I mean? When you're in stir, and when you don't have many cigs, you like to tease yourself a long time before you suck the first deep drag of tobacco into your bellows.

While I smoked, a big yammer went up in the yard. It sounded like a riot. I'd been half asleep in the sun, and I figured some of the guys had started something. My eyes opened big.

But nothing had happened. It was just the baseball game. Some Mex named Morales had socked a three-base hit, sending a man home from second.

Everybody was yammering. Even a screw up on the wall, with a rifle in his arms, called down: "Nice going, Morales!"

I closed my eyes again. All I wanted was to sit there against the wall, in the sun. I wanted to sort of day-dream. Know what I mean? You pretend you're on the outside, and you've got plenty of dough, and you've got some swell little dame, and she'll go to hell and back for you.

You sit there and figure what she looks like. Maybe she's a blonde. Built like Ginger Rogers. Wears snappy clothes and big hats. She's got nice eyes, a swell mouth, and the way she walks is sort of fast, in quick steps, on shoes with high heels. She's willing to do anything you say. All you've got to do is name it.

Maybe she won't stick to you forever: so what? As long as you're in

the dough, everything's jake. Who gives a damn about forever?

So I sat there in the sun, dreaming like that, and a guy came over and sat against the wall with me. He said, "Hello, Red."

I opened my eyes.

It was Tommy Monroe.

Now I didn't like Tommy Monroe any more than the rest of the guys liked him. He had curly black hair, and his skin was soft—like he went to beauty parlors. I'd say he was about twenty-eight. And this was only the second time he'd taken a rap.

He took his first one for short-changing a bank. That was a few years ago. It was a soft jolt, and after he got out he went straight for a long time. Then he passed some sucker a thousand dollar check with the wrong signature on it, and he wound up in our hotel for two-time losers. His second jolt was about as easy as the first. One of those milk-toast raps that you can serve standing up. We figured he was a stoolie for the warden.

I said to him: "Scram, angel!"

He leaned toward me in a confidential way. "I want to talk to you, Red."

"Beat it."

"Can't I talk to you?"

"Not while I got my reputation to think of."

He looked at me, kind of sore. "I'm not a stoolpigeon," he said.

I shrugged. "Maybe not. But I still got my rep. Beat it, punk."

He wouldn't beat it. I felt funny, because some of the guys along the wall were beginning to look over at us.

He says to me, in a whisper: "How'd you like to get out of here, Red?"

I gave him the laugh. "With you and who else?"

"Just me."

That was a laugh, all right. Imagine crushing out with a punk like Tommy Monroe! What a laugh!

He said: "I've got it fixed, Red. On the first rainy day. Just before the noon gong, we're busy working in



the machine shop. We stroll back to the toilets. The bars on the first booth are sawed loose at the bottom."

"How do you know?"

"Because I sawed them myself. And the screen is loose. All we do is knock out the screen, knock out the bars."

"Nuts," I told him. "That only puts us in the air-well."

"But there's a gate into the exercise yard."

"Locked," I said.

He shook his head slowly. "No, Red. I've got things fixed so the gate won't be locked. We sneak into the yard, see? It's empty, rainy, and there's only one guard—he's in the turret. We sneak across the yard, close to the wall. There's a rope underneath the box that holds the baseball equipment. We throw a noose up to the spikes, climb up, drop down. Then we run the field. If we make that, I have it fixed so we can change our clothes in town and get some money."

I still laughed at him.

I figured he had stir-fever.

THAT afternoon, while we all worked in the machine shop, I strolled back to the toilets and examined the screen and bars. They were just like Tommy says. Loose. You could knock them out.

The next day I fooled around the exercise yard while the baseball game went on, and found a coiled rope hidden under the big box which held the sport equipment.

I began to think that maybe Tommy Monroe wasn't such a punk after all, so I angled him into a corner of the yard and says to him: "Listen. If you got it all fixed like this, why take me in on it?"

"Because I've heard about you, Red. I know you've attempted breaks before. I want you to go along with me."

"Why?" I asked.

And he says to me: "Because I haven't any guts, I guess. I'm afraid to go alone. I want somebody with me. Even though it's all fixed. I'm still scared. Do you know what I

mean, Red? Have you ever felt all alone and scared?"

I admitted I knew what he meant. While I've never been scared myself, lots of guys are like that. They can frame a break that's a perfect push-over, but when it comes to the actual time, they lose their nerve unless they've got some fellow along who won't be scared.

"I know what you mean," I told him, "but I still think it's sappy for a guy like you to break. All you got to do is sit on your pants for eight more months. Then you're free, with a clean bill of goods. So what's the idea of the break?"

"It's not sappy," he said. "I can't wait—not even eight months. I've got to get out now."

"Why?" I asked him.

He dug something out of his shirt pocket and showed it to me.

It was a photograph of a girl. Just the kind of a bim I'd been pretending I owned. Young, with a snappy shape, nice eyes, and a swell mouth. Sort of like Ginger Rogers. And blonde.

I studied the picture for a long time. It was the kind of a picture a lifer might take to his bunk with him and put under his blanket.

"What's her name?" I asked.

"Daisy."

"Just Daisy?"

"Daisy Davis. She lives in the city. I've got to see her, Red. Got to see her in a hurry."

"Why?"

"Because she might die if I don't," he says.

That gave me a punch. In the picture, this Daisy Davis seemed a hundred per cent healthy and raring to go. She wasn't the lily type. You couldn't imagine her dying.

"You mean she'll really die?" I asked him.

He nodded, and I could tell he was plenty worried. He said Daisy had acute appendicitis, and unless she was operated on right away, the appendix might burst and it might be too late to save her.

But Daisy wouldn't have an opera-



tion. She'd discovered a new religion since Tommy Monroe went to stir, and the religion didn't believe in surgery. Her sister and her father kept trying to talk her into going to a hospital, but she wouldn't go. She wouldn't even go to bed. She just went along in the old way, singing in a night club, and pretending there was nothing wrong with her.

Tommy says to me: "If I get out of here I think I can talk her into the operation. She won't do anything for her father and sister, but I think she'll do it for me. Her father thinks so, too. I can talk her into it. Do you understand, Red? Do you understand why I can't wait eight months? I've got to break out, Red!"

I told him I saw what he meant.

He said: "Will you break with me? On the outside, you go your way and I go my way."

"How about the gate?" I asked him. "How about the gate from the air-well to the exercise yard?"

"Like I said, it'll be unlocked."

"Who's gonna unlock it?"

"I have that fixed, Red."

"Fixed with who?"

"A guard."

"What guard?"

"I have it fixed with Captain Cotter," he says.

I stared at him. "Old Puss Face?"

And when he said yes, I gave him the laugh.

"It'd cost about twenty million bucks to bribe Old Puss Face to open a gate, even a gate into a chicken yard. Don't try to kid me, Tommy."

But Tommy looks at me straight and steady. "It's fixed with him, Red."

"With Puss Face?"

"With James J. Cotter—Captain of the Yard. I swear I've got it fixed, Red."

"Does Cotter know I'm going along with you?"

That got him. He sort of bowed his head and rubbed a hand across his eyes. "No. It's fixed just for me alone. But I'm afraid I might blow up if I tried it alone. I can't afford to blow up. Will you try it with me, Red?"

I thought it over.

Finally, I thought: sure! Why not? The bars and screen were out, the rope ditched. Everything was set. It sounded good. Tommy had a push-over break lined up, and it was nice luck, for me, that he was scared to run it alone.

I'd try it with him. The laugh would be on Puss Face. Know what I mean?

**WE TRIED** it that Thursday. Just before the noon gong, I signaled permission from one of the guards in the machine shop, and I sauntered back to the Johnny. There was lots of noise in the shop. The big belts and wheels kept turning; you couldn't hear anything but the machines.

I passed a lot of the cons, working at their machines, and when I passed Tommy Monroe, I slipped him the nod.

Inside of thirty seconds we were pushing out the loose screen and the sawed bars.

Then we were out in the air-well.

It was pouring down rain.

Tommy Monroe said: "I'm scared, Red."

I told him that if the gate wasn't unlocked he'd have plenty reason to be scared; I told him I'd wring his neck.

But the gate opened when I twisted the handle.

I still thought there was something funny about it. I still couldn't figure how a punk like Tommy Monroe could saw the bars, hide a rope, and bribe Old Puss Face to leave the gate unlocked.

But why think that stuff? We were getting out. Everything was swell.

We slipped through the gate, and the exercise yard was gray and bare. Up in the sky, dark clouds rolled together, flashing sharp lightning, booming thunder. The rain came down in a steady rush, making puddles in the yard.

We sneaked along, close to the wall.

The rain soaked us, but we kept going. We knew there was only one guard—sitting in his turret on the top of the wall. I could picture him



up there, keeping warm, reading a paper, smoking.

We got over to the box of sport equipment, and I fished the rope out. It already had a noose on it. I swung the noose like a cowboy's lariat. After four tries I caught it on one of the spikes.

I said: "Let's get out of here, Tommy."

He was shaking like a woman with a chill. I had to get him started up the rope. I felt kind of nervous myself, and I didn't wait till he got to the top. I grabbed the rope, went up it, walking my feet against the slippery wall.

At the top, we clung there. I hauled the rope up, dropped it down the other side. Tommy went down, sliding. I glanced along the wall and saw the guard come out of his turret into the rain. I guess the whole thing took him by surprise. He yelled: "Hey, there!"

I went down the rope fast, burning the palms of my hands. I landed beside Tommy Monroe in the mud.

"Let's get outta here, Tommy!"

We ran.

I heard the guard on the wall yell something. He shot at us. I don't know how many times he shot, but I could hear his rifle going, like exploding firecrackers, and Tommy and I kept running through the rain.

All the whistles on the prison cut loose at once. The sirens, the noon whistle, the boiler room whistle, the riot whistle. It sounded like the end of the world.

We ran across the muddy field, in the rain. A thick mist was rolling in from the river. We knew we had to pass between two towers at the edge of the field, but we got past them all right. We didn't even see them through the fog and rain. We just saw the lights, and heard the sirens and whistles, and heard the chatter of machine guns.

Down on the bank of the river, it was easier. We forced through wet brush, waded through soggy weeds. I knew we were getting away. I knew it was okay. But I knew we'd never

get away from the sound of whistles and sirens. I knew we'd hear them forever.

**WE** WORMED up the bank of the river and got into the back of town. Tommy kept saying: "I know where we can change our clothes."

We went down a back street to a small cottage. Tommy knocked on the rear door. It opened, and we went inside, into a kitchen.

Old Puss Face was standing there, looking at us. I figured this was his house, that he'd come home for lunch. It didn't surprise me to see him, because I knew he'd fixed the gate for us—the gate into the exercise yard. It didn't surprise me a bit to see him—he was the guy with the surprise.

His face went kind of white when he saw me. He closed the kitchen door behind us, and said in a soft, quiet way: "I didn't expect you, Red."

Tommy Monroe took the front for me.

Tommy said: "I guess I'm a coward, Captain. I was afraid to run it alone. This is Red Nelson."

Puss Face shut him up with a wave of his hand. He kept looking at me narrowly. "I know Red Nelson. We're old friends, aren't we, Red?"

I didn't like the way he kept looking at me. He was plenty sore.

I tried to kid it off.

"Let's let bygones be bygones," I told him.

He shook his head. "I'm afraid we can't, Red."

"Why not?"

"Because you're a habitual criminal, Red. You belong right back where you came from—prison."

"Listen, Captain," I said. "You fixed it up for Tommy to bust stir. So what's the matter with me riding out on Tommy's ticket—as long as Tommy invites me?"

Cotter seemed kind of old. I never noticed before how old he was. He had gray hair, a thin face, and he reminded me of Lewis Stone in the movies.

He says: "Listen to me, Red Nel-



son. I admit I did assist Tommy in breaking prison. In doing that, I broke my oath of office, broke my career, broke myself. No reason in the world excuses me for assisting a convict in my charge toward escape."

"What the hell, Captain?" I said. "I'm not asking questions. If Tommy reached you, if he slipped you a little spinach, what of it? A guy has to make a living—even a Captain of the Yard. So what?"

His back went stiff, and he reminded me of a general I saw once when my Dad put me in the army in order to keep me out of the reformatory. That was a long time ago, but I remembered it plain. And the way Puss Face talked was just like the general. I mean the same voice.

He said: "Red you're going back. I broke my career to help Tommy out of prison, but my plan didn't include you. You're going back, Red."

"Listen," I told him. "If I go back, I'll tip the warden about how you fixed the gate for us. If I stay out, I keep my mouth shut. How's the proposition?"

I thought I had him, but he smiled at me in a funny way. It sort of gave me the creeps.

He says: "You're accustomed to bargaining with the scum of the earth, Red. You don't understand decent people when you see them. You can't bribe me, Red."

"Tommy bribed you," I said.

He looked kind of hurt. I guess I'd stabbed him in the right place. But in another second he had his chin out and his shoulders back.

"There are various degrees of bribery," he says to me. "The kind that released Tommy, you wouldn't understand. So I won't explain it. In the meantime, Tommy gets away, and you go back. I don't care how you involve me, Red. I realized what chances I took when I made the step. So you're going back, Red."

**A**LL THIS time Tommy Monroe stood at the end of the kitchen looking at us. I figured him for just a sap. Other people had to do his

thinking for him, and do his fighting for him. Sort of an artist type.

Puss Face glanced toward him briefly. "Change your clothes, Tommy," he said. "I'll give you an hour start. And after the hour, I go back to prison—to return Red Nelson."

With that, Puss Face hauled a Colt automatic from under his coat. I knew it was me who'd get on the wrong end of the Colt, so I beat him to the punch.

I slugged him.

I got him right on the jaw, and his head went back. It made a hard thump when it struck the wall.

I yanked the gun away, and when he dove for my legs, I let him have it. I shot him three times through the top of the skull.

Tommy Monroe was just standing there. He seemed in kind of a daze. He looked at Puss Face, lying on the floor, and then he looked at me.

I said: "Let's get out of here, Tommy."

"No."

"Let's go."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you're a rat," he says to me.

"Where do you get that rat stuff?" I asked him.

He shook and trembled, like a guy with too much liquor. His face was sick, and gray as ashes. He bunched up his fists. "You're going back to prison, Red. The captain is right. You're scum. You're going back."

"Who's gonna take me?" I said. I laughed. It was a laugh, all right.

"I am," he says.

"You and who else?"

"Just me."

I gave another laugh. He took a dive at me, and I let him have it. I only had to shoot once. I got him swell. I got him right between the eyes.

When he went down it reminded me of slaughtering steers in a stockyard. I saw it once in Chicago. The steers came out of a chute, and a guy wearing a rubber apron slugged them with an axe. One after another. He



just slugged them, and they went down. The only difference was that I had a gun instead of an axe. Everything else was the same. There was blood on the kitchen floor, and Puss Face twitched, and thrashed his arms, and made sounds like a steer that's being axed.

I went into the bedroom of the house and took off my stir clothes. A tweed suit that belonged to Puss Face fit me fine. I found some shells for the automatic, and stowed them in my pockets. I found a hat and a raincoat that fit me.

I went back into the kitchen.

Neither of them moved. They just lay there on the floor, quiet, and Puss Face wasn't groaning any more.

I frisked his pockets and got fifty-nine dollars and twenty cents. I frisked Tommy Monroe and got the picture of the blonde, Daisy Davis. Her address was on the back of the picture. It was down in the city. I still had a hundred miles to go—218 Telegraph Lane. In the city. A hundred miles. Daisy Davis.

I opened the kitchen door and peeked out. The street was dark. It was still raining. You'd think it was evening, instead of just one o'clock in the afternoon.

I went out into the rain, wearing Puss Face's clothes and carrying his automatic concealed under the coat.

I wasn't scared. If you think I was scared, you're crazy. I wasn't scared a bit.

It was just those damn sirens blowing from the prison. But they didn't really scare me. It was just the sound of them blowing. Know what I mean?

**I**T TOOK me two days to get to the city. On the first day I hitch-hiked with a family touring west from Kansas, and with a Japanese vegetable-gardener, and with a guy on an oil truck.

The guy on the oil truck was a kick. He kept telling me about the prison break. It was in all the papers.

He says to me: "Didn't you hear about them two fellows? They went right over the wall. It's just graft,"

he says. "Whenever you read about that stuff, it's graft. It's a good thing we've got the G-men. If it wasn't for the Federal government, this country would go to the dogs."

"That's true," I said.

"Sure," he nodded. "Everything else is graft."

I left him, after a jaunt of forty miles, and took a bus. I figured I was far enough away to take a bus. I bought a paper that evening, and it said that the bodies of Tommy Monroe, escaped convict, and James J. Cotter, prison official, had been found in Cotter's home.

The paper talked about it in a way that showed they didn't know Cotter had assisted in the break. The paper figured that the two escaped convicts, Monroe and Nelson, had gone to Cotter's home and had surprised him and had fought him, because they held a prison grudge. Monroe and Captain Cotter were killed in the fight. Frank Nelson (that's me) was still at large, and the paper offered a thousand bucks in reward to anybody who stooped on me.

So there I was.

And on that second night I got into the city.

I'd bought a suitcase in a pawnshop, and I'd filled it full of pieces of wood, a gunny-sack and some magazines. I always figure that a guy well-dressed, carrying a locked suitcase, doesn't look like an escaped con.

I registered in a good hotel on Powell Street, and I told the clerk I was expecting a telegram from New York and some phone calls from Oakland. I registered under the name of Joseph Weinberg. It all sounded good. I pretended I was a big-shot traveling man from Chicago. I even bought a couple of ten-cent cigars. I even said to the clerk: "If my mother calls, tell her I'm on my way out to see her."

That was swell. If a guy has a mother he's going to see, he's not an escaped con.

The clerk said: "Certainly, Mr. Weinberg. We'll take care of your calls, Mr. Weinberg."



Everything was swell, so I went out, called a cab, and rode over to 218 Telegraph Lane.

**I**T WAS an apartment house, not very swank. I asked the manager about Miss Daisy Davis, and he directed me. I went upstairs.

I knew her right away when she opened the door. I took off my hat. I had my hair combed down nice. "Are you Miss Davis?" I asked her. "Yes."

"I'm a friend of a friend of yours."

I could tell by the way she looked at me that I had to have a better ticket in order to buy myself inside,



It took me two days to get to the city

so I dug out her picture, the one that belonged to Tommy Monroe, and I gave her a flash of it.

"Come in," she says.

I went in, and it was just a one-room apartment. She closed the door, and sort of leaned against it. I tossed my hat on the floor, sat down on the sofa. It was a cheap sofa with broken springs, but it seemed swell after stir.

I looked her over.

She was swell, all right. She wore a blue dress that fit her like a million dollars. Her hair was just like in the picture, but the rest of her was better. I figured right away that she wasn't dying of appendicitis, nor dying of anything else. That gag was probably just to get Tommy Monroe

to crush out of stir. Women are great at thinking up gags like that to fool suckers.

The only thing I couldn't figure was why she'd picked on a small-timer like Tommy Monroe. She was the kind of bim any big-shot would go for. But I guess women are like that.

I says to her, straight out: "My name's Red Nelson."

She nodded and came over and sat in a chair across from me. "I know you from the pictures in the papers," she says. "You escaped with Tommy."

"Yeah," I said. "Tommy wanted to reach you. He was desperate to reach you. I tried to help him. I'm a pal of his."

You never get anywhere with a bim if you tell her that her last flame was a heel. I knew that, so I put it to her soft.

"Tommy was a great little guy," I said. "He was game to the finish. We had a fight with Cotter. Cotter is Captain of the Yard up there. Tommy and Cotter both got killed, fighting each other. I held Tommy in my arms while he died. He says to me: 'Red, I want you to go find Daisy. It's up to you to take care of her. I'm counting on you, Red.'"

She looked at me, and I could see she was about to cry. I could see the tears coming.

I went on: "I held Tommy in my arms when he died. He gave me your picture and told me to come look you up. So I'm risking my neck to come here, Miss Davis. Tommy was a great little guy. You should've seen the way he fought with Puss Face."

"Puss Face?"

"Yeah. That's Cotter. James Cotter. He's Captain of the Yard."

"Oh," she says.

"Tommy was game," I told her. "I tried to save him. But him and Cotter had a fight to the finish. I tried my best, Miss Davis."

She sort of cried into her hands. "I'm sure you did, Mr. Nelson. I'm not blaming you. I know any friend of Tommy's—"

"That's it," I cut in. "Any pal of Tommy's would go the whole way for



him. He's a great little guy. And that's what I tried to do. I tried to go the whole way for him. I got him over the wall, all right. But we didn't figure on Cotter. I guess Cotter set a trap for us. He double-crossed us."

She stuck her chin out. "I'm not going to cry, Mr. Nelson. I did my crying yesterday. Today, I'm not afraid."

"That's the old fight," I told her.

"Shall we have something to drink, Mr. Nelson?"

I went over and patted her on the shoulder. I didn't do any more. Just patted her shoulder. You've got to use your bean with these dames. Don't try to rush it. They like you all the better if you don't rush it.

**S**HE didn't have a bottle in the place, so we walked down the block to a liquor store and picked up a few pints. I bought nice stuff. Why not? You never get anywhere if you're a piker.

We went back up to her place and cracked a bottle.

"You don't have to worry about a thing," I told her. "I'll take care of you like Tommy would want it. I'm not a bad guy when you get to know me. I've got a little dough now, and I'll have more dough right along. I've got good connections in the city. Some pals of mine know the ropes. They've got a few banks all cased. All we have to do is push them over. So you don't have to worry about a thing, baby."

"I won't worry," she said.

We'd hoisted a few quick drinks. They hit me hard, after stir. I felt fine. Everything was going jake. I'd crushed stir, and I still had about forty dollars, and I had Cotter's clothes, and I had Tommy's blonde.

"Let's have a big drink and start a new life," she says to me.

I picked the bottle off the kitchen sink.

"How big?" I asked.

"You set the pace, Mr. Nelson."

"Me set it?"

"Yes."

So I set it.

I tipped up the bottle and took a deep drag. The booze hit my stomach like boiling water, but I felt fine. I'd tricked this blonde into letting me set the pace. I intended to set a pace for her, all right! She was a nice little bim, and my story about being a pal of Tommy Monroe was going over great.

I waited until she took a little drink from the pint; then I slipped my arm around her. I kissed her, and she didn't seem to mind it.

We went back to the living room and sat on the sofa.

"It's warm in here," I said, in a nice way. "Mind if I take my coat off?"

She said she didn't mind. Her eyes kind of melted. I took my coat off and put it on the floor. The Colt automatic slipped from the pocket.

"Is that a pistol?" she asked me.

I told her that it was a pistol, all right.

"Is it loaded, Mr. Nelson?"

I gave a laugh. "It wouldn't be much good if it wasn't."

"I've never seen one like that before," she says to me. "The kind I've seen have a little thing in the middle that holds the cartridges. The little thing—"

"You're thinking of a revolver," I told her. "This here thing is an automatic."

I showed her how it worked. I handed it to her with the safety on. Then I felt warm from the booze, and I felt amorous, and I put my arms around her and tried to kiss her again.

She shoved the gun at me. The nose of it poked into my ribs. I noticed she'd thumbed off the safety. It all happened in a split second.

Heel? Sure, I was a heel, all right. She had the gun on me, ready to trigger it. She meant business. It wasn't the first time she'd seen an automatic. I knew right away she'd played me for a sucker.

"Look, babe," I said.

"Get away from me!"

"Listen, babe—"

The glint in her eyes meant busi-



ness. I backed away and sat down on a chair across from the sofa. The nose of the gun followed me. I don't mind saying she had me scared.

She says to me: "So you're a friend of Tommy Monroe, are you, Mr. Nelson?"

"Sure," I lied. "Tommy and me—"

"And you came here to see me for Tommy's sake? You had no personal interest in me, did you, Mr. Nelson?"

I tried to grin. "Put that rod down, babe. Like I told you, it's loaded."

She said: "Tommy Monroe and Captain Cotter killed each other in a fight, did they, Mr. Nelson?"

"Yeah."

"You're a liar, Mr. Nelson!"

"What makes you think so?"

She looked cool and calm, pointing that rod at me. She said: "My name's not Daisy Davis."

I thought: so what? I'd known all along it wasn't her real name. Daisy Davis sounded too much like poetry. Most of the dames I knew figured out names like that. Ruth del Ruth. Margorie LeMar. Judy Jewell. And now Daisy Davis.

I said: "I don't care what your right name is, baby. Keep it secret. I'm the kind of guy that never asks personal questions."

I thought that line would take her. But it didn't. She says to me, over the gun: "Did you hear the story that I'm supposed to need an operation, and that my religion doesn't permit it, and that Tommy Monroe broke prison in order to talk me into a surgery?"

"I heard the story," I nodded.

"Did you believe it?"

"No."

She sort of smiled. But it was a hard smile. I'd never seen a dame get so hard. She seemed different from any bim I'd ever seen before.

She says to me: "You didn't trick me for a minute, Mr. Nelson. I loved Tommy Monroe, and I've always loved him. You don't understand that, because you've never heard about love."

"Listen, babe—"

She shook her head. "That's all you

know about it. You call a girl babe, and you think it's love. In a way I'm sorry for you, Mr. Nelson. I'm sorry for you because you think you know what life is all about, and you're going to die without ever learning the truth."

"Let's have another drink," I said, and laughed.

She didn't laugh. Her face still had that setness. "Life isn't just another drink, Mr. Nelson. Tommy and I loved each other. Tommy went to prison twice, trying to make a way in the world. He was wrong, of course. But he took his punishment like a man."

"That punk was never a man," I said to her.

"Tommy was more of a man than you'll ever be, Mr. Nelson. He made his mistakes and took his punishment. He accepted prison as justice."

I said: "He broke out, didn't he?"

"Yes. That was wrong. But even though it was wrong, he had a reason. He wanted to see me. He thought he could save my life. What was your reason for breaking prison, Mr. Nelson?"

I didn't say anything.

She went on: "Your reason was selfish. You broke out because you hate everybody in the world. You killed Tommy and you killed the Captain. You tried to trick me. You kill everything you touch. You don't understand anything."

"I'm doing all right," I said.

She sort of smiled at me. "Think so? I don't. Listen, Mr. Nelson—you thought Tommy was a weakling, and you hated Captain Cotter, and you thought I was just another woman. And that's what brings your finish. You think everybody in the world is tough and hard. That's your mistake. And you're going to the gallows for it."

"Who? Me?"

"Yes." She kept the rod pointed at me. "I've called the police, Mr. Nelson. I called them when we were out to the liquor store. That's why I went out with you. I didn't believe your story about Tommy Monroe and Cap-



tain Cotter fighting to their deaths."

"It's a fact," I said.

"No, it's a lie."

"Why?"

"Because—because, Mr. Nelson, Captain James J. Cotter happens to be my father."

**S**O THEY got me. I tried to fight when they came in the door. I jumped at the first cop, and I damn near knocked his block off. I picked up a chair and socked the second cop with it. It was the third cop, busting into the apartment, who got me.

They took me off in the Black Maria, but I wasn't scared. I wasn't scared a bit.

At the trial, I pleaded Not Guilty to the murder of Tommy Monroe and Captain Cotter. None of my pals owned enough dough to get me a good criminal lawyer; I had to take the Public Defender. He was a louse.

We were in court for only two days.

They proved that Daisy Davis' real name was Ruth Cotter, and that she'd only changed it when she fell in love with Tommy Monroe. She changed it because Tommy had gone to the pen, and she didn't want to hurt her father, who was James J. Cotter, holding down the job of Captain of the Yard.

They proved that Daisy Davis needed an appendix operation, and that her religion wouldn't permit it.

Tommy wanted to bust prison in order to save her life. And old Cotter, her dad, helped him do it.

They proved Tommy had no motive to kill Cotter.

They proved I did it. I killed both of them, they said.

I'd have gotten out of it—with a decent lawyer. But I didn't have enough dough.

So they gave me the rope.

**I**T'S the tenth day now. I just have to wait here. There's five of us in the death house. We call it the Dance Hall.

There's a black boy in the cell across from me. He goes at six a.m. I go at six-fifteen.

I'm not scared. I can sit here and write this, and my hands don't even shake. I'm not scared a bit. Do you think I'm scared? I'm not scared.

I don't care about the rope.

I'm not scared of it. All you got to do is walk in there and take it. It's over quick.

I'm not scared of it. I'm not going to break, either. I'll walk right in there.

At six-fifteen.

I still got seven hours and twenty-one minutes.

I'm not scared.

I can take it.

I'm not scared a bit. It's just this waiting for it.

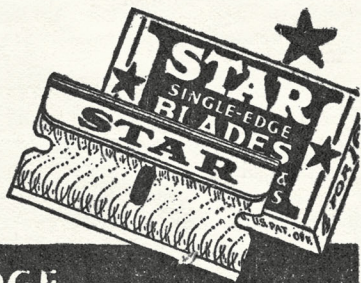
Waiting for it.

Know what I mean?



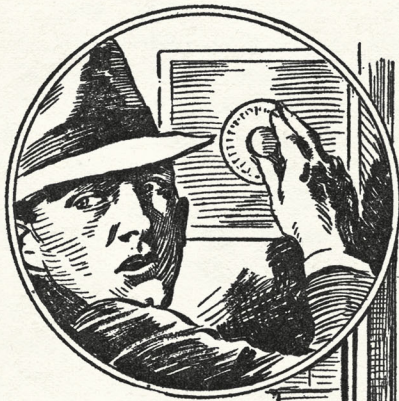
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## The Woman's Touch

**Warning: Never embroider  
on murder**

MRS. RHODES' new French maid got out of bed at seven in the morning with a couple of very un-French remarks, which needn't be repeated here. First of all she'd been out until four that morning with a certain gentleman of her acquaintance, and three hours' sleep wasn't enough, even on a pushover of a job like this. Secondly, he was coming around for her answer in a few minutes, and seven a. m. is no time to decide whether to go wrong or give up a right guy.

Mrs. Rhodes' maid put on her working clothes, which included a handkerchief for an apron and another for an eyeshade. She went into the kitchen and crumbled a chocolate bar

into a pan of hot water. Then she went to the front door and put it on the latch, so that it could be opened from the outside just by turning the knob.

She went back and gave the muddy water a shaking up—and she had hot chocolate. She put it on a tray and started toward the stairs with it. Just as she got to the foot of the stairway, the front door opened and closed again, and the gentleman of her acquaintance had come for his answer. Or rather, the door had given it to him already by being spiked like that, but she gave it to him over again.

"I'm in," she breathed with Gallic pungency. "Fifty-fifty split. Gimme about twenty minutes time up there. Sometimes she takes 'em out and paws over 'em in bed—you know, like a kid playing with toys. When you hear this spoon clink on the floor,



that'll be for you. Be sure you keep your phiz covered. And don't forget to tie me up too, so it'll look kosher."

A handbell started to go ting-a-ling-a-ling upstairs. "That's her now," said the treacherous handmaiden. "I gotta cheese it before she comes down to find out what's holding me up." She gave him a fond look. "And Spike—you do like me better than that red-headed dame, don't you?"

"Baby," protested her cavalier devotedly, "I'm gonna hold out one of them rings upstairs from the fence and marry you with it! Now go to it, toots."

He slunk out of sight behind a portière. Mrs. Rhodes' petite breakfast-bringer went on up the stairs, a dainty dish if there ever was one. The handbell kept tinkling, getting sorer all the time. "All right, don't be in such a hurry," she murmured. "You're going to get what's coming to you, don't worry."

She knuckled a door, turned the knob with one hand, and went in. A lady of mellow age, with strips of courtplaster at strategic locations all over her face, was sitting up in bed giving the bell a workout. She hadn't been cut or slashed. The courtplaster was to banish wrinkles. But the wrinkles just went other places on her and showed up anyway.

"Bum jour, madame," said the maid.

"What took you so long, Celeste?" said Mrs. Rhodes. "I was sure I heard you talking to someone on the stairs."

Celeste dropped her eyes demurely. "I talk to myself honly. Oo is zere to talk to?"

"I get nervous," admitted her employer. "Just the two of us alone in this big house."

Celeste parked the tray beside her employer. Then she rolled up the shades and fiddled around. From time to time her eyes strayed to a circular metallic insert in the wall, with a dial in it. "Madame weesh somezing else?" she hinted.

Mrs. Rhodes evidently wasn't in a jewel-pawing mood this morning. "No, you can get my bath ready. That will be all," she said.

"*Oui, madame,*" said Celeste, and gave her a surreptitious dirty look. Spike would have to put a little heat on her, it seemed.

The maid picked up the tray again and dipped her knees in a curtsy—a quaint habit she had picked up in the old country (Cook County, Illinois). The gesture knocked the spoon off and it fell with a ringing clash.

The door swept open and a man came in, with a handkerchief tied around the lower part of his face and his hand held threateningly in his coat pocket.

Celeste gave a very low-pitched scream, that couldn't possibly have been heard on the other side of the door. She carefully put the tray down out of the way first, and then she held her hands up over her head, beating the intruder to the punch. Just as she got through doing it he snarled: "Stick up your hands, both of you!"

Mrs. Rhodes wasn't equally complaisant. She let out a noon-factory-whistle of a screech that rattled the windowpanes. The man jumped over to her, gripped her throat by one hand.

"Come on," he ordered, shaking her. "Where's your jewels?"

"Celeste," was the strangled answer, "run for help!"

Celeste was all the way across the room. She could have made the door a million times over. But all power of action seemed to have deserted her. She started shuffling her feet around, picking them up and putting them down again—but somehow she stayed in one place. Mrs. Rhodes had no time to sit back and watch her.

"In the safe, eh?" her assailant growled, although she hadn't said a word to that effect. He swung a short jab from his right arm. "Come on, gimme the combination! Hurry up!" He swung another short jab. Whether he was pulling them or not, Celeste couldn't tell. His back was to her, and Mrs. Rhodes was hidden.

"Oh," Celeste bleated helpfully, "do not urt madame, she weel geeve zem to you." And then in a slightly lower voice, she added in purest Norman



French: "Ixnay the uffray uffstay! She's got an eakway ickertay!"

"Seven—four—nine—three," gasped Mrs. Rhodes expiringly.

**H**E LET go of her and she fell back in a faint. This seemed to give Celeste a much more fluent command of English. "Hurry it up and scram while she's bye-bye!" she urged while he twirled the dial. The little disk popped open. He reached in, pawed, and pulled out a series of satin and velvet jewelry-boxes of assorted shapes. He emptied them out onto the dresser and a gleaming pile of rings, bracelets, necklaces and pins resulted.

He thrust out his arm to sweep them into his coat pocket, and then he stopped dead, staring at the baubles. He bent down closer to look. He picked one up, turned it this way and that. Then he flung it viciously down on the floor.

"What's the matter?" asked Celeste.

"What's the matter! They're paste, they're imitations, every last one of them! Can't you tell the difference between the real ones and fakes? Why, you—I oughta—" He drew back his fist threateningly, as if he were going to give her a little of the treatment he'd just given her employer.

Celeste cringed. "Sure I can!" she protested. "She had 'em all on her only last Monday night, and I could eat my hat they were the McCoy then!"

"Then she put one over on you since then. Got leery maybe, had imitations made to wear, and put the real ones away in a vault." He gave her a disgusted look. "I buy you beers every night for a week, wear out my shoes dancin' with ya—for this junk!"

"Well, you've got to go through with it now, Spike," the ex-French maid whimpered pleadingly. "Don't leave me holding the bag. She's already seen you and she'll smell a rat. Leave 'em behind here if they ain't worth taking, but tie the two of us up at least, so it'll look right. I'll tell her I screamed and frightened you away."

He went back to the bed with a curse, started to strip off a pillowcase to tear it into strips.

"She'll bring the real ones out sooner or later and put 'em on. She's bound to," his accomplice went on encouragingly. "That'll be our chance. Hurry up! What's taking you so long? Somebody's liable to butt in."

He'd stopped dead again, like when he'd first examined the jewels. "Something's the matter with her! I think she's hauled her freight!"

Celeste ran up behind him, craned her neck over his shoulder. "What'd you hit her so hard for, you dope! I told you she had a weak heart. Look at that lump you raised on her forehead!"

He pried open one of Mrs. Rhodes' eyelids. "She's gone!" he said, and dropped the inert form as though it had bitten him. "Then it's—murder."

He turned and bolted for the door, but she got there ahead of him, blocked the way, pushed him back. "Don't run out and leave a set-up like this or we're cooked! Pull yourself together, Spike. We can cover it, as long as no knife or gun was used. If it's just her heart, we can make it look natural. We've got to." She seemed to have more presence of mind than he did at the moment.

"Yeah, but I gave her a couple of nasty bruises on the dome when I clipped her. They show."

"That's all right. We can take care of that too. This needs a woman's touch. You put all that glass back in the safe like you found it. She can't tell about the hold-up now, see? I'll attend to her. She was going to take a bath in a few minutes anyway. Well she's gonna take one now. A good long one. She's got a tiled shower-compartment in there. The water comes too hot or cold, get it? Her heart goes back on her, she keels over, and conks herself against the tiles. Get it? How they going to make anything of that?"

He took time off to contemplate the idea, poking his tongue against the inside of his cheek so that it stuck out. Then his pasty face brightened.



"You've got something there, toots," he admitted, flashing her an admiring look. He began stowing the jewel-cases back into the wall-safe. "If the tub was full, they could tell if it was phony by whether she had water in her lungs or not. But with her taking a shower they can't even tell that!"

"Keep your head turned now," said the modest Celeste. "I gotta get her things off first before I drag her in there. Otherwise the marks might show on her clothes. You didn't tear them when you roughed her, did you?"

"Naw," her accomplice said, with unintentional comic effect. "I went for her easy—just slugged her a couple times. Anyone that was in halfway decent shape at all, they'da come right out of it fresh as a daisy."

CELESTE disappeared backward into the bathroom, dragging the body. "Upsydaisy," he heard her remark under her breath. She came out again a minute later to announce, "Okay, I've got her all set, just as if she tumbled natural in there."

He clicked the safe shut. "You sure you've got her lying right, so she would hit where those bruises are?"

"Yeah. Your luck is you gave 'em to her where the edge could reach 'em, and not on top of the head. All right, get ready to scram. I'm going to turn the water on."

"You haven't left out anything now, have you? Remember, you're going to be up against dicks, and it'll be too late by then if you have." He took a step forward to go in and see for himself, but she quickly pulled him away.

"Here, here! Don't forget I expect to marry you after we've made our first heist. Don't worry about it. It's A-1. It's more natural than if it really was an accident." And she added with professional pride, "It takes a woman to give a thing like this the right touch."

"What're you going to do—stay here and buck them?"

"I've got to, don't you see? If I lam, that gives it away. It's just an accident, and I report it. I can make it,

easy. It's a pushover. All right, shuffle off to Buffalo, Spike. Watch yourself going out the front door."

"Meet me at Dinty's tonight as soon as you're in the clear," he told her. "I gotta couple other irons in the fire, and I could use a smart frill-partner like you. That French maid act of yours is a honey. Stick to me, toots, and you'll go places."

He went slithering hurriedly down the stairs, there was a brief pause while he reconnoitered, then she heard the front door open and close again. She went back into the bathroom again, gave her handiwork a final onceover, and nodded approvingly. Then she arched herself above the prostrate form, wrapped her postage-stamp apron around her hand, and gave the two valves a swift turn. A geyser came slashing downward and Mrs. Rhodes disappeared behind a curtain of mist.

Celeste backed out into the bedroom, looked around to make sure that Spike's brief onslaught on the lady hadn't left any telltale signs. It hadn't. All she had to do was replace the pillow he had started to strip. Then she closed the door after her and went downstairs. She could still hear the hiss and tumble of the water. She'd give it about twenty minutes, she decided. That, in the ordinary course of events, was about how long it would take her to grow suspicious of her employer's continued ablutions.

She sat down where she could keep her eye on a clock, and smoked a cigarette to pass the time. "See, I'm waiting for her to finish her breakfast and call me to take the tray away," she rehearsed herself. "It's a cinch. The only thing I gotta watch myself on is the phony frog accent. But hell, how many dicks do you run into that can talk French? And if they catch on, it's still no crime. They can't arrest me for that. She wanted a French maid and I needed a job bad, that's all. Bring on your dicks!"

But it worked out even better than she had hoped for. She got a ready-made witness for her "discovery" act. The bell rang and when she went to



the door there was a telegram for Mrs. Rhodes. It had to be signed for personally. "I take it up, you come wiz," she remarked to the messenger. She knocked delicately outside the bedroom door. "Madame?" she cooed. "Tele-gramme."

"She must be taking a bath," the youth pointed out when there was no answer. "I can hear the shower running."

"Ah, *oui*, you are right," said Celeste, cocking one shell-pink ear. "Wait here. I go inside." She opened the door and eased in, but carefully left the door partly open so that he could get at least a bird's-eye view of the proceedings. "Madame?" she trilled at the bathroom entrance. Ribbons of steam were drifting out. Then she looked down. She let out a scream that actually dislodged the messenger boy's cap from his head.

"Look! She is faint! Queek, run for 'elp! I cannot go near! Ze water it is too 'ot"

**S**ECONDS later he was back with a burly cop at his heels. Celeste was twittering out on the staircase landing. The cop barged through to the bathroom. The sound of water broke off short, there was an ominous pause, and finally he came out again with spray glistening all over his uniform. "She's dead" he said. "Where's your phone?"

Celeste wedged her hands to her face. "Oh no! 'Ow it 'appen? What 'ave 'appen to her? Oh poor madame!" But then, she decided, why waste all this on a mere cop, when there'd be real detectives along any minute to get the benefit of it? He was too busy phoning in by then to pay any attention to her anyway, so she just rested up behind her apron and rehearsed some more.

Two dicks came. Celeste appraised them as they came trundling up the stairs one behind the other. She wasn't the worst judge of character in the world. At the reformatory she'd always been able to tell just which matrons—

One man, she could tell at a glance,

was more or less of a chump. She had nothing to worry about from him, all else being equal. But the other one she didn't like the looks of so much. She decided she'd have to watch out for him. She heard them call him Innis, and he had a pair of eyes that went through you. He didn't say very much, but the little he did say—socko! The reason she didn't like him was you couldn't tell by his face what was going on behind it. He must have been wicked in a poker game.

The man carrying the black bag, who got there a little after they did, was some kind of doctor or medical examiner. He didn't count much.

They didn't pay any attention to her for a few minutes. They wrapped Mrs. Rhodes in a couple of towels and brought her into the bedroom and the doctor went to work inspecting her and they just stood watching him. Celeste hung around out in the hall, like an actress waiting in the wings for her cue. Finally this Innis got around to noticing her. He strolled out to her, real slow like he had all the time in the world, and parked his elbow casually on the bannister rail alongside her and said, "You the only other person in the house with her?"

"*Oui*, m'sew." She dipped him a curtsy.

It didn't go over so good. "What's the matter? You got water on the knees?" he said. "You ought to have that fixed." And he did the drilling act with his eyes. "What happened?"

She took a deep breath and went into her spiel. "I bring up madame's chocolate at ze regulaire hour. She is sitting in bed just like always. She say she take 'er shower first. So I feex. Zen I go downstairs. I wait for to be call' to take ze tray away. She 'ave ze little bell, you know. She don't call. So I wait. She don't call some more. I wait long time. Zen ze tele-gramme she come. I go up wiz it and oo-la-la!—ze shower is still running and madame is flat on ze floor."

The stupe had joined them meanwhile, attracted by her piquant accent. "French, eh?" he said to the first one.



"Yeah," was all Innis said. But the way he said it, she couldn't tell whether it should have a question mark after it or not.

"What part of France?" he asked her.

"Par-r-ree," she gargled. That was always a safe bet.

"Is Nutter Dame still hanging around?"

"Oh zere is lots of zem left zere. You think I was ze only one?"

He turned away as though he'd lost interest. The doctor came out again closing his bag. "How about it, Doc?" Innis asked him.

"Weak heart," the doctor answered. "Water came either too hot or too cold—I should say hot judging by the looks of her shoulders—shocked her, she keeled over, knocked herself out on the tiled floor, and never came to."

"Accidental, eh?"

"Nothing to show it wasn't. I'll run over her more thoroughly down at the ice-box."

Celeste delicately turned her head away as Mrs. Rhodes was taken downstairs. This part of it really wasn't acting. It wasn't any fun watching a thing like that.

"Well," the chump said, "suits me, if he says so."

Innis didn't say if it suited him or not. But at least he didn't say it *didn't* suit him. He went back into the bathroom again. The chump followed him, and Celeste in turn followed the chump at a little distance. She didn't really want to, but something seemed to pull her against her will.

"Let's see," Innis said. He pulled up his coat sleeve, stuck his arm out, and gave both spigots a spin. "Ouch!" he hissed, and jerked his arm back. Faint patches of pink showed on it. "Too hot is right," he said.

"Suit you now?" the chump asked.

He still didn't answer. He looked all around the shower stall with those eyes of his, drilling holes in it until it should have been like Swiss cheese. Then he turned away. "Suits me now," he said.

Celeste took a deep breath of relief, without letting it be heard. The worst

was over. "Now if Spike had handled that his way," she thought, "where would we be right now?"

The rest was just a routine matter of examining Mrs. Rhodes' papers, and winding up things. They found the combination of the safe, opened it, took out the jewelry, saw that it was paste, put it back again without a word.

"She have any relatives you know of?" Innis asked.

"Only a nephew in Souse America."

"Okay, we'll have to notify him."

They opened the telegram and it turned out to be from him. He was coming back.

CELESTE hung around waiting, just to make it look right, but they both seemed to have forgotten her existence. Finally she said, "You wish to ask me any more questions, m'sew?"

"No," said Innis without even looking at her. "I know all I need to now." He had such a peculiar way of putting things, you never could tell exactly what he meant—whether you were in the clear or not.

"Zen I can go down and change my clothes?"

"Yeah, you may as well. We're closing up the house until her nephew gets here."

She went downstairs, packed her bag, and virtuously resisted the temptation of swiping any of the silverware. This had panned out so beautifully, why take a chance on spoiling it? She and Spike would have plenty of chances to pull other jobs together.

She'd hoped both dicks would be gone by the time she was ready to leave, so the coast would be clear and she could get over to Dinty's and meet Spike without any risk of being tailed. Well, Innis had gone—much to her relief—but the chump was still hanging around waiting for her to go so he could put a police seal on the door and station a cop outside. That was all right. She wasn't afraid of him.

"I go now, m'sew," she announced demurely. "I see I can find a room



until I get a new job, *oui?*" She pitched him another curtsy.

"Gee, that's cute," the sap beamed. "I wish my girl'd do that to me! Oh, by the way, don't forget to report your new address to us. That's just in case you're wanted again."

Spike was waiting for her there at Dinty's, at their usual table, when she showed up.

"How'd it go?" he asked anxiously.

She sliced her hand at him reassuringly. "Like velvet. Why, they never tumbled from first to last!"

He mopped his forehead relievedly. "Boy, I'm glad! I been sweating all day. I didn't know whether to lam or to wait and see if you showed up. You sure you're in the clear? No one tailed you over here?" he added anxiously.

"Sure I'm sure. Don't be so noivous, will you, Spike? You're turning into a regular old woman. First thing you know you'll be no good for business. Make it my usual suds," she said, as the waiter's shadow darkened the table from across her shoulder.

A chair scraped up instead, and Innis was sitting there at the table with them!

"Ave ze drink," he suggested amiably.

She could tell that the French gag was washed up, if nothing else, so she dropped it. She wasn't in very good shape for fancy accents just then, anyway.

"I—I'm not thirsty," she mumbled.

Spike started to get up and go

someplace else at this point, but Innis flattened him down again with a shove on the shoulder, without even looking at him. He kept addressing her instead.

"Bettaire 'ave ze drink, no? You get good and thirsty where you going."

"You haven't got anything on us," Celeste scowled. "What's this for?"

"For croaking Mrs. Rhodes. Him for doing it and you for being an accessory. I could have made the pinch five minutes after I was in the place. I got it right away, but I knew some guy was in on it with you and I figured the easiest way of getting him was just to let you lead us to him. Come on, you two."

"But how did you figure—?" Spike couldn't resist asking as Innis jerked him to his feet. They could both see the game was up by now, anyway.

"Easy, you saps. You thought of everything but the main things that go with a bath. There was no soap and no towel. Did you ever know anyone to take a shower without having a cake of soap and a towel handy? It shows somebody around here isn't so clean themselves or they'd know more about things like that."

Spike just looked at his late accomplice with deadly intentness. "The woman's touch," he said. Then he suddenly poked her one in the eye.

"What was the idea of that?" Innis snarled, smacking him one in turn.

"That," he announced, "is what this job needed from the beginning—the man's touch."

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"Mr. Harmon, have you gone crazy? Don't point that gun at me"

# Shoal Waters

by Richard Sale

I WAS cleaning the spark plugs of my Crown Chryslers because the twin engines had been missing now and then when I was offshore, and I was kneeling there in the deck-house when I heard a thud on the deck and I knew somebody had jumped aboard. The *Amberjack II* was wallowing in her slip, feeling some of the chaff of the sea that was rolling in with the fresh southwesterlies. I wasn't outside fishing that day for two reasons: my boat hadn't been chartered, and it was pretty rough going with a poor chance of spotting a fin in that kind of water.

I got up when I heard the thud and looked astern and saw this man standing in the cockpit back there. I didn't notice anything queer about him then, mind you, because after all Key West is the place they come to get the fish and you get all kinds of screwy guys here.

It was windy but the sun was hot. This guy was built big and his face was heavy and sort of hard. He had a lot of air in his cheeks and they were long and hung so low in his face that they made an inverted U go up and under his nose and then down on the other side of his mouth. It was like he was perpetually gloomy; you know the look. His hair was jet black. It was too black, now that I think of it, and I figured for a minute it was false hair, like a toupee. It was too black and shiny, as if he'd washed it in shoe polish. He didn't look half as young as his hair did. He had a black mustache, too, but it wasn't trimmed very neat and it was kind of scraggly. His face was very long. His eyes jumped all over the place. I had the feeling I'd seen him before some place, but I couldn't remember where.

"Hello," I said.



He nodded first and looked me over. Then he said, "I'm looking for Captain Tom Hannigan. Are you him?"

"My name's Hannigan," I said, watching him.

"I want to fish out of Key West for a couple of days," he said. "I don't know much about it but I'd like to take a fling at it. They told me at the bank that you were a good man. They said you had a good boat and you knew the ropes."

I said drily, "I been fishing out this Stream for fifteen years. I used to be a guide back when Long Key was the spot, before the hurricane blew it to hell and gone."

"You've got a nice boat," he said evasively. "She sure is a nice boat. She's big, isn't she?"

"She's the *Amberjack II*," I said. "Thirty-eight feet, twin engines, and she'll make twenty-four miles an hour. I've got a Bludworth radio direction finder aboard her. I carry a Jefferson ship-to-shore phone set, and I don't take chances. She's safe enough, mister. She could take you clean to Cuba and back again."

"To Cuba, eh?" he said, his eyes narrowing. He looked around vaguely and then caught my eyes again. "You mean Havana?"

"I mean Havana."

"That's a long trip, isn't it?" he said.

"Ninety miles from Key West," I said. "If the weather is right, the crossing is easy."

"Well!" he said. "Think of that. She could go to Havana, a boat like this. That certainly surprises me."

But I didn't think it did.

"My name is Harmon," he said. "James Harmon. I'm from New York. I'm staying at the Seaside Hotel for a few days and I thought I'd get in some fishing. Some of these marlin they talk about. What do you charge, Captain Hannigan?"

"Thirty-five a day," I said. "Do you have your own tackle?"

"No."

"Then it's forty a day," I said. "And you pay for any damage you do the tackle. That is, if it's your

own carelessness. It's cash with me before the trip. You understand how it is."

"That's all right," he said politely. You could feel him holding himself in. I had a notion he could be nasty. He sure was a big guy and he looked like he knew how to handle himself. "I think you're the man for me, Captain. Suppose I charter your boat for three days, eh? That makes a hundred and twenty dollars, doesn't it? And I'll give you a hundred now and settle up the rest on the last day. Is that fair enough?"

"That's fair enough," I said.

He handed me a one-hundred-dollar bill, but he didn't ask for a receipt either. I said, "We'll need a boy to cut bait." I shrugged. "Only another buck a day."

He narrowed his eyes. "No. Can't you do that?"

"I can, but—"

"Nobody else, Captain. I want to be alone. Just you and me. I don't want anybody else around." Then he relaxed and smiled. "I'm sure that's all right, isn't it? I want a complete rest, you see?"

"That'll be all right," I said, and he left. I decided I didn't like him. I kept wondering what sort of guy he was to carry around one-hundred-dollar bills like that.

NEXT day the wind died and the sea broke out into a flat calm and Mr. Harmon showed up bright and early. He'd brought beer and sandwiches and I put them in the galley, and in a little while we were heading southeast for the Stream with the engines nearly wide open. Harmon didn't say much to me. He sat in the stern in the open sun, smoking a cigar. I remember wondering if he was the sort who'd get seasick in a swell.

It was a fine day, sunny and sometimes a little cloudy, and I cut the stomach off a mullet and baited up my heavy tackle because he was an amateur and I wasn't taking any chances.

Well, I won't tell you the fishing



details because this isn't a fishing story. He lost two sailfish in the morning and it didn't worry him a bit. In the afternoon, he hooked into an Allison tuna, which is something you don't hit every day in the week. He got his first taste of how a heavy fish runs and sounds and it scared him. He made me cut his line.

I was pretty disgusted with Mr. Harmon when we got back to the slip in Key West that night, but I was more puzzled than I was sore. It was pretty plain that he wasn't a fisherman and didn't want to learn how to be one. You get all kinds when you own a charter boat, but you don't often get a guy who'll spend good money on fishing when he don't want to fish.

"It was a nice day," Harmon said. "I'm sorry about that tuna but he just scared me a little. I'll make a better try tomorrow."

"All right," I said. He saw how I felt about it.

"I'm sorry," he said again. "But she's an awfully fine boat. She's fast and she's big and she doesn't roll at all. I swear, I think she would go to Havana safely at that."

"She's been," I said laconically.

"She has?" He seemed more interested than surprised.

"Mr. Harmon," I said, "if you're worrying about this boat being seaworthy, you can forget it. I don't say she'll weather a hurricane but I've been caught in gale force and come through. I've got a jury rig for her and a sea drag and she heaves to as pretty as a sailing ship and rocks as comfortably as a cradle. She never pooped a sea yet and she never will."

"I'll see you tomorrow," he said, his eyes sparkling.

"You talk about Havana a lot," I said. "I'll take you across if you want to go. I can get the papers and clear us for Cuba if you want to go."

"Oh, no," he said quickly. "Don't do that. I don't want to go to Havana. Forget it, just forget it."

He was there at the slip later the next day and we went right out. He tried harder to be interested in the

fishing and we hooked a sailfish one hour out and he hardly tried to play it. He didn't lose the fish only because it was foul-hooked in the dorsal fin and you can't throw a hook out of your fin no matter how good a fish you are. It's got to rip out, and this one didn't. But the fish wasn't hurt and it took a long time to bring him to gaff. While he was on the way, a shark showed up.

"What's wrong?" Harmon grunted as I started for the cabin.

"Shark," I said. "I'll get a gun. He'll cut your fish in half if he gets to him."

"I've got a gun," Harmon said. "Right here. Go ahead and take a shot. It's loaded but the safety is on."

He gave me a .45 Colt automatic and I hit the shark on the third try and drove him off and we landed the sailfish. Harmon called it a day then. All the way in, I kept thinking about him, wondering who he was and what sort of man carried century notes and a .45 automatic. He carried it on his left side in a shoulder holster. Like a gangster. I didn't like it. I was beginning to get uneasy about Mr. Harmon now. That shoe-black hair. Like a disguise almost. The way his face looked, the phony spectacles he wore now and then, the dark glasses, the black mustache that didn't look real.

What the hell, I thought. I could go to see Frank Swinney, chief of police at Key West, and I could tell him my suspicions, but I didn't have anything to go on and there might be trouble. I had the feeling that Mr. Harmon was on the lam and was somebody big, somebody they might be after. But I didn't want any trouble. One more day, I thought, and he'll be finished. He'll leave me alone and I'll forget about it. It seemed the smartest thing to do, to just go along and play ball and then forget about him. I didn't want any trouble.

"Well, Captain," Harmon said when we got back to Key West, "I don't think I'll come out tomorrow. I don't care for fishing much. I can't keep my mind on it and it takes too much pa-



tience. So I think I'll cancel tomorrow's trip."

"You can't do that," I said. "You chartered the boat. I've already downed offers for charter for tomorrow because you were going to be using the boat."

"I know, I know," he said. "I'll pay for it all right. Don't worry about that. But I figured maybe I'd take a moonlight sail in her tonight after dinner. Just a little sail out and around and back again. Would that be all right?"

Well, I thought, I can finish him up that way and maybe get another party for tomorrow, and I'll be doubling up. I'll be making twice as much money, technically, for one day's actual fishing.

"That'll be fine," I said. "That'll be okay."

"Just a little cruise," he said. "Out and around in the moonlight. No fishing. I know you can fish at night, but no fishing."

"All right."

"I'll bring some beer and sandwiches again."

"Eight o'clock?"

"Nine," he said. "I want moonlight. It's my last night in Florida. I'm leaving tomorrow for New York."

So he left, and I had the tanks filled with gasoline again, although they didn't take much, and I took it easy. I felt pretty good. I didn't like Mr. Harmon and I didn't like his pistol. But his money was good and I needed it. I felt fine because I was glad to get rid of him at a profit. It was no fun for me to fish him if he didn't want to fish.

I hung around the wharf a while talking with Joe Perry, who also operates a fishing boat, the *Nita*, and Joe told me about some Yankee up at No Name Key that lost a leg to a barracuda. These barracuda we have down here, you know, aren't nearly as big as sharks but they're ten times as vicious. They'll strike you out of pure meanness, when a shark won't touch you unless he smells blood or something.

Well, I went by Sloppy Joe's for

a couple of quick ones and talked a few minutes with Skinner, the bartender. A crowd came in with Ernest, and they were celebrating because he'd just got back from another one of his trips to Spain, and I wanted to hang around, but it was supper time. I went on home to supper.

Sarah—that's my wife—didn't like it at all when I told her about this customer.

"You be careful, Tom," she said.

But I laughed and put in half an hour helping Johnny with some tackle he was rigging up. Johnny's my kid. He's eight years old.

IT WAS a perfect night. There was no wind at all and the moon came up, and I waited for him. Somewhere southeast, there had been a storm, because the storm swells rode in with wallowing gentleness and rocked the *Amberjack* in her slip. But they were slow soft hills and would be no trouble and I rather looked forward to the cruise because I had not been out at night in a long time.

He came at a quarter after nine. He looked a little different because he was all dressed and he wore a hat and carried a bag. I got uneasy; he seemed a little excited and I didn't like that bag. But he stalled me first and said, "Sandwiches and beer and a few bottles of wine. We'll have a nice cruise. I've looked forward to this. Cast off, Captain, and let's get under weigh, eh?"

I felt uneasy, but I didn't want any trouble. I eased the *Amberjack* out of her slip and headed due south from Key West.

After a while, when the town was a cluster of lights far astern, he said: "Which way are you heading?"

I figured I'd play safe, just in case I'd suspicioned right, and I said: "Due east. Thought we might run up to the old Long Key camp."

He got up from the fishing chair in the stern and came into the cabin. He took a seat across the ship from me at the chart table and he watched me for a few seconds at the helm. Finally he took out his gun. He held



it carefully in his hand and pointed it at my stomach and he said, "Captain."

I'd seen him do it and I got all cold. I said, "Mr. Harmon, have you gone crazy? Don't point that gun at me."

"I'm pointing it at you," he said. "I'll use it on you, Captain. You do as I say or I'll plug you."

"I haven't done anything," I said. "What do you want to hold a gun on me for?"

"You do as I say," he snapped, "and you'll live to make the trip back! I'm bound for Havana, mister."

"We can't do that," I said. "We've got to have clearance papers. We can't just go to Havana like that."

"You're taking me," he said. "My name isn't Harmon. It's Gennico. Paul Gennico. I guess you've heard the name."

"Paul Gennico?" I said. "I thought I'd seen you before and I did. In the newspapers. Only your hair was blond and you didn't have a mustache. You disguised yourself. You're"—I swallowed—"you're wanted in New York for kidnaping and murder."

"They can't burn me twice," Harmon, alias Gennico, said. He smiled, and he seemed to feel better—like he did in New Rochelle when he slit that ten-year-old boy's throat, I supposed. "I'll kill you, Hannigan, if you try anything," he said. "I'm bound for Havana and you're taking me there. Get to it!" He waved the gun.

"Listen, Mr. Gennico," I said. "We can't do it. This compass of mine is all haywire. It's not accurate. It don't work right."

"You've got a radio direction finder," he said. "You can check your position with that, and don't tell me you can't."

"All right," I said. "You win."

"You're telling me."

I swung the *Amberjack* over. So he thought we were going due south, but we really were heading west toward Dry Tortugas, the island they made a movie about once and called it *The Prisoner of Shark Island*; remember? I turned on the juice and took a radio

bearing but it didn't mean anything. I knew where I was, but I did it as an excuse to turn on the Jefferson ship-to-shore phone. I left it on the Coast Guard frequency and hoped that they might pick up some of our talk and try and get us. But they didn't.

I waited half an hour but there was no sign of them. I talked with Gennico and even gave directions to the Coast Guard in conversation with Gennico, but I guess they never picked it up. And all the time I was thinking about my wife and kid back home and what it would do to us if some hoodlum took Johnny away and killed him.

It was a spot, a nasty kind of spot, and I didn't feel good at all. If I went to Havana, that would be all right except that he'd probably shoot me offshore so that no one could tell that Paul Gennico had escaped from the United States to Cuba. I wasn't ready to die so I was damned if I'd head for Havana. The storm swell was too gentle. I wished it were really rough out, so that he might get really sick, so damned seasick that he'd go green and have to vomit. I'd have a chance to get my own revolver then. But he was probably one of those guys who never got sick, not even chumming in a fresh wind.

Well, I said to myself, there's one thing to do. I had to take a long chance. I got the chart and plotted a course for Mud Turtle Reef, which lies about half a mile southwest of the lighthouse on the Marquesas Key. It would hurt the bottom of the *Amberjack* but with luck the screws would stay on and maybe the mahogany would stand the shock without splitting.

"How's it going, Captain?"

"All right."

"No mistakes, Captain. I'll shoot you. I'll shoot you low where it hurts."

"No mistakes, Mr. Gennico."

"Good."

Twenty minutes later, we picked up the pencil light of the Marquesas lighthouse and Gennico stood up and



stared at it. "There's land," he said. "You're pulling a fast one, Captain. That's not Havana."

"Course it ain't," I said. "That's the Marquesas Key. You got to reach that light before we turn full toward Havana. It's the channel."

"You're lying!" he snapped. "Give me that chart."

"Look for yourself," I said. "You'll see." I gave him the chart and prayed that he wouldn't locate the lighthouse on the chart right away because I had to have a few minutes yet. I turned up the engines a little more and held on. Mud Turtle Reef wasn't far off now.

"Where is it?" Gennico snarled.

"Can't you find it yourself?" I said.

"You're stalling. I'll kill you for this, Captain. Show me where it is."

I started to show him but that was when we reached Mud Turtle Reef.

**T**HE *Amberjack* rode up the rock like a surfboard and I instantly killed the engines. We teetered precariously a second and then she settled on the rock and held there. "Aground!" Gennico said, and his face was terrible. "We're aground. Captain, you double-crossed me! This lighthouse is 'way off our course!"

"Now wait a second," I said. "Don't shoot. Just listen to me for a second."

"Talk fast."

The *Amberjack* sat on the reef nicely. Her bow and beam were out of water. I wondered how she'd stood it. I wondered if I'd ripped the bottom off her. It hurt me to do that. She was a fine boat.

"Talk fast," he said.

"Now listen," I said. "I've double-crossed you right enough, but if you give me a chance for my life, I'll give you a chance for yours."

"I hold the ace," he said. "Talk fast. I ought to kill you now."

"If you kill me," I said, "you're finished."

"Keep talking, Captain."

"We're on Mud Turtle Reef off the Marquesas Key," I said. "This reef is only quarter of a mile from shore. Look." I switched on the searchlight

and penciled it through the night until I picked up a palm tree. The shore looked very close.

"Well?"

"Well this," I said. I pointed: "The ship-to-shore phone has been on the whole time. We've been tipping off the Coast Guard to the whole thing. They're probably on the way now, from Key West."

"I'm going to kill you," Gennico said with cold fury.

"Then you'll kill yourself," I said. "I've got an out for you. I can get you ashore."

"You think I'd try and swim that in the dark?"

"You listen," I said. "They'll be here soon. You've got a chance to get away. I don't want any trouble. You lay off me and I'll give you an out. You throw that gun away over the side and I'll tell you how to get ashore and get away."

"I've got to get away," he whispered suddenly. "I've got to get away from here. All right, Captain. But if you double-cross me I'll strangle you with my bare hands." He towered over me savagely. "And I can do it, understand me—I can do it!"

He tossed the gun over into the sea and it splashed and sank from sight.

"All right," I said. "Look at the chart. Here's where we are on Mud Turtle Reef. A quarter of a mile to shore. If you walk directly north-northeast, *you can walk to shore from here!* Look at the chart. The reading is in feet. It isn't over three feet anywhere except right in the middle. It goes to five there and then drops back to two. All you have to do is hold to north-northeast by your compass."

"You rat," he said, "I haven't got a compass."

"I've got a flashlight and a pocket compass," I said. "Here they are. The chart don't lie, mister. You'll put ashore at the island in ten minutes, walking all the way. Was that a motor I heard?"

"I didn't hear anything," he said.

"I thought I heard a motor," I lied. "Maybe I'm wrong."



"Give me that," he said. He snatched the light and compass. "Keep the spotlight on—give me a break. I've given you one."

I didn't say anything. He was scared now, scared stiff. He listened again, his imagination making sounds for him. "I think that was a motor," he said. "I got to lam." He slid overside into three feet of water. It came to his thigh. He held his light on the compass and found the NNE point and started walking. I held the spotlight across the water for him. I didn't have anything to lose. I'd told him the truth. It was shoal water all the way to shore. But I hadn't told him everything. I hadn't told him that if he made shore, there was no place to go.

WHEN he was halfway across, I saw him stumble, and he let out a terrible scream and for a moment I thought he'd stepped into a quicksand pit, but that wasn't it. The bottom was hard enough there so it wasn't quicksand. He stumbled again, screamed worse and then he fell forward on his face. I saw his light vanish. I turned the spot on him but he was gone. He went down in four feet of water. Then he came up and he struggled toward shore again on his knees, but he finally fell on his face and floated east, and I knew he'd drowned himself.

I went below and looked at the damage to the *Amberjack*. She had a hole in the bow but her bottom

was all right. I went back and turned the Jefferson set knob to *Ships* and I said into the phone, "Calling Joe Perry's *Nita* at Key West. This is the *Amberjack* calling the *Nita* in Key West."

I turned to *Stand By* and Joe Perry cut in: "Hello, Hannigan. What do you want?"

"I'm on Mud Turtle," I said, "with a hole in the bow. Come and get me, Joe, and bring a couple of men and a skiff."

"You poor old fool," he said, "can't you navigate any more?"

"Never mind that," I said. "You come and get me before the sea kicks up."

"Coming."

And I turned the set off.

It was only a matter then of waiting for the *Nita* to arrive and take me off the reef. I held the spotlight on Gennico's body until I saw that it had drifted to the beach and clung there. I knew the tide would hold it there until the *Nita* arrived, so I turned off the toplight.

I felt sorry for Gennico, in a way. He was such a landlubber. I'd told him the truth about shoal waters, all right, but I hadn't told him everything.

Like the fact that the island was a virtual prison if he'd made it, and that he'd have to wait there for the police to take him off.

Or like the fact that this quarter-mile stretch of shoal water was always alive with barracuda.



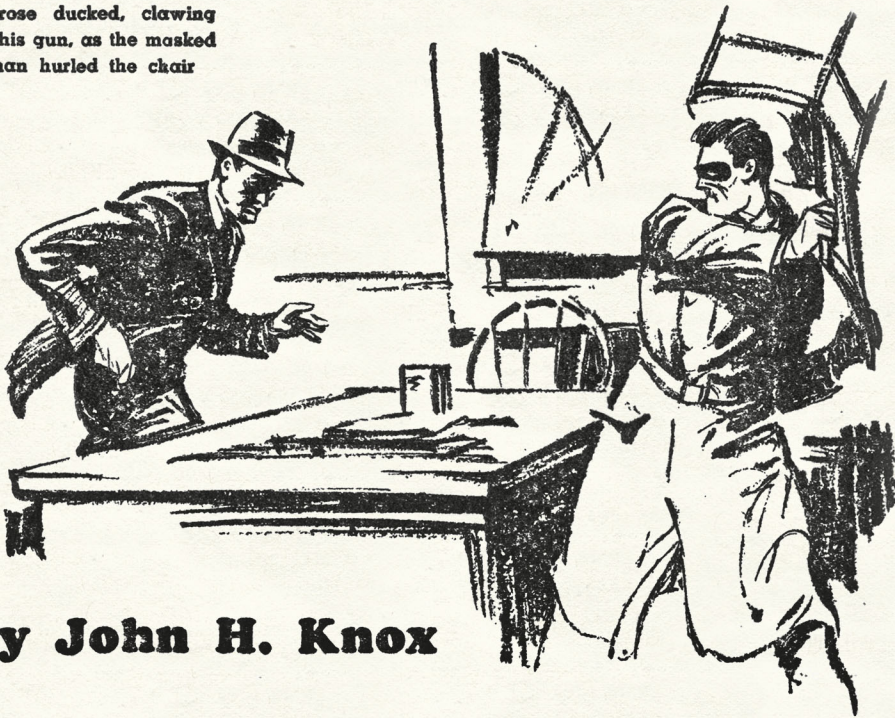
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Melrose ducked, clawing  
for his gun, as the masked  
man hurled the chair



by John H. Knox

## The Riddle of the Gilded Girl

The Wooden Indian of El Paso  
meets his toughest problem in the  
weird death of the Aztec dancer

THE morgue was chill and dank, a room of gray concrete full of that indescribable chemical smell which is not wholly chemical and not wholly a smell, but a slimy and almost tangible something that seems to crawl into a man's throat. It was dim save for one bright light above a cooling board, and as they moved nearer and the thing upon the cooling board leaped into view, even Hawk Melrose paused, and across those chiseled granite features which had earned him the nickname, the Wooden Indian, there flashed a brief look of incredulity.

"Well," Sergeant O'Hara said, in that voice that was always like two sheets of sandpaper rubbed together, "I told you I'd make yer black eyes pop out."

Hawk said nothing, but Cabeza de Vaca Perez, his constant shadow, let a little weak whistle trickle between his lips.

They went nearer.

The girl was beautiful, and she was more than that. About the shapely and unmistakably Mexican contours of her face, as about the whole small and superbly moulded body, there was a statuesque, breathtaking perfection usually associated only with an inanimate work of art. But it was neither her beauty of form nor the tragic quiet of the death that froze it, which had caused their breath to



lock in their lungs. It was the fact that the girl, from her forehead matted with wet dark hair to the soles of her small feet, was a glimmering thing of gold. And in that dim place of pallid corpses, she glowed and shone like something miraculous out of folklore.

"Wouldn't believe it, would you?" O'Hara cackled. "But there she is, just as we fished her from the Rio Grande. She was weighted with a rock tied with copper wire, but the current must have swished her about until the wire broke. The Mexicans who found her are probably still crossing themselves. They thought it was sorcery."

"*Valgame Dios!*" Cabeza de Vaca Perez exploded huskily. "And who wouldn't?"

But Hawk Melrose had recovered his Sphinx-like composure and was bending over the body to read something that had been printed with a small brush and black paint on the girl's golden forehead:

*She who for gold betrays,  
Golden forever stays.*

Hawk straightened, his black eyes on the red-headed Irishman's face. "What's your idea, O'Hara?"

"Well," O'Hara said, "at first glance, I thought: love-mad maniac kills faithless flame. But on second thought it seemed too elaborate for a hot-headed killing. Looks more like a gang or cult of some sort. Anything can happen in Jaurez, you know. I figure she betrayed the cult and they made an example of her."

Hawk pondered. "I think you're right about the love killing being out," he said. "But so is the cult business, I think. One thinks of a cult, O'Hara, as having sinister uses for dead bodies and secret ways of disposal. No, I should say a gang."

"But a gang!" O'Hara exclaimed, making a spitting sound. "I can't feature any ape-browed border mobster having enough imagination to do a crime up in a way so—" he faltered.

"Poetic?" Hawk asked. "Yes, horrible, but poetic. And you're right,

O'Hara. These men are not poets but vermin. And when they gild a lily they do it to hide something."

"Hide something? What the—?"

"Find that out," Hawk advised. He reached out a long finger and touched the gilded flesh. "Real gold leaf," he mused. "Thoroughly resistant to water. Put on with fat-oil size, I'd guess. That holds like hell. I can't tell you exactly what reagent will remove it, but any chemist can. And remove it you must."

O'Hara clapped a palm to his forehead. "You're serious? But the doc's already established that she died from a blow on the back of the skull and there's no call for any further post-mortem, so—"

"Get it off, O'Hara, get it off," Hawk said, and he walked away.

Back in the early afternoon sunlight, the gaunt half-Indian private detective sauntered with a slow, contemplative stride. His short, burly, excitable assistant, tried to urge him on. "Bentham will be waiting, *mi jefe*; he said two o'clock sharp. And he is a man of short temper."

Hawk did not appear to hear. He had stopped before the foyer of a theater and was staring at the photographs displayed under the caption:

BLAS CORRIDO AND HIS MONTEZUMA DANCERS  
PRESENTING THE ANCIENT CEREMONIAL DANCES OF MEXICO  
TONIGHT—XALAUQUI, OR THE SACRIFICE OF THE DANCER  
ANCIENT AZTEC RAIN-RITE, STARRING MITZLI, DANCE SENSATION OF MEXICO

Cabeza de Vaca Perez groaned. "*Mi jefe*," he pleaded, "you will not go again? Already for three nights—"

Hawk smiled. "I am half Indian, and you, being a Mexican, are almost all Indian. I marvel at the lack of response to the art of your ancestors."

"Ancestors, bah!" Cabeza de Vaca said. "You cannot fool this one, *mi jefecito*. It is the dancers that have caught your eyes, worthless strumpets that they are." He choked with rage. Being a family man, he was full of righteous utterance on



such subjects. And his pet terror—never yet realized—was that his chief would some day tumble for the sort of adventuress who was always making passes at him.

Hawk clicked his tongue. "Here, here!" He grinned at his dumpy assistant. "Head of a Cow, it is not the women as women, but as dancers." "Carácoles! But they do not even dance."

"That is the marvel of it," Hawk said. "Simply by moving in those slow processions, even with masked faces, they convey a weird emotion that is uncanny. They seem not living things but the actual ghosts of the dead race of Montezuma stalking across the stage."

THEY went up to Hawk's small and elegantly plain office in a tall building overlooking El Paso's Plaza. Stark Bentham, Director of the El Paso district of the Border Patrol, was leaning across the desk, chewing a cigar while he toyed nervously with the small crystal globe which Hawk kept there as an aid to concentration. Bentham was a big man, slope-shouldered, with thin sandy hair and a hard-jawed red face that could speak eloquently with or without words.

"I wish you'd throw this damned thing out of here," he growled, giving the crystal a shove. "It makes me feel like I was coming to a damned soothsayer every time I drop in for a little help or advice."

Cabeza de Vaca had gone on into the laboratory and Hawk sat down. He smiled at Bentham and picked up the crystal. "You no believe?"

Then, striking a dramatic pose and gazing into the crystal, he began to intone: "I see *un hombracho*, great, sandy-haired, who is angry and annoyed. He is an important official, and important officials of another nation are threatening complaints to his chiefs in Washington, because the daughter of a great man in the southern government has been stolen and perhaps taken across the border which the *hombracho* guards."

He looked up. Bentham's jaw had

dropped; the cigar butt was hanging loose in his fingers. "How did you know?"

Hawk shrugged. "You know, Bentham, that my grapevine straggles into many dark places. But I don't reveal sources. Any luck?"

"None!" Bentham groaned. "You know, I suppose, that the girl is the daughter of the old war-horse, General Adan Oliveros. He is still a powerful figure, though temporarily out of power, and now he is accusing the opposing faction in the coming elections, of being behind the kidnapping. They've managed to keep it quiet so far—on both sides of the border. But it's ready to erupt. There's reason to believe she's really been brought into this country, and if the Border Patrol has let them get by with that, well," he sighed, "it may mean my official neck."

"What have you done?" Hawk asked.

"Everything!" Bentham said. "Combed the underworld, set a watch on all planes, trains, busses, highways. Contacted every known stool-pigeon and scattered bribes like water. The wise ones say no known gang or smuggling ring would touch anything with so much political dynamite in it. Now I've come to you, Hawk, precisely because that grapevine of yours does straggle into so many dark places. And I see you know something about the business already."

Hawk nodded, "But I," he said, "have had the same reports. No regular mob would dare try that. I've been wondering if it might not be—well, something worked from the inside."

Bentham's brows knotted. "I can't believe it!" he said, as if arguing with himself. "I've talked to the old general, who's in town. Or rather, he's talked to me—threatens to blow the lid off if I don't get some results in the next twelve hours. I think he's honest, damn his hide, and earnest too. And if it gets to the papers, the Border Patrol will be a joke, and I—"



"All the same," Hawk cut him short, "you've had the same idea?"

"About the inside job angle?" Bentham paused. "Well, to tell the truth, I've had it dinned into me. This young aviator—Arch Walling, you've heard of him—was engaged to marry the girl, against the old general's wishes, and they were all set to elope, when the girl vanishes. But wait, I'll let you talk to him."

**H**E TOOK the phone and called a hotel. They sat smoking in silence and in a very short time Arch Walling appeared. He was a tall young man, with black hair and clipped mustache, and a graceful greyhound-leanness that made him a very picturesque figure about the local hotel lobbies. He was a well-known stunt flyer and adventurer of sorts. Now, however, he appeared to have the jitters. Introductions over, he spoke fast and nervously.

"It's like this, Mr. Melrose. The old general hates my guts, if you'll pardon my bluntness, and wants Lucia—Miss Oliveros—to marry some fat bean-merchant back home. But she agreed to elope with me anyhow in my plane. Then when I go to meet her, she's not there, and the next thing I hear is this kidnap rumor."

"And you think the old general himself—" Hawk began.

"Well," Walling said, "two and two makes four. The old man's fighting to get back into power with the next elections, and Lucia is the idol of her state. Now in addition to squelching me, if he can lay it onto his political opponents that they've kidnapped Lucia, the populace will be so fighting mad they'll sweep him in with a landslide and—"

"Have there been any ransom demands yet?" Hawk asked.

"I understand," Walling said, "that they left a note telling him to get two hundred thousand pesos together and wait for further instructions, which sounds like a stall too." He lit a cigarette with shaky fingers. "But if I just knew she was safe, if I just knew! Mr. Melrose, can't you do

something, give me something to do?"

"Brace up, Walling," Hawk told him, "I'll do what I can. Go back to your hotel now and stay sober and as calm as you can, and if I work out some approach to the problem, I'll call you in. What's your hotel and room?"

Walling told him and Hawk jotted it down. When the flyer had gone out, Bentham said, "Plenty upset, that kid." He grinned wryly. "But no more than I am. Well, Hawk, you're going to help me. I'll have a group of picked officers at my office at six, and I want you to think the matter over in the meantime, and then join us and we'll make plans together."

"Can't, tonight," Hawk said. "Sorry. Tomorrow maybe."

Bentham jumped. "But you told that kid—"

"Couldn't discourage him," Hawk said. "But after all, if the old general's at the bottom of it, what can we do?"

"Unmask him," Bentham said hotly, "and save my face anyhow!"

The phone rang. Hawk answered.

"Hunt? Yeah. Sure, I'm going there again tonight—the fourth night now. A new angle? Well, come on up." He hung up.

Bentham scowled. "Hunt? What Hunt was that?"

"Narcotics undercover man," Hawk said.

Bentham snorted. "So that's it! Turn me off to help that young shrimp with some petty dope-smuggling case, and my career, my very job—"

"He's got one too," Hawk said smiling. "Young fellow trying to get ahead. Wife and kids. Besides, his case interests me, which your political kidnapping doesn't. Hunt's on the trail of some new kind of dope never heard of before in this country—weird stuff. Unbelievable, almost. No, wait, Bentham."

The Border Patrol Director had got up, was reaching for his hat. Hawk took his arm. "Wait, *amigo*. I'm not turning you down. I simply don't see a clear angle to your case



now, and I promised Hunt. But I'll put Perez on that Oliveros business and maybe he can dig up something we can get our teeth into."

"All right," Bentham muttered coldly, and turned and went out.

Cabeza de Vaca Perez, who as usual had been eavesdropping behind the laboratory door, now burst into the room. "*Mi jefe*, you should not! Señor Bentham is a man of power." Then he paused, knowing the uselessness of such appeals to Hawk, who had now lapsed into his chair. Another thought struck the assistant and his face brightened. "But something else I hear too, *mi jefe*. When you talk to Hunt over the phone, you say, 'Sure, I go again tonight—the fourth time.' To the theater, you mean, eh? So it is not the women that interest you then, but a case?"

Hawk nodded. "A weird business," he said. "Hunt's been trying to get at certain *marijuana* sources, and he's picked up a specimen who doesn't fit into any of the usual dope-addict categories. He shadows the fellow to a room, and sees him sitting at a table staring at a gun. Hunt walks in on him, and makes some friendly remark, but the man neither answers, nor covers him with the gun either, as Hunt half expects. Hunt goes toward him but the man doesn't move, and then it occurs to Hunt that the staring maniac is just waiting for him to get close to shoot him, so he slams a right to the man's jaw. The man falls back to the floor and a cigarette tray jars off the table and a burning snipe falls in the open collar at the man's throat. Still the man lies there staring, though Hunt swears he could smell his flesh burning.

"Hunt says it gave him the creeps. He knocked the cigarette off, and still the man just stared. Hunt then yelled, 'Get up!' and the man got up. He yelled, 'Get your hat!' and the man did. Hunt had the creeps sure enough now. He said it was like meeting with a real zombie, a soulless, walking dead man. He swears he took that man to headquarters without ever laying a hand on him."

Cabeza de Vaca whistled. "I hear of such things among the *Nagual* men," he said, "when I am a child. It is a bad thought. "But, *mi jefe*, what has this to do with the Montezuma Dancers of Blas Corrido?"

Hawk lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair. "Maybe nothing," he said. "Just a hunch of mine. But from the first time I watched those dancers, their weird movements in the processions, the way they were able to hold the most difficult poses for long periods, without a muscle twitching, an eyelid batting, the impression they gave of being not living things, but dead things—ghosts—I wondered how it was done. It wasn't normal, it wasn't human. Hypnotism? I discarded that. A drug of some sort? It didn't seem to quite fit any drug I knew, but it puzzled me and I kept going back. Then, when Hunt told me—"

A KNOCK at the door interrupted him. Hawk called, "Come in," and a slight, shabby, unshaven young man, his hat low over his eyes, shuffled in. But once the door was closed, he straightened, his furtive eyes came level, his facial muscles tense.

"Can't risk it for long," he said. "I may have been followed. But I wanted to tell you our zombie came out of his trance, and after being sullen and silent a while, cracked and talked. Said he was down and out and wanted to shoot himself and heard of some weird powders that made a man insensible to pain. He bought some from a big negroid Mexican who stays in the dive he's in. He took the stuff, but then he didn't want to kill himself, or do anything but just sit and stare."

"You got some of the drug?" Hawk asked.

The undercover agent nodded, produced a folded white paper to which still clung a small amount of an orange-yellow powder. "He had only a little of it left. Our chemists can't make anything of it."

Hawk looked at the stuff. "Now



about this negroid Mexican who peddled it. There's an ugly looking giant of that description who plays the part of the Aztec priest in Blas Corrido's pageant."

"He's the man," Hunt said. "I remembered your remarks about those dancers, showed our zombie the giant's picture, and he identified him. But before arresting him, I want to get his cache. So I'm going to wait until he goes off for the performance tonight and then raid his room. I thought maybe you'd want to go along."

"You thought right," Hawk said. They arranged to meet at seven.

Hunt went out, and Hawk leaned back in his chair. "I wonder," he mused, "if we have found a modern Svengali, one who drives his puppets to superhuman performances, not by hypnotism, but by some weird, ungodly drug? Arabian Nights stuff again, eh. Head of a Cow?"

"Too much Arabian Nights," Cabeza de Vaca said. "But look, *mi jefe*, something occurs to my simple mind while Senor Bentham is talking to you. Beautiful Mexican girl is kidnapped; beautiful Mexican girl is found dead in river. No possible connection, you think?"

Hawk said: "You can be sure Bentham's kept up with anything the police have found. He was probably at police headquarters as soon as they brought that girl in, and he'd have made sure it wasn't Lucia Oliveros, you can bet. He probably forgot to mention it because he was so wrapped up in his personal problem."

He picked up the paper with the orange powder which Hunt had left and started into his laboratory.

"Go and get our tickets for the performance at the theater tonight," he told Cabeza. "If Hunt and I don't get through in time for the show, you just go and get that distracted young airman and take him with you. Maybe it will calm him, keep him from doing anything rash. And while you're out, contact Torriente and Rojo and see if they've heard any more about this Oliveros business."

For an hour Hawk puttered at the long laboratory table which bristled with microscopes and test tubes and all the latest paraphernalia for scientific crime-detection. From time to time he went to a bookcase at the back of the room, selected a book and carried it back. He consulted pharmacopoeias and chemical tomes. He made a call to a professor at the College of Mines. He came from the phone shaking his head. The orange-yellow powder completely baffled him.

He selected other books and chose an easy chair under a bridge lamp. *Secret Cults of India and Tibet* he discarded after a brief perusal of the chapter headed *Drugs. Practices of the African Witch-Men* he found more interesting.

He began to read.

He was still reading when a knock at the office door interrupted him. He laid his book aside and went to answer it. It was Sergeant O'Hara. The Irishman wore a sheepish grin. "Well, we found it," he began. "We found it on her—whatever it is. But damn your black eyes, how you can see through a layer of gold leaf is more than I—"

"What?" Hawk snapped. "What did you find?"

O'Hara was carrying a big brown envelope. "Marks on the girl's back," he said. "Tattoo marks. Away down at the waist they were, where they wouldn't show even with the scantiest gown on her. But what a girl would want to tattoo herself like that for—"

He had been pulling a big photograph from the envelope and now he laid it on the desk. Hawk bent over it, tense with interest. It was an enlargement. You could see the pore-pitted skin and against it four queer little hieroglyphics. Hawk's black eyes blinked, then squinted as flashes of yellow fire lanced under the dark lids.

O'Hara was grinning. "Now you got it," he said, "what you going to do with it? Know what they are?"

"Yes," Hawk answered.

O'Hara's jaw fell. "You're bluffin'!"



"Oh, no," Hawk answered. "They're characters from the ancient Aztec pictograph writing. I happen to have made a study of it."

"The devil!" O'Hara exclaimed. Then: "Well, will you kindly tell me—?"

"I'll tell you what each of those little figures represents," Hawk said. "The first is a mousetrap, the second is an eagle, the third is a lancet, the fourth is a hand."

"Well?" O'Hara was scratching his red hair. "And what the hell does that indicate?" Then, when Hawk didn't answer, "That ain't *all* you're going to tell me?"

"That's all," Hawk said. "I'll probably call you later."

After O'Hara had gone out muttering, Hawk sat down. Outwardly he was still composed, but inwardly he was quivering like a leashed hunting dog. And this inward thrill was the breath of life to Hawk Melrose. The son of a Cherokee oil heiress and an Oklahoma sheriff (the sheriff had died four years ago at the hands of a border mob), Hawk lived only to stalk the shadowy wolves of crime, hoping always that some lucky break would lead him eventually to his father's murderers.

Now he sat holding the crystal globe and forcing himself to concentrate. The problem now was largely one of procedure. He sat for three quarters of an hour. Then he got up, spoke briefly with O'Hara over the telephone, and then went back into a dressing room beyond the laboratory where he busied himself before a mirror with greasepaint.

**A**T SEVEN o'clock, two stooped, shabby looking men, one tall, one short, walked up the stairway to the Alameda rooms on South El Paso Street. Hunt, the undercover man, already had a room there. They went to this room on the third floor, waited a few minutes, then crept softly down the dim, dank hall to Room 347. They entered with a skeleton key.

It was dim and malodorous; clothing and shoes lay on the rumpled

bed and on the littered floor. Scraps of theatrical costume hung from nails on the wall. Hawk drew the blind, snapped on the fly-specked light-bulb, and after a survey of the room, went straight to the small, old-fashioned iron-bound trunk in one corner.

Keys from a compact black-leather kit tinkled, and presently the trunk lid came up. The two men stared. Inside was a tin coffee can, a stack of folded white papers—and something else. It looked at first almost like a living thing, like a monstrous reddish spider crouched in its web. But as Hawk lifted it out, Hunt saw that it was a root of some sort, hard as rock, of an orange-reddish color, with a mass of slim tendrils spreading in tangled cables from the main stem.

Hunt frowned. "Got any idea what it is?"

Hawk nodded. "*Kingo*," he said, "the most horrible drug of the East African Snake Men. I don't know if the Federal law mentions it, but whoever peddles this damnable stuff should be hanged."

Hunt said: "I can grab the fellow now, at the theater."

Hawk shook his head. "Show's about to start; he can't get back here now. I'd just wait until it's over. Have the place surrounded. By then I may have developed some business with Blas Corrido too. I'd just take this stuff on to headquarters, and begin posting your men about the theater."

After Hunt had gone out carrying a bundle containing the queer root and the can of orange powder, Hawk still crouched by the trunk, thinking. He was thinking of a dead girl, golden from head to foot. He knew a number of things now, but there was still the question: *why?*

Suddenly he stiffened. There was an inner door connecting this room to the next one and Hawk's roving eye had caught a peculiar glitter in

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: The *kingo* in this story is not a product of my imagination, but a real drug, unknown in civilized laboratories until a few years ago. In describing its effects I have not exaggerated, but stuck to the facts given by F. G. Carnochan, of the Smithsonian Institution, in his treatise, *Secret Empire of the Snake Men*.



the wide crack<sup>s</sup> beneath it. He was across the room in a flash, and his fingers came away from the crack with thin flakes of gold clinging to them.

In an instant he had inserted a skeleton key and softly opened the door. He waited, then he stepped in. The shade was drawn and the room was almost dark, but Hawk could see the long table in the center, could see the flat, long-haired brushes, the buffer, the flakes of gold leaf that still littered the floor. His nerves tingled. He had found, if not the actual murder-room, at least the room where the dead body of a girl had been transformed into a golden image.

He closed the door behind him quietly, took one step toward the table and halted. In that vivid flash of awareness there was only time to curse his own carelessness. Then he was ducking, was clawing for his gun as the tall shape, masked, swathed in a dark slicker, surged from the opposite closet. But there was no shot. There was just a chair hurtling through the air, crashing against his skull. Then blackness.

Hawk opened his eyes with a choking sensation in his throat, a bitter taste in his mouth. Whether he had been out for seconds or hours, he couldn't be sure, and there was a dim memory of having choked and strangled over something and there was the fact that his body seemed uninjured.

Odd. He flicked on his flash. The room was empty now, the closet door open; he was lying on the floor. Then he saw it—the spilled orange powder, the half-filled glass of water—and sudden panic jelled his blood and he began to spit. The man hadn't wanted to kill him, and he hadn't bothered to tie or gag him, and the reason was obvious: he had forced some of the *kingo* down his throat!

"Well," Hawk thought, "I don't suppose I swallowed enough to—"

Then he tried to get up and couldn't. He didn't have the will to move. The truth came to his fading faculties then and he managed to

take a pen from his pocket, to scrawl laboriously on a used envelope: *Call immediately*—

Then the pen fell from his fingers; he couldn't even write the phone number. His head fell back. The dim ceiling, its pattern of shadows, absorbed him completely. He was fully alive, fully aware of every sound—the blood pulse in his ears, the tick of his watch, occasional steps in the hall. There was nothing wrong with his limbs; they could move; he simply lacked the will to move them. The last thing he felt was a stab of pain at the knowledge of his certain failure. Then he lacked the will to think, even—will, energy, initiative, were dead. Then nothing mattered, nothing mattered at all. There was only the shadowy ceiling.

The effects of the drug left him as quickly as they had come. He jerked up, thoughts and emotions tumbling back to him with the sharpness of acid or fire. "He didn't get enough down me," was his first thought and then he looked at his watch. It was nine-thirty; he had lain there for two solid hours. Too late now!

He got up. Aside from a faint grogginess, he felt all right. He swept the room with his flash. The man had been wearing a raincoat—probably the same one he had used when they gilded the girl, to keep the gold leaf from clinging to his clothing. Fragments of the stuff covered the floor. His eye fell on an overturned can marked *Fat-Oil Gold Size*. Near the edge of the spreading oil stain was the mark of a sharp-toed shoe.

Hawk went out, walked swiftly up El Paso Street. Too late, too late, too late. A fool! They'd made a fool of the wooden Indian.

HE REACHED the theater. Incredibly, there was no excitement. He passed the front and came into the alley on which the stage entrance debouched. Amazedly he saw loitering shapes whom he recognized as Hunt's Narcotics men. Then a hand was on his arm. It was Sergeant O'Hara.



"It's about time for the curtain to go down on the intermission," he whispered. "If you've got something here, why wait?"

Hawk nodded. "Come on."

O'Hara spoke softly to the wide-eyed doorman at the stage entrance. The man opened his mouth to protest. A plainclothes man came out of the shadows and stood guard on the doorman while Hawk and O'Hara went in.

"He'll pass the word on to Hunt," O'Hara muttered. "You'd better really have something here, Hawk."

They passed into backstage confusion. From a group of startled stagehands, fat, oily-haired Blas Corrido fluttered toward them.

"Stop! You cannot—" he squealed.

O'Hara gripped his arm, growled in his ear as he propelled him toward the wings. Slow music was reaching a finale. The scene on the stage had frozen. Xalaqui, the dancer, symbol of the maize, lay on the altar, and the huge negroid Mexican in Aztec priest's garb, stood over her, a glittering obsidian knife poised. The curtain was coming down amidst a thunder of applause.

The curtain was down. Hawk stepped out; there was an automatic in his right hand. "Just hold the pose," Hawk said, in tones that rang above the din of the milling crowd beyond the curtain. He turned slightly. "Hunt?" Hunt moved up beside him. "All right, let's start herding them out. Somebody go and announce that the show's over."

THEY occupied a large back room. Hunt's Narcotics men and detectives from the Homicide Squad guarded the doors. The costumed members of the troupe sat on divans and chairs, silent, indifferent, queerly apathetic—all except the huge, negroid Mexican, who stood in an attitude of attention.

Blas Corrido was declaiming: "It is an outrage! What if I do give my dancers a certain harmless drug which makes them enter into the spirit of the thing? Could I know it

was being sold?" He paused to glare at the burly Aztec priest. "Fool, burro, *lechon!* If I know you sell the stuff, I would beat you black and blue." He appealed to the three men facing him. "I fire heem, I promise you. He have thees drug which he get from Voodoo men. I use it, but I do not sell."

"Never mind that!" Hawk cut him short. "You're being arrested, Corrido, for murder."

"Murder!" the fat Mexican shrieked. "You are not serious, señor?" But his face had gone livid with terror.

"Oh, yes," Hawk said. "For the murder of that dancer of yours whom you covered with gold leaf and inscribed with a misleading rhyme. You did that to keep her from being identified as a member of your troupe of drugged slaves." He turned to one of the masked dancing girls, seated like an image on a divan. He snapped his fingers. "Come here—you!"

Mechanically the girl rose, stepped toward them. Hawk spun her about. She stood utterly still while he pulled the waist of her scant costume lower and exposed the cream-colored skin on the small of her back. There, in small, black tattoo marks, were the curious little figures which O'Hara had photographed on the back of the dead girl.

"Great Guns!" O'Hara said. "Brands them like slaves so they can't escape him. But how did you guess, Hawk—that mousetrap and eagle stuff, and all?"

Hawk smiled, indicating each of the tiny figures in turn. "Mousetrap, eagle, lancet, hand," he said. "Makes no sense? But in the Aztec language, mousetrap is *montli*, eagle is *quanhtli*, lancet is *zo*, hand is *mailt*. Put it together, and you have approximately, *Motequanzoma*, or Montezuma, as we spell it now. It is the Aztec pictograph for the ancient king's name. These are the Montezuma Dancers. Do you see now why Blas had to cover up those tattoo marks on the dead girl's back?"

Blas Corrido was quaking. "But I



do not understand. What is all this about a dead girl? Why should I keel one of my dancers?"

Hawk didn't answer, for just then there was a commotion at the door. An excited voice was protesting, "But I can come in! I am Cabeza de Vaca Perez, of the Hawk Melrose agency."

Hawk turned, grinning. But the first figure to come through the door was the lean, haggard shape of the young airman, Arch Walling. He took two steps into the room, stopped and snarled a curse at Cabeza de Vaca, who followed him gripping a gun.

"I want to know," Walling demanded, "why this idiot has been holding me with a gun!"

Cabeza de Vaca broke in, "*Mi jefe*, I am sorry if I do wrong. I go for thees young man as you tell me, take heem to the show to distract his mind. He come, but when the show starts he get up and leave. I am worried when he does not come back. Maybe he keel heemself because of the girl. I hunt about theater, wait outside. Half hour later I catch heem coming up alley. He looks *loco*, wild. I am much afraid for heem now. I poke gun to heem; sure enough he has a gun; I take it. What can I do? Let heem go? No, I take heem into restaurant, into curtained booth, and I hold heem with gun while he beg and threaten. He must see hees friend, Blas Corrido. But I say, 'Wait till intermission.' Then I think I find you, *mi jefe*, and see what to do." He stared uncertainly at Hawk.

"You did perfectly right, Head of a Cow," Hawk said. Then to the gaping, twitching airman: "Go over there and sit down, Walling."

Walling went to a divan and sat. His hands shook so that when he tried to light a cigarette, he couldn't. Hawk stared at him keenly. The airman slumped with his feet straight out ahead of him, and suddenly Hawk's eyes slitted and his jaw went tight. He turned on Blas Corrido, his bronze face becoming abruptly hard and craggy to the point of cruelty.

"Blas," he said, "you asked me a

question which a moment ago I should have had to guess at. Now I know. And it means the electric chair for you—and some others. Heretofore I had only suspicion, but now—" He turned to one of the plainclothes men. "One of those dancing girls," he said, "lacks, I believe, the Corrido brand. I imagine it's the one who played the part of the Sacrificial Dancer. Go and see."

In utter silence the man stepped to the girl, told her to rise, examined her back. Where the other girls had been branded, her creamy flesh was bare.

"Turn her around," Hawk ordered, "and remove that mask."

THE papier maché mask came away. Revealed was the pale olive, delicate-featured face of a dark-haired girl—a face of culture and refinement, and breeding. But it was masklike now, dead and dull as a sleepwalker's. Hawk took one look at her, then faced the startled detectives, smiling. "Gentlemen," he said, "I present the Señorita Lucia Oliveros!"

The words fell like a bombshell. But before any of them could speak, Arch Walling sprang to his feet, lurched toward a window. The big fist of a plainclothes man slammed him back to the floor. Blas Corrido suddenly wilted into a chair and began to shake.

Then Hawk was standing over the airman, an almost Satanic grin on his gaunt face as he said, "You should have killed me, Walling, instead of feeding me that dope. No, I didn't know it was you then, but I've had my eye on you from the start. Your act was overdone, your accusations of General Oliveros too pat. That's why I sent Cabeza de Vaca, my favorite bloodhound, to stay with you, just in case. But you grew suspicious, you had to go back to that murder room and see if anything had been discovered. And you caught me there and took me like a greenhorn, Walling. But you should have killed me. Also, after stepping in that fat-oil, and with the floor littered with gold leaf, you should have changed your



shoes. Up in the arch of your shoe, near the heel, some of it is still clinging."

He paused. Walling was trying to get his facial muscles under control. "But you're wrong," he stammered. "I don't understand."

"Oh, yes, you do," Hawk said. "Miss Oliveros cannot speak now, because that drug has numbed her brain, made her a robot who can only dumbly obey orders or follow a routine. But when she is all right, she will talk. She will tell us, doubtless, of how, after agreeing to elope with you, she changed her mind, decided to obey her father, and of how you, enraged at losing the slice of her father's wealth you were after, decided to get it anyhow, to kidnap her and hold her for ransom."

"You probably brought her across the border in your plane. But you knew that your danger only began then. If you flew on into the interior with her, you'd certainly be missed. But where to hide her? You thought of your friend Blas Corrido and his troupe of drugged dancers. It was a brilliant stroke. The safest place to hide her would be right before the eyes of the public. You must have read Poe's story, *The Purloined Letter* once."

"We're guessing a little now. Blas may have used the scheme to smuggle aliens before. That doesn't matter. What matters is that the girl, Mitzli,

whose place in the act you decided Lucia Oliveros was to take, must have balked at the plan. My guess is that her murder wasn't deliberated, but resulted in a row in which you or Blas struck her and killed her. And now you were in a mess, with a dead girl on your hands, a girl tattooed with Corrido's mark, and a dead body's not easy to dispose of. If you threw her in the river, even weighted down, the body might be found. If you cut the tattoo marks out of the flesh, or mutilated her there, it would still leave an important clue—the fact that some identifying mark in that spot had been eradicated. Then you hit on the gold leaf, and that was brilliant. You probably had a supply for use on scenery and costumes. And it was better than paint, or anything else. Then, with the rhyme you wrote on her forehead, you could make the whole thing look like the work of a jealous maniac. Yes, it was brilliant. O'Hara can testify, I'm sure, that the stuff was hell to remove."

O'Hara nodded.

Arch Walling opened his lips to protest, but no words came, so he closed them again. Hawk turned to the others. "Well, gentlemen," he said, "there they are. Fight over them. . . . Head of a Cow, let us go. I am tired, and I've got to find Stark Bentham and assure him that international amity has been restored."

## Backache, Leg Pains may be Danger Sign

### Of Tired Kidneys—How To Get Happy Relief

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

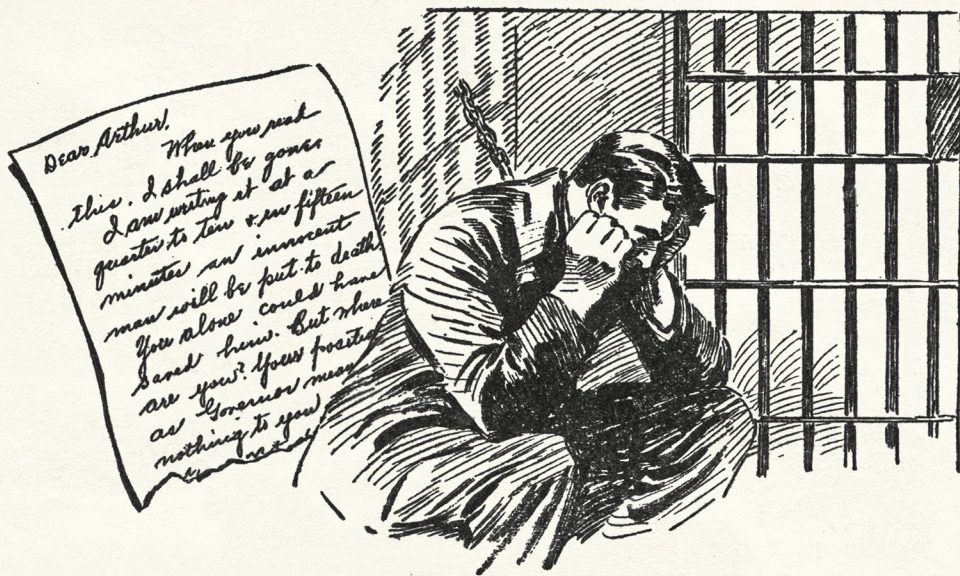
If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter

stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait. Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)





## The Forgotten Man-Killer

by Hugh B. Cave

How does a man feel when he goes to the death house—or when he kills everything that he values?

**T**HE other night I was reading a story in a magazine, and while it didn't do much to me at the time, later on I got to thinking about it and felt uncomfortable. I mean it would never go down in history as a real good story, but still it got under your skin, long after you turned to something else.

And I thought, Angelo Pucci's story is like that. Maybe I ought to tell it.

If you saw the newspapers last January, you already know a little bit about Angelo. When his brother Nicky was arrested, they put a lot about Angelo in the papers, how he played in a symphony orchestra and had four kids and was positive Nicky was innocent.

They had his picture in a couple of

times, too, but the pictures didn't do him justice. They didn't show you Angelo's round dark eyes that always looked as if they were ready to cry. They didn't show you how he would always lean forward and talk in a whisper when he had anything important to tell you.

I knew him eight or nine years, and Nicky too. They were both born in this country, though you wouldn't think so to look at them. Sometimes we'd ask them questions about Italy, about Mussolini and Ethiopia and all the rest of it. Nicky would always argue and get hot under the collar, sometimes for Mussolini, sometimes against him. But you never could get a rise out of Angelo.

"All you think about," he'd say, "is politics. You think of Italy, you think of guns and uniforms and foolish men yelling in big loud voices. Me, I think of—"

I couldn't give it to you the way he said it, so I'd better leave it alone.



But there was music in it. You could hear birds singing and smell grapes, and see how blue the water is in the Mediterranean.

The night they arrested Nicky for the murder of that nurse, Angelo was playing in the orchestra. He didn't hear about it until he got home and found a couple of cops at the house firing questions at Mama. Then he rushed down to the police station to talk to his brother, but they wouldn't let him.

For the next three or four weeks Angelo didn't play in any orchestras. He pretty near went crazy trying to find someone to help him. The papers were full of the murder, and the consensus of opinion around town was that Nicky was guilty.

Maybe you remember some of the details. This girl, Anna DiMasi, had gone out steady with Nicky for three or four months, and they were planning on getting married. She was a nurse at the city hospital, and Nicky drove a truck for a laundry.

The night they found her dead, she was in her own car, way out on a country road, and she was strangled. Nicky swore he wasn't out with her that night. He said he was drinking around town, feeling miserable because Anna was starting to go out with another guy, a fellow named Anthony Stasio. He said he hadn't seen her since the night before, but he couldn't prove it. He couldn't even prove he'd been around drinking in various barrooms. Plenty of people must have seen him, but no one would come forward and say so.

On the other hand, this Anthony Stasio had a flock of friends to swear that he'd been over to the New Social Club that night. At least half a dozen men had seen him in there, off and on during the evening, and by piecing their testimony together he established an alibi that was airtight.

At least, it sounded airtight to the police, and with Anthony Stasio eliminated, Nicky didn't have a chance. They said he killed the girl in a fit of anger because she was going out with someone else.

Angelo hired the best lawyer in the city, but the lawyer didn't have much hope. "This isn't a case of who murdered Nicky's sweetheart," he said. "It's a case of who is going to be Governor when the people go up to vote at the next election."

I had heard the same story from several politicians around town, and it seemed a terrible thing that Nicky would be sent to the electric chair just to put the District Attorney, Mr. Philip Andrel, in the Governor's chair. We told Mr. Andrel it was a terrible thing right to his face, when we went to his office to talk to him just before the trial. He didn't like it. He got mad and ordered us out. But it was the truth, just the same. He wanted to be Governor, and he knew it would help him if he could prove Nicky guilty, because as I said before the majority of the people thought Nicky was guilty.

The jury said he was, too, and the date for the execution was set at March ninth.

**I** DIDN'T see much of Angelo after that. He should have been in the care of a doctor, because he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, but instead of that he worked like a Trojan to uncover some kind of new evidence which would enable Nicky's lawyer to demand a new trial. The first of March came around and Angelo looked ghastly. He had lost around twenty pounds and was getting absolutely no sleep. Whenever he'd see me he'd say, with tears in his eyes:

"Luigi, do you think there is any hope? Do you?"

And I would say, "Yes, Angelo, I do." But I didn't.

So the ninth of March drew nearer, and Nicky's lawyer begged the Governor to grant a stay of execution, and the Governor said he would think it over. The Governor said if we could only find some new shred of evidence, some new angle to work on, he would grant a stay of execution in a minute, but as things stood now, he wasn't sure.



If you've read the papers, you know a lot about Governor Nason, and you know a lot about his wife. His wife is beautiful. I've seen her myself, and I honestly think she is the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on. She's younger than he is, of course. She can't be over twenty-six, whereas he is around forty-five. His sun rises and sets in her. Or rather, it used to.

According to the newspapers, he met her when he was traveling in England. Traveling in England was one of his favorite pastimes.

I can't tell you much about Governor Nason himself, except that he was always in the Blue Book and always had a lot of money and never had to work for a living. They said when he first went into politics that he did it for the sake of the people, not because he had political ambitions or wanted to make money; and maybe that's right, but he was a terrible Governor. Every time any important thing came up, he would be off on somebody's yacht, fishing, or else he would be visiting with somebody in Miami. And after he got married to Myrtle—the girl he met in England—he was impossible.

After he married her, he said he wouldn't want to be Governor next term, because it took up too much of his time.

So anyway, on March eighth something happened. Angelo found a man who had seen Nicky the night of the murder. This man said Nicky was drunk in the back room of a barroom on Haynes Avenue from nine o'clock that night until the place closed up at two in the morning. He wrote it down on paper and signed it, and Angelo was a changed man. Angelo rushed to the lawyer with it, and the lawyer said: "This will save him! When the Governor sees this, we'll get a stay!"

The lawyer sent Angelo home, because he looked awful. "You go home and stay there and take things easy," he said, "and leave this to me. And don't worry." And he promised to get in touch with Angelo as soon as he saw the Governor.

Well, I went over to see Angelo about eight o'clock the next evening, because at that time I didn't know about the paper this man signed and I thought Angelo would be needing a friend. They were going to burn Nicky at ten o'clock.

I found him walking up and down, up and down like a crazy man, all through the house. He should have been in the hospital, he was so sick and pale-looking, and so nervous. He kept pushing his fingers up into his hair—those same long fingers that could make a violin sing so beautifully—and he would stand still and close his eyes as if something were hurting him inside, and then he would begin walking again. Mrs. Pucci was there, but she just stared at him without saying anything.

So Angelo told me about the paper the man signed, and I said: "Well, what are you worried about, then?"

And he said: "All day long I don't hear from the lawyer, Luigi! He said he would let me know, but there is no word from him! I try to get him at his office. I call him again and again at his home! Where is he? Why does he not call me?"

"You let me try," I said, and I went to the telephone and called the lawyer's office, and got no answer, and called his home. His wife answered.

"I don't know *where* he is," she said. "All night long he has not come home or even telephoned."

I went back to Angelo and put my hands on his arms. "There is nothing to be upset about," I said, to soothe him. "You have the best lawyer there is, and he will not make any mistakes." But I looked at the clock and the clock said half past eight, and at ten they would take Nicky into that awful room and kill him.

**P**RETTY soon the clock said nine, and the three of us were just sitting there, waiting. Angelo was too sick to pace the floor any more. He was too sick even to talk, and when I tried to cheer him up the words sounded queer, and I could see he was not listening, so I too was silent.



The clock said nine-thirty, and I called the lawyer's home again, but he was not there yet. From the lawyer's wife I tried to find out if the execution would be stayed. She did not know.

We sat and watched the clock. At ten minutes to ten Mrs. Pucci made a little sobbing sound and threw herself down flat on the sofa, with her face pressed into a pillow. I knew what was wrong. The face of the clock was hurting her, and the ticking of it was like a hammer beating against her brain. I felt sorry for her, but what could I do?

Angelo went to her and said, "Mama," very softly, and put his arm around her. And after a while it was ten o'clock, and then half past ten, and the telephone was ringing.

I answered the telephone myself, and it was the lawyer, and by the sound of his voice I knew Nicky was dead. I beckoned to Angelo to come and talk to him, but Angelo shook his head. He was holding Mama in his arms and he was crying. Not crying much, but just crying. So the lawyer talked to me instead of Angelo, and he said:

"I did all I could. Ever since Angelo handed me the paper I've been running around like a madman, trying to locate the Governor. You'd think he would stay around town at a time like this—but no, I could not find him. And no one else would listen to me or even look at the paper."

I put the phone down and told Angelo what the lawyer had said, and Angelo just stared at me. Those hands of his, which can make a violin sing so wonderfully, opened and closed a few times, and a queer look came into his eyes, but he said nothing. After a while his mother went upstairs.

Angelo and I sat there, not saying anything, until around one o'clock in the morning, and then Angelo stood up. I saw his hands opening and closing again, and I saw that queer look still in his eyes, only more so.

"Where are you going?" I said quickly.

"To see the Governor."

I argued with him, but it made no difference. I put my hands on his arms and tried to hold him, but even that made no difference. He would not struggle with me. He just waited until I released him and then he walked to the door. So I went with him, because I was afraid to let him go alone.

IT WAS about two o'clock when we arrived at the Governor's house, but there was a light shining in the front room, downstairs, and when we went up the steps and rang the bell, we heard footsteps coming along the hall. The footsteps were very slow and shuffly, as if the person making them had just been awakened.

The door opened and the Governor was standing there, looking at us. He just looked at us for a little while and then he said: "Oh. It's you."

There was something wrong with him. He was fully dressed but he looked as if he had been sleeping in his clothes. His hair was all this way and that, and his face was sick-looking, and he had been crying. He looked very old.

"What do you want?" he said.

Angelo said, "I will show you what I want," and pushed him back from the threshold and walked inside. I followed, saying to Angelo: "Be careful now. Please!" But the Governor did not seem to mind being pushed around. He did not seem to mind anything.

We went into the living room, where the light was, and Angelo said to the Governor: "Sit down, please."

The Governor sat, but Angelo remained standing, with his legs wide apart and his hands clenched.

"I think you know why I come here," Angelo said.

The Governor stared at him. "Yes. Because of your brother."

"Tonight—they killed him."

"Yes," the Governor said in a voice you could hardly hear.

"And where were you tonight, please?" Angelo said.

"I—I was—" The Governor stopped staring at Angelo, and stared instead



at a piece of paper which was lying on the table. I picked the paper up and it smelled of perfume, and there was writing on it. The writing was very small and neat.

It said: "Dear Arthur . . . When you read this, I shall be gone. I am writing it at a quarter to ten, and in fifteen minutes an innocent man will be put to death. You alone could have saved him. But where are you? Your position as Governor means nothing to you. You joke about it. But you will never again joke about it to me, for I cannot continue to live with a murderer. Nicky Pucci's lawyer showed me positive proof this afternoon that Nicky is innocent—yet because of you, the poor boy will die in a few minutes. This is goodbye. Myrtle."

That was what the letter said, and after I read it to myself I passed it to Angelo, and Angelo read it. The Governor sat there like a dead man, staring at us. Looking at him, I could see how terribly miserable he was. How alone. The thing he loved most in the world had gone away from him.

Angelo finished reading the letter, and a queer look came into his face. To the Governor he said: "Where were you tonight?"

"Away," the Governor said heavily. "Buying a house—for her. A house she has always loved and wanted. And now . . ." There were tears in his eyes and in a way, a very small way, I felt sorry for him.

"She will come back," I said.

He shook his head. "You don't know her. She is gone. I do not even know where to find her."

Angelo said: "You do not even know where to find her. That is too bad. I know where to find Nicky." His voice was bitter, but he was not looking at the Governor. He had opened the perfumed note and was reading something inside it. I stepped closer and read it over his arm.

It said: "I am going to New York, and will stay there a few days before taking the boat to England. If you have anything to say to me, Arthur—

if you can convince me that I am wrong in my judgment of you—you can reach me at our usual hotel. If I do not hear from you in a few hours, you will never see me again."

The Governor saw that we were reading something. He stood up, and there was a wild, feverish kind of eagerness in his face. "What is it?" he said. "Is there something I haven't read? Is there?"

He saw that there was. He tried to snatch the note from Angelo's fingers, but Angelo was too quick for him and pushed him away. Angelo pushed him so hard he staggered against the chair and fell into it.

"Yes," Angelo said, "there is something more."

"Let me have it!" the Governor gasped.

"Tonight," Angelo said, "they killed my brother for something he did not do. He is gone—and so is your wife. When you give me back my brother, I will give you back your wife. That is fair enough, isn't it?"

With that, he held a match to a corner of the note.

The Governor made a choking, sobbing sound and rushed at him, and Angelo again pushed him away, this time so violently that the Governor fell and lay in a sprawled, sobbing heap on the floor. He lay there, reaching up with one hand for the note, and Angelo held the note and let it burn—let it burn to a crisp and then dropped it and ground it with his heel into the carpet.

And that is all. I wish there were more, but perhaps you will think about it later, the way I did with that story in the magazine. Only that was just a story, I suppose, and this—well, if you saw the papers about a week after they killed Nicky Pucci, you remember reading how Nicky's lawyer proved too late that Nicky was innocent, and how the Governor committed suicide when people began calling *him* a murderer. They said he could not bear the shame of it. But I do not think so. I think he could not bear losing his wife.



# THINGS TO COME

THIS magazine was launched last fall with the idea that there was room, in an already overcrowded field, for a monthly which would publish only crime fiction of a better class. We believed that there were many detective story fans who were tired of cut-and-dried formulas, who wanted fresh, original tales of mystery of varied types; and we believed that these fans were numerous enough to support a magazine which would never "pad out" its issues with cheap and shoddily written stories.

Even the writers, a notoriously cynical group, were doubtful at first. Too idealistic to be true, they said. Nevertheless the more courageous of them fell to with a will, and now that a first anniversary is approaching, they are rubbing their eyes in wonder and planning better stories with new enthusiasm.

Their revitalized attitude will be apparent in early issues. Hugh B. Cave is busy on an insurance murder novel, which, judging from the first half which arrived in the office today, will double the following he created with **Rifles at Dawn**. Norbert Davis, author of **String Him Up!** is shaping a book-length mystery with a vivid and dramatic setting, the Mississippi River. John K. Butler (who wrote **The Black Widow**) is concocting another long one featuring a character even more interesting than Flag Rafferty. Dale Clark is giving the

finishing touches to a novel about **The Perfect Cop**. And we are still negotiating with Cleve F. Adams for his next book-length, but it'll probably feature Lieutenant Shannon and his sassy girlfriend, Frances McGowan.

The regulars are all in there fighting—and we've some husky recruits coming

up, too. There will be novelettes by D. L. Champion and Edwin Truett, whose first stories appeared in **Double Detective**. Remember Champion's **The Chained Dog** and Truett's **Murder Yet to Come?**

John H. Knox will have more adventures of Hawk Melrose along the Mexican border, and H. Randolph Peacock brings back Bibber Bascomb the cartoonist in as bright and intriguing a novelette as you're likely to read in years. Dwight V. Babcock, who collaborated with Norbert Davis in a short story recently, joins the ranks with a novelette of his own. There'll be another by Roger Torrey in which the leading character is a gambler—and Torrey, believe you us, knows

his subject when he writes about gamblers. Cornell Woolrich will tell one of the most absorbing stories of his career, in his own inimitable style—a novelette of a youngster who literally signed his life away.

All in all, there'll be plenty to tickle everyone's story palate in the fall issues of **Double Detective**. You can't afford to miss 'em.

—THE EDITORS

## NEXT MONTH

### PATTERN OF MURDER

by Paul Ernst

A book-length novel of the exciting career of a criminologist whose only experience was in theory, and who suddenly found himself caught in a real-life mystery. An eerie case in which a skeleton is an important member of the cast.

### THE EDUCATION OF A KILLER

by Hugh B. Cave

A startlingly different novelette of a youngster who was born to a life of mayhem.

### THE RIDDLE OF THE HAND OF GLORY

by John H. Knox

Hawk Melrose returns to expose a spiritualistic medium racket.

### The SECRET of PRISONER J-45109

by Lawrence A. Keating

### FOURTEEN ODD

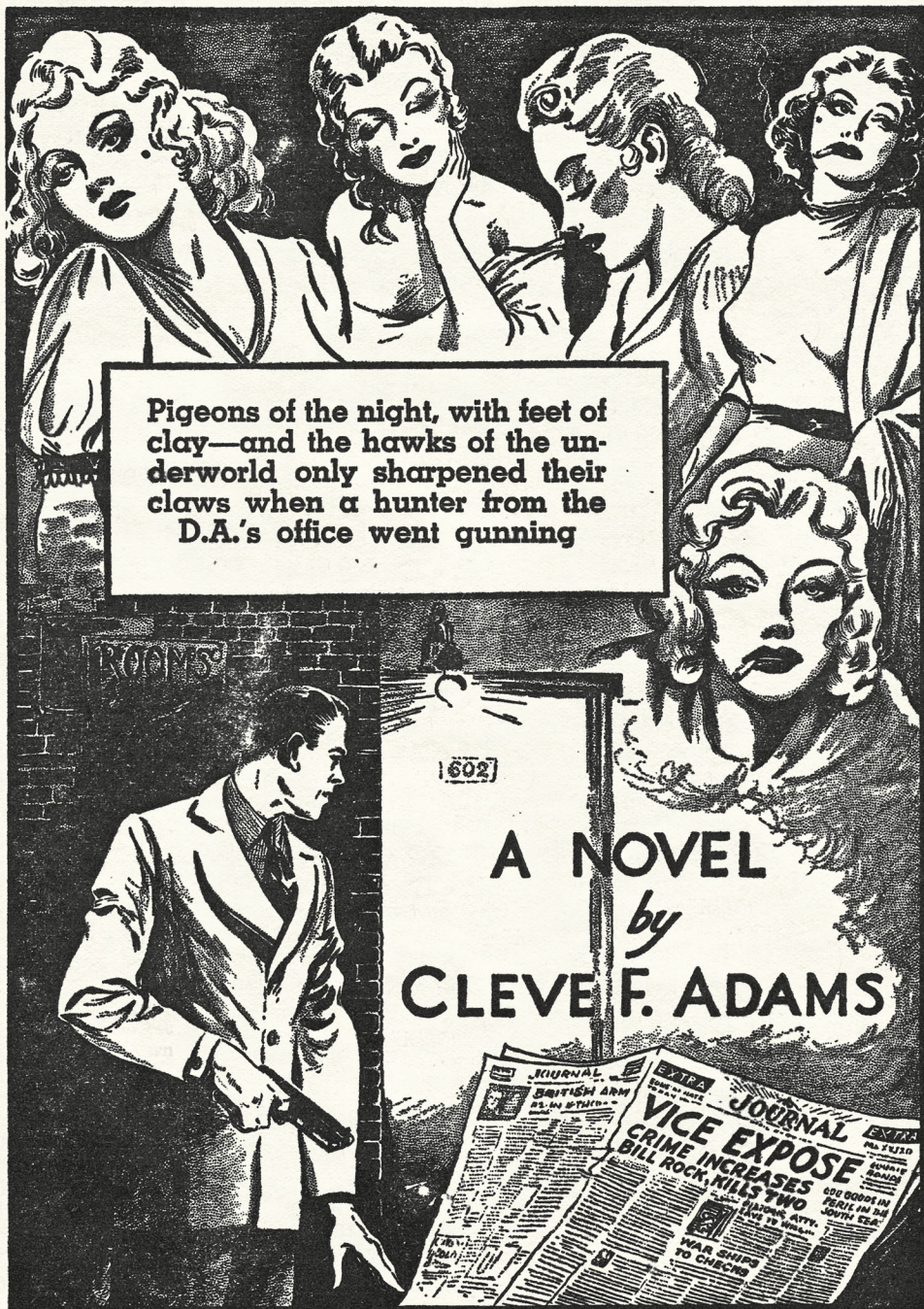
by Edwin Truett

And Others

## DOUBLE DETECTIVE



# SONG HATE





# Song of Hate

## CHAPTER I Burlesque Backfire

**R**OCK had a nice eye for a well-turned leg, but he had an objective mind, preferring just one pair of legs at a time instead of a whole forest of them. The chorus of the Frolics left him cold. He was in a third row aisle seat and he hadn't even bothered to take off his overcoat because he didn't expect to stay very long. Snooping around cheap burlesque houses wasn't his idea of the way to tackle a vice probe. He sulked, watching the mechanical gyrations of the morons who made up the chorus. A couple of tons of beef, faces either vacuous, or painfully concentrated on the necessity of keeping step, or wearing simpering smiles which were even worse. Like the legs, the faces were all cut from the same general pattern. This, Rock thought, must be where all the little girls go, whose

mamas train them to be child stars instead of normal human beings.

There was a girl in the second line, fourth from the end, who looked as though she might be different. Her eyes met Rock's for an instant over the footlights. They were dark eyes, intelligent, and she didn't smile at him like the others. If anything her mouth was faintly sneering. He felt vaguely uncomfortable, wondering if she thought he was there from choice.

The orchestra blared the finale to the number and the gals traipsed off like marionettes on strings. Rock tried not to listen to the male singer who followed, but it was pretty difficult because the guy was using a portable mike and they must have put amplifiers under every seat. He looked around the house, was surprised to find a lot of fairly decent-looking people. Not all baldheads, either. There were young couples, boys and gals around eighteen or twenty, and most of the boys had a feverish look in their eyes, eager, intent on the stage.

The male singer finally convinced himself and everybody else that he couldn't hit high C any more and gave it up and retired to the sanctuary of the wings. Rock suspected that it was this same guy's voice, using another microphone, which announced, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, now we give you that delicious, that de-lovely, enchanting personality, Miss Maisie Reeves."

Maisie came out and sang a song which no one listened to





Everybody clapped. Everybody but Rock. Maisie came out and sang a song which nobody listened to, and went through some suggestive bits of pantomime, and finally used her zippers, and Rock might have gotten a thrill if she'd just had stockings on. None of the chorus wore stockings either, and to an aesthete a leg without a stocking is no more good than a last season's goal post.

Maisie folded herself coily into a velvet back-drop, and this was replaced by a street-drop and a couple of alleged comedians came out. They were plenty raw. Rock, a lover of good clean dirt, felt slightly sick. He looked around, to see how the other customers were taking it, and found that with everybody else it seemed to be going over big. He waited till the act was over before he moved, though. Then, to a fanfare of music from the orchestra pit, he got out of his seat and went up the aisle.

An usher with a face the color of old leather and the eyes of a hop-head spoke to him from a mouth corner. "What's the matter, pal, donya like the show?"

"Sure, it's okay."

"You oughta drop in for the mid-night some Saturday. They really go to town on Saturdays."

"I'll remember that," Rock said. He went out to the lobby and around through a smelly passageway to the stage door. A guy that looked like a stir-bug if Rock had ever seen one was acting as doorman. He looked at Rock's clothes. "Who'd you wanna see, pal?"

"There's a girl in the second row," Rock said. "Fourth from the end."

The old guy made up his mind that Rock's clothes were too good for Main street. "Visitors ain't allowed, mister. You could maybe wait around outside."

"Unh-unh," Rock said. "I come of a very impatient family. We never were any good at waiting." He took out his identification card.

"Oh, a dick, hunh? What's the beef?"

"No beef. I just want to see a gal. Do I see her?"

The old guy opened the door. "Ask for Laura. She's the fourth from the end."

Rock went in, buttoning his coat because he had the impression that if he brushed against anything no cleaner on earth could do anything about it. Another stripper was just coming off stage. She looked at Rock as if he were a step-ladder. He said, "I still think you ought to wear stockings. Black ones."

The door of the chorus dressing room was open and a few stragglers were being fitted. Rock saw the girl he was looking for, crooked a finger. She came over, the faint sneer on her lips more pronounced than ever.

He said, keeping his voice low, "I'd like to talk to you. Some place else."

"So what am I supposed to do—clap hands?" She was older than he'd thought, close up. The paint stood out on her face in layers, but the eyes were the same.

He said, patiently for him, "I'm a dick, sister. There'd be some dough in it for you." He watched her eyes get big and round and scared and then he realized that she wasn't looking at him any more. She was staring over his shoulder. He turned.

The guy was a big gorilla. He was in his shirt sleeves, his vest unbuttoned over a fat paunch, and he wore a derby far back on his head. He didn't bother to take the cigar out of his mouth, just talked around it.

"So who let you in?"

"I just walked in," Rock said.

"Well, you can just walk out again. On your way, mug."

"Go away," Rock said. "Crawl back under your stone with the rest of your kind. I'm talking to a lady."

He turned to find the lady and she wasn't there any more, and then the guy with the derby hit him behind the ear. Rock took a dive into the dressing room, right among all the legs in the world, and all the gals screamed mechanically. He got to his feet and brushed himself off. Then he looked at the guy with the derby and made a fist of his right hand. The guy looked at the right hand, which was his mistake, because Rock was left-handed, and so Rock hit him with



the left, right on the button. The derby galloped out across the stage, embarrassing another stripper no end, but the guy didn't go after it. He couldn't.

Rock looked around at the ring of faces, the comedians and strippers and chorines, the grips and electricians. He said in a discouraged voice, "Well, I guess he hasn't got any friends."

Nobody said anything to this. He didn't see the girl Laura around and he thought probably he hadn't been getting anywhere with her anyway, so he picked up his hat and put it on and started back along the passage. A hand came out of nowhere and pushed a slip of paper at him. He took it, not looking around.

Presently he was out on Main Street again, among all the garish lights and noise. The smell of stale liquor and steaming hot dogs made the air heavy, hard to breathe. He caught a cab, feeling that the most important thing in the world was a bath.

**T**HE clock in City Hall tower said it was just nine. Rock paid off his hacker and climbed the steps of the Hall of Justice. There was quite a crowd still around. He went through the lobby, nodding at an acquaintance here and there, and rode the night elevator up to the third. Lights were still burning in the district attorney's private office. Rock went in without knocking.

Morgan McLeod, the D.A., was pacing the floor, dictating, and Karen Lacey, his confidential secretary, was taking it direct on the typewriter. Karen was something pretty special in the way of confidential secretaries. She was also something pretty special to Bill Rock, though to date this hadn't seemed to mean a great deal to her.

McLeod stopped pacing and looked at Rock. The district attorney was a tall man, tall and slender and straight as a ramrod. He made a fine figure in a courtroom. He had crisp white hair and clean-looking gray

eyes, a little hard, perhaps, but then you can't be a softie and a prosecutor at the same time. Rock wished he looked as well in his clothes as McLeod did.

The D.A. said, "All right, Miss Lacey, that will be enough for tonight. Sorry to have kept you so late."

Karen ripped the copy from the machine, put it with some other loose sheets and locked them in the small private safe. Rock watched her with his warm-looking eyes. She had everything, this gal. Breeding and looks and a competent, straight-thinking mind. She was addicted to man-tailored suits and crisp white turnover collars and cuffs, but even in these you'd never forget she was a woman.

McLeod's voice sounded harsh without the clatter of the typewriter. "Well, Rock?"

Rock took his eyes off Karen's dark hair. "I didn't find out any more than you or anybody else could have."

"Is it as bad as your brother-in-law says?"

Rock's brother-in-law ran a column in the Journal, and the Journal was given to exposés. The district attorney seemed to think that this was all Rock's fault.

"I can't help what Corrigan does," Rock said. "Or the Journal. In this case, though, they're right. The burlesque houses are rotten."

McLeod's mouth made a thin hard line. "All right, we'll clean them up."

"Will we?" Rock's eyes were cynical. "They've been cleaned up before but it don't seem to last. Same with all the rest of the lousy racket. Every time the Journal or some other sheet lifts the edge a little, what happens? Why, we have a few raids here and there, and the town is closed up tighter than a drum for a week or two, and then blah, it begins all over again. Clean it up? Not by trimming the outer edges, you won't."

"We prosecute every case the vice squad brings us."

"Sure you do." Rock watched Karen moving around, straightening things on McLeod's big desk.



The D.A. took to pacing again. Finally he went over and stood by the windows, looking out at the lights of the city. "It's a bad time to start trouble," he said presently. "A bad time."

Rock shrugged. "Any time's a bad time."

"The vice squad—"

"I read somewhere that if there was vice and a vice squad in the same town you only had one guess as to what was going on. And if you think there isn't vice, just ask any cab driver. He'll be glad to show you around."

McLeod turned. His lean face looked older, a little haggard, but he'd made up his mind. "All right, do you want the assignment?"

Rock grinned. "It would be interesting, at least."

"And dangerous," Karen said.

McLeod smiled for the first time. "Rock won't be the only one in danger." His gray eyes got a faraway look. "I remember once, on a deer hunt, I started a little slide, coming down the side of a mountain. It turned out to be quite an affair. They were days digging me out." He sighed, probably thinking, as Rock was, that there were some slides you never did get dug out of.

Rock said, "Well, I'll try to shut up that brother-in-law of mine for a day or two. Give you a sort of breathing spell." He looked at Karen, who was shrugging into her topcoat. "You going my way?"

"Which way are you going?"

"I'm headed for a steak. One of Felipe's. With mushrooms and just the faintest touch of garlic."

She wrinkled her nose, debating. "The garlic does it," she decided finally. He held the door for her, looked back. "Good-night, chief."

"Good-night," McLeod said.

## CHAPTER II Hot Spot

**FELIPE'S**, from the street, was just a hole in the wall. You went through a sort of passage with a



newsstand on one side and a cigar stand on the other in order to get to the big, barnlike room behind. Felipe made no pretense of dogging it for the tourist trade. He catered to people who liked to eat and didn't care whether the silverware was sterling or pewter. There was sawdust on the floor, so you never felt embarrassed if you spilled something. There was a long bar running down one side of the room. The rest was just tables. There was no music.

Day or night you'd find a crowd in Felipe's. Newspaper men made it their hangout. Cops, lawyers, bail bond brokers and politicians all met on common ground. Any time you wanted anybody and he wasn't in his office you went to Felipe's. The waiters were noted for their cauliflower ears.

Rock piloted Karen through the crush at the entrance and they had Martinis standing. Somebody touched Rock's elbow as he was finishing his drink. It was Lieutenant Nick Baudino, skipper of the vice squad. Baudino was big, very fat, yet he didn't give you the impression of being flabby. He had greasy-looking olive skin and tight-curling black hair parted in the exact middle. His eyes looked as though he might have chronic malaria. The pupils were jet and the whites had a yellowish cast. He was invariably chewing on a toothpick.



"I hear you had a little trouble over at the Frolics tonight."

"You certainly get around," Rock said.

Baudino didn't remove the toothpick, didn't take off his hat when he looked at Karen. "You'd better keep an eye on your boy friend. He's hitting the burlesque houses. No telling what he'll be doing next."

Karen deliberately mispronounced his name. "Thank you for the tip, Mr. Bawdy-no."

"Hah-hah," he said. "That's very funny." He looked at Rock. "This is just a friendly warning, William. Lay off the Frolics and the other houses. They're as clean as anybody wants them. We're even making the gals wear brassières."

"Unh-hunh," Rock said. "I noticed that. Cellophane, aren't they?"

Baudino grinned his tight, small-mouthed grin. "The ordinance don't specify what the brassières should be made of."

"Make a note of that," Rock told Karen. "Maybe McLeod could have that ordinance changed." He looked over Baudino's shoulder at a table in the far corner. His sister Gerry and Pat Corrigan, her husband, were just ordering. "I think the air would be better somewhere else, hon."

Baudino's toothpick bobbed. "Any kind of air is better than none, William. Especially if you want to keep on breathing. Think it over." He turned away, scuffing sawdust with his big feet as he crossed the room.

Karen's gray eyes were dark with apprehension. "What did he mean by that, Bill? What happened over at the Frolics?"

Rock took her arm. "Nothing to worry about, hon. I just bopped a guy, is all."

"Bill, you didn't!"

"Well," he said, grinning reminiscently, "he bopped me first." They were at the Corrigan's table now. "Hello, mugs."

**H**IS sister said, "Hooray, the oracle speaks. And says nothing." She was a pert little thing,

redheaded, smartly dressed. Rock's mother had let herself go after being licked in an argument over Bill with Bill's old man. She'd named the daughter Geraldine. Gerry pushed out a chair for Karen. "It's Miss Lacey, isn't it? I have such a hard time keeping track of Bill's women."

"You little hellcat," Rock said. He looked at Karen. "Don't mind her manners, hon. She hasn't any. She thinks it's smart to have a nasty mind and nobody's ever had time to tell her different. Now if I were Pat, here—"

Pat Corrigan said, "You had her before I did." He grinned amiably at Karen, not rising. "Bill's right, though, Miss Lacey. Gerry's a hellcat and no mistake." He was tall, gangling, loose-jointed, a couple of years younger than Rock. He had a horse face and nondescript, dun-colored hair, and he was sloppy about his clothes, always broke, always mildly lushed. A grand guy, though, and crazy about his wife. Understanding brown eyes, soft and wistful as a setter's, regarded Rock's frown. "What did Baudino say to you, Bill?"

Rock sat down. "Never mind Baudino. What I want to talk about is you and that mud-slinging column of yours."

His sister bridled. "You leave my hero alone, you big brute. He writes what O'Melveny pays him to write." She wrinkled her pert little nose at Karen. "The only thing is, he isn't paid enough. By the time I collect his check and pay back what he's borrowed during the week there's hardly enough left to feed the children. It's lucky we haven't any."

Rock scowled at her. She winked at Karen. "Isn't he handsome when he scowls like that? Don't you love those little touches of gray at his temples? They make him look so—so distinguished. Or is it extinguished?"

Rock shrugged resignedly as their waiter came up. Ordering, he looked around at the nearby tables. There were a lot of people he knew, very few he could call friends. A district attorney's dick is not exactly in an



enviable spot, being, you might say, in that category which is neither fish, flesh nor fowl. The city cops resent him; the sheriff's office considers him a trouble-maker. The only reason for his being is that the D.A. needs evidence to convict; the kind of evidence that can't be shot full of holes; the kind that isn't always forthcoming when the arresting officers are careless—or worse. It's not a pleasant job, and for that reason the pay is higher than most and the expense account is unlimited. Rock sometimes wished he'd chosen coal-heaving as a profession.

The waiter went away. Karen and Gerry seemed to be getting on rather well together. Corrigan grinned at Rock over the rim of his highball glass. "So I've been annoying your boss?"

"And me," Rock said. His eyes glowed darkly, not warm-looking any more, but resentful. "Maybe it's true what Gerry says, that O'Melveny tells you what to write and you write it. I don't think so. You write as though you meant it, mug, and I've always given you credit for being honest."

Corrigan spilled liquor down the front of his shirt, taking a bow. "Thank you too much, my fraan." His brown eyes were friendly, alert. The rest of him looked drunk as a boiled owl, horsily waggish.

"Well, then," Rock continued, "you ought to know better than to pick on McLeod. He's not responsible for conditions. All he can do is prosecute on the evidence submitted."

"What's he got you for? And the rest of the staff?"

"To get holeproof evidence after an arrest is made. Can we help it if the arrests are the dime-a-dozen kind?"

"O'Melveny thinks you can. He thinks that if you went far enough you might really turn up something that wasn't a dime a dozen. I admit that O'Melveny doesn't like McLeod; that he opposed his election; but just the same I've got to agree with him on that."

"I don't trust O'Melveny."

"Neither do I," Corrigan said surprisingly. "So far, though, he hasn't asked me to tell anything but the truth. And that's bad enough. There used to be a time when you didn't see anything in night court but a lot of tramps. Now there are young kids coming in, girls from good families." He lifted a finger in salute at someone behind Rock. "That old gal could tell plenty if she would."

ROCK turned. The woman just coming in was a Mae West character come to life, but a little taller and more slender. Diamond Annie, they called her up and down the Rialto. You saw her in a box at the races; in the best hotels; getting in or out of her eighteen-thousand-dollar limousine to shop in the most exclusive shops along the Boulevard. Rumor credited her with millions. Rumor didn't say how she had got them.

She was always beautifully gowned; always she wore diamonds in profusion. Her silver-white hair, done high on her head, like a crown, said she was sixty. Her skin and her eyes and her figure said she couldn't be a day over forty. Men liked to be seen with her, though they rarely asked her out to the house for dinner. She had given Rock the wrist watch he was wearing.

Corrigan's eyes rested on the wrist watch. Rock flushed. Corrigan said, "Why don't you ask her some time, Bill?"

Rock said, keeping his voice low as a hint for Corrigan to do the same, "Maybe I will. McLeod has given me the sign to go ahead."

"Glory be!"

Rock nodded, not happily. "So lay off the chief for a while, will you? He's got a fight on his hands."

Corrigan drank thirstily. "You watch your step, Bill."

"And you watch yours," Rock said. "It's a wonder to me you haven't been killed already."

They pretended to be very gay after that, joining the girls in a toast to crime, and after that in a toast



to Felipe's twenty-four ounce steaks. Rock only turned once to look at Diamond Annie. She had two men with her now. One was Giles O'Melveny, publisher and managing editor of the Journal, Pat Corrigan's boss. O'Melveny was a small man, square-shouldered, compact. His red face and close-cropped mustache gave him a faintly military air. His eyes had all the warmth of chilled steel. He pretended not to notice that Corrigan was in the same room with him.

The other man was a stranger to Rock. He thought he remembered seeing him around, but he wasn't an habitu   of Felipe's. He was tall, very good-looking in a blond robust way. You had an idea he'd know all about polo ponies. Rock asked Corrigan if he knew who the guy was and Pat said he didn't.

They finished eating and had a brandy with their coffee. Pat and Gerry said they were going on later to some kind of a bust in Hollywood. Rock, looking at his watch, saw that it was after eleven and he wanted to get back downtown around midnight to meet the intelligent looking chorine from the Frolics.

He stood up. "Time to go home, Karen." She rose and he held her coat for her. The irrepressible Gerry said, "Don't let him show you his etchings, darling. He hasn't any."

Karen smiled. "I don't think I'm in any immediate danger. We just happen to work in the same office." They said good-night all around and Rock and Karen went out to the street. It had begun to rain.

In the cab, going across town, Rock stayed carefully in his own corner. Not that Karen held herself aloof; it was just some intangible something about her that made him know she wasn't susceptible to the usual line. Her fine, clear-cut profile was pre-occupied, a little strained.

Presently he said, keeping his voice matter-of-fact, "You know that I love you, Karen?"

"I know that you think you do." She didn't look at him. "Perhaps it's just a sense of frustration."

He touched her ungloved hand. It was cold. He said roughly, "See here, if you've heard things about me—I mean things like that nit-wit sister of mine intimated—well, this is different. The others were just women. You're Karen."

"Yes," she said, "I'm Karen. The point is, Karen who?"

He sat up straight. Her face was definitely strained now, cold as marble. "I've never told you, Bill. I've never told anyone. The fact remains, however, that I don't know who I am. I don't know who my people were. There are no records to show that I was even born."

He cursed. "So that's why you've always held me at arm's length! What difference does it make?"

"None, to you, perhaps. It makes a difference to me."

Neither said anything for a little while. The tires of the cab made sucking, greedy sounds on the wet pavement. Needling rain, coming down faster now, fogged the windows and made the passing neons of Wilshire's Miracle Mile faintly mysterious. He put an arm around her and she made no move to withdraw it. "Tell me," he said quietly.

"There isn't a great deal to tell. I'm one of those people who apparently had a trust company for parents. There was a fund established and from as far back as I can remember I just went from one school to another. The fund footed the bills."

"But surely some officer of the company—"

"He didn't know anything. At least he claimed he didn't."

"We'd better have a talk with this guy," Rock said grimly.

Her laugh was mocking, bitter. "I don't think it would do much good, Bill. The man, you see, shot himself. That was back in '29. His company went into receivership and there were no records."

"You've tried the license bureau? Vital statistics?"

"Of course."

The cab drew up before her apartment. He got out, went to the door



with her. "Look, Karen honey, what difference does all this make?"

"I've got to know, Bill, before—well, before I do anything about you." She put out her hand. "Good-night, my dear."

He stood there, head bared to the rain, a long time after she had gone in. There was a funny kind of lump in his throat and he was very indignant about this because it had never happened to him before. Presently he got back into the waiting cab and gave the driver the address on the little slip of paper. It was a quarter of twelve.

### CHAPTER III The Fugitive

IT was a ramshackle old house like dozens of others up and down Towne Avenue; a two-storied frame with gew-gaws strung along the ridge and the eaves, and decorating the rail of the porch roof like the curlicues on a wedding cake. Back in the '90's it had really been something. There was a sign beside the fan-lighted door that said *Rooms*, but nobody tried to rent Rock one when he went in. A marble-topped walnut table had a bell on it that you were supposed to ring if you wanted the landlady. Rock didn't. From behind the series of closed doors on either hand came the sound of voices, female mostly, and somewhere a radio was playing.

Rock looked at the numbers on a couple of the doors, looked at the slip of paper in his hand and decided the room he wanted must be on the second floor. He climbed worn carpeted stairs. He didn't know why he should be doing this so quietly. Perhaps it was the furtiveness with which that slip of paper had been thrust into his fist in the first place.

He found Number 12 and knuckled the panel gently. Inside the room a gun blasted. It was so loud it rattled the flimsy door. Not thinking that the door might be unlocked, not even trying the knob, he backed up and hurled himself forward. He never hit the door, for the simple reason that it

was opened by somebody else, and he plunged into the yawning black chasm of the room. Right after that something as hard and as heavy as an anchor clunked at the base of his skull and the blackness of the room became an even greater blackness. Rock didn't feel the hardness of the floor when it came up and hit him in the face.

He must have been out for quite a while because when he finally did open his eyes the cops were already there. You couldn't miss knowing they were cops. They had nice whipcord uniforms and Sam Browne belts and everything. Looking up at them from the floor they seemed very tall, almost the super-men the commissioner called them. Rock tried to lift his head and went suddenly sick and giddy, so that the room started doing cartwheels.

One of the cops, also doing cartwheels, or at least following the room around, came over and tromped on Rock's wrist. Pain shot up clear to his shoulder; swift, agonizing pain, but strangely enough this seemed to act like an antidote for the one at the back of his skull. His eyes focussed on the cop's red face. "You heel!"

"Oh, yeah?" the cop said. He lifted his foot again, but only to motion with this time. Rock saw the gun. He knew then why the cop had stepped on his wrist. He, Bill Rock, had been holding the gun. Ergo, there must be a body around somewhere. He sat up, saying thickly, "My mistake, copper. You aren't a heel. You just believe your eyes."

"You said it."

Well, Rock thought, this guy don't make long speeches, anyway. That's something. The other cop was yelling at the huddle of tenants in the hall. "G'wan, now, there ain't nothin' to see!"

Rock finally managed to stand on his feet. The girl Laura was lying on the bed, and what few clothes she'd been wearing had ben ripped almost to shreds. She'd been shot. Her wide open eyes stared rather accusingly at Rock, making him almost feel that



he was responsible. His sensitive, slightly cynical mouth moved soundlessly.

The loud-mouthed cop said, "Praying, hunh? Well, you better."

Rock looked at him. "Listen, flattie, I wouldn't expect you to recognize this for what it is, but at least you can keep your remarks to yourself. I'm Rock, out of the D.A.'s office."

"Hah-hah, I'm glad to know you, Rock. Me, I'm George Washington."

"You'll be almost as dead if you don't button your lip," Rock said. He looked up at a new sound from the doorway.

**JACK SANTANYA** and another homicide dick came in. Santanya was a lieutenant and pretty good. He had jet-black hair and a small jet mustache over a mouthful of very white teeth. Heavy black brows met in a straight, uncompromising line. His eyes had reddish glints in them. They called him the mad Russian, not because he spoke with a burlesque accent, but because he had a hair-trigger, uncertain temper that was liable to go off half-cocked. They could have sent almost anyone else and it would have been all right with Rock. He was feeling a little temperamental himself.

Santanya said in a faintly sneering voice, "Hello, Rock. Looks like you've got yourself in a jam." He took out a freshly laundered handkerchief, picked up the gun and sniffed at it.

The loud-mouthed harness bull said with profound amazement, "Well, strike me dead if the guy wasn't telling the truth! His name is Rock. Well, whadda you know!"

His partner said, "Shut up," and Santanya said that was a very good idea.

The other dick just stood in the doorway, blocking off the view for the gallery, hands in his pockets, face blank as a brick wall.

Santanya moved unhurriedly about the room, like a prowling cat. Finally he came and stood in front of Rock, almost stepping on his toes.

"Well?"

Rock put up a hand and felt of the

swelling behind his ear. "Somebody slugged me."

Santanya looked at the two bulls. The quiet one said, "Maybe," and shrugged his shoulders.

Loud-mouth said, "Oh, yeah? Well, he was awake enough to know when I stepped on his wrist." It appeared that they were cruising around the corner when the shot was fired and some woman began screaming right after that so it was no trouble to locate the house. "He had the gun in his hand."

Rock lifted a lip at Santanya. "Smell anything?"

"Meaning a frame?"

"I don't mean anything else but!"

Santanya said, "You know the girl?"

"I met her."

Santanya toyed with his mustache, looked at Rock from the corners of his eyes. "So what were you working on?"

"I'd prefer not to say."

"Oh, you'd prefer not to say!" Santanya mimicked. And then, like a striking snake, his fist came up and smacked Rock in the mouth. "Listen, you lousy fink, the department's been waiting a long time to get you in a spot like this!"

Rock took out a handkerchief and blotted the blood from his cut lip. "You can't make it stick, copper."

"The hell I can't!" Santanya yelled. "You crashed the Frolics' backstage tonight, trying to date this dame. She turned you down and so you came here and laid for her, and when she put up a fight you let her have it." He looked at Loud-mouth. "The gun was actually in his hand? You didn't touch it?"

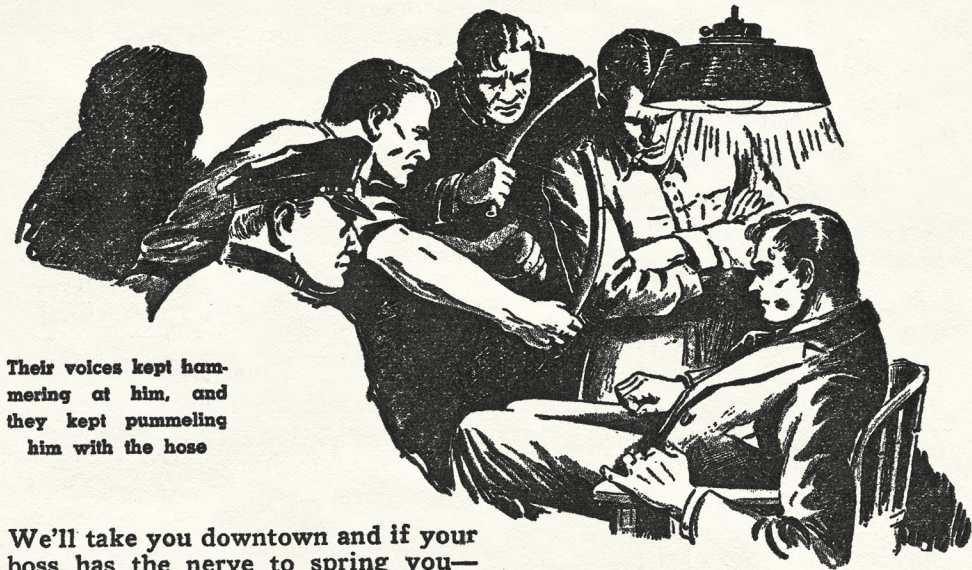
"Not me, boss."

"Then that makes it very nice indeed," Santanya said. "We've got prints and everything."

Rock's eyes smoldered, but he tried to keep his voice down, reasoning. "Now look, Santanya. I've always heard you were a square copper. Give me a break on this."

"Yah, when did the department ever get a break from your office?"





Their voices kept hammering at him, and they kept pummeling him with the hose

We'll take you downtown and if your boss has the nerve to spring you—well, I just hope he does, is all."

**ROCK**, from past experience, knew this to be a fact. The public loves a scandal, no matter who it hits, and the papers, especially the Journal, would spread this all over the front pages. You could hurl charges of a frame until you were black in the face and what would it get you? In a way he didn't blame Santanya. It was the system that was responsible. A district attorney can't convict without evidence, sometimes not even with it. His natural alibi is the inefficiency of the police department, and any investigating he does on his own account is just an added slap in the face. Honest cops resent this just as much as crooked ones.

Rock didn't think they could pin this kill on him in spite of the evidence. Still, it was possible. Especially if there was nobody interested in finding another fall guy. So what? In the can, waiting for trial, his own hands were tied. If the district attorney admitted him to bail, then what? Then the cops and the papers would yell their heads off about favoritism and politics and McLeod would be lucky if he didn't have to resign. McLeod himself had mentioned a landslide from which there

was no digging out. The papers would probably make Rock out a profligate, a rake of the first water.

He looked at Santanya. "Okay, copper—let's go."

Santanya showed his teeth in the semblance of a smile.

"Got it all figured out?"

"I know which ball comes after the seven," Rock said. "Even looking at it from behind." He stooped and picked up his hat. "Come on, let's get it over with."

The harness bull at the room's one window turned and said, "Here's the bunch from headquarters, Lieutenant."

Everybody seemed to be arriving with a remarkable lack of noise. The thing was working out with the precision of a long-planned and hole-proof maneuver, yet Rock knew this could only be true up to a certain point. He had met this Laura girl scarcely three hours before. Nobody could have known that he was going to pick her out of fifty other chorines. But after he had picked her, then someone had gotten very busy indeed. Offhand it looked as though she were merely a pawn in the game. The real object was to put the district attorney's office in the worst light pos-



sible. He looked at the girl with brooding eyes. My fault, he thought. I'm going to have to take somebody apart with my bare hands to sort of make up for her.

He was in a bad way to do anything about it now, though. The room was swarming with cops. Everybody looked at Rock as though he were a degenerate axe murderer. No one spoke to him. He wondered if Pat Corrigan and his sister had heard the news yet—or McLeod.

Finally Santanya and the broad-shouldered, phlegmatic dick who had arrived with him came over and ranged themselves on either side.

"All right, Rock, I guess we're cleaned up here."

The three of them went through the mob in the hall and down the stairs to a big department sedan. The legend describing the circle around the city insignia on the door said *Justice for All*. Rock made a derisive sound with his lips.

Santanya opened the tonneau door, stood back. The other dick climbed in under the wheel. Rock got in and sat down. Santanya had to duck his head a little, following, and so he didn't see Rock's fist in time to do anything about it. The fist got him square on the button and he made a little sighing sound, like "Ahhh!"

The dick at the wheel yelped, "Hey, what goes on?" and started to turn. By this time Rock had Santanya's gun and he poked this in the back of the guy's neck.

"It's your move, baby. All you have to do is drive."

His left hand, holding Santanya, let go, and he stuck out his foot and pushed the unconscious dick onto the sidewalk. The door slammed. The dick up front took a chance and yelled.

Rock said, "Okay, it's your head, not mine," and clouted the guy with the gun. This man didn't even say, "Ahhh." He just toppled over on the wheel. The horn started blaring, and Rock climbed over the back of the seat and pushed the second man out on top of Santanya.

Half a dozen cops tried to get out of the house at once and got stuck in the door. Up above, somebody leaned out of the dead girl's window and started shooting. Rock didn't wait to find out who it was. He turned the first corner on two wheels.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### Check-in

IT was a nice apartment. It was, in fact, a swell apartment. Rock hated to think that he might never see it again. He finished packing a suitcase, leisurely, quite as though every cop in the city wasn't looking for him, and then he took off his coat and adjusted his own special shoulder-harness. Guns, like monkey wrenches, work equally well for either right- or left-handed people. Shoulder clips are a little different. You don't buy the left-handed kind at the bargain counters. Sometimes you *even* have to have them made. Rock, finding this out after a lot of inquiry, had incorporated a few innovation of his own and was thus able to wear a fairly heavy gun without destroying the set of his coats. He was particular about his coats.

Presently he sat down on the edge of the bed and picked up the phone and called McLeod's home.

The district attorney's voice sounded harried. "Rock, where are you?"

"Home," Rock said. "I gather from the tone of anguish that you've heard the news."

"Who hasn't?"

"Well, I wouldn't know about that."

Rock sipped a drink while McLeod told him what a fool he was. "Okay, am I arguing? I'm a fool because I happened to think about you. You know you wouldn't let me stay in the can, and that's just what somebody was figuring on. Nope, it's better this way. You can come out in the papers and say I'm probably guilty, and that you wash your hands of me. That way, the frame will miss on one count, anyway."

"Does Santanya think you're guilty?"



"If he didn't before, he does now. And even if he didn't he'd still like to shoot my ears off for bopping him."

McLeod sighed. "What are you going to do? Shall I put another man on the case?"

"Not unless you hear I've been picked up dead." Rock replaced the phone and made a wry face at his reflection in the mirror. Gerry's right, he thought. I look extinguished. His dark eyes brooded over the graying hair at his temples. It wasn't fair for a guy's past to creep up on him like that. At fifty, maybe. Not at thirty-two. He dialed the number of the Frolics and after arguing with a guy who claimed to be a janitor he got the home address of the theater manager. Yes, the janitor said, the manager wore a derby. Rock thanked the man very politely.

Cradling the instrument and picking up the suitcase and an extra topcoat, he was halted at the door by the phone bell. He debated answering it, finally decided he'd better. It might be McLeod calling back. It wasn't, though. It was a woman's voice.

"Is this Mr. William Rock?"

"Maybe," he said cautiously.

"Well, this is a friendly warning, William. You've been seen around town with Karen Lacey. Lay off."

"Who is this, please?"

"Just a friend," the voice said. "Someone who would hate to send you flowers if you forgot about the girl. She doesn't want any part of you."

"I like your voice," Rock said, "but what you say don't seem to make sense. Maybe I'm not very bright."

"I hope you are," the voice said. "For your sake." There was a click at the other end. Rock finally hung up, too. He didn't think there was much use in trying to trace the call. Anonymous threatening messages usually came from pay stations.

Down in the street someone accidentally stepped on a siren button. Apparently the cops had reached the conclusion that Rock might do the unexpected and actually go home. He was descending the back stairs when

he heard the automatic elevator climbing. Nobody tried to stop him in the alley. He walked over to the avenue and caught a cab and was driven out to the Cromwell. He had to have some place to park his suitcase, and there certainly wasn't any nicer place in town than the Cromwell.

IT WAS one of those hotels you see in the pictures advertising Southern California as a swell place to come if you aren't looking for a job. There were acres and acres of lawn, and tennis courts and swimming pools and cabanas and one thing and another.

Inside, there were three dining rooms besides the ultra-famous Palm Grove. That kind of a place. Rotary conventions met there, and visiting firemen from all over the world wrote home on the Cromwell stationery. The cocktail lounge was a good place for meeting any kind of people. If all the purses dropped more or less coyly were laid end to end it would explain how Perkins, chief of the house dicks, was able to lose a hundred grand in one season at Santa Anita and still keep the wolf from the door.

Rock, followed by a hop carrying the suitcase, walked up to the desk and registered as William Smith.

The clerk looked pained, no doubt having at least fifteen other William Smiths on the books at the time. Rock felt pleasantly anonymous. He and the bellhop went up in an elevator, and the kid, after raising the windows and seeing that nobody had moved out with the radiator, paused in the doorway and gave Rock a knowing smirk.

"Anything else, sir?"

"No, thanks," Rock said. "I like to pick my own." He tossed the kid a dollar and sat on the edge of the bed till the elevator had gone down.

He was worried about Karen and that screwy phone message. Why should anybody bother to tell him to stay away from her? Karen herself had said she didn't know who she



was. Yet here was someone who apparently thought Rock a bad influence for little girls who didn't know who they were. He resented this, feeling that while perhaps he hadn't spent his youth in a Tibetan monastery, he still wasn't a social leper. Not that he intended complicating things by dashing right over to Karen's apartment. That would be silly even without the warning, on account of the cops were probably hoping to trace him through her.

He picked up the phone, put it down again, deciding he'd better use a pay station down in the lobby. He opened the suitcase and got out a quart of rye. He looked at this longingly, shook it a little, watching the bead form, sighed, set it down on the dresser unopened. Presently he went down to the cocktail lounge and used one of the pay stations there. A blonde with a nicely modeled figure came and watched him through the glass, pretending she too wanted to use the phone, though there were three empty booths on either side. A guy who couldn't be anything but a house dick watched the blonde.

The operator's voice rattled in the receiver. "There is no answer, sir."

"Keep ringing," Rock said. Karen's apartment had a direct wire because McLeod sometimes wanted her in the middle of the night. The bell kept on ringing, but there was still no answer. Presently he depressed the hook and called his sister's number.

Geraldine, recognizing his voice, wailed, "Oh, Bill, you ought to be ashamed, killing that poor girl like that! I mean, was it necessary?"

"Of course," Rock said. "I always kill 'em afterward."

"Oh!"

He cursed her. "Listen, you dimwit, I haven't killed anybody, but I will just as soon as I get my hands on you. Is Pat there?"

"Pat's drunk again."

"What do you mean, again? Isn't he always drunk?"

"Bill Rock, don't you dare be like that! I'll have you understand—Well, what if he is a lush? There're

worse things. At least he don't go around murdering defenseless girls."

"All right, all right!" Rock yelled. "I didn't call you up at one in the morning to discuss morals. Look, I want him to do me a favor. How drunk is he?"

She seemed to be thinking this one over. "Well, he's pretty bad. They ganged up on him at this party we went to and somebody kept putting double shots in his drinks. At least that's what he says. He says he never had a little absinthe do this to him before. He says absinthe is a very mild drink. He says—"

"Will you shut up? If he can say all that he's able to come to the phone."

"But he isn't!" she wailed. "That's what I'm trying to tell you!"

"Then take the phone to him," Rock said disgustedly.

He wondered what he had done to deserve a sister like this. Presently there was a croaking sound at the other end.

"Listen, you tramp," Rock said, "you can't be so pie-eyed you don't know what a spot I'm in. Drink some ammonia or something and I'll call you back in five minutes." He hung up and dialed McLeod's number again.

McLeod said he hadn't seen Karen since she'd left the office.

Rock went out to the bar and ordered a double rye. The blonde came along and dropped her purse right at his feet and he just let it lie there. She finally picked it up herself, saying wasn't it terrible there wasn't any more chivalry in the world? He said he thought so too, and then, because he was slightly superstitious and she might bring him luck, he bought her a drink. She said she never touched the stuff.

He really looked at her then. She was younger than he had thought and the blonde was natural. There were twenty respectable women in the bar who couldn't touch her for looks or for clothes, and an idea occurred to him.

"Look, I'm going to be busy for an



hour or so, but if you happened to be around after that—"

She nodded and Rock watched her disappear toward the main lobby stairway. She was wearing black stockings, his favorite color. He carried his drink back to the phone booth.

Pat Corrigan said he hadn't been able to find any ammonia. He said that what Gerry had thought was ammonia had turned out to be spirits of camphor and that he no longer had any tonsils.

"You don't need tonsils," Rock said callously. "All I want you to do is try to locate Karen Lacey. She don't answer her phone and McLeod hasn't seen her. I can't go over there myself right now because the cops may have the place staked out."

"Where can I get in touch with you?"

"You can't," Rock said. "I'll get in touch with you." He hesitated a moment. "Look, Pat, this is pretty important to me. I mean—well, from one thing and another I've got a hunch Karen may be mixed up in something. For the first time in my life—hell's hinges, do I have to draw you a picture?"

"All right," Corrigan said wearily, "I'll see what I can do. It's the British in me, I suspect. We carry on. Nor flood nor torrent shall us stay; excelsior's just a form of hay. Or something." He hung up.

**R**OCK went out and caught a cab and rode it downtown to the address he'd gotten from the Frolics janitor. This turned out to be one of the second-rate hotels along Spring Street, just a couple of blocks from the theater. Judging from the gang in the lobby and the adjoining bar it catered to bookies and track touts and the lower order of theater folk. Rock didn't see the guy he was looking for so he went up to the desk and asked.

The clerk didn't even bother to take his eyes off the racing form he was studying.

"Mullins? He's in 612."

Rock went up to 612. If anything, it was noisier up here than downstairs in the lobby. Every room, apparently was radio equipped, and the bellhops were doing a nice business in bottled goods. Rock stood in front of 612, being very casual about lighting a cigarette until the corridor had temporarily cleared. He couldn't hear anyone moving inside. The transom over the door was a solid panel, so he couldn't even tell if there was a light in the room. He twisted the knob, found the door unlocked and slid quietly in, closing the door after him.

The guy with the derby said, "Hello, pal."

He was sitting in a Morris chair, shoes off, but still wearing the derby. He had a highball in one hand and a gun in the other. The gun was pointed at Rock's belly.

"I kind of thought you might be around. What took you so long, pal?"

"I had a couple of things to do," Rock said. He leaned his shoulders against the door and, being very careful about this, pushed his hat up off his forehead. The palms of his hands were sweaty.

He said, "So you were expecting me. Why?"

"Well, it was just an idea. We heard you got away from the cops, and we thought maybe you'd be sore about something. You aren't sore, are you?" He had uneven yellow teeth and the mangled cigar between them bobbed up and down as he talked.

Rock said he wasn't sore. He said, "What is there to be sore about? It's just a friendly little game. The only thing is, poor Laura didn't know that. She sort of took it to heart."

Mullins thought this was very funny. "Hah-hah, took it to heart! The slug, you mean. You're a card, Rock. Took it to heart. Hah-hah-hah!"

Rock's eyes smoldered. "Did you kill her?"

"Me? I should say not!"

"Then who did?"

"I wouldn't know, pal. I just heard about it."

Rock moved his feet a little, eas-



ing his shoulders away from the door.

Mullins lifted his gun. "Easy does it, pal." He got up, moved forward. "Just turn around and put your hands up high and flat against the door."

Rock did this. Mullins came so close Rock could feel his breath on the back of his neck. "Let's see, now, if I remember right you're a south-paw."

His free hand came around Rock's chest, searching for a weapon. Rock moved his head a little and his loosened hat slid down into Mullins' face. The guy's rod was buried in Rock's kidney but for some reason Mullins didn't seem to think he could shoot with his eyes covered so he stepped back and took a swipe at the hat.

This was the second mistake he'd made with Bill Rock. It was also the last. Rock swung around and clouted him so hard he smacked into the Morris chair, and he and the chair skidded clear across the room and almost knocked the wall out.

The only trouble was that the chair had sort of cushioned the guy's fall, and Rock's fist had missed the button by half an inch or so. Mullins was groggy but not out. His gun started spraying lead so unevenly that it was almost impossible to dodge the slugs. Trying it, Rock fell down and a slug dug a hole in the rug right in front of his nose. This made him so mad that he yanked his own gun and shot without looking.

The racket ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Rock rolled over. Mullins wasn't wearing either the cigar or the derby any more. Part of his teeth were gone, too, though Mullins was in no condition to miss them, now or later.

Rock got up, breathing heavily through his nose, just as somebody banged the door open. Rock banged it closed again, twisted the key.

"I'll shoot the first guy in!" he yelled.

There was a hasty consultation beyond the door. Rock pawed through the litter of stuff on top of the dresser, grabbed the only thing that looked as though it might be interesting and

ran to the window. He threw the sash up noisily but didn't climb out on the fire escape. He just raked his gun along the iron rungs, sending out bell-like sounds, and then he crossed the room and stood beside the door.

It burst in. So did the house dick and a harness bull and three or four other guys. They all ran to the open window. Rock slid into the hall, nodding politely to a huddle of scared guests.

"I think they got him," he said.

He descended the stairs in a most dignified way till his hat was below floor level. Then he ran like hell.

## CHAPTER V Calling All Cars

**R**AIN drummed on the cab roof like shot. It rattled against the windows in a futile attempt to get in and wash Rock free of his sins. This was just an idle thought. He didn't see how the rain could know whether he was sinful or not. He must have been, though. Otherwise how could you account for the way things were piling up?

He turned on the dome light and looked at the back of the driver's neck for a while. Then he got out the wallet he'd taken from Mullins' room.

There was a couple hundred dollars in the currency section. The driver's license and an obsolete pass to an obsolete dog track identified the two hundred dollars as probably belonging to Isaac Mullins, who wouldn't be needing them any more. The little leather-bound notebook was really something, though. Rock's eyes glowed as he saw all the girls' names. Even his own notebook had never boasted anything like this. Nor had his entries been as replete with detail. Ike Mullins, perhaps in his capacity as a burlesque manager, had certainly gone in for the more important things of life, such as color of hair and eyes, height, weight, probable age, where born and the like. All this in addition to the routine



name, address and telephone number of the gal described.

There were cryptic marks against some of the names. Others had lines drawn through them, indicating they had served their purpose. Rock wondered what that purpose might have been. Where were those girls now?

Eyes speculative, he put the little notebook in the fob pocket of his pants and attacked the last remaining item, a card case. Ike Mullins, it seemed, hadn't had any cards of his own; he just used the case for other people's. From the cards you could have bought anything from a case of liquor, wholesale, to a used battleship. One of the cards bore the name and imprint of the Daily Journal, and down in the lower left-hand corner it said *Pat Corrigan, Editorial*. Rock looked at the card a long time before he finally turned it over. On the reverse was scribbled a brief but pertinent message: *I.O.U. one grand*, and in parentheses, *One thousand dollars*. Pat Corrigan had signed it.

The hacker said over his shoulder, "Something the matter, boss? You lose something?"

Rock said, "Yes, I've lost something, but it wouldn't be anything you could find by looking. Some people call it faith. You either have it or you don't."

The guy thought he was wacky. He didn't say this, but you could tell by the way his bullet head wagged. Rock thought he might be slightly screwy at that.

Here was a guy who, from the recent course of events, was almost certainly connected with the vice racket. This guy was holding Pat Corrigan's I.O.U. for a grand. Yet Pat Corrigan had been panning hell out of vice conditions and the burlesque houses in particular. It didn't seem to make sense. All it did was prove that Rock's brother-in-law was under obligation to a guy who, if he hadn't killed that girl himself, was most certainly a party to the frame against Rock.

The hacker had a bright idea. "Like to hear the radio, boss? Me, I always



Karen came in and found him with the gun in his hand then she crumpled to the floor

listen to cop calls this time o' night."

"Sure," Rock said absently.

He wasn't interested in cop calls or anything else except this business between Corrigan and the guy Mullins. He'd always figured Pat for a square shooter, yet this set-up certainly smelled. Presently, though, he became conscious that the police broadcast related to him, Bill Rock in person.

It said, "All cars. All cars, attention, please. William Rock, former investigator on the district attorney's staff, wanted for the murder of Laura Stengel, has just been identified as the man who shot and killed Isaac Mullins in the Grand Hotel. This man is armed and dangerous. He must be stopped." The voice droned on with an excellent word picture of William Rock and finally signed off with a curt, "That is all. Johnson."

The hacker chuckled. "Hah-hah, don't you love that 'That is all?' Believe me, mister, I wouldn't wanna be in that guy's shoes. They'll blast him down on sight and ask questions afterward."

Rock said he wouldn't be surprised. He said this fellow William Rock certainly seemed to be a menace to society.



Rock said, "Would it be too much trouble to find me a telephone?"

"The Cromwell's full of telephones."

"I know," Rock said patiently, "I just thought it'd be fun to use one before we got there."

"You tell 'em, bo!"

The hacker pulled into a closed service station. There was a ready-fabricated booth stuck on the outside of the main building, and Rock dodged into this and dialed his sister's home.

GERALDINE'S voice was indignant. "Now see here, Bill Rock—you're going too far. Mother always said Pop was making a mistake letting you have a B.B. gun before you were twelve."

"What do you mean, too far?"

"Why that man you just shot in the Grand Hotel. That makes three tonight."

Rock ground his teeth. It wasn't any good telling this sister of his that it was only two, or even one. He said, very deliberately, "Listen, Gerry, has that no-good husband of yours come back yet?"

"No. No, he hasn't, Bill. And let me tell you one thing, when he does come back I'm certainly going to tell him— Oh, Bill, there's a man coming in the door!" She screamed then, and there was the sound of a scuffle.

Rock jiggled the hook. "Hello, hello?"

"Hello, Rock," said a fat, oily voice. There was only one guy in town that had that kind of a voice. "Baudino talking."

Rock's voice was so thick it almost choked him. "Listen, you heel, what have you done to my sister?"

"Oh, her? Why, no, a thing—yet. I just wanted to talk to you before you hung up."

"All right, talk."

Baudino's voice got very confidential. Rock could almost smell the guy's breath over the wire. "I think maybe I could square most of the beef against you, boy. If you were

willing to play my way, I mean."

"How?"

"Well, suppose Mullins killed the dame, see, and you found it out. Or maybe—well, we could say that, anyway. So then you went after him and he pulled his rod and you had to let him have it."

Rock made a bitter mouth. "Just saying it wouldn't do any good. I'd have to have proof, and the only kind of proof I could possibly have would be a witness."

"Maybe I could even produce a witness," Baudino said.

Rock pretended to be thinking this over. He wasn't fooled a bit by Baudino's kind offer. Rock had something the head of the vice squad wanted, or Baudino thought he had, and he was holding out a trade as bait. The minute the trade was made, the minute Baudino got what he was after, then Rock's life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel. The only point in his favor was that his life was in jeopardy anyway.

He said, "I must have something you want, huh?"

"Maybe."

"Well?"

"Where could I meet you to talk it over?"

Before Rock could answer there was a tremendous bang at the other end, almost bursting his eardrum, and then there were a whole lot of diminishing bangs. Later it turned out that these were caused by a dangling receiver.

Geraldine's voice, hysterical but with a distinct note of triumph, shrieked, "Bill, I hit him! Oh, Bill, do you suppose he's dead?"

"What did you hit him with?"

"My Chinese vase. The one Aunt Emma left me in her will. It's—it's all broken, Bill."

"That's tough. That certainly is tough. Now would you mind seeing if the guy's head is all broken, too? Is he still breathing?"

Geraldine said she would see. The receiver did some more banging. Presently Gerry's voice quavered, "Oh, Bill, he's alive. He's waking up!"



"Then you'd better get the hell out of there," Rock advised. "Something tells me Baudino is going to be indignant. Not that in this case I blame him. You're certainly a big help."

"But where'll I go? I haven't any money!"

Rock sighed. "All right, flag a cab and go out to the Cromwell. Just sit there and wait for me. Don't do anything else, you hear? Just sit in the cab." He hung up dispiritedly. This was what you got for having a family, he thought. No wonder they preached birth control. The guys who started that movement must have had sisters, too.

He went out into the rain and looked at the cabbie. "You got any brothers or sisters?"

"Five."

"My God," Rock said. He got in and slammed the door.

#### CHAPTER VI Compromised

THE carriage starter at the main entrance of the Cromwell was a big guy. He was caparisoned in top hat and very tight breeches and an olive green coat with big brass buttons. Standing there like a stallion at bay, he kept flicking at his boots with his riding crop and looking at Rock. No doubt he was wishing Rock would go away so he could sneak a furtive cigarette.

It was getting colder. The rain drummed on the long striped awning leading from the doors clear out to the street. There were cars parked along both sides of Wilshire, the kind of cars that sported chauffeurs, but there was no sign of the chauffeurs themselves. Rock, just making conversation, asked the guy about this. It seemed that chauffeurs didn't like to sit out in the rain any better than anybody else and so the Cromwell management had provided them with a shelter room while their employers supped and danced to the famous Palm Grove orchestra. Rock said this was very thoughtful of the management.

"Yeah. You waiting for someone?"

Rock said he was. He'd been waiting for nearly twenty minutes and there was still no sign of Geraldine. He'd been around to the other entrances (the hotel covered several blocks) and found them all closed. Any cab driver in the city should know about there being only one entrance at this time in the morning, anyway. There was no place for Gerry to come but here, yet she was long overdue.

He lit his last cigarette and puffed at it with growing irritation. Finally, after another ten minutes had elapsed, he got out his billfold and gave the starter a sawbuck.

"I'm expecting a young lady in a cab. The name is Mrs. Corrigan and she is my sister and that don't rate any cracks, either. She really is my sister. When she comes, use this to pay off the hacker and keep the change. I'm in Room 1105."

"Yes, sir!" The guy put exactly ten dollars worth of respect in his tone.

Rock went up the walk and into the main lobby, stopping only long enough to buy a pack of cigarettes at the news and cigar stand. He was surprised the True Crime mags didn't have his picture all over the covers with a reward offered. It seemed like a long time since he'd stumbled into this murder rap they were trying to hand him. Lucky he'd registered here under an assumed name.

Getting his key at the desk he happened to look in a mirror. Perkins, chief of the house dicks, was just coming up from the cocktail lounge. Rock had had no idea Perkins would be working nights. He was high enough on the payroll so he shouldn't have to be, and his presence was disconcerting, to say the least, on account of he knew Rock very well indeed. Rock tugged his hat down over his eyes and walked to the elevators. He didn't think Perkins recognized him.

It was very quiet upstairs, restful. Rock thought about the full bottle of rye he'd left on the dresser. And then, opening the door, he saw that



the bottle was no longer full. It was nearly half empty.

The gal waiting for him was the blonde he'd met downstairs in the bar. She made quite an eyeful.

"I thought you didn't drink," Rock said.

"I don't," she said. "Not on duty."

"Well, what are you doing now—having a vacation?"

"Unh-hunh." She yawned delicately. "I get through at two. A gal's got to have a little relaxation."

He took off his hat and topcoat and went over and poured himself a drink. Sipping this he began to be more appreciative of the blonde.

She said, "That's all right, don't bother to offer me any. I drank my half before you got here."

He sat on the edge of the bed. "How'd you get up here?"

"I described you to the bellhops. It wasn't such a chore. You've got what it takes, handsome."

"You're not so bad yourself," he admitted. He remembered that he'd dated this gal for a purpose. He said, "Look, sister, I hate to spoil your fun but all I'm out for tonight is information."

She looked startled. "What kind of information?"

He tried to keep his eyes on her face but it was pretty difficult. The stockings were especially distracting. Finally he had to get up and go over and stand at the windows and pretend to be interested in how hard it was raining.

"Well," he said, "it's no secret that you can't work a swell drop like the Cromwell without paying off. I happen to know Perkins, the house dick, gets a cut, but who pays him? You? The guy you're working for?"

"So you're a dick."

"In a way. I've nothing against you, sister, don't get that idea. In fact, if I didn't have so much on my mind—" He broke off, sighing. "There's a grand in it for the name of the guy that's above you; above Perkins."

There were strangled sounds and he turned and looked at her. She was

laughing at him. In fact she was in stitches. She finally had to sit up to keep from choking to death. "Take a look!" she gasped. "Take a look in my bag!"

He made his way a little unsteadily to the dresser. There was a badge in her purse. Besides the *Police Department* and the number on it, there was the well-known city insignia and the legend: *Justice for All*.

ROCK did some very fancy cursing then. *Justice for All!* It was to laugh. There was no justice. He put his back against the dresser and glared at her. "You're working undercover for the vice squad. For Baudino."

"Well?"

He mopped sweat from his forehead. "What do you mean, well? What's he hope to find out that he don't already know? What's your angle?"

She giggled. "I think Baudino's looking for the same thing you are. I don't know this. He just gave me this beat and told me to keep my eyes open. So far I haven't seen a lot."

"But what about me?" Rock yelled.

She gave him a lazy-lidded look. "I told you I got through work at two. This was supposed to be fun."

"And what fun," Rock's sister said.

She was standing in the doorway. Behind her were Corrigan and Karen Lacey. Karen's face was dead white. She didn't look at Rock, didn't look at the blonde. Finally she turned and started unseeingly down the hall. Rock ran after her.

She fell just before she got to the elevators. He picked her up and carried her back to the room. His face was white, too, and his eyes were sick, and he laughed a little, remembering he'd thought the blonde might bring him luck. The blonde had gone into the bathroom. Corrigan and Gerry were looking out the windows, not saying anything.

Rock laid Karen on the bed and began chafing her wrists, and all the while he was doing it he kept praying



that she wouldn't wake up and remember. Maybe if he got the blonde out Karen would think it was all a bad dream. He went into the bath.

The blonde wasn't laughing any more. She said, "I'm sorry, my friend. I had no idea you were receiving tonight."

He nodded gloomily. "Not your fault, keed. It's just my kind of luck, is all." He helped her on with her coat and they went out to the hall together.

When he came back Corrigan was trying to pour a little liquor between Karen's lips. Geraldine was crying. It was certainly turning out to be a swell night.

Karen choked on the liquor and her eyes fluttered open. Corrigan lifted her to a sitting position.

"It's all okay now, Karen. Everything's going to be okay." There was something about him that was infinitely kind. Karen gave him a grateful smile. "I'm such a fool. You'll all have to forgive me for acting up like this." She even smiled at Rock.

He said, "Believe it or not, Karen, that woman was working for Baudino. She's a cop."

Geraldine quit sniffing. "I liked her uniform. It was so—so informal."

Rock flushed. "All right, be funny. I'm not denying I'm a heel. I guess I've always been one, but just the same it gets me down to have you think that—well, whatever it is you're thinking."

Corrigan looked like a mildly inebriated horse. "What was she doing—arresting you? If she was I'm going out and commit a couple of crimes myself." He made luscious sounds with his lips.

Karen said, "This is all very silly, isn't it? I mean it's rather beside the point. What we came here for is to see if there wasn't something we could do to—help Bill." She faltered over that last because it's one thing to preach being sensible and another to be that way. "The police are raising the very devil about you, Bill. Did you really kill that theater manager?"

He nodded. "I didn't intend to. I just went there hoping to beat a little truth out of him. It turned out that he was expecing me."

He told them about his first encounter in the theater.

"I don't even know if the dead girl had any real information for me. It's possible that she did and was killed to keep her mouth shut. On the other hand she may have been killed just to frame me. Either way it was a pretty safe bet that this Mullins, the manager, saw her pass me her address and knew I'd contact her. I had to talk to him, you see."

Corrigan poured himself a stiffish drink. "You were a fool to clout Santanya and that other dick. Why didn't you let them take you in? McLeod would surely have sprung you."

"That's just it," Rock said. "You wouldn't understand how I feel about the chief. He's—well, he's always treated me pretty swell. If he'd got me released you know what the papers would have done to him, and if he didn't get me released the rest of the staff would have thought he was a heel. They wouldn't take chances for him, believing he'd let them down, too."

He spread his hands.

"No, it's better this way. I've already had one overture and if I can just keep messing around for a while maybe I'll come up with enough dirt to make my predicament look like a nice quiet parlor game." He glared at Geraldine. "I would, that is, if my own sister would only quit making it tougher."

She said, "Oh, yeah? Well, I don't know why we're all worrying about you. You seemed to be doing all right for yourself when we came in. Boy, oh, boy, if they have any more cops like that Pat's going to have to quit going to night court. He can write recipes or something."

Rock looked at Karen. "You've got to believe me, hon. My evil-minded sister to the contrary, it was strictly business."

"Such a business!" Gerry yawned.



ROCK went over and took her by the shoulders and shook her. "Will you shut up? There have been times when you showed a little sense. Let's make this one of them."

He faced Corrigan and Karen. "I met the girl down in the bar and made a date to see her later, thinking I could buy some information. I had no idea she'd come to my room. In fact, what with one thing and another, I'd forgotten all about her when I came up. I found her just like you saw her."

"Such is fame," the irrepressible Geraldine said. "She must have heard about you."

Corrigan scowled at her. "That's enough of that, kitten. This thing is serious."

He took Rock by the elbow, spoke in a tone so low the others couldn't hear. "There's something I think you ought to know, Bill. Karen may be on the level. On the other hand she may not. When I went over to her place she wasn't home. Not wanting to hang around outside and be spotted by the cops I found a way to get in." He shrugged. "Well, you know how you get to be in the newspaper racket. You can't just sit still and do nothing. Snooping around, I uncovered something."

Rock's voice sounded tight. "What?"

"A savings deposit book. The gal has got over half a million dollars. Now I ask you, where would a D.A.'s secretary get a half million bucks?"

It could just as well have been a kick in the stomach. Rock swayed on his feet like a punch-drunk fighter. There had been leaks from the office; sometimes pretty important leaks. Then there was that phone call, warning him to stay away from Karen. Were the two things connected?

He passed a hand over his eyes, as though that would clear his mental vision. "So why did you bring her up here? How did the three of you get together in the first place?"

"She came back finally and I thought—well, I had an idea maybe we could break her down. I brought

her back to our house and we met Gerry, and Gerry seemed to know where you were, so—" He broke off, remembering something else. "I don't know what in hell I'm going to do about that screwy wife of mine. She's got the cops looking for her, too." He sighed.

Rock came out of his funk like a diver breaking water. "She didn't do it, you hear? Karen's as straight as a string. I'd trust her with my life."

"Maybe that's what you're doing," Corrigan said.

Rock cursed him. "Listen, you lug, I happened to stumble on something about you that don't look so hot either. What was this Mullins doing with your I.O.U.?"

"What are you trying to do—rib me?"

"Not a damned bit! He had it, and now I've got it, and it's for a grand. I want to know how come!"

Corrigan sat down suddenly. "I don't remember—" He raised haggard eyes to Rock's face. "I couldn't have, Bill. It don't make sense. Why, I hardly knew the guy."

Geraldine came over and put a hand on his shoulder. She wasn't pretending to be Gracie Allen any more. "What goes on, Pat?"

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing to bother your head about, kitten."

She looked at Rock. "What have you been accusing him of?"

"He told you. It's nothing to bother your red head over. It's—well, it's just hell, that's all."

There was a sound at the door and he whirled, reaching for his gun.

Lieutenant Jack Santanya said, "I wouldn't, Rock."

He pushed the door open a little wider with his foot. There was another dick with him and they both had their guns out. Santanya's jet black mustache lifted.

"I guess this is it, mister."

Rock said he guessed so, too. Even if he could have gotten his gun out he probably wouldn't have used it. Corrigan and the two girls were behind him, fair targets for stray slugs. Besides, it was one thing to clout



a cop, quite another to shoot one. He raised his hands shoulder high.

"My rod's on the left side, Jack."

Santanya took it. The other dick waved his gun at Pat and Gerry and Karen.

"Just stay put for a while, folks."

He took the key out of the door and locked it from the outside. Then he and Santanya walked Rock down to the elevators.

## CHAPTER VII

### Third Degree

THE cone of light was white hot. It seared the eyeballs and scorched the flesh and it pulled the sweat out through the blistering skin and then dried it before it had a chance to run. By and by, after an hour or so under the light, there wouldn't be any more sweat and Rock knew that then you just cooked. Rock was the guy under the light.

It was so hot in the room, even beyond the direct rays of the light, that Santanya and the other dick had their coats off, and their collars and ties, and still they were wringing wet. Of course, Santanya and the other dick were exercising. All Rock had to do was sit there and take it.

Their voices kept hammering at him, first one, then the other, and to sort of emphasize the importance of what they said, like punctuation, they kept belting him with the hose. This hose was just garden hose. It didn't even have any shot in it. It didn't leave any marks, just sort of molding a new face out of the old one, using the same features but altering the meaning.

"Why'd you kill her?"

"I didn't."

"Why'd you kill Mullins?"

"Because he was trying to kill me."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

Wham! would go the hose. Maybe it would only take off an ear this time. Rock knew what they were trying to do. They had to have an airtight, unbeatable case before they took him into court because it was

known that he was McLeod's friend. The D.A. would give him all the breaks possible, but he couldn't stall if they had a good clear motive for both kills.

Mullins' death could be accounted for as the result of the brawl on the Frolics stage. But the girl's was something else again. Rock could prove he hadn't known her before; he could prove she'd actually given him her address. Santanya wanted either proof of a frame or a motive for Rock's doing the job himself. Rock couldn't supply either of these.

He wasn't being stubborn. He just didn't have the right answers. Being perfectly fair, he didn't even think Jack Santanya was exacting revenge for being knocked cold earlier in the night. This was strictly business with Santanya. He had a couple of killings on his hands and he thought he probably had the killer. He had to be sure, though. If Rock didn't do it he certainly ought to know who did. Thus Santanya.

"If you didn't kill her who did?"

"I don't know. Mullins, maybe."

"Why?"

"To frame me." Rock's voice was beginning to sound mushy. He'd been trying to keep his mouth shut as much as possible, to save his teeth, and the teeth had gouged the insides of his lips. He tried to spit but there was no moisture left in him. The light had absorbed the last drop.

Santanya mopped his forehead with a wet sleeve. His voice was almost pleading. "For God's sake, Rock, don't make me go on with this. Do you think I like it?"

"No."

"Then come clean, damn it! Did you kill her?"

"No."

"Then who did?"

"I don't know." *Wham* went the hose.

This went on for quite a while. After fifteen or twenty minutes more of it Rock stopped answering. He stopped answering because he could no longer hear their questions. He was out.



WHEN he woke up he was in a bunk in one of the four-cell tanks up above headquarters. In the next cell a guy was snoring and there was another guy pacing up and down the length of the tank. A fifteen-watt bulb high up in the ceiling cast blurred, indistinct shadows on the concrete floor and walls. Rock smelled strongly of witch-hazel. He just lay there for a while, faintly surprised that he didn't feel worse than he did. His wrist watch said it was four o'clock. Four in the morning that would be. It was still dark outside. Otherwise they'd have turned out the light.

Rock didn't get the full significance of the watch for a minute. When he did he rolled groggily to his feet and searched his pockets. Santanya had beat him to it. Everything was gone, including the Mullins guy's wallet. That alone ought to be enough to hang him. They could prove robbery. Quite suddenly, thinking of the wallet, Rock remembered what he had done with the little notebook.

It was still in the fob pocket of his pants, under his belt. That made two things Santanya had missed: the watch and the notebook. Rock couldn't see what good either was going to do him. He went out of the cell and drank thirstily at the tank fountain.

The nervous guy stopped his pacing and said, "Whatta you in for?" He looked like a bindle stiff just in from the jungles.

Rock said he was a murderer. "Huh?" the guy said, impressed. "You mean really?"

Rock examined his face in the cracked mirror above the latrine. It was hardly swelled at all. They must have got a barber to steam him back into shape and the witch-hazel had reduced the swelling. The cops were getting pretty cagy about things like that. He drank some more water.

There was a rattle of keys down the corridor and some of the prisoners in the other tanks began yelling. The nervous guy wasn't expecting

visitors. He went into a cell and laid down. Rock looked at the barred grill expectantly. The guy with the turnkey was Giles O'Melveny, publisher of the Journal. The turnkey went away.

O'Melveny looked like the presiding officer at a court martial. He said, "So they finally caught up with you."

"Isn't that what you wanted?" Rock said. "Short of framing McLeod himself, your lousy sheet has just about proved that the D.A.'s office is full of grafters."

"Are you intimating that I'm responsible for your arrest?"

"I don't intimate. If I've got anything to say I say it. You've always hated McLeod. You jockeyed him into a spot where he had to do something about vice conditions. I don't think you give one little damn about vice; you were just hoping he'd trip himself."

O'Melveny squared his shoulders. His red face and bristly mustache looked just the same. Only the chilled steel eyes looked tired, as though he hadn't slept.

"Pat Corrigan's in jail," he said.

Rock gripped the bars with his two hands. "Because my sister clipped Baudino?"

"Because Santanya found his I.O.U. in Mullins' wallet. Santanya thinks Pat knows something about the killings. Does he?"

Rock remembered something Mullins had said before the slugs started flying. He'd said, "We'd heard you'd got away from the cops. We kind of thought you'd be around." We could have included Pat Corrigan. The I.O.U. proved there was a tie-up somewhere. Was it possible Corrigan would help frame his own brother-in-law? Hell, Rock thought cynically, anything is possible in this town!

Aloud he said, "What does Corrigan say?"

"Corrigan's drunk. He don't remember the I.O.U. at all."

"Then I don't either."

O'Melveny looked at his watch. "I'd like to get Corrigan out."



"I'd kind of like to get out myself."  
 "I think even that could be arranged."

Rock stared. "You're the second guy that's offered to help me out of this jam. Why? What have I got that you want?"

"Nothing."  
 "You're a liar."

O'Melveny let this pass. He had actually turned away, was starting back along the aisle when he paused, looking over his shoulder. His voice was casual. "Who was the other man who offered to help you, Rock?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

O'Melveny nodded as though he'd expected this and disappeared in the direction of the main gate. Rock went over and stared gloomily out of the tank's one window. The sky in the east was beginning to turn a dirty gray, and silhouetted against this the buildings of Civic Center looked like black cardboard cut-outs. The nervous bindle stiff had gone to sleep. His snores mingled with the other guy's. Rock thought he'd go screwy if he had to listen to the duet much longer. Then he forgot all about it because he heard Karen's voice down at the end of the corridor. Karen's and McLeod's.

**P**RESENTLY they were in front of the grill, looking at him. Rock felt like an animal in the zoo. Karen said in a tight voice, "Oh, Bill! Bill, I'm so sorry."

"I can imagine," he sneered. "It was you that tipped Santanya, wasn't it? You should be sorry."

She flinched as though he'd struck her. "Why do you say that?"

"It's just an idea I've been nursing. Somebody had to tell him, didn't they? Nobody knew where I was but Gerry and Pat and you."

McLeod spoke. "See here, Rock, don't let this thing get you down. Why should Karen do a thing like that? She's the one that came and got me out of bed after they'd picked you up. She's on our side."

"That's what you think," Rock said. "How much salary is she drawing?

Two hundred a month?" His mouth made a thin hard line. "Figure out how long it would take to save a half million bucks out of that."

Karen gasped and her gray eyes went wide with horror. "But Bill, that—that money isn't mine? It belongs to someone else!"

"Such as?"

She put her hands on the bars to steady herself. Her voice had a flat, hopeless sound. "I don't know." Then, not looking at him, not looking at McLeod, she turned and ran out the way she had come.

McLeod's voice was harsh. "No wonder we've had leaks in the office. A half million, eh?"

"Yeah."

"How did you find out?"

"It was Corrigan. He was snooping around out at her place and stumbled on the pass book."

"That reminds me—Corrigan's in jail."

"Who isn't, these days?" Rock said.

McLeod nodded. His eyes were haggard and there were deep lines etched at the corners of his mouth. He shoved a hand through the bars and touched Rock's shoulder. "You've done a lot of things for me, boy. Things you didn't have to do. I just want you to know that I appreciate it."

"Think nothing of it," Rock said.

McLeod's hand fell away and his harsh voice became brisk, incisive. "Well, we've got to get you out of here. I'll arrange to have counsel represent you. Bail won't be contested."

Rock scowled. "That'll leave us right where we started. I might just as well have let Santanya pick me up the first time. What do you think I've been chasing around in circles for—to let the papers crucify you for springing me?"

"Well, what would you suggest?"

"I can get out of this can any time I want to," Rock said. He wasn't as sure of this as he sounded; he'd just had a bright idea which he thought might work. "If I can crush out you'll still be in the clear."



"You'll be a murderer at large. You know what that means. Any flatfoot on the force can shoot you down and get a citation for it." McLeod bent closer to the bars, studying Rock's face. "Bill, you haven't played exactly fair with me. You didn't tell me you'd had trouble at the Frolics. What have you got up your sleeve? What do you hope to accomplish that one of the other men can't?"

"How do we know that the next guy wouldn't be spotted the same as I was? Besides, I've sort of got a personal motive now. If I can bust the vice racket wide open in the process, well and good. But the main idea is my neck. I'm very, very interested in my neck, chief. If I can find the guys behind the frame I can more than likely find the murderer and substitute his neck for mine."

McLeod looked doubtful.

"You still haven't told me anything."

"I don't think I will, either," Rock said. "The less you know, the less apt you'll be to stick your neck out."

McLeod shook his head. "I think you're making a mistake."

"Probably." Rock thought of Karen and his eyes were bitter. "It wouldn't be the first one I've made."

McLeod read his mind. "You've been hit pretty hard, boy. Aside from these killings, I mean. Do you really think—hell, a half million dollars seems to be a lot of money for information."

"This thing is big. I haven't even touched all the fringes yet and I've seen enough evidence to convince me that a half million is only a drop in the bucket." He heard one of the sleeping prisoners stirring in his cell. "Wait a minute, chief." The restless guy turned out to be the bindle stiff. Rock said, "What's your name, bo?"

"Dinwiddie. Reginald Dinwiddie."

"No!"

"It's a fact." Reginald Dinwiddie himself saw the incongruity and waved a disparaging hand. "Not my fault. Parents."

"Yeah, I can understand that,"

Rock said. "What's the rap against you?"

"Vag."

Rock went out and whispered to McLeod. "Leave me a little dough. Fifty bucks or so. Then go out and call up some bail bond broker and arrange bail for a guy named Reginald Dinwiddie. Better use a messenger or some second rate shyster so they can't trace this back to you. But look, wait till after six o'clock, get it?"

McLeod said, "You can't do that, Bill!"

"Well, it's worth a try. What have I got to lose?"

McLeod pushed a roll of money at him. "Let me know how you make out, will you, boy?"

"You'll probably hear," Rock said. He watched McLeod's tall form disappear in the direction of the main gate. After that he went into the cell where the third guy was still asleep. It looked like this mug never would wake up. Rock hoped he wouldn't. Not for an hour or so, at least. He went back and engaged Reginald Dinwiddie in desultory conversation.

IT WAS getting lighter outdoors now. Through the grimy window you could see the sky turning from gray to pearl and then to pink. The sun tipped the horizon and as though this were a signal all the vags and dips and scum of a night's combing woke up and began yelling for breakfast. Rock held his breath. The guy in the other cell didn't wake up.

Dinwiddie yawned. "Time for slum, hunh?"

Rock looked at his watch. "Five-thirty."

The turnkey and a couple of trustees came along the aisle with coffee and stale rolls. Rock gave his rolls to Dinwiddie. He drank the coffee, though.

He kept looking at the point of Dinwiddie's chin, wondering how hard he'd have to hit him. Then he wondered if he'd get the chance; if Santanya or some of the other dicks wouldn't come for him first. Or if the



champion snorer of the world, the guy in the next cell, wouldn't wake up and complicate things.

Six o'clock came. Down the corridor he could hear the night guard going off shift and the new one coming on. He hoped the new one wouldn't be someone who knew him by sight. He chewed his nails.

After what seemed like hours of this there was the rattle of keys and a guy started yelling, "Dinwiddie! Hey, you Dinwiddie, where are you?" Feet clumped along the aisle.

Rock yelled, "Here!" at the top of his lungs, and clipped Dinwiddie on the button. The guy didn't let out a peep.

Rock put him in the bunk, stuffed the roll of bills into a ragged pocket and went out and was standing at the grill when the jailer came stumping along.

"I'm Dinwiddie."

The turnkey was a total stranger. He unlocked the gate, remarking that Dinwiddie was certainly a funny name. "Somebody's posted bond for you, punk. Scram."

Rock scrambled. He didn't even pause at the property clerk's desk to get poor Dinwiddie's belongings. There was a little guy with crossed eyes leaning on the sergeant's desk. He identified himself as a bail bond runner for Schwartz & Schwartz. He suggested that Rock better drop into the office around nine. He didn't think that Rock would do this, and neither did the desk sergeant. It was just routine.

Rock said he would drop in. He then went down three flights of stairs, trying very hard to keep from running, hoping he wouldn't meet anyone he knew. He had probably five minutes before Dinwiddie woke up and began yelling and the trick was exposed. It took a lot of will power to saunter. Rock used up all he had and then took a chance and ran. Luckily there was a cab stand at the corner. Civic Center was practically deserted. Rock fell into the nearest hack and gave the driver his own address. The hacker thought he was drunk.

## CHAPTER VIII The Handkerchief

THE shower felt good. The needle-fine spray put a glow in Rock's skin, cleared some of the cobwebs from his mind. He knew he was taking a chance coming back here, but there was no other place where, at six-thirty in the morning, he could have gotten all the things he needed at one swoop. In the first place he didn't have even enough money to pay off the cab. He wished he hadn't been so generous with Reginald Dinwiddie. Fifty bucks seemed like a lot to pay a bindle stiff for taking one little bop on the chin. He wondered if Reggie would understand. Not that it made much difference.

Dressing, Rock considered his reflection in the mirror. There were dark circles under his eyes and one ear was still swollen a little. On the whole, though, he wasn't much different from the Bill Rock of yesterday. Not on the surface. Underneath, down deep, there was a fierce resentment that he, William Rock, should have been subjected to the things he had gone through the last few hours. Somebody thought he was very cute indeed. Rock's eyes smoldered.

He didn't know what it was that caused him to remember something he'd completely forgotten. Maybe it was just looking in the mirror. There had been a mirror connected with the incident; a mirror in the lobby of the Hotel Cromwell. In it he had seen Perkins, the house dick, coming up from the lounge. He had thought Perkins hadn't recognized him. But maybe the guy had. Maybe it was Perkins, not Karen, who had tipped off Santanya.

Rock strode to the phone. His sister answered, yawning. Rock said, "You and Nero. Only you don't play the fiddle. You sleep. It don't make any difference to you that your husband and your brother are in jail."

Geraldine said, "Can I help it if I ran out of coffee? And, anyway, Mr. O'Melveny is going to get Pat out. He called me up and told me so."



"But what about me?" Rock yelled. Just as if he was still in the can. "Don't I rate any consideration?"

"After last night? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Bill Rock. Saying that woman was a cop. What do you think I am?"

He gulped to keep from choking to death. "Skip it, you imbecile. Look, I want you to think back. It'll be a strain on you but try it, anyway. Did Karen leave you and Pat at any time after they met you last night? I mean, could she have phoned anyone after you told her where I was?"

"Of course not!"

"I forgive you everything," Rock said. There was a new light in his eyes, a funny little lump in his throat as he hung up.

Karen hadn't crossed him. She hadn't called copper on him. It must have been that Perkins. Of course there was the little matter of an unexplained half million dollars but what was that to worry about? He'd accused Karen of turning him up and she hadn't done it. Maybe she was telling the truth about the dough. At any rate he had to see her; had to tell her he'd been wrong. The menace of Santanya and Baudino and all the rest of the department seemed of minor importance.

He stuffed what loose change he could find in his pockets, and an extra checkbook and a spare gun. He no longer had a holster; his harness and his other gun were down at headquarters. The spare gun made his right hand pocket sag. He took the gun out and shoved it in the waistband of his trousers, under his vest. Then, with a last fond look around, because he thought probably he'd never see the dump again, he went out of the apartment.

He was at the top of the last flight of stairs when he saw the cops come in the front door. That meant they'd discovered the substitution. They'd very likely found the cab he'd used. He stepped into a window embrasure and wrapped himself in one of the drapes. The two bulls clumped by.

"You'd think the guy would have

more sense," one of them said. Rock went quietly down the last flight of stairs.

IT WAS just seven when he swung off the bus in front of Karen's apartment. The early morning sun sparkled on trees and grass, drenched by the rain of the night before, and the air was clean and fresh. Rock felt a sense of exhilaration, as though he too were rejuvenated. It was a new day and the sun was shining and he had recovered his faith in Karen. He even whistled a little as he went into the foyer.

There was no desk. You gathered the impression that the management was very careful in the selection of tenants, but that once in you weren't spied upon. The mere fact that you lived there was proof positive that your life and habits were above reproach. There was a great bowl of newly-picked roses on the console against the wall. The scent of them was heavy in the air.

A girl came down in the automatic elevator, a girl reminding Rock faintly of Karen herself, probably because she wore the same sort of clothes.

She gave Rock a cool, self-assured glance and paused in the door, drawing on her gloves.

"It's lovely, isn't it?"

There was no coquetry in this, merely an acceptance of Rock as another decent human being.

"Very lovely," he agreed quietly. He felt as a man does who comes into the sanctuary of a church after a prolonged debauch. The girl gave him a brief little nod and went out.

Rock went up in the elevator. The upper hall was empty. Here and there a morning paper lay propped against a closed door. Presently people would be reading all about a guy named William Rock who was not only a killer but who had defied precedent by walking unmolested out of the city bastille. Rock pressed the buzzer beside Karen's door.

After a little wait he rang again. There was still no answer. He got



panicky at that. It wasn't time for her to go to the office. And then he remembered. She wouldn't be going to the office anyway. Not after the scene at the jail; the one in which he'd accused her of not only ratting on him, but of selling out the office. McLeod had been there, too. Maybe McLeod had had her picked up. On the other hand, maybe she was there behind the closed door, afraid to open it.

He twisted the knob, not expecting that the door would be unlocked, just sort of absent-mindedly. The door opened under his touch and he went in. The first thing he saw was the dead man.

There could be no doubt that the man was dead, not even to one who only read about such things. The handle of a knife protruded from the man's breast and there was quite a lot of blood. The man was sitting stiffly upright in a deep upholstered chair. The man was the one Rock had seen last night in Felipe's; the blondly, robust young fellow with Giles O'Melveny and Diamond Annie; the one who looked as though he might know all about polo ponies. He was no longer blondly robust. All the color was gone from his face, leaving the outdoors tan like a thin yellow pantina on old china. His eyes had a blankly fixed stare, neither surprised nor resentful.

Rock went over and lifted one of the man's wrists. Not a doctor, Rock had yet seen enough of death to recognize some of its signs.

The man had been dead at least a couple of hours.

Rock took a deep breath. All the exhilaration was gone now, all the sunshine. All his doubts of Karen were back, gnawing at his insides, clamoring in his ears like the pounding of surf. Like a man in a daze he went over and locked the hall door before going through the rest of the apartment. He didn't know why he did this; didn't know what he expected to find. It was just something to do, a temporary expedient to kill time until he had accustomed himself

to the shock of what he had found already. Gradually, as he went from living room to bedroom and from there into the tiny kitchenette, it dawned on him that the apartment had been pretty thoroughly searched. Who had done his? Not Karen, surely. The dead man, then? If so, what had he been looking for? Why had Karen found it necessary to kill him?

There was no rear entrance to the apartment. A dumb waiter took care of service deliveries and the removal of waste, but the thing wasn't big enough to accommodate even a child. Rock closed the hatch knowing that his one chance of getting out was by way of the front door. A very tough spot indeed, no matter who came calling.

HE WENT into the living room and telephoned Morgan McLeod's home. The district attorney himself answered. "Oh, it's you, Rock. Well, I see you pulled it off."

"Unh-hunh. Listen, chief, have you had Karen picked up?"

"No." He misunderstood Rock's exclamation. "See here, Bill, I don't doubt your word, or Corrigan's either, but this thing requires a certain amount of investigation. I did call Karen's apartment, thinking I'd have a quiet talk with her before taking action. She didn't answer. Somehow I don't think she'll go far, though. As a matter of fact she has no reason to even start."

Rock growled something that sounded like "That's what you think!"

"Well, she hasn't. Knowing she has a half million dollars and proving she got it crookedly are two different things. Any lawyer in town could keep us from even holding her."

"Yeah. Well, I just asked." He started to hang up.

McLeod's voice sounded frantic. "Wait a minute, Bill! You haven't told me what you intended to do."

Rock's eyes rested speculatively on the dead man in the chair. He wondered what McLeod would say if he



knew about the dead man. "I don't know what I intend to do, chief. Something has come up that—that sort of changes my plans."

McLeod snorted. "I can tell you one thing you'd better do. You'd better find some place to hole up till it gets dark again. Running around in broad daylight is tempting providence a little too far."

"It's an idea," Rock admitted. "In fact, it's a pretty darned good idea."

"Well, have you any place in mind? Where can I get in touch with you?"

"I'll let you know when I find out," Rock said. He cut McLeod's protest short by the simple expedient of hanging up.

The little black and gold clock on Karen's desk ticked off minute after minute while he stood there, somber, uncertain of himself and of all the world. Presently he snapped out of it. There was no use waiting here on the chance that Karen would come back. She wouldn't. So then what? Well, for one thing, the dead man was known to both Giles O'Melveny and Diamond Annie Cowan. There was a lead there, if it was handled right.

Rock went over and gingerly searched the dead man's pockets. He turned up nothing more interesting than the man's name. This, according to the engraved cards in an expensive card case, was Brian DeLys. Rock had never heard it before.

Sharply, very loud in the quiet of the apartment, there came the sound of a key being inserted in the lock of the hall door. There was no use running. There was no place to run to. Rock could hide and wait for the inevitable discovery or he could take the bull by the horns and stand his ground. The element of surprise would be in his favor. He flipped out his gun, waiting.

The newcomer was having a hard time getting the door open. When it finally did swing in it was Rock himself who was surprised. Karen looked too exhausted to be surprised at anything. She just stood there, one hand clutching the doorknob as though for needed support, the other groping for

her bedraggled hat. Mud caked her high-heeled pumps.

"Hello, Bill."

She saw the dead man then. Rock couldn't make up his mind whether the shock was real or feigned. If it was an act it was good, though. She crumpled to the floor.

Quite suddenly it came to him that he didn't care whether it was an act or not; he didn't care how many guys she had killed, nor what else she had done. She was his. He went over and picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. She had been soaked to the skin. He made savage little sounds as he stripped off her stockings. Her feet were like ice. Then, remembering that the hall door was still open, he ran out and locked it. Karen's eyes were open when he came back.

"So it's real, then! It is you, and there is a dead man out—out there!"

He nodded. "That's right, hon."

SHE colored faintly as he picked up her shoes and stockings and tossed them in a corner. "Bill, what are you—I mean, I thought you were still in jail."

"I just got tired of it," he said. He went into the bath and turned on the hot water. When the tub was half full he poked his head out. "Come on, toots, we haven't got all day."

She sat up. "But Bill, I don't understand!"

"That makes two of us," he said roughly. And then, seeing her flinch as though he had struck her, he came over and took her chin in his hand and looked deep into her gray eyes. "Look, Karen, let's get this straight. I don't care who you are, what you've done, why you had to kill this guy or any of the rest of it. I love you, get it?"

She pushed him away. "You—you think I did it?"

"Well, didn't you?"

"No!"

He shrugged. "Okay, you didn't even know the guy. Now will you hurry up and get thawed out and get into some clothes? Pardon me if I seem to be rushing you, but I've been



seen with so many dead people lately that it's getting to be almost second nature to expect an escort of cops along with each body."

She touched him. "I didn't say I didn't know him, Bill."

"All right, you did know him!"

"And there are still no questions?"

"No!"

"Thank you," she said. "I shall remember that as long as I live, Bill Rock."

She went into the bathroom and closed the door. He went out and stared resentfully at the dead man. This didn't seem to be getting him anywhere so he got out the little notebook, the one he'd lifted from the theater manager's wallet. As his eye skimmed over the pages he began to notice that the crossed-out entries seemed to have at least one thing in common. The discarded girls were all over thirty. Apparently Mullins had liked them young, and when they attained the ripe old age of thirty or so he scratched them out. So what happened to them? If they were no longer good enough for the Mullins kind of burlesque, what would they be good for? Rock thought of a possible way to find out. He looked in the phone book for theatrical agencies. It was still too early in the morning for any of these to be open, but he found one ad that had the manager's name down in a corner.

He discovered that the manager had a residence phone. After a long time he got an answer. The guy sounded irritable. Rock said, "Okay, just save the beef, my good man. This is the district attorney's office. You recognize any of these names?" He read off five or six.

The guy said he didn't. Then he said, "Hey, wait a minute! I remember one of those dames on account of she gypped me out of my commission."

"How was that?"

"Well, I sent her down to the Frolics, see? Mullins was starting a troupe down to South America and she went out with this bunch and I never did see her again."

"Thank you," Rock said. He wondered if anyone had ever seen her again. Anyone except the South Americans. There was a sort of terrible finality about the lines drawn through those names now. As if even the girls themselves wouldn't be needing names any more. He felt just a little sick. Everywhere he turned he seemed to stumble into something that reeked of murder, or worse. He went over and flung one of the windows high, breathing deep of the cool clean air. The street below was coming alive now. People on their way to work. Decent people. Rock had almost forgotten this last few hours that such people existed.

He wondered how it would feel to be a bookkeeper, or a shoe salesman, and come home at night to the little woman and maybe go out to a movie afterward. He'd always laughed at that sort of thing before. He wasn't laughing now. Not with a dead man in the same room, and a couple thousand coppers looking for him in the matter of two other deaths.

**H**E HEARD Karen moving about in the bedroom. Swinging to meet her, he brushed one of the window drapes aside. There was a little ball of white on the rug and he stooped and picked it up and unrolled it a trifle absently. Probably one of Karen's handkerchiefs. Then he saw that it wasn't Karen's. The initials in one corner were G.C. He stood quite still for a moment, remembering other handkerchiefs like this, others with the same distinctive monogram. Almost against his will he lifted the tiny square of linen to his nostrils. The perfume was Gerry's. G.C.—Geraldine Corrigan.

Karen came out of the bedroom. "Bill, are you sick?"

"Plenty sick," he said. He sat down, suddenly, as though all the strength had gone out of his legs. Karen came over and touched his head gently. "What is it, Bill? What's happened?"

He shook himself. "Look, Karen, did my sister come here at any time last night? Maybe I misunderstood. May-



be she met you and Pat Corrigan here. Did she?"

"Why, no. No, Corrigan and I met her just outside their own house. Does it make any difference, Bill?"

"Does it make any difference!" He made a bitter mouth. "No, it doesn't make any difference. I just found her handkerchief, is all. In the same room with a murdered man. You say you didn't kill him. That makes it look swell for her, don't it?"

"I don't believe it! Why—why, it doesn't make—"

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "What was she doing here in your apartment in the first place? Why was a guy named Mullins carrying Pat's I.O.U. for a thousand dollars? They're both mixed up in this, I tell you!" He stood up. "Well, I'm going to find a spot for you. I'll take care of the rest later."

"But Bill, I don't see why it's necessary to—"

"To get you away from here?" He laughed shortly. "Look, Karen, I don't usually go off half-cocked. As a matter of fact I don't often get jittery. I'm that way now. Regardless of whether you did or didn't kill the guy, he's here, isn't he? I can't very well lug him out in broad daylight. So he's got to stay here. If we call the cops, that means you'll be on your own, on account of I can't stick around to help you. You could say my sister did the job. Maybe it could even be proved. I don't know."

"As if I would!"

He gave her a smile for that. "All right, there's another angle beside the cops to consider. Somebody has searched your place pretty thoroughly. Maybe it was the dead guy, or Gerry, or Pat Corrigan. Maybe it was somebody I've never heard of. The point is, did they get what they were after?"

Karen looked startled. "I haven't the slightest idea what anyone could want here. I haven't anything."

"Somebody thinks different," Rock said.

"But really I haven't!"

"All right, let it pass. Regardless,

there's somebody, or a whole lot of somebodies who think you have. They're going to keep looking. I've an idea you'll be healthier if they don't find you. Are you ready to go?"

"All ready, Bill." She looked a great deal better, though there were still dark shadows under her eyes. He kissed her gravely. "That's the first, Karen. Maybe it'll be the last."

She shivered. "Bill, there's something I've got to tell you. I—well, I didn't feel like talking about it yesterday."

"You'd better save it till we get out of here," he said. He took her arm and they went through the door together.

Going down in the elevator, walking the two blocks to the nearest cab stand, he was surprised that they should look exactly like anyone else. Their hacker even tipped his cap.

Rolling along Wilshire at a sedate pace, they were almost out to Beverly Hills before Karen spoke. Then, keeping her voice quite matter-of-fact, she said, "I told you I didn't know who I was. Remember?"

"Yes, hon?"

"Well, that doesn't mean I haven't tried to find out. The man you saw in my apartment—the man who is now dead—came to me and offered to sell me some information. I didn't know him, but it was a chance. I agreed to get him the money."

"When was that?"

"Last night. After you left me. I couldn't get the money till the banks opened and he wouldn't tell me anything until I paid. There was nothing to do but wait. Then, when you accused me of—" She broke off, stared out the window.

Rock touched her hand. "You don't have to tell me all this, hon."

She nodded. "I know. You think I'm silly. You don't see why a girl who has seen life from a district attorney's office should let a little thing like a misplaced family tree bother her. Perhaps I wouldn't have if it hadn't been for the money. Someone has been sending me that money for years, Bill; someone who is ashamed of me, but who apparently feels some



sort of an obligation. It's—it's been pretty bad."

Rock cursed. "I'd like to meet the guy."

"So would I, Bill. Maybe if I did, if I only knew the worst, then perhaps I'd get over some of my old-fashioned ideas. Marriage and babies aren't very alluring to a gal who might be a—a leper for all she knows."

"And you couldn't trace this money?"

"Not even that. Sometimes it would come by mail, sometimes it was just left at my door. Always it was in cash, bills I couldn't trace. For a while, after the crash and until I'd learned to be self supporting, I used some of it. But I've paid back every cent. It's all there, waiting to be thrown in somebody's face."

"If I ever find the guy," Rock promised savagely, "he won't have any face to throw it in."

#### CHAPTER IX House of Refuge

IT WAS a big house. Bel-Air is a district of big houses. Winding streets curve in and out of wooded canyons and climb steeply to the mountains beyond. It is a discouraging place for door-to-door salesmen because the houses are so far apart. You rarely see anyone around at nine in the morning except Jap gardeners and colored chauffeurs. The owners of the houses probably live in them but you don't get that impression. All you're sure of is that whoever does live here has got the money to live anywhere in the world. Diamond Annie Cowan lived here.

The cab went up the curving sweep of the drive and halted before the front door. Karen said, "I don't feel right about this, Bill. Who lives here?"

"A friend of mine," Rock smiled at her. "Just stay put for a minute. I'll be right out."

He lifted the knocker. Inside, there was the sound of chimes, mellow, distant, very sweet. A colored maid

opened the door. Rock said, "Hello, Flo. Is Annie awake?"

"She's having breakfast."

"Tell her I want to see her," Rock said.

He went in, scaling his hat toward a glass and chromium table. The foyer was circular, done all in white. Even the carpet was white. He went through an arch and through three other rooms, crossing acres and acres of carpeted floor to get to the only informal room in the house. You felt as though someone had given a free hand and a checkbook to one of the major studios' art directors. The only thing that was missing was the click of the cameras. The fireplace had never had a fire in it. Rock poured himself a drink at the bar.

After a while the colored maid came back. "All right, Mr. Rock. She'll see you in her room."

He followed her back across the acres and acres of white carpet and up the broad stairs. She left him before a closed door and he went in alone.

Diamond Annie was still in bed. It was a gorgeous bed and a gorgeous room, though again you were conscious of a sense of unreality. The woman in the bed might have been a queen. Her silver-white hair was piled high as though she had had it done before ordering her tray.

"You are very beautiful, Anne," Rock said. He meant this. She was so beautiful that you forgot she was no longer young.

"Come here," she said. Her voice was a rich contralto. It had the same magnetism as the rest of her. Hearing it in a pitch-dark room you'd have known it could not belong to an ugly woman.

Rock crossed the room.

"Kiss me," she said.

He kissed her lightly on the cheek. She pushed him away. "All right, what have you been doing with yourself?"

"I'm in a jam."

"I heard about it."

"Who hasn't?" He took a turn about the room. This was going to be harder



than he had expected. Presently he came back and stood at the foot of the bed, using it as a sort of barricade. "Anne, there's someone downstairs I want you to take care of for a while. She won't be any trouble. She's got to get some sleep, is all, and a place where no one can get to her."

"She?"

He didn't look at her. "Yeah, a girl. She works in the office." He tried to make it casual.

"Why pick on me?"

Rock flushed. "I did you a favor once, Anne."

She stifled a yawn with a hand covered with rings. "I paid you for it, didn't I?"

He just stood there for a moment. He was afraid to move, afraid that if he even lifted a hand his anger would get the better of him.

He said, "Well, I asked for that one, didn't I?" Then, very deliberately, he released the gold strap on his wrist and tossed the watch in her lap. "Give it to some other guy. I don't want any part of you." He swung on his heel and started for the door.

Her voice halted him. "Bill!"

"Well?"

"I'm sorry I said that. The only thing was, you were lying to me and it made me sore. You're crazy about the dame, aren't you?"

He turned, scowling. "Well, what if I am?"

"Nothing. Not a thing, Bill." She swung her pajamaed legs out of bed. "Just don't lie to me any more. You can bring her in. Flo will give her a room and see she gets what she needs."

"No, thanks," he said. "We'll be shoving off."

She moved with the lithe grace of a panther, barring the door.

"I'm offering to help you, Bill. Do you know why?"

"I can guess," he said.

"And you'd be wrong," she said. "It's a funny thing, Bill, but you're the first guy that ever called me Anne. Somehow there's a difference between Anne and Annie. Maybe if they'd left

that damned *i* out of my name—" She gave a brief, disillusioned little laugh. "Well, I guess it's a little late to be thinking about that now. Will you bring the girl in?"

He hesitated. There was no use kidding himself, he had plenty things to do and he could certainly do them better without Karen on his mind. There was no place she'd be safer, or more comfortable than here.

"All right," he said finally. And then, "You're a swell egg, Anne. I'm sorry I'm such a heel." He went out and down the broad stairs to the foyer.

KAREN was still sitting in the cab. Rock opened the door for her. "Come on in, hon. It looks like a movie set but they tell me the beds are good."

She got out and they went inside. Diamond Annie had slipped into a hostess gown of some shimmering green stuff and there were diamond buckles on her high-heeled slippers. She stood at the foot of the stairs.

Rock performed the introductions. "Karen, I want you to meet Anne Cowan, a very good friend of mine. Anne, this is Karen Lacey."

"I'm afraid this is rather an imposition, Miss Cowan," Karen said. She put out a hand. "Or is it Mrs. Cowan?"

"I'm Diamond Annie," Anne said. "Didn't Bill tell you?"

"Bill didn't have to tell me. There probably isn't a man, woman or child in California who doesn't know you by sight."

"If not by touch," Anne said. She laughed suddenly, throatily, and took the hand Karen had let fall to her side. "I think I'm going to like you, Karen. I was afraid I wouldn't for a while, because—well, because Bill Rock is something pretty special in the way of men and I hate to see him taken out of circulation."

Karen flushed faintly. For just an instant Rock fancied there was a resemblance between the two women. The straight slimmness of Karen in her tailored suit, her blue-black hair and



calm gray eyes, all these were totally unlike the striking voluptuous older woman, but there was something in the carriage of their heads, the way they stood measuring each other—He shrugged away the illusion.

"Well, if you two have decided you can get along—"

"We'll get along," Diamond Annie assured him.

Karen smiled. "Of course."

Rock took up his hat and started for the door. On the threshold he paused, said carelessly over his shoulder, "Oh, Anne, the guy who was with you and O'Melveny last night. Brian DeLys, I think the name is."

"Yes?"

"What do you know about him? What's his racket?"

"By me, Bill. He's just one of the guys you see around. I think I met him first out at Santa Anita. Why?"

"Maybe Karen will tell you," Rock said. "If she feels like it." He grinned suddenly. "I left a dirty glass in the bar. You'd better have it taken care of. Somebody might get the idea this wasn't a museum." He went out and got in the waiting cab.

The hacker had been reading a morning paper. "This guy Rock seems to be quite a lad," he observed.

"Is that so?"

"Yep, quite a lad." He half turned in his seat, held up the front page for Rock to see. There was a nice three-column cut of William Rock. "You know, you look a lot like him."

"Maybe I'm him," Rock said.

"I see some of the better citizens are talking of offering a reward." The driver's eyes glistened.

"Well, I hope you meet the guy," Rock said. He pulled out the jump seat and put his feet on it and leaned back in the corner. "In the meantime how's about taking me back downtown?"

"Sure, pal, sure."

The cab rolled down the drive. Rock dozed in his corner. He hadn't had a wink of sleep for around twenty-four hours, except for the time he was out after the session with Santanya and the other dick, and you

could hardly call that sleep. He was grateful for a brief respite from physical movement at least.

After a while he awoke with a start. The cabby was saying, "Here's your street, mister. What number you want?"

Rock looked out. They were just passing the Corrigan bungalow. Down the street a little way, on the other side, there was a parked car, and there was a guy in it pretending to read a magazine. You didn't need three guesses to figure he was a dick.

Rock yawned. "Drop me off at the next corner. My wife'll give me hell if she sees me coming home in a cab."

The hacker looked righteous. "And you couldn't blame her for that. Especially if she knew where you'd been."

Rock sat up straight. "Say that again."

"Well, now, look, you don't hafta get tough about it. I just figured if I called something to your attention you might be a little more generous with your tip."

"So you're on the make, hunh?"

"Who isn't?"

Rock got a calculating look in his eye. "Maybe I could use you, fella. How's about chartering you and the hack for the rest of the day? Say a hundred bucks."

"Not the hack. I got a car of my own, though."

Rock opened the door and got out. "Okay, go get it and meet me here in half an hour."

The driver said, "You sure do look like this guy William Rock. And wasn't that a copper I saw sitting in that car we just passed?" He had rosy cheeks and innocent blue eyes. The eyes met Rock's suddenly. "I could be mistaken, of course."

"For a hundred bucks?"

"For a hundred bucks."

Rock sighed. "You'll have to take a check, you blackmailer."

"Gimme."

Rock juggled his checkbook on one knee and wrote. When he got to the signature he paused and looked at the hacker.



"Just sign your own name, Mr. Rock," the guy said. "I can get it cashed."

"Then we'd better make it for five hundred," Rock said. "I may need a couple of dimes myself." He tore up the check and wrote a new one. He was wondering if the hacker would come back.

The guy read his mind. "Sure I will, Mr. Rock. I'm practically a William Rock fan."

"You're a heel," Rock said. "What's your name?"

"Just call me Smitty."

**R**OCK went down the alley toward the rear of his sister's home. Apparently the cops hadn't considered it necessary to stake out the back. This could mean that they already had Geraldine and were just watching the house as a matter of routine. Or it could mean that they didn't as yet know about the murder of Brian DeLys and were merely tailing Gerry on the off chance that she would lead them to Rock.

He dodged in beside the garage and went swiftly across the small patch of lawn and into the service porch. The morning's milk and cream were still sitting there though it was almost ten.

Geraldine opened the door. "Bill!" She had been crying and the makeup on her cheeks was smeared. Her red hair was tousled, like a child's, and all the anger went out of Rock, leaving him just weak and sick.

"Why'd you have to do it, kitten?"

She quit sniffing. "Why'd I have to do what?"

He slapped her. "Come on, quit stalling." And then, sorry in spite of himself, he grabbed her and pulled her close. She made muffled sounds against his chest.

"All right, you killed the guy, and you and Pat are in the racket up to your necks, but you're still my sister. Where's Pat?"

"I d-don't know."

"Didn't O'Melveny spring him?"

"Sure he did, but he hasn't come home. Oh Bill, I'm worried sick!"

"You ought to be," Rock said savagely. He held her at arm's length. "Look, Gerry, there are things I've just got to know. What was this guy Brian DeLys to you? Why'd you have to kill him in that particular spot?"

She kicked him in the shins and he yelped. "You little hell-cat!"

"Well, I don't care, Bill Rock. You can't come around here accusing me of killing somebody. Haven't I got enough to worry about?"

"You've got plenty. So now that we're agreed on that will you please pull yourself together and talk sense? I don't know why you went to Karen's apartment, I don't know what you and this DeLys guy had in common, but I do know that he's dead and that you were there with him."

She stared. "You're drunk!"

He pulled out her crumpled handkerchief. "All right. I suppose this handkerchief isn't yours, either."

She snatched it. "Of course, it's mine! Where'd you find it?"

"Haven't I been telling you?" he yelled. "In Karen's apartment! In the same room with a dead guy!"

She backed away from him, staring at him as though he were a total stranger. "I've never been in Karen Lacey's apartment in my life."

Rock whirled as the kitchen door squeaked. Lieutenant Nick Baudino slid in behind a gun that looked as big as a cannon. He was chewing the inevitable toothpick.

"Hello, Rock." The gun covered Rock and Gerry impartially. "I thought we had a date."

"I've been busy," Rock said.

"And how." Baudino's swarthy skin glistened. The yellowish whites of his eyes were bloodshot. "So the little lady has gone in for murders too, hunh?"

Gerry stamped a foot. "I have not!"

Baudino shrugged fat shoulders. "Okay, okay, I wouldn't argue with you. Murders are a little out of my line, anyway." He bobbed the toothpick at Rock. "What did Ike Mullins tell you?"

"Nothing."

"All right, we'll forget that for a



minute. What did you take out of his room?"

"You've probably seen it all," Rock said. "I got his wallet. They took it away from me down at headquarters."

Baudino was unimpressed. "There was something else."

Rock looked at Gerry. She wasn't scared. She was mad. "Maybe I can make a deal with this guy, kitten. I seem to have something he wants."

"Then if you want to stay alive you'd better keep it."

Baudino looked pained. "Now is that nice?"

Rock thought swiftly. There was nothing stopping Baudino from blasting him down except that he didn't know where the notebook was. Once he had his hands on the thing it was goodbye William Rock. Probably Gerry too. The screwiest part of the whole business was that the notebook didn't incriminate Baudino or anyone else as far as he could see. He said, stalling for time, "Okay, I haven't got it with me, but there was a notebook in the wallet. Nothing in it but a lot of girls' names and phone numbers. Give Gerry and me a break and I'll see you get the thing inside of an hour."

Baudino cursed. "You mean that's all you got?"

Rock was genuinely surprised. "What else was there?" His tone must have carried conviction because Baudino nodded unhappily.

"All right, we might as well go down town."

"You mean it's a straight pinch?"

"Sure." Baudino wagged his toothpick and his gun in the direction of the front door. "Let's get going, you two."

Rock went over and took Gerry's arm and they started out ahead of Baudino. His left hand, screened by his body, tugged at the gun under his vest.

Baudino said, "Take it easy, Rock," and then he gave a terrific grunt and fell against Rock's back. Rock looked cautiously over his shoulder. There was Smitty, the taxi driver, examin-

ing the knuckles of his right hand.

"How'm I doing, Mr. Rock?"

Gerry stifled a scream. "Who is this man?"

"Just a heel I picked up," Rock said. He looked down at the unconscious Baudino, looked at Smitty. "Who gave you your cue?"

"Well, I come back like you said and I spot a cop car in the alley in back of this place so I just walked in kind of quiet and there you are."

"You might have got killed, you ape!"

"Is that a fact!" Smitty was mildly annoyed at the lack of appreciation.

"Well, we could revive him and I could go out the way I came in."

"Never mind," Rock said. "I'm not one to look a gift horse in the mouth."

"You never even seen a horse," Smitty said.

Geraldine kicked Baudino in the ribs. "Here's part of one. I don't mean the mouth part, either."

Smitty looked shocked. "Why, lady!"

## CHAPTER X Missing Persons

GERALDINE kept wailing, "I want Pat! What do you suppose has happened to Pat?"

Rock said, "If you don't shut up I'm going to throw you out on your ear and let you look for him by yourself."

They were rolling out Sunset Boulevard and Smitty, at the wheel of the sedan, was pretending to mind his own business. Rock was trying to think. That screwy business back there with Nick Baudino was really something to think about. All this time Baudino had been laboring under the impression that Rock had something important. Something he was supposed to have taken away from Ike Mullins, the manager of the Frolics. It wasn't the notebook. Baudino hadn't seemed to give a damn about that. So what was it? Rock dodged the blank wall at the end of this train of thought and tackled something else.



Apparently satisfied that Rock was telling the truth, Lieutenant Nick Baudino had been willing to turn Rock and his sister over to Santanya and the homicide squad. He'd even said he wasn't particularly interested in the murder angle. And before that he'd offered to square the original rap against Rock. This, obviously, was because he thought Rock was holding something. Maybe he still thought it. Maybe the threat of Santanya and the wrecking crew had just been a stall.

Geraldine said, "I want to find Pat."

"Shut up!" Rock looked at her out of the corner of his eye. She was crying again. He said, "Look, I've told you I'm for you. Why can't you shoot straight with me? Did you or didn't you kill the guy?"

"I told you, didn't I? If he was killed in Karen's apartment and I've never even seen the place, how could I have killed him?"

"Then how did your handkerchief get there?"

"Maybe Pat—" She broke off, looked wildly at him. "No, I didn't mean that. Pat couldn't have done it. He was in jail."

Rock thought back. It was true. Pat Corrigan had still been in jail at the time Brian DeLys was stabbed. The man had been dead for at least two hours at seven o'clock, the time Rock had found him. That certainly cleared Corrigan of the kill. It didn't explain—"Hell's fire!" Rock snarled. "I forgot all about something. Pat could have picked up one of your handkerchiefs somewhere and accidentally dropped it while he was snooping."

Geraldine gave him a nasty look. "A fine brother you are! You even have me suspecting my own husband!"

"Yeah," he said. And then, after a long moment, "Well, that's just fine. That makes everything just perfectly swell." He was thinking that he was now right back where he'd started in the matter of the Brian DeLys kill. If Gerry hadn't done it, and Pat hadn't, that tossed the job right back in Karen's lap. He wondered if anyone had discovered the body yet.

Geraldine said, "Why don't you try suspecting somebody different for a change?"

"Who would you suggest?"

"Oh, I don't know. How about the king of Siam? At least he isn't in your immediate family." After a moment she added irrelevantly, "How's your cop friend? The one with the informal uniform?"

Rock cursed her. "Look, despite my filial affection you do get on a guy's nerves. You aren't as dumb as you act. You couldn't be. So I will now outline this case as I know it and you play like you're omnipotent and tell me what part, if any, makes sense."

"I want to find Pat."

"He's in it too," Rock assured her. "You wait and see."

"All right," she sighed, "shoot."

**S**TARTING with his visit to the Frolics and the subsequent encounter with the girl Laura and the stage manager Mullins, he recounted the murder frame and his reason for escaping Santanya. "It was all clear up till then. I mean, the idea of the frame was to throw discredit on the district attorney's office."

"Giles O'Melveny and his Daily Journal."

"And your sweet husband, don't forget. He's the guy that actually wrote the stuff that raised all the odor in the first place."

"Pat didn't write anything but the truth."

"Granted. I'm not arguing vice conditions. In fact I'm going to expose them now I've got started and if they let me live long enough. The thing that Pat did—I presume under orders from O'Melveny—was to throw all the onus on McLeod's office instead of on the metropolitan vice squad."

"O'Melveny hates McLeod. Everybody knows that."

"Exactly. So was all this vice furor meant to trip McLeod, or did O'Melveny really want the situation investigated?"

"What are you getting at?"

"I'm trying to locate the guy behind the works. I think it's too big for



Baudino, though he's probably in it. I think it was far too big for Ike Mullins, though I know damn well he was in it. And speaking of Ike Mullins, did you know your darling husband owed him a thousand dollars?"

"It's a lie!"

"I saw the signed I.O.U."

"The tramp. You just wait till I get hold of that guy!"

"Who—Mullins? He's dead."

"You fool! I mean Pat."

"Oh." Rock looked out the window, trying to concentrate again. "Now let's see, where was I?"

"You were just putting the noose around Pat's neck."

"Unh-hunh." He snapped his fingers. "Here's Pat shooting barbed arrows at a guy he owes a thousand bucks to."

"Maybe O'Melveny made him do it."

"Then it's a cinch O'Melveny can't be head of the vice ring. He wouldn't put one of his own men on an exposé that would incriminate himself, would he?"

"Not unless he was slightly wacky."

"Then how do you account for this: Baudino thought I'd gotten something of value from Ike Mullins before I shot him. So did Giles O'Melveny, the eminent publisher. O'Melveny even went so far as to come to me in jail this morning and offer to help me if—well, come to think of it, he didn't actually say what I was supposed to do in exchange, but I'm pretty sure he meant the same thing as Baudino. I wish I knew what it was."

"Why don't you ask O'Melveny?"

"It's an idea," Rock admitted. "The only thing is, I'm slightly handicapped. In daylight, especially. I'll have to let that wait till after dark."

Smitty turned around. "We just keep drivin'?"

"For the present." Rock looked out the window again. They were rolling toward the Santa Monica Palisades. "Hey, you remember where we were this morning?"

"Who could forget it?"

"Turn around and go back there."

Smitty wheeled the car around and they started back. Geraldine said, "Where are we going?"

Rock ignored that. "I want to talk to you about Karen, Gerry." He told her about Karen's half million and all the rest of it. "Sometimes I believe her, sometimes I don't."

"If you really loved her you'd believe her."

"That isn't the way it reads in my book. If you can believe a gal is a liar and a crook and a murderess and still love her, then you've got something."

Geraldine reverted to her original complaint. "I want to go find Pat."

"If you're smart you'll stay where I eventually put you and let me do the finding. Lieutenant Nick Baudino overheard me accusing you of murdering a certain Brian DeLys. He knows I found your handkerchief. Remember?"

"You mean they'd actually arrest me for that?"

"Arresting is only the first step," Rock said. "You should see what they did to me afterward." He shivered. "It would probably be tougher on you." He looked at her. "I'm not fooling. You've got to do as you're told till I clean this up. I'll try to find Pat for you."

"Cross your heart?"

"Cross my heart." He lit a cigarette for her, another for himself and a third for Smitty, all from the same match. Smitty shuddered. "You're certainly askin' for it, pal."

ROCK leaned back, closing his eyes. "That reminds me, Smitty. You were about to divulge some very interesting information about one Diamond Annie. Something to do with girls."

"Well," Smitty said, "maybe I went off half-cocked on that one. I knew where Annie lived, of course, and seeing you take this dame there—well, it just sort of added up to something I heard." He coughed embarrassedly. "Maybe on account of the lady I hadn't better—"

"Go right ahead, Smitty," Geraldine



encouraged. "If it'll help you any I'll vary the old gag. I ain't no lady—I'm Rock's sister."

"Have it your own way," Smitty said resignedly. You could see he thought redheads were hell on wheels.

His eyes met Rock's by way of the rear vision mirror. "This is just gossip, pal. I got no way of provin' it. Seems as though there is a class of visiting firemen, mostly big shots from the East, that just can't be satisfied with anything less than a movie star. Now on account of movie stars is very busy acting for a livin' and no doubt wouldn't be interested in visiting firemen anyway, the studios aren't lending 'em out to all and sundry.

"But they gotta maintain the illusion, get it? On account of maybe some of these visiting firemen might be stockholders, or even bankers. They gotta entertain these moguls in the style to which they ain't been accustomed."

"Keep it up, Smitty. You're doing a nice job."

Smitty's neck reddened. "Well, I'm just tellin' you what I heard. And this ain't no crack at the studios, neither. It could work just as well for oil companies."

"Am I arguing?"

"So a guy comes to town and his host asks him what would he like to do. He hints that maybe if his host could show him the inside of Hollywood, like he's read about in the papers, and maybe put him next to a actress or two, why, who knows, maybe it would even affect the old purse strings. So the host then calls Diamond Annie and she arranges to furnish gals who if they ain't stars they at least look and act the part. Strictly high class—get it?"

Geraldine looked sidewise at her brother. "And you playing around with so-called lady cops!"

"I wasn't playing, I tell you! It was part of my job."

Gerry yawned. "Well, it's nice work if you can get it."

Smitty said, "Well, here we are again." He tooled the sedan up the

semi-circular drive before Diamond Annie's. The landscape artist had done a better job than the interior decorator. While the general effect was formal there was a lot of atmosphere in the choice of shrubs and flowers. Tulips in a thousand shades bordered the drive and the scent of roses hung heavy in the warm air. It was almost noon.

Rock got out and lifted the knocker. Presently Flo, the good-looking colored gal, opened the door. Her eyes went past Rock to Geraldine, leaning out of the cab. "Miss Annie isn't home. She's gone shopping."

"That's all right," Rock said. "I'll talk to Miss Lacey."

"She isn't here either, Mr. Rock."

Rock swore. "What do you mean she isn't here? Did Anne take her out?"

"No, a gentleman called for her."

She might just as well have kicked Rock in the stomach. His mouth got tight and bitter and there was a haunted, desperate look in his eyes. "What was this gentleman's name?"

"Corrigan."

Geraldine fainted.

## CHAPTER XI A World Crashing

SMITTY said doubtfully, "Well, I could take her to my place." He looked at Geraldine lying on the white couch. "Moms ain't never got used to my bringin' gals home with me, but still and all—"

Geraldine sat up. "Oh, so you make a habit of it!"

He flushed. "Well—"

Rock said, "Look, Gerry, this is no time for cracks."

"You're telling me!" Her eyes were tragic and tears had smeared mascara all down her cheeks. Flo, Diamond Annie's colored maid, hovered in the background, a trifle antagonistic toward the whole thing.

Rock tried to think. Corrigan had called for Karen and she had gone away with him. How had Corrigan known where to find her?

Well, that part at least was ex-



plainable. Corrigan had known that Rock was a friend of Diamond Annie's. He even knew about the wrist watch. He could have guessed that Rock, being red hot and having exhausted the hotel situation, might have holed up at Annie's. By the same token Rock might have taken Karen there. So Corrigan had just breezed up and asked for her, and Karen, of course, had known him for Rock's brother-in-law and trusted him. As to the reason, however, the motive behind the affair, Rock simply couldn't figure it out. It was obvious, though, that Corrigan was knee deep in the racket. First the thousand dollar I.O.U., then what amounted to abduction.

Geraldine said, "Bill, you remember what you said about love? Well, that's the way I feel about Pat. I don't care what he's done, or how bad it looks—"

He nodded. "I know. In a way you and I seem to be on opposite sides in this, but maybe we can work it out. Will you trust me?"

"Up to a certain point. If it's a question of helping to hang something on Pat—well, you're my brother, but I'd stick a knife in you the same as I would anyone else that tried it. I'm nuts about the guy."

Smitty looked longingly at the bar. "Could I try some of that, boss?"

"You can take a bottle with you," Rock said. The colored maid showed her teeth in a snarl. Rock scowled at her. "One crack out of you and I'll ruin that pretty mouth of yours. This is all your fault." She didn't say anything.

Rock considered Geraldine. "Well, it's nice to know where we stand on one thing, anyway. But look, if you won't be a help, you can at least get out from under my feet. I've got a hell of a lot to do and I don't want to worry about you. Will you go home with Smitty?"

"Why should I?"

He went over and turned on the radio and found a news broadcast. The air was full of his name, and Karen's and Geraldine's. The cops

had found the body of Brian DeLys. Baudino was responsible for that; also for the story of Geraldine's handkerchief. Rock switched the thing off, shrugging. "You see?"

She stood up. "All right, I'm not promising anything but I'll go with the guy. It's a cinch I couldn't do anything in jail." She and Smitty went out. Smitty had a quart of Scotch under one arm.

**R**OCK spent the next half hour alternating between the bar and the telephone. Flo, the colored maid, kept looking in on him as though afraid he might steal some of the spoons. After a while she brought the cook in and gave her a look too. Rock pretended he was all alone.

He called every place he could think of where he might get a line on Corrigan. He even called Giles O'Melveny. O'Melveny said he hadn't seen Corrigan since he'd bailed him out early that morning. He said, "Where are you, Rock?"

"In a pay station," Rock lied.

"I'd like to get in touch with you."

"Why?"

"I run a newspaper. You're news."

Rock considered this. "Maybe I could arrange a meeting later. After it gets dark. Stay somewhere close to a phone and maybe I'll ring you."

O'Melveny said he would do this. Rock called the D.A.'s office. McLeod wasn't in. Outside, there was the sound of a car arriving. Rock went to the windows and looked out.

It was Diamond Annie. The colored chauffeur had plum and gold livery and aside from his deep chocolate skin he might have been a courtier bowing before his queen. Anne, as usual, looked like a million.

Rock went back to the bar and sat on one of the white leather stools, waiting for her. He drank straight rye, thirstily, because he needed something to keep him from falling off the stool and going to sleep.

Anne came in shedding six thousand dollars' worth of silver fox. Behind her the colored girl Flo stood in the arch looking worried.



Anne said, "Hello, William." She seemed in good spirits. This annoyed Rock no end. He felt that nobody had a right to be in good spirits. He got off the stool, swaying slightly.

"A fine pal, you are," he sneered.

She said, "You're drunk. What's happened to you? Where's the gal?" She came over and led him to a divan and pushed him down on it and kissed him lightly on the forehead. She smelled of violets.

He leaned back against the cushions. "Taking your several questions in order, I am so tired I wouldn't know if I was drunk and what has happened to me is a long sad tale and the gal is gone. Cleopatra over there let a guy named Corrigan in."

Anne got up slowly. "Come here, Flo."

Flo turned the color of weathered parchment. "Please, Miss Annie, she went away with him willing."

"Come here, I said."

The girl came on lagging feet. When she was within arm's reach Anne brought up a fistful of rings and smacked her in the mouth. Flo went down. "You tramp!" The white-haired woman lifted her skirt daintily and kicked the maid in the stomach. Flo whimpered but made no effort to defend herself.

Rock sat up. "All right, Anne, that's enough of that."

She whirled on him, green eyes blazing like a cat's. "You keep out of this! I promised you I'd take care of the girl and if you think I'm going to let this servant make a heel out of me you're crazy."

Rock pulled her down beside him. "I felt that way too, at first, but this guy Corrigan could talk an angel out of Heaven. It wasn't all Flo's fault." Still with an arm around Anne's waist he looked at the prostrate maid. "Come on, Flo, get up off the nice white carpet before you soil it. I won't let her hit you any more."

Flo got up, not looking especially grateful. Diamond Annie said, "A fine business. I can't even manhandle my own servants." She dismissed the girl with a wave of a hand and looked

at Rock. "Well, what's to be done about it?"

"I've done all I could for the time being. After a while, after it gets dark, I'll start circulating around again. My Number One boy Smitty may stumble onto something." He yawned. "Meantime I'd give a dollar and a half for a little shut-eye. As a stimulant that liquor of yours is a washout."

Anne's white fingers brushed his eyelids. It seemed incredible that the hand that had just knocked Flo down could be so gentle. "I feel terrible about this, Bill."

He muttered something drowsily. Presently he slept.

**I**T WAS dusk when he awoke. Shadows lay heavily on the white carpet, and through the slats of the Venetian blinds he could see a pale sliver of moon sliding up over the mountains. There was one of those sunsets you see on lithographed postcards and don't believe. Against the reflection of it the moon looked transparent, unreal. It was very quiet in the house. It was so quiet that the front door chimes sounded as loud as Big Ben.

Rock didn't move. He was three rooms removed from the foyer and not in line with the arches. Presently he heard the front door open and close. There was a suggestion of stealth about the way it was done, and this was confirmed as his eye caught the barest flicker of movement in a wall mirror. He sat up very cautiously, because if he could see the reflection of the foyer it was quite possible for whoever was out there to see him.

Diamond Annie herself had opened the door out there. She must have been dressing, or asleep, for she wore a loose satin robe and her hair was disarranged. Her rings flashed as she lifted a finger to her lips, enjoining silence. Rock really looked at the reflection of the man then.

It was Morgan McLeod, the district attorney. Rock's world crashed about his ears.



It seemed a long time that he sat there, an age in which he lived over again the last few years. It wasn't enough that he should have lost faith in Karen, in Pat Corrigan, in even his own sister. They had to take McLeod away from him too. McLeod, whom he had thought a tower of integrity, almost a god. McLeod, meeting Diamond Annie in this clandestine manner. It was incredible, but it was true. Not only that, it was evident that he had been here before, that he and Diamond Annie shared some secret in common. Their whispering proved that.

Watching the mirror, Rock saw McLeod disappear up the stairs. Anne turned, coming through the first arch. Reflected light made a halo of her beautiful white hair and Rock almost laughed aloud. He didn't, though. He lay back against the piled cushions and closed his eyes, breathing carefully, evenly.

It seemed like an hour before she reached his side. Her feet hadn't made a sound, but he could tell she was there, studying him. The scent of violets was overpowering.

After a while she went away as silently as she had come.

He let four or five minutes go by before he sat up and took the gun out of his waistband. He didn't know what he intended to do with the gun. It was just something tangible to hold onto after everything else was gone. The quiet was ear-splitting.

He made quite a business of crossing the acres and acres of white carpet. Not that he could have been heard, even if he had run. The stuff was like sponge. Coming into the circular foyer, he looked into the shadowy rooms on the other side, saw no one, waited till he heard the faint rattle of dishes somewhere in the rear of the house, then went up the broad stairs two at a time.

Prowling along the upper corridor, he heard voices. There were lights up here, flame-shaped lamps in wall sconces. At other times he had had the feeling of being in a convent. This time the cool austerity of the

hall was vaguely menacing, like the orderly air of a madhouse. He paused beside a closed door.

McLeod was saying, "I'm still fond of you, Anne."

Rock's sensitive mouth drew down at the corners. Here, apparently, was another guy who called her Anne instead of Annie. She'd even lied about that.

Her laugh was brittle, but somehow musical in spite of its hardness. "I remember how fond you were of me."

"I'm trying to be friendly, Anne. I can't wait any longer. The papers are demanding immediate action and I've got to tear the lid off or get out of office. You're part of what's under the lid."

Again she laughed. Mockingly, this time. "Go right ahead, Mr. Prosecutor. Don't mind me. Diamond Annie has taken care of herself for—well, you know for how many years. I'll get by."

"Very well, Anne." Rock could almost see the thin lips compress in a hard straight line and the double vertical furrows between the eyes as McLeod frowned. "Very well, I've warned you."

"All right, you've warned me. Now get out."

There was the whisper of footsteps beyond the door. Rock, turning to run, found himself face to face with the chocolate colored chauffeur. Two arms in plum and gold pinned his own arms to his sides. Then, quite as though he were accustomed to using his head for a mallet, the chauffeur banged it against Rock's. Rock's head was the softer. He went byebye.

THE first thing he sensed after that was the smell of violets. It was a nice clean smell, and after the things he'd been dreaming it was as welcome as water to a dying desert rat. He was terribly thirsty and he remembered finding violets one time in the Sylvan Dell over at Griffith Park where there was a stream. Maybe there would be a stream near these violets too.



He opened his eyes and was very disgusted to find that the whole thing was like all the rest of his illusions. There wasn't any stream and there weren't any violets, except the bottled kind. He was in Diamond Annie's bed, and Diamond Annie herself was sitting on the edge of it, pointing his own gun at him. She certainly was beautiful.

He grinned. "Hello, pal." He slit his throat with the edge of a flattened hand.

"What did you expect?" she asked. "Keyholers always get an eyeful. If they don't get it in the neck first." She lifted the gun slightly. "How much did you hear before Shang got to you?"

"Not a thing," he lied. "I'd just come up."

She slapped him lightly across the mouth. He made a grab for her hand, but she was up and away before he could touch her. Her beautiful green eyes weren't the only cat-like things about her.

He said lazily, "If you ever slap me again I'm going to break you in two."

She smiled down into his eyes. Then, very deliberately, she lifted the gun and squeezed the trigger. The slug buried itself in the pillow under his head. He knew this wasn't an accident. She could have hit his head if she'd wanted to.

Gunsound still rocketed around the room. Burned cordite drowned out the smell of violets. Nobody came to see what it was all about. Obviously Flo and Shang and the cook had every confidence in their mistress' ability to handle any situation. Rock felt the same way.

He said, "My mistake. I've decided not to break you after all."

"That's nice," she smiled. "That's really very nice of you, Bill."

She tossed him his gun and turned away with complete indifference as to what he did with it. He didn't touch it. Presently he saw that she was watching him in the vanity mirror. She had another gun in the pocket of her robe.

Their eyes met in a sort of mutual admiration. She came over. "We certainly understand each other don't we, William?"

"You gorgeous hell-cat."

"You handsome lecher."

After a while he said, "So you've been paying off to McLeod. What a prize sap that makes me."

She shook her head. "Wrong number, Bill. Diamond Annie never pays off to anybody. I run my racket, and it's a nice clean business—of its kind—and everybody gets their money's worth. But chiselers? Unh-unh."

"McLeod was warning you to cover up."

For a moment he thought she was going to strike him. Then the green fire went out of her eyes and they got sort of misty, as if they were seeing something a long way off and against the sun.

"That wasn't for money, Bill."

"Then what was it for?"

She gave him a brittle laugh. "Maybe to ease what some people call a conscience. Who knows?"

"All right, skip it."

"That's the best way," she agreed. She moved over to an Empire table beside the windows and lit a cigarette. "It's dark, Bill. I want you to get out and find that girl. I've had a couple of punks out looking but so far they haven't turned anything up." Something in the lift of her head, the movement of her shoulders, again reminded him of Karen.

He said, "You're her mother, aren't you?"

She whirled, was at his side so fast his eyes crossed in the attempt to focus. "What makes you think that?"

He shrugged. "Oh, I don't know. Just a little of this and that."

"Well, it isn't true, do you understand? It isn't true!"

"Then why do you care what happens to her?"

For the first time since he'd known her she refused to meet his eyes. Instead she went over to the vanity and pretended to be looking for something. "I kind of liked her, is all. And you like her, and I like you. I want



you to have what you want." She laughed harshly. "Mother! A hell of a mother I'd make!"

Rock got up and straightened his tie. He had the feeling of being choked by it. "Well, I'll be shoving off then."

"Don't forget your gun," she said. "And if you get time knock off a couple coppers for me." She slipped the white robe off her shoulders and began powdering them as if she were quite alone. Rock had an idea she was, at that. He went out and down the stairs to the foyer, where he ran into the colored maid Flo and Shang, the chocolate chauffeur.

Shang offered him his hat. "No hard feelings, suh?"

"Only in my head," Rock grinned. "How's yours?"

"Jus' fine, suh."

Rock looked at Flo. "Did a guy named Smitty telephone? You know, that taxi driver?"

She shook her head.

"Well, if he does, tell him I'll see him at his place."

Shang said, "Drive you down to the Boulevard, suh?"

"No, thanks, I'll walk."

He went out and strode down the tulip-bordered drive. The night air was sharp, stimulating. He felt pretty good, considering. He felt this way for about two minutes. Then a couple of guys stepped out of the shadows and ranged themselves on either side of him and he didn't feel so good any more.

"Going our way?"

"Not if I can help it," Rock said.

He started to run, fumbling for his gun at the same time, but they were pretty good runners too. One of them tripped him and he went to his knees. Just as he got his gun out the other guy kicked him on the chin.

you can't bite nails without teeth. Also he was more or less grateful to the guy for kicking him on the chin. He didn't think the top of his head could have stood any more.

It was very dark in the room. He couldn't even tell if there were any windows. He knew it was a room, though, because he was on a bed and there was the feel of other furniture about him. He was spread-eagled on the bed, arms and legs tethered to the corner posts. They hadn't bothered to gag him so he supposed there was no use yelling. He yelled anyway.

This brought immediate results. Somebody opened a door and yellow light came in, and then two shadows blotted out the path of yellow light and there was the click of a wall switch. The two shadows became substance. Rock thought they were the same guys who had picked him up. One of them he recognized. He was a district attorney's investigator, the same as Rock, and his name was Trask. Well, that added up. McLeod had seen Rock at Diamond Annie's, had known that Rock must have been listening, and had planted these guys to pick him off when he showed.

Trask was a tall rangy guy with close-set, mean-looking eyes and a receding chin. Rock had never liked him very well. He was to like him a lot less presently. The other guy was tough. He'd been born tough and you could see the years hadn't softened him any. His round head was as naked as a cue-ball. The rest of his face was an assortment of twisted features and pock-marks, and there were a couple of knife scars thrown in, just to make it harder. He had kind eyes. The kind the Chinese put in their dragons.

Trask came over and looked down at Rock with the calculating gaze of a student surgeon in the dissecting room. Rock's stomach crawled. The tough guy came over and had a look too. Then they looked at each other.

"Do you suppose he'll talk?"

"Of course he'll talk."

"Go right ahead," Rock said. "Just

## CHAPTER XII

### Thicker Than Water

WELL, his teeth were still in, anyway. Rock was very glad of this because he was so mad he could have bitten twenty-penny nails in two and



pretend I'm not here. My feelings aren't easily hurt."

"That's what you think," the bald-headed guy said. He licked his lips. Then he got out a pack of cigarettes and selected one with exaggerated care. When he found one that suited him he stuck it in his mouth and found a match and leaned over and scratched the match on the front of Rock's pants. It made a swell mark.

Rock spat in the man's face.

The tough guy stuck a thumb in his eye. Rock heaved up with the agony of it, but he couldn't heave very far because the four ropes were pretty taut. He did have a little slack, though. And when he could start thinking again he turned his head on one side and looked at his left wrist. The cord was not so heavy as that on his right. It went around the wrist a couple of times, crossed in a hard knot and then led off across his palm to a bedpost. He found he could double his fist by letting the cord pass between spread fingers, but a fist isn't any more good than a flattened hand if you can't use it. Rock couldn't.

Trask said, "Where's the stuff, Rock?"

"What stuff?"

"You know what we're after. The dope you took off of Ike Mullins."

"All I got from Mullins was his wallet. The cops took that away from me. I held out a notebook. You probably found it."

"Yes, we found the notebook." Trask looked at the baldheaded guy. "This is going to be difficult."

"Oh, I don't know," the tough guy said. He leaned over Rock and unbuttoned his vest and then his shirt and pulled the undershirt up so that Rock's belly was exposed. He then stuck the lighted end of his cigarette against the bare skin. Rock had never known before how tender his stomach was.

"What's your initials, punk?" the tough guy asked. "Maybe I can make you a monogram."

Rock exhausted his vocabulary in a steady stream of profanity. This

guy really scared him. It wasn't the burning, though that was bad enough. It was the way the guy seemed to enjoy doing it.

Trask said in a choked voice. "The stuff, Rock."

"What the hell for? You're never going to let me walk out of here anyway."

"No," Trask admitted. "No, we couldn't very well let you do that, Rock. You could make it easier on yourself, though."

"All right, pull this sadist off of me."

One of his fingernails was working very hard on the cord stretched across his left palm. He was afraid they'd hear the scratching sound it made. He started talking loudly and a little hysterically to cover it, going into a great deal of detail about an imaginary address and the exact hiding spot of the "stuff." It was good. The bald-headed guy's lips moved, memorizing. Rock's fingernail broke. He tried another. The rope was fraying but he was afraid he couldn't string the story out long enough.

Just then the telephone rang. Trask went out to the hall, closing the door after him. Rock took a chance and called the tough guy a dirty name.

Baldy said, "Oh, you wanna play, hunh?"

He put his eyes down close to Rock's. They were the cruelest eyes in the world. Rock snapped the cord on his left wrist and brought his arm up and over the guy's neck.

He'd been thinking about how he was going to do this for a long time and he didn't miss. He broke the guy's neck. It sounded like a dried stick.

It was harder getting the guy's gun, because he only had one arm to work with and he couldn't twist very far. If he let go of the bald head the guy would slide down to the floor and he couldn't reach him. He finally solved the problem by hauling the body up and across his own chest and after that it was no trick at all to take the gun out of the shoulder clip. He had it all ready and waiting,



butt snuggled into the palm of his left hand, when Trask opened the door.

**T**RASK yelled, "You bald-headed moron! What do you think you're doing?" And then he saw that Baldy wasn't doing anything and never would do anything again. He grabbed for his gun.

Rock shot him dead. It was a pleasure. He just lay there for a little while, savoring it, and then he pushed the tough guy off his chest and felt in his pants pocket for his knife. When he had gotten all the cords off, and his shirt buttoned, he got up and moved around the room, limbering his cramped muscles. He didn't feel the slightest need for hurry any more. There was all the time in the world. His eyes looked just a little bit like the tough guy's had.

Presently, when he was quite sure that he had everything under control, he picked up Trask's gun and shoved that and Baldy's in his pants pockets. He couldn't find his own, but probably two would be enough anyway. He searched both bodies thoroughly without discovering any more than he knew already. It turned out that the house belonged to Trask. Bills and stuff in the living room desk told him that.

He went out to the hall and tried to get the number of the party who had just phoned. He didn't have any luck on this. Outside in the drive he found Trask's car. There were no near neighbors to argue the point so Rock got in the car and drove away. The clock on the dash said it was eight-fifteen.

He was utterly reckless now, and anger surged and churned in him, demanding release; anger against Karen and Corrigan and all the rest of them, but mostly against Morgan McLeod. The meeting between the district attorney and Diamond Annie was almost proof positive that McLeod was crooked. Added to that you had Trask, one of McLeod's own staff, resorting to gangster methods

to get whatever it was they were all after. Even McLeod's conniving in the matter of the jailbreak was no longer explainable as an act of friendship. He'd wanted to get Rock on the streets where he'd have a chance at him. No wonder O'Melveny had been pounding the prosecutor's office to pieces. The publisher must have known.

Rock slowed down to a circumspect twenty-five miles an hour going up Broadway toward Civic Center. Mad as he was, fully intending to burn at least a couple of guys down, he had sense enough to know he couldn't afford to be stopped for a traffic violation. Passing the Daily Journal building he saw that the presses were rolling. And then he saw his brother-in-law. Corrigan was just issuing from the ornate bronze and glass doors.

There was a line of cars all along the curb. Rock double-parked, got out and reached the sidewalk just as Corrigan started walking north. Rock had a gun in his hand and the hand was shaking. There were dozens of people around him. All he could see was Pat Corrigan's back.

"Corrigan!"

The reporter turned. Rock shoved the gun in his belly. "You double-crossing rat! Do you go with me quietly or do I give it to you right here?"

Corrigan sucked in his breath. "Rock!"

"Nobody else, heel."

Corrigan's eyes searched the crowd desperately. The few passers-by who were looking thought it was a gag. "Are you crazy, Bill?"

"Off my nut," Rock admitted. He jammed the gun so hard that Corrigan gasped. "I've got a car here. How's about it?"

"All right," Corrigan said. His horse face was resigned. Rock hooked his right arm through the reporter's left, crossed his own left over his middle so the rod was in Corrigan's ribs. They walked back to the parked car. A woman in the crowd screamed shrilly.



Rock said, "You drive," and shoved Corrigan in the right-hand door of the car and slid in after him. Corrigan let in the clutch.

"You don't need the gun, Bill. I want to see you as badly as you do me."

"That makes it just swell," Rock said. "I'll keep the gun, though." They rolled out through the North Broadway tunnel.

**A**FTER a while they came to a section of weed-grown vacant lots. Most of these were screened from the street by towering signboards and offered all the privacy necessary for what Rock intended to do. He said in a tight voice, "All right, turn in here anywhere."

Corrigan swung in, set the brake and switched off the motor.

They got out, Rock first, Corrigan more slowly. Corrigan had a lot of length to unfold. He was half a head taller than Rock, not so heavy. Faint light seeping in from the street made deep hollows of his cheeks and his eyes looked feverish.

Rock hit him in the stomach. The air went out of him with an agonized sound and he doubled over and Rock hit him in the mouth. Corrigan went over backward, shoulders smacking the hard ground, and Rock thought, "I can't go through with this. The guy's just a shell." He discovered that he was sobbing.

Corrigan propped himself on his elbows. He hadn't lifted a hand to defend himself—apparently didn't intend doing it now. "Go ahead, Bill, finish me off. I guess I've got it coming."

Rock tried to curse and couldn't. His throat was all choked up and something that wasn't sweat ran down his cheeks. He wiped a sleeve across his face and leaned against one of the signboard supports. He had to lean against something. He was as limp as a rag. Corrigan got up and came over and put a hand on his shoulder. "Go ahead, Bill. What are you waiting for?"

"You know damn well I can't do

it," Rock said. "You can lick me every time by just doing nothing." He lifted a fist, looked at it as though it belonged to somebody else, let it drop again. "It's—well, you've been like a brother to me. I ought to hate you, and I guess I do, but—" He shook himself. "Where's Karen?"

Corrigan wiped blood from his cut lips. "I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know? You took her away from Anne's place!"

"I know I did, Bill." Corrigan was having trouble with his words. "There was a reason for that—even before I found out Geraldine was suspected of killing the guy in Karen's apartment. That half million bucks had me worried; that and the fact that there have been leaks out of your office. And then, last night, seeing Karen and Diamond Annie there in the same room, at Felipe's—well, I fancied there was a resemblance."

"I saw it too," Rock said. "Not then, but later."

Corrigan took a breath. "That just proves my point, Bill. You still don't care. You're nuts about the girl and you'd let them hang you rather than admit you're a fool. I figured maybe if I could make her talk, if I could come to you with actual proof, it'd sort of snap you out of it. Believe it or not—well, what you just said about being brothers goes for me too. You're Gerry's brother and even if I didn't like you for yourself I'd—" He shrugged thin shoulders. "What's the use talking about it?"

"Deliver me from my friends!" Rock said. "You can take care of your enemies, but friends—especially brothers-in-law—are hell on wheels."

Corrigan's voice had an edge to it. "You're telling me! I hear it was you cracking smart about Geraldine's handkerchief that gave Baudino ideas in the first place."

"Well, the thing was there, wasn't it?"

"Of course it was there! Gerry's always going around dropping the damned things and I keep picking



them up. I told you I'd been snoop-ing around the girl's apartment. That's how I found out about the half million bucks. So probably I pulled out one of my own handkerchiefs and hers came with it. But no, you wouldn't think of anything as simple as that!"

"You're forgetting something, aren't you? It wasn't only the handkerchief. There's the little matter of a thousand-buck I.O.U. It don't make sense, Mullins holding that when you were panning him and his kind in your column, but just the same—"

Corrigan nodded glumly. "It looks bad, all right. The only way I can figure it—" He broke off, wrinkling his long nose. "Say, I've got a faint recollection of being in a game somewhere. I was tanked to the eyes, and in that condition—well, you know me. A thousand bucks would be pin money."

"What happened after you took Karen away from Diamond Annie's?"

"Well, in the first place I want you to see why I had to do what I did. When I got out of the can I went out to the girl's apartment and ran smack into a load of cops investigating a corpse. It seemed to be a toss-up whether Karen had done the job, or my wife. Naturally I knew it wasn't Gerry but I couldn't make anyone else believe it. Putting two and two together I figured you'd probably be mixed up in it somehow and might be hiding the girl out at Annie's."

"As it turned out, you were. I gave her a yarn about how you'd sent me for her and she came along as nice as you please."

"That ought to have proved something or other," Rock said bitterly. "You wouldn't see that, though."

"Well, would you? My wife—your sister, incidentally—was accused of murder. If I could get the only other suspect to confess, why Gerry would be cleared."

"And did she confess?"

"She didn't. She didn't even admit that Diamond Annie was her mother."

"You told her that?"

"Bill, don't it stand to reason she knew? Are you still so slug-nutty that you can't see what's right before your eyes?"

"All right," Rock said wearily, "go on from there."

"There isn't any more. She fooled me, that's all. She pretended to go all to pieces when she found out I knew who she really was, and then when I wasn't looking she conked me with a bottle." He licked his lips. "It was a full one, too."

"So you spent the rest of the day looking for her?"

"No, I was looking for Geraldine."

Rock told him where Geraldine was. "I'll drive you back downtown and you can hop a cab. Tell Smitty to meet me at"—he thought for a moment—"at Mopey's joint."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to see a guy," Rock said. "A guy I used to almost love."

## CHAPTER XIII

### Close Call

CITY HALL was ablaze with light. So was the Hall of Justice and the Court House and the Records Building. There were a lot of people still coming and going and Rock guessed it was because of all the recent murders. Newsies hawked their wares in a raucous attempt to sell second-hand information back to the very guys that made it. "All about the scandal in the City Hall!" in the shadow of the Hall itself. Rock bought a paper.

It seemed that one William Rock was still wanted very badly by the police. Likewise one Geraldine Corrigan, identified as William Rock's sister and wife of a prominent columnist. Also Karen Lacey, in whose apartment the body of one Brian DeLys had been found. Brian DeLys, it appeared, had been an assistant cashier in the Third National Bank, and his father, a vice-president of the same bank, was very incensed over his son's murder. It had been established that the alleged murderess had on deposit in this bank



an even half million dollars, which sum seemed rather a lot for a district attorney's secretary. It was not known whether the half million had anything to do with the mysterious slaying of the assistant cashier.

However—this paper was not O'Melveny's Journal; it referred to the Journal as an estimable contemporary publication—it was clearly apparent that where there was so much smoke there must be a lot of smudging, and they didn't mean out in the orange groves, either. The estimable contemporary publication had been pointing out for some time a certain laxity in the prosecutor's office. Linking the events of the last twenty-four hours, you came to the conclusion that the E.C.P. was on the right track. William Rock, of the district attorney's staff, a killer and a fugitive from justice; Karen Lacey, also of the D.A.'s staff, a killer and a fugitive from justice. Could the Honorable Morgan McLeod explain these things?

Rock almost felt sorry for McLeod. He did get one bit of news from the account, though. Brian DeLys worked in a bank. He worked in the same bank Karen had used to store the money she wouldn't use. Therefore he was in a position to know about it, and perhaps to wonder about it. Through the clearing house or other channels it would have been quite possible to ascertain who had drawn cash or bearer checks in like amounts at approximately the same times as the deposits were made. And his vice-president father notwithstanding, the guy might have needed money.

So far, Karen's story stood up. So far, there was no motive for Karen to kill the guy. She wanted the information he had to sell; wanted it desperately. That seemed to indicate that there was someone who didn't want her to have it. Who? Diamond Annie?

It was obvious Annie hadn't wanted Karen to know. She'd gone to great pains to keep her from knowing. And she'd had the girl educated and taken

care of and kept sending her money and—Rock scratched his jaw. All this indicated a certain love on Annie's part. Love mixed with shame perhaps, but nonetheless a very real love. It didn't stand to reason Annie would kill the guy and leave the body in Karen's apartment. You didn't do that sort of thing to people you cared much about.

**D**ECIDING that this wasn't leading anywhere, Rock crossed the street. With his hat tugged down over his eyes and the open paper screening the lower part of his face he didn't look much different than half a dozen other guys waiting for an elevator. He rode up to the third. It was not so noisy up here. A couple of reporters lounged in the anteroom of the D.A.'s suite, and somewhere beyond was the clack of typewriters. Rock went around an ell in the hall to a door that had nothing on it but a number. This door was always kept locked and he knew it, so he didn't bother to try the knob. He knocked.

The door opened a cautious crack and McLeod himself looked out. "Rock!"

"You bet," Rock said. He shouldered his way in, kicked the door shut behind him. "Good old Bill Rock, the people's sap!" He took out one of the guns and twirled the cylinder. "This is what's known as the showdown, McLeod. You're going on record cleaning the slate, or I'm going to blast you right here and now."

McLeod just stood there for a moment. Fine shoulders slumped a little, face no longer lean and alert, but drawn and haggard, he'd aged ten years since last night.

"You must be drunk, I think," he said evenly. "Put the gun away and let's talk this thing over reasonably."

Rock chuckled harshly. "Oh, yeah?"

McLeod passed a hand over his eyes. "I'd—I'd like to sit down, Bill. I'm very tired."

Rock couldn't help himself. He'd known this man too long, respected



him too much, to toss it all overboard in a minute. It was even worse than the session with Corrigan.

"All right," he said, "go ahead and sit down. But keep your hands away from that row of buttons." He backed to the communicating door that led to the outer offices and locked it.

McLeod sank into his desk chair. "So you're like all the rest of the pack."

"Not quite," Rock said. "They're only guessing. I know."

"You know what?"

"That you're in the racket up to your neck. You didn't want to start an investigation; you stalled as long as you could. But when you finally had your back to the wall you let me grab the dirty end of the stick because you knew I couldn't be corrupted. You framed me, and I think you framed Karen, so that you could hide behind a murder smoke screen till some of the filth was covered up. I've a good notion to let you have it!" He lifted the gun.

McLeod's thin lips curled. "You're a fool, Rock. I'd never thought of you as one but you are." He lifted a hand to study his well-kept nails. "Go ahead and shoot. Nobody's stopping you."

Rock let his gun sag. "That's the trouble, damn it. Nobody but me wants to fight. You're as bad as Corrigan."

"Sit down, Bill," McLeod said quietly. "Somehow I hadn't expected you to be like the others. You ought to know—you must know—that the things they're saying aren't true. I haven't the slightest idea where Karen got that money. The dead man in her apartment is as much an enigma to me as it is to anyone. As for your own predicament, you yourself recognized it for a frame. Isn't it possible that I too am being framed?"

"You talk well," Rock said. "The only thing is, you're not addressing a jury of morons now. You're talking to a guy that's been around. I suppose you'll be telling me next that you don't know Diamond Annie."

McLeod looked at him. "I know her," he said. "I've known her for nearly thirty years."

Rock was mildly annoyed at this calm confession. "Oh, so you admit it! Well, after that it's just a step to admitting you saw her this afternoon, warned her to get out from under while the getting was good."

"I'll even admit that," McLeod nodded. "I don't know how you knew of it, but it's true."

Rock scowled. "And now you're starting to lie. You do know how I found out, because you were there when Shang the chauffeur caught me. You sent one of your own men and another guy out to knock me off and get the dope you thought I had."

McLeod straightened. "Who was the man, Rock?"

"Trask."

McLeod reached for the row of buttons. "We'll settle this thing right now."

Rock slammed the gun against his wrist. "I told you to leave those buttons alone. It wouldn't do any good anyway. Trask and the other guy are dead."

"Oh?"

"Quite."

"Then I guess I'll have to take your word for it, eh?"

"You can prove it by sending out to his house. I don't think you will, though, because I don't think I'm going to let you. I told you this was the showdown. I meant it."

McLeod nursed his wrist. "Did Trask say I sent him?"

"Would he have to?"

"Well," McLeod said drily, "as far as that goes, you're one of my men too. How do I know you aren't as crooked as he was? As for my knowing Diamond Annie, you knew her, didn't you? Rather well, I understand. Pot calls kettle black. You speak of proof, of having some sort of evidence I wanted. Have you got it?"

"No, but I think I know where to find it."

"Then go get it, you fool!"

Rock looked nonplussed for a



minute, then he saw the joker. "Oh, yeah? You want me out in the open so you can take another crack at me. Not this baby. Unh-unh!"

McLeod said disgustedly, "Look, Rock, I'm being very patient with you because I can see your side of it. Will you try to see mine? I can't prove that Trask wasn't working under my orders. You killed him. But I can do this: I can prove I was utterly unaware of your presence at Diamond Annie's." He pushed a phone across the desk. "Why don't you call her?"

Rock said, "It's an idea." He picked up the phone. Anne answered almost at once. "Bill, where are you?"

"Why?"

"You'd better get out here. They've got Karen. Picked her up right outside my door."

Rock cursed. "You see who it was?"

"I think one of them was Nick Baudino."

"All right," he said heavily, "I'll take care of it." He started to hang up, remembered why he had called in the first place. "Hey, Anne! Did McLeod know I was there this afternoon?"

"No. No, he couldn't have. Shang put you in another room till after McLeod had gone. Why?"

"I was just having an argument with a guy," Rock said. "As usual, I lose." He hung up.

McLeod said bitingly, "Well, now that that's over—"

**W**HATEVER else he was going to say was lost in the crash of the glass door. It was Lieutenant Jack Santanya who kicked the hole in it. The gun in his hand barked twice, missing Rock both times on account of the angle, and then Rock shot the gun out of his hand. Santanya yelled to somebody behind him and stuck his other hand through the opening, feeling for the key.

McLeod tore a phone out by the roots and hurled it. Rock went out the hall door. He met a second dick in the corridor and swung a terrific round-house with the gun at the end

of it. The guy folded. Rock straddled the marble stair bannister and slid down to the second.

He was reading the newspaper again when he crossed the lobby.

#### CHAPTER XIV

#### Date With Baudino

**M**OPEY'S joint was a disreputable little cellar dive just outside of Chinatown. You could meet a stoolie there, or a politician. Mopey's was sort of neutral territory, Mopey himself being strictly non-partisan and notably hard of hearing. As an undercover rendezvous it was ideal; it had five exits. The only other recommended feature was the pork tenderloin sandwiches. Rock had three while he was waiting for Smitty to show. He wished Smitty had a telephone.

Thinking of telephones reminded him he'd promised to call Giles O'Melveny. The guy had a lot of influence. Besides, there was something bothering Rock. Nobody had ever mentioned just why O'Melveny hated Morgan McLeod. The two were on opposite sides of the political fence. Was that enough to account for the Journal's latest attack on the district attorney?

Rock went into the smelly little phone booth and dropped a nickel. O'Melveny had gone home, they said. He called the publisher's home. Presently O'Melveny answered. "Hello?"

"This is Rock."

"Oh, how are you, Rock?"

"I think I'm about ready to make a deal," Rock said. "There's a couple of angles I want to check first. You know Diamond Annie, don't you? I mean I saw you with her last night and somehow I didn't think you'd just met her."

"Well?"

"That's very noncommittal," Rock said. "I could check back if you don't want to tell me."

O'Melveny's voice rasped. "I don't want Annie touched, understand?"

"That's funny," Rock said. "McLeod don't either."



There was quite a wait before O'Melveny said, under his breath and as though he'd forgotten Rock was listening, "No, he wouldn't."

"Why do you say that?"

"It's something you wouldn't understand, Rock. At least it isn't necessary for you to understand. Where can I see you?"

Rock thought a moment. He had two very important jobs to do. He had to locate the thing everyone seemed to be looking for and he had to find Baudino, who had Karen. "Say Diamond Annie's in an hour?"

"Right."

Rock went out of the booth and found Smitty munching a pork tenderloin sandwich. "Where did you leave the Corrigan?"

"Out to my place. Moms feels better about it now she's found the gal is respectable."

"I wish you had a telephone," Rock growled. "I need that lousy brother-in-law of mine."

"Well," Smitty said, "they got a phone next door. If it ain't nothing secret you could call him there."

"Well, why didn't you say so?"

"I just did."

"Okay," Rock said, "let it pass. You remember the number?" Smitty gave him the number. Rock went in and called it and after talking to three separate voices he was able to make himself understood. Corrigan came to the phone with a cautious, "Yeah?"

"Rock, you tramp!"

"Oh."

"Unh-hunh. So listen: as far as I know the cops aren't after you, and there's something I want you to do. You might dig something out of your own morgue, or you might have to locate a few of the old-timers. This thing goes back around thirty years."

"My, my," Corrigan said. "What am I supposed to be looking for?"

"The tie-up between O'Melveny and McLeod and Diamond Annie Cowan. There's something there that will explain at least part of what's going on today."

"And which one do I concentrate

on? Who is the guilty party, if any?"

"You guess," Rock said. "If you find anything I'll meet you at Diamond Annie's in an hour. If you don't you and Gerry had better take a trip to Honolulu." He hung up.

Smitty was guzzling beer. He said it was very bad beer, and Mopey, who could hear perfectly when he wanted to, took exception to this remark. Rock tossed a five-dollar bill on the bar. "Forget he ever said it, Mopey." And to Smitty, "Come on, dog-puss."

"I resent that," Smitty said. "Even Moms never called me that." He followed Rock up the dingy cement stairs and they got in his car. "Your pants is baggy," he remarked after a while.

ROCK took one of the guns out and put it in his hat. It was an old trick but he hoped it would work just once more. He hoped his other hunch would work out too. They came to the slattern rooming house on Towne Avenue, the one where the girl Laura had been killed. As nearly as he could tell there was no stake-out. There was no reason for the police to be still watching the house. The girl's death, at least as far as the police were concerned, was solved and done with. All they were interested in was the apprehension of her killer, and, tradition to the contrary, killers very seldom go back to the scene of the crime.

Rock climbed the steps presently, standing on the porch and peering in through the fan-lighted door before attempting to negotiate the hall and the inner flight of stairs. A couple came out of one room and went into another. A woman with flat-heeled slippers slap-slapped down the hall and vanished beyond a door labeled *Bath. No Loitering.*

Rock opened the door and went swiftly up the stairs. He didn't know what he expected to find, had no idea where to look for it. It was just a hunch born of circumstances. Something existed; something a lot of people seemed to want very badly. All these people believed that Rock



had it. Therefore he must have been in a position to get it. The theater manager, Mullins, had had it originally. Rock hadn't gotten it. Neither, apparently, had anyone else. There was a chance—a very long one—that the girl Laura had really had something for Rock but that the party or parties arranging the murder frame hadn't been aware of this. It was possible that Rock had killed Mullins before he'd discovered his loss.

Rock opened the door of the dead girl's room. It had been cleaned. There was a fresh counterpane on the sagging bed where the girl had lain, a clean towel on the dresser. All signs that there had been a murder committed there, or even of recent occupancy, had been removed. It was just a three-dollar-a-week room waiting for a new tenant. Rock wondered what they had done with the dead girl's personal effects. He couldn't very well ask.

He closed the door behind him, stood with his back against it, thinking. Say that Laura knew what she had—if she had anything at all. Say she knew it was valuable. There was no safe place she could put it at twelve o'clock at night. Besides, she might have intended to sell it to Rock. He'd mentioned money. But being a chorine and therefore smart she wouldn't show her hand until she'd made a deal. She wouldn't just leave the thing lying around. He studied the room's meager possibilities. The mattress? No, too obvious. It had probably been changed anyway. He pulled out the dresser drawers, turned them upside down. Nothing pasted to the bottoms. There was no bath, but there was a lavatory bowl in a corner. He got down on his knees and looked under this. No dice. He stood on a chair and ran his fingers along the picture mold. All he got was a pair of dirty hands.

There was a small windowless clothes closet and he looked in this, was just about to close the door again when he noticed a draft. Without windows there shouldn't be any

draft. He looked up at the ceiling. There was a small screened ventilator, not over a foot in diameter. He had to get the chair again in order to reach it. The screen gave readily under his hand. He slid it aside and poked blindly among accumulated debris, broken lath and plaster, and cobwebs and dust, until he finally felt something that rustled.

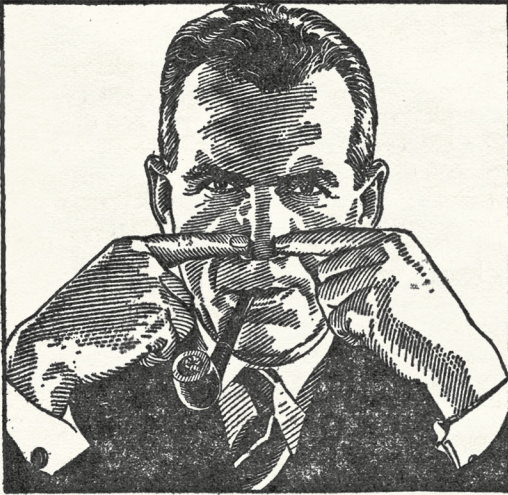
It turned out to be a fat manila envelope. There was a lot of stuff in it. There was a detailed map of the city with inked-in markings and numbers according to districts. There were names and addresses running into the hundreds, and jotted notations of sums of money ranging from a hundred to a hundred thousand dollars. A carefully drawn graph illustrated the importance of some of the names in relation to others. There was little doubt that what Rock now held was the life chart of the biggest vice ring in all history. There were only two names he recognized. Ike Mullins was one. The other was Perkins, the Cromwell house dick.

Rock just stood there for a while. He had something, but it wasn't what he had hoped for. With time, and a small army of men, this data could wreck the vice racket. It couldn't touch the guys at the top because there wasn't any top. Not in this batch of stuff, at least. The house dick Perkins was even lower in the scale than Mullins had been. Mullins was dead, yet the thing went on functioning. So why was this envelope's contents so valuable? The guy who had laid it out, who had made all those notations, could certainly duplicate it, couldn't he? So where were you? You could knock off one or two of these dives, or a dozen, and by that time a dozen more would have sprung up somewhere else. For that matter, the big shot, whoever he was, could have set the wheels in motion already. What good would it do to beat the head off Perkins, the Cromwell's house dick? If he was in a position to talk, to disclose anything of real

*(Continued on Page 122)*



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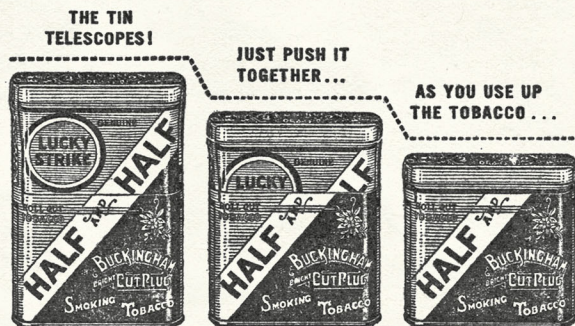
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*(Continued From Page 120)*

importance, they wouldn't let him go on living, would they?

Rock stuffed the mess back in the manila envelope with the feeling that it was no more good than Ike Mullins' notebook. Except for one thing. Apparently Baudino wanted it. If you believed your eyes and the fact that Trask had been one of Morgan McLeod's men, then McLeod wanted it too. However, Baudino was the guy that had Karen. Rock decided to trade with Baudino.

**H**E TURNED out the lights and went down the stairs. The slattern with the flat heels came out of the bath and slap-slapped toward him. She'd washed her stringy hair and it kept falling down over her eyes, and she told Rock, who wasn't interested, that she'd just washed it and couldn't do a thing with it.

He said, "Why don't you try shaving your head?" and went out and got in the car with Smitty. "I want a telephone, Smitty," he said. "Would you know where we could find one beside the one at your next door neighbor's?"

Smitty said, "Lookit, for a hundred bucks I don't have to put up with your disposition." He reached in a side pocket and uncorked a flask. "Why don't you take something for it?"

Rock took something. Smitty took something too. They found a telephone in a drug store. It took quite a while to locate Baudino, but finally Rock, calling headquarters for the second time, got the vice squad commander on the wire.

"This is Rock."

"I've been expecting to hear from you," Baudino said.

"You have the girl?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that, but if you have what I want I might be able to find her for you."

"I've got it," Rock said. "I'll meet you at—"

"At my place. You know where?"

Rock said he did. He was figuring the distance Baudino would have

to travel compared to his own course. They were about equal. He hoped he could get there first. He hung up, cautioning Baudino not to try any capers, and went out and told Smitty to drive like hell.

"This guy is tricky, Smitty, but I've got to trust him part way. I've got to prove to him that I really have the dope and then keep him from killing me afterward. I think I can do this if we aren't interrupted. Catch on?"

"I catch."

"Then let me out here," Rock said.

They had turned into a dead-end, tree-shadowed street with only three houses in the block. There were no lights in any of them, no parked cars. Rock sighed with relief.

"Okay, here's what you do: Park in front of the last house there and turn off your lights and get down in the back seat. Watch the middle house. If more than one man starts in, blow your horn. Okay?"

"Check."

Rock swung out and went down the cross street to the alley and up the alley to the rear of the middle house. The screen door wasn't locked. The kitchen door was. It was just an ordinary mortise lock, though, and Rock used a nickel passkey and opened the door.

The lights went on. Baudino had got there first after all. He stood just far enough away so that Rock couldn't reach him with his hands. There was no use going for the gun in his pants pocket because Baudino already had his out. His black eyes with the yellowish whites were intent on the top button of Rock's vest.

"Come on in, sucker."

It was the kind of invitation you don't refuse. Rock went in. "You're faster than you look, Grease-ball."

"I get around," the fat man admitted comfortably. His inevitable toothpick waggled. "That a gun in your pants pocket?"

"What do you think?"

"I think it is. Turn around and take it out, but don't try to use it. Just drop it on the floor."



Rock protested. "Listen, is this a trade or what? I've got something you want; you've got something I want. What's all this business of who's got a gun and who hasn't?"

"Suit yourself," Baudino shrugged. "You can do it my way, or I can take a chance you're carrying the right stuff and burn you down right now. They'd give me a medal for it."

"How do I know you won't anyway?"

"You don't."

"Tell me where the girl is?"

"Afterward."

Rock pretended resignation. Most of his hesitation had been built-up. He knew he was going to need every break he could get and the idea was to concentrate Baudino's attention on the gun in his pants pocket. He turned his back and dropped the gun.

Baudino said, "All right, now let's see what you've got." He backed behind the kitchen table as Rock turned. "Just toss it on the table and then sit down."

He waited till Rock had done this. The ceiling light shone on his tight-curling black hair. It looked greasy, like his olive skin. Rock loosened his hat a trifle.

**B**AUDINO, eyes on Rock, gun hand braced on the table, shook the stuff out of the manila envelope. It was an impossible feat but he did it. He managed to check the stuff without once removing his eyes from Rock's face. His small mouth contrived a smile without disturbing the toothpick. "Thank you too much, my fraan. You're an honest man."

"Are you?" Rock said.

"Sure. What do you want to know?"

"Where's the girl?"

Baudino shook his head. "You wouldn't have any use for the girl where you're going."

Rock pretended to mop sweat from his forehead. It wasn't all pretense, at that. This was going to be very close.

"All right. I knew I was a fool to trust you. Maybe I'll rest easier

in my grave if I know a few things, though. Who killed the guy in the girl's apartment?"

"I did," Baudino said.

Rock nodded and his hat slid down over his eyes. "That's nice. Mind telling me why?"

"In case you're stalling till your driver remembers to come in, don't bother. He's being taken care of."

Rock drew up his legs till they were touching the front legs of the chair. "No, I'm really interested. It's one of the pieces that don't fit."

The toothpick wagged reflectively. "It had me fooled, too," Baudino said. "I went out to the girl's place expecting to camp there until either you or she showed. This monkey conked me with an andiron and by the time I woke up he had my rod. What with one thing and another, me being a dick, he figured I was after him for breaking and entering. At any rate, he was very intent on killing me. So I killed him first." His eyes narrowed as he put pressure on the trigger. "Well, it's been nice knowing you, pal."

The gun slid off Rock's head into his waiting hand. With all the luck in the world, with the butt falling just right, he was still a fraction of a second behind Baudino's first shot. The slug caught him high up in the shoulder, knocked him and the chair over backward.

He didn't let go of the gun, though. He was firing all the way from lap level, where he'd started, till he was flat on his back, shooting at the ceiling. Baudino didn't seem to be shooting at anything any more. Rock turned his head cautiously, expecting it to be blown off instantly, and saw Baudino lying under the table. There was a hole in his throat, another under his right eye, but he was still living.

Rock crawled over to him. "Okay, fella, you're done. Nothing can make any difference to you now. Where's the girl?"

"Wouldn't you—like—to know?"

Rock lifted a fist to slap the leering mouth, but it was no use. Bau-



dino wouldn't have felt it. He was dead.

Smitty came in pushing a sullen-faced dick ahead of him. Smitty had the dick's gun. He looked at the blood seeping through Rock's coat. "You hit bad, pal?"

"I'll probably live," Rock said. "Not that I care much about it." He stared, sultry-eyed, at the dick. "You're one of Baudino's squad. Have you any idea where he hid the girl?"

The guy spat out a curse. "Cop-killer!"

"I could just as well make it two," Rock said. "He had it coming, but even if he didn't it wouldn't make any difference to me. I'm in a swell mood for murder."

He went through the messy business of searching Baudino's pockets. There was nothing, no hint of where the girl might be, nothing to tie Baudino up with the stuff in the manila envelope. Rock was right back where he had started. A little worse, if anything.

Smitty said, "I think maybe some of the neighbors are waking up, boss." The dick got a hopeful look on his face.

"It won't do you any good," Rock told him. He lifted his gun. The guy got panicky. "I don't know anything, Rock, so help me! Maybe Baudino was crooked. I wouldn't know. I've always done what I was told to do and no more."

"I think maybe you're telling the truth," Rock said. "You're too dumb to lie." He thought of something. "There's a dame on your squad, a hot-looking blonde." He described her minutely. "She was working the Cromwell Hotel last night. Know her?"

The guy gulped. "Sure, Rock, sure. She's Delle Fift."

Rock nodded at Smitty. Smitty lifted the gun and slugged the guy behind the ear. They went out the front door. There were two women and a man on the lawn of the end house. One of the women screamed when she saw Rock and Smitty with guns in their hands. The man slapped

her. "Shut up, you want 'em to kill us too?" He pretended to be very interested in the moon.

Rock said, "You don't have to call the cops. There's two of them inside." He and Smitty got in the car and drove away. After a while he stuffed his gun in a pocket and made a compress for the hole in his shoulder out of a couple of handkerchiefs. He said, "I thought I told you to blow your horn."

"There just ain't no pleasing you," Smitty complained. "In the first place you told me to blow the horn if there was more than one guy went in. There wasn't no guys went in. How that other guy—that Baudino—ever got in is beyond me."

"He had a good driver," Rock said.

#### CHAPTER XV The Blow-off

SMITTY came out of the side entrance of the Cromwell leading the blonde. She said, "What is this, a snatch?" Then she saw Rock sitting in the car. "Oh, it's you. I must have made an impression on you last night."

"You did, babe, you certainly did."

Smitty said, "What a guy! He even makes lady cops!"

The blonde ignored him. Rock said, "Baudino is dead, babe. If you owed him any loyalty, if you've got anything to cover up, I'm giving you the chance to do it before the town falls apart. Maybe you can do me a favor in return."

"Don't worry about me," she said. "I'm clean. What is this favor I'm supposed to do you?"

"Baudino has made a hell of a lot of money these last few years. Something tells me that the place we just left him is only a front, the poor-but-honest cop build-up. He should have another drop, a nice place where he shows gals his etchings. A smart gal like you ought to know where it is."

She thought this over for a minute. "What do I get out of it?"

"Maybe they'll make you a sergeant."



She shrugged. "What have I got to lose?" She gave him the address. "You won't forget I go off duty at two?"

"I won't forget," Rock said gravely. He didn't add that he might be cold meat long before two o'clock, that even if he wasn't he probably wouldn't be seeing her.

"What a guy!" Smitty said. They left her standing there at the curb. "Moms would know I had something if I ever brought that doll home."

"Moms must be quite a gal herself," Rock said. They rode out to the address on Crenshaw. It was a two-story Spanish stucco with lots of trees and shrubs around it, and enough lawn so that the neighbors wouldn't be bothered in case you wanted to play the radio all night. There were no lights.

Rock went up to the front door. Smitty went around back. Rock rang the bell. Nobody came. He was in a hurry now, so he didn't use much finesse about getting in. He just kicked out the first window he came to, reached in and snapped the lock and raised the sash. Still nobody came. He decided he must be playing the wrong hunch.

Smitty, hearing the crash of glass up front, thought it sounded like a nice game, so he kicked in a window too. He and Rock met in the main hall.

"Take the upstairs," Rock said. "I'll catch this floor and the basement. I don't think she's here but we might as well try."

He found Karen in the furnace room. She was all taped up, ankles and wrists and mouth, and she was strapped securely to one of the furnace pipes.

Rock said, "Hello, hon," and ripped the adhesive off her mouth. She cried out with the pain of it and he said, still in that matter-of-fact voice, "Sorry, Karen."

She said, "Oh, Bill!" Just that, and then she fainted. Smitty came down and found Rock holding her in his arms. He was annoyed. "This is no time for capers, pal. Have you got

a date with somebody or haven't you?"

Rock looked at him. "I'm just trying to figure it out, Smitty. I've got Karen and I've got a slew of papers that don't seem to mean a lot. Something tells me that with both of these I ought to be able to pry the rest loose, but I'm damned if I can see how."

Karen opened her eyes. There were tears in them. "She's my mother, Bill. Did you know?"

He stood her on her feet, gripped her shoulders. "I told you before—what difference does it make?"

"I don't know." She sounded puzzled. "Somehow it makes a difference, but not the way I thought it would. I'm just sorry for her."

He nodded gloomily. "You're liable to be sorrier, too." He bent his head and kissed her. "Look, hon, no matter what happens you're not to forget that I love you. We may come out of this and be able to live like decent human beings. We may have to hide in rat holes the rest of our lives. But we'll stick together. Is it a deal?"

She put out her hand, man-fashion. "It's a deal, Bill."

"Then I guess we better be goin'," Smitty observed. "I'm getting mushy too." He blew his nose.

THEY stopped only once on the way. Rock telephoned Morgan McLeod and then called Lieutenant Santanya. He was depending a lot on the hope that Baudino's body hadn't been discovered yet. Karen, too, was an ace in the hole if he could keep her under cover till just the right time.

Arriving in Bel-Air, he went to a great deal of pains to explain to Karen and Smitty just what they must do. Then he dropped out of the car and went up the sweep of the beautiful drive alone. There was one car before the door.

He lifted the knocker and the sound of chimes came to him faintly sweet in the stillness. They reminded him somehow of Karen, not of Dia-



mond Annie. The colored girl Flo opened the door.

"Miss Annie got company, Mistah Rock."

"I know," he said. "She's going to have a lot more." Even as he said this there was the sound of a car behind him and he turned to see Pat Corrigan getting out of a cab. He had Gerry with him.

Rock said, "Haven't I got enough trouble?"

"Well, I like that!" Geraldine snapped. "Am I your own sister or am I just another one of your women, to be bandied about from pillar to post?"

Diamond Annie came into the hall. "What goes on here? Oh, hello, Bill. What is this, a shower or something?"

Rock nodded. "And not a shower of blessing, either. I've arranged for you to have a few guests this evening. O'Melveny is here already, I take it. You know Pat Corrigan. This is my sister, Mrs. Pat Corrigan. Gerry, Anne Cowan." He smiled at Anne. "I hope you're going to like us."

She shrugged. She was in an evening gown that molded her beautiful figure as if she'd been poured into it. Diamonds glittered at her throat, on her fingers, even on her slippers. "Don't mind me, Bill. I just own the place."

They went into one of the great white-carpeted rooms. Giles O'Melveny turned from examining a limp leather volume of Boccaccio. It was the only book in the room. His chilled-steel eyes examined Rock instead of the book. His red face and mustache gave him the look of an army major in mufti. Presently he said, "Hello, Rock. Hello, Corrigan. What brings you here?"

Rock said, "You wanted the dirt. We're here to dish it out." He went over to the windows, turning his back on the room. Corrigan joined him. "I couldn't find a hell of a lot, Bill. Nothing at all in the morgue except an old account of the kidnapping of McLeod's baby."

Rock looked at him sharply.

Corrigan shook his head.

"I thought of that too. Even the names were similar. Carol—Karen. But it can't be, because they found the body a few months later. Whoever did the job collected the ransom and then didn't come through. For a while they thought it was Giles O'Melveny, but it turned out he couldn't have done it."

Rock shook his head, trying to rattle his brains around into a better thinking position. "There's a swell motive for O'Melveny to hate McLeod."

"He hated him before that," Corrigan said. "I didn't get this from the files but some of the old-timers remembered. Seems Diamond Annie—she was just plain Annie Cowan then—chose McLeod instead of O'Melveny. McLeod later threw her over and married a gal on the other side of the tracks. She still wouldn't have O'Melveny, though, and he was sore because McLeod threw something away that he himself couldn't have. Everybody knew he was sore and that's why they thought he might have copped McLeod's kid. McLeod's wife died from the shock. The baby was a year old."

"And I never even knew McLeod was married," Rock said. He took a breath. "What happened to Diamond Annie?"

"She went up to the gold camps. I guess she must have cleaned up because when she came back a few years later they say she sure had it to throw around. She was rated worth a million even then."

The front door chimes bong-bonged musically. Flo ushered Morgan McLeod in. He was very tall, very straight and distinguished in tails and white tie. Only his face showed the strain he was under. He smiled a little when he saw who was there, but there was no pleasure in it, nothing more than a polite, rather cynical wonder that he should be included. Rock wondered if he hated O'Melveny as much as O'Melveny hated him. He looked at Diamond Annie. Her eyes rested steadily on McLeod's



handsome face and there was a strange glow in them that wasn't love. No, nor even admiration. It was hate again, a living burning flame of it that showed in spite of her. Hate suddenly seemed to fill the room, throbbing, like a song. A song of hatred, Rock thought. That's what has motivated this whole thing. A thirty-year-old song of hate.

**T**O COVER his emotion he cleared his throat noisily. "Corrigan, do you remember when I met you coming out of the Journal building?"

"Could I ever forget it?"

"Had you told O'Melveny about your encounter with Karen? About who she really was?"

"Why yes, I did."

"Then, Mr. O'Melveny," Rock said, "I think we've got you. In fact I'm sure we've got you."

O'Melveny poked at his mustache with a blunt forefinger. His eyes didn't twinkle exactly; they sort of glittered. "So I'm being got. May I ask what for?"

Rock said, "Why not? There's nothing like a nice quiet discussion to sort of clarify the atmosphere. What I meant to say was that you're the vice czar of this city; that you framed me for killing the little Frolics girl; that Baudino, after he'd killed the banker's son in Karen Lacey's apartment, thought it would please you if he framed Karen too. We both worked for the district attorney. You wanted to break McLeod more than anything else."

O'Melveny carefully clipped the end from a cigar. His hands were perfectly steady when he lit it and a little smile hovered about his mouth. "Would you like to see the girl again, Rock?"

Diamond Annie pulled a drawer out of a little table. When she turned she had a gun in her hand. She looked at O'Melveny. "I could kill you!"

He smiled at her. "But you won't. No one is going to kill me. No one is going to do anything to me—because none of you has one iota of proof. That's why I don't mind talking it

over like this. I'm holding all the aces."

McLeod spoke for the first time. "Where do we go from here, Bill?"

"Well," Rock admitted, "I've been chasing around in circles for a long time now. It just occurred to me a little while ago that O'Melveny could have known where to have me picked up. I telephoned him from here. He asked me where I was phoning from and I lied. There was nothing to stop him from tracing the call, though."

"But why were you so important to him?"

"He thought I had something that would cinch the case against him. As a matter of fact I didn't have it, didn't even know what it was, till a couple of hours ago. And after I got it I didn't know what I really had." He took out the manila envelope, slapped it on the table. "There is the business chart of the racket. It includes all the angles, from new recruits to shipping the leftovers to South America. But it didn't mention O'Melveny or his hired man Nick Baudino. I was stuck. I couldn't see why Baudino or anybody else should be so hot to find the thing. Then all of a sudden I did see, and I remembered that O'Melveny could have found out where I was, and now Corrigan tells me that he tipped off O'Melveny about the girl."

"They wanted the girl to use as a club over me. Baudino even let himself be seen grabbing her so that I'd know. He was safe enough in this because he always had the out that she was wanted for murder."

O'Melveny turned his back on them all. Cigar smoke hung heavy about his head and he waved a hand, dispelling it.

McLeod opened the manila envelope, ran through its contents. "There's a lot of stuff here, Rock, but I don't see anything to implicate O'Melveny."

"Let Corrigan look," Rock said. "He works for the guy."

Corrigan took one look. "My God!"

"Unh-hunh," Rock said. "I thought you'd recognize it."



McLeod said, "Recognize what?"

"O'Melveny's handwriting," Rock said. "That was the joker. With all that stuff written in his own fist he can't very well deny it, can he?"

O'Melveny turned then and looked at Diamond Annie. "You've got a gun in your hand," he said quietly. "You'd better see that I walk out of here. Otherwise I'm afraid your daughter—"

Rock said, "I've got Karen, O'Melveny."

O'MELVENY'S face turned livid. Anne raised her gun to shoot and he saw that she was going to do it and jumped the gun. Anne went down under him and together they rolled, over and over, and the gun kept making little popping sounds, muffled by their bodies. Rock kicked O'Melveny in the back of the head.

Corrigan and McLeod pulled O'Melveny off. Rock needn't have kicked him after all. His eyes were wide open, glazing. Diamond Annie just lay there. Two of her own bullets had found her chest and her blood was staining her beautiful gown and mingling with O'Melveny's, there on the thick white carpet.

Rock dropped to his knees, sobbing hoarsely. "Anne!"

Her fine eyes opened slowly. "You're a good sport, Bill. For your sake, not for anyone else's, I'm going to tell you something." She smiled at McLeod. It wasn't a pleasant smile. "I still hate you," she said. "I swore I'd hate you to my dying day and I guess this is it."

McLeod made choking sounds. Rock lifted Anne's head. "Take it easy, Anne. You'll be okay." He looked around. "Why in hell doesn't somebody get a doctor?"

And then he saw Jack Santanya and a lot of other cops bringing Karen and Smitty in.

Anne motioned for Karen to come and kneel at her side. "They lied to you, babe. I'm not your mother. I guess I liked to pretend I was—after a while. At first I hated you, same as

I did your father and the woman who took him away from me. But then I kind of got to watching you grow, and it was almost like something I'd created myself. When you went to work for—for him, I used to laugh, thinking about you both being together and not knowing. I used to laugh like hell—but I didn't mean it, I guess. Just kidding myself."

Rock gulped. "It was you that phoned me, Anne? Warning me to stay away from Karen?"

"I thought you were just trying to make her. I didn't—didn't know you—well, you know what." She let her eyes close for a moment. Santanya came up with a first-aid kit and got down on his knees. After a while he said, looking at Rock, "Nothing much we can do, fella. She'll go the minute she's moved."

Rock said, "You guys heard all there was to hear?"

"I think we've got all but a couple of points that don't matter much."

Karen bent and kissed Anne on the mouth. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you for everything."

Anne opened her eyes. They were as bright as her diamonds.

"Thank me?" she asked wonderingly. And then she laughed. "For what, babe? For snatching you? For keeping you away from your father all these years? For letting him think it was you they found instead of some kid nobody ever heard of?"

"No," Karen said. Her eyes were wet too. "Not for any of those things, Anne. For what you are doing now. For giving me a name and the man I love. I'm grateful, Anne."

"He used to call me that," Anne said drowsily. Her eyes were closing but she opened them for one last look at McLeod. "He didn't like Annie."

Presently Rock lifted Karen and took her to her father. They stared at each other, not saying anything.

"Well," Rock said, "why don't you kiss her, you fool? A lot of guys kiss their secretaries."

McLeod seemed to think this was a good idea.



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