

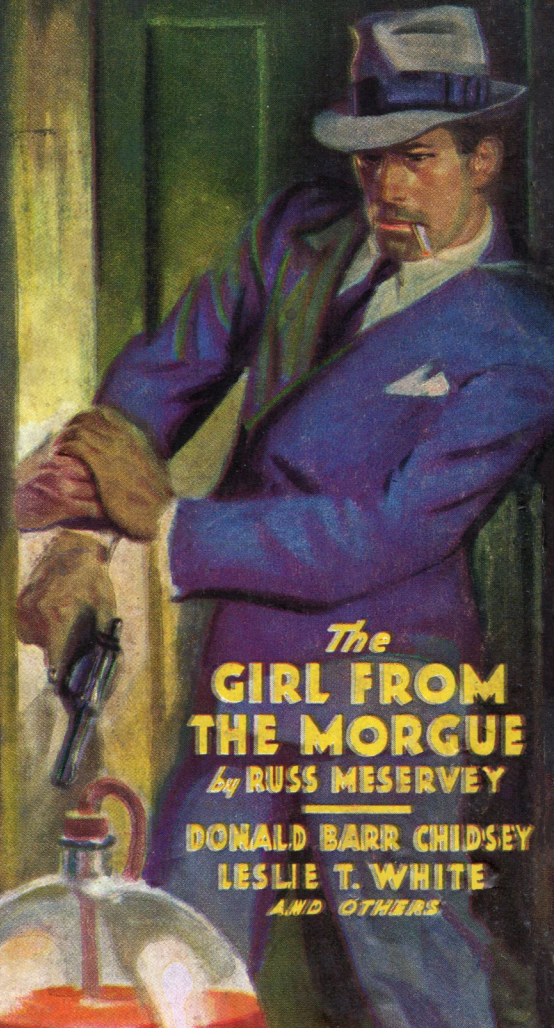
10¢ DIME  
**DETECTIVE**  
MAGAZINE

TWICE  
A MONTH

DECEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup>



**RED RAILS**  
*by* WILLIAM  
EDWARD HAYES



*The*  
**GIRL FROM  
THE MORGUE**  
*by* RUSS MESERVEY  
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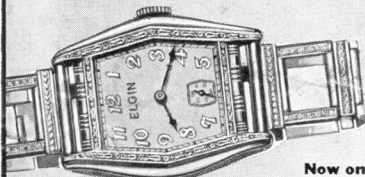
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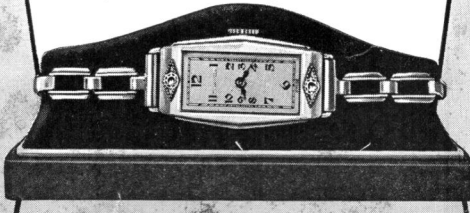


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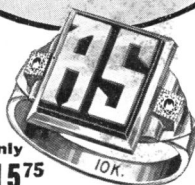
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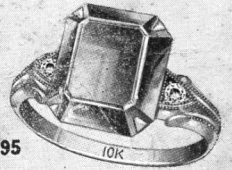


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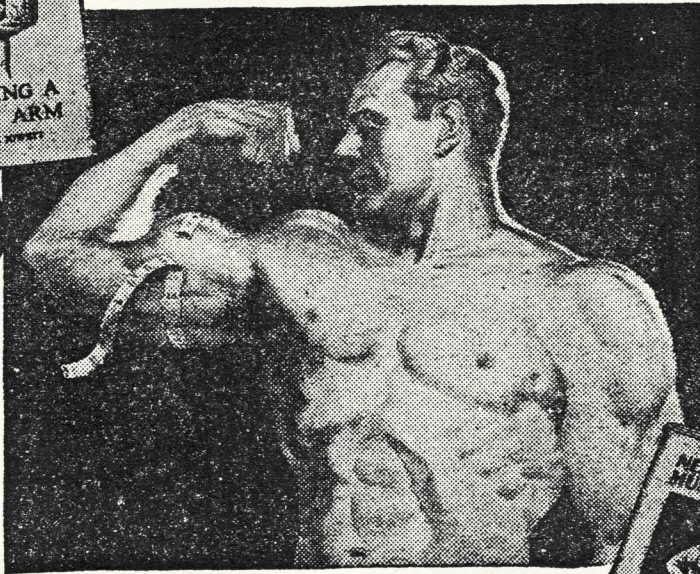




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**Vol. 15      CONTENTS for DECEMBER 1st, 1934      No. 2**

## 4 SMASHING MYSTERY-ACTION NOVELETTES 4

*Race through the night over*

**Red Rails**.....William Edward Hayes      8  
On the trail of a private car stolen from the end of a terror train.

*Follow*

**The Jade Beast—A Johnny Carr Story**.....R. D. Torrey      27  
As that hard-boiled private op translates a Greek's murder jargon into plain American.

*Meet*

**Murder In the Rain**.....Oscar Schisgall      44  
A stiffening bloodstained corpse, parked outside the Polo Club in Cavender's coupé.

*Step up and be*

**Chosen to Die**.....Leslie T. White      114  
In a gilt-edged, time-locked, steel-barred kill frame that didn't have even one weak link.

## 4 THRILLING DETECTIVE SHORT STORIES 4

*Make a date with*

**The Girl from the Morgue**.....Russ Meservey      62  
In that corpse-filled horror chamber where the dead rise from their coffins overnight.

*Weave a bolt of*

**Homespun Homicide**.....Jack Allman      76  
And prove that a city dick can be just as dumb as a country dep when a killer's loose.

*Watch a callow calf of a copper turn into a*

**Prize Bull**.....Donald Barr Chidsey      88  
When he gets a chance to clamp down on a murder set-up de luxe.

*Watch out—or*

**It's Your Own Funeral**.....Maxwell Hawkins      102  
If you make a habit of ordering silver-handled coffins for your friends before they really cash in.

*No. 5 in the interesting puzzle series*

**Cross Roads of Crime**.....Richard Hoadley Tingley      138  
Who is the man of mystery this time? And the answer to last issue's brain teaser.

*If you've got any*

**Bones to Pick**.....Editor      140  
This is the place to do it. Here are some remarks—both harsh and soft—from the fan ranks.

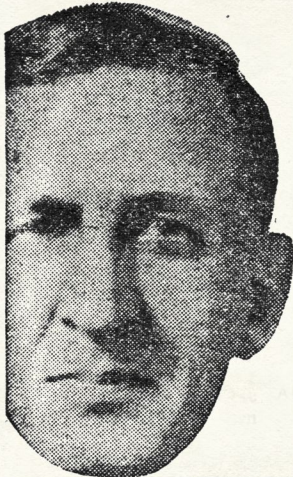
**Cover—"He Gripp'd a Thin Surgeon's Knife"**.....Walter Baumhofer  
From "The Girl from the Morgue."

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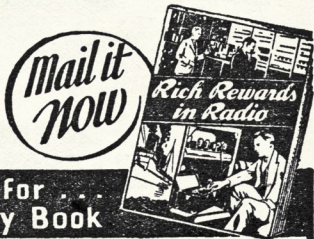
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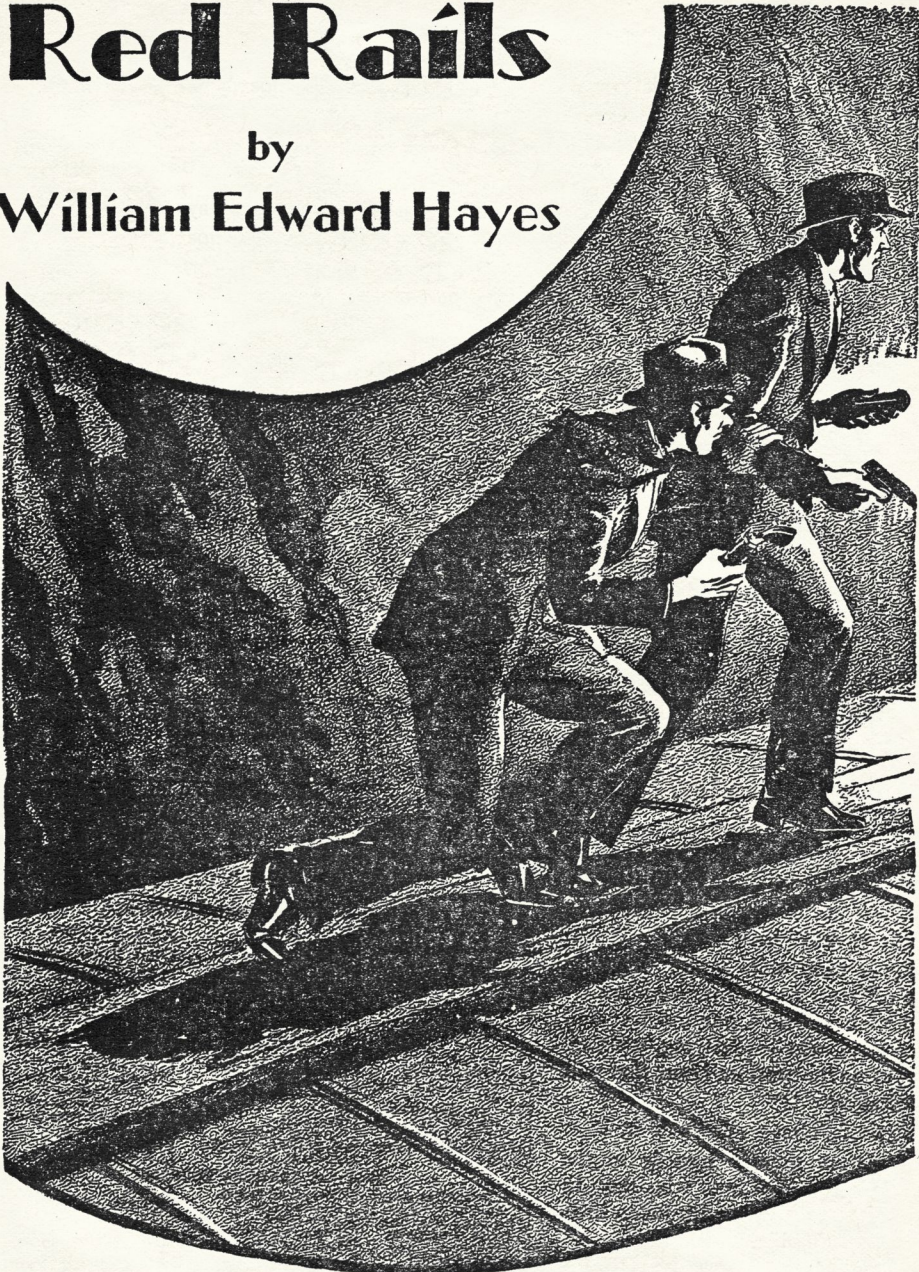
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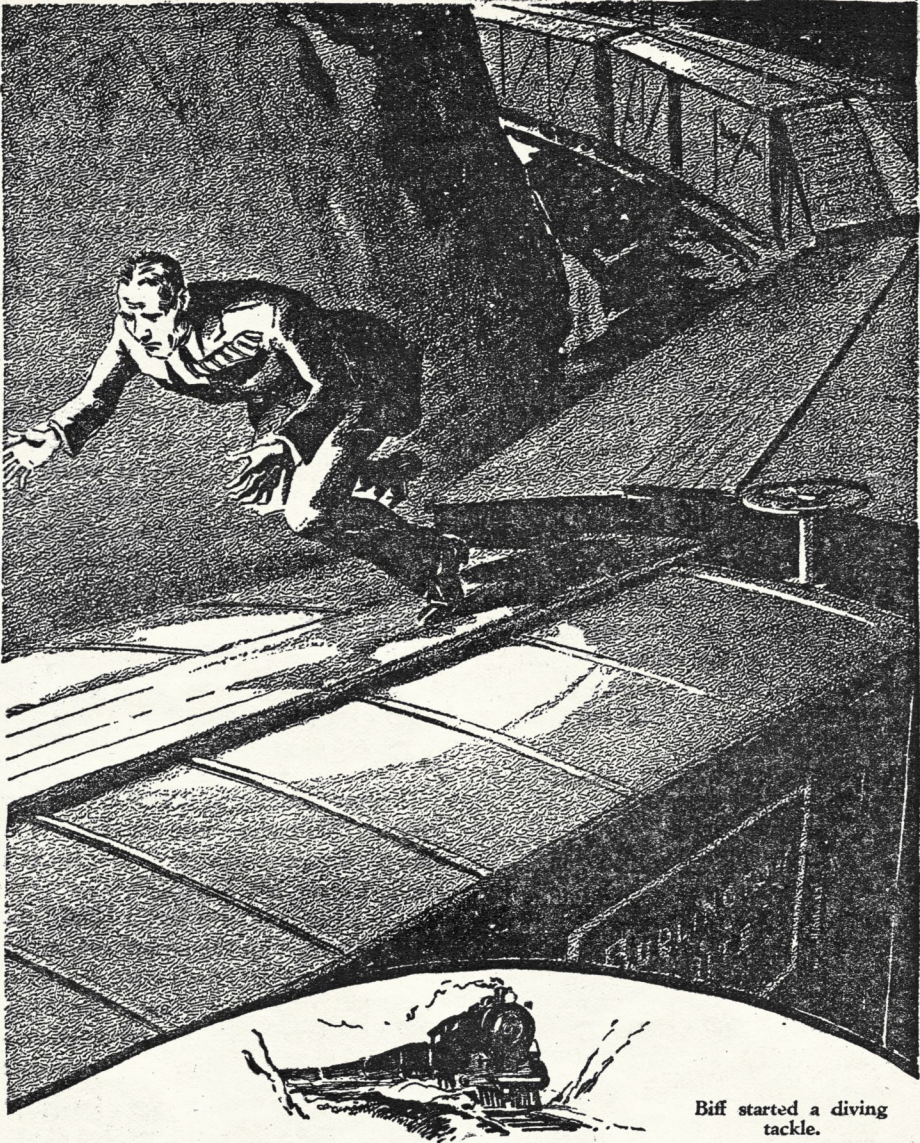
# Red Rails

by  
William Edward Hayes



*Biff Norton had fumbled the ball more than once when he'd played half on his eleven back in college but he'd always managed to recover, somehow. Now, as bodyguard for the boss's daughter he'd fumbled a whole private car, tacked onto the end of Train 31. And recovery in this case meant he'd have to block death on the one-yard line and blast his way to score—all in the last minute of play.*





Biff started a diving tackle.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Ghost

**B**IFF NORTON stood in front of the chief engineer's desk with a red flush on his lean cheeks and a glint of suspicion in his eyes. He displaced something like the same amount of cubic air space as one of those concrete telephone booths you see by the switch stand at a passing-track, and he felt just

about as animated. He never was cut out for office detail. The chief knew how much he despised it and was finding a fiendish pleasure in keeping him inside. The chief had a peculiar grin on that granite pan of his even now.

The chief said: "Sit, you mug." He spoke with a snap. "You don't take up as much office room that way." He nodded to a chair.

Biff sat. He was suspicious. He was



still burning under the disgrace which had come to him two weeks ago—being hauled in from the new main line construction, when all he had been doing was looking out for the company interests. He had tried to explain why he had waded into three gentlemen, single handed, who insisted on making trouble among the men by some labor protective-racket gag.

He could still hear this same chief engineer who had said at the time: "You're all right, Biff. A little crazy. If you weren't you wouldn't have attempted to settle a thing like that with those trip-hammer fists of yours. See? What you succeeded in doing was to bring about a bad tie-up in a new cut they were blasting out. You should have reported to the company and let the railroad take it up with the construction contractors to handle in an orderly way." Biff stared at the chief who still grinned.

Now the chief barked: "Look here. You want to get back out on the line?"

Which, any way you took it, was a hell of a question to put to some two hundred pounds of hellion like Biff. He had been in charge of the railroad company's end of the new main line job. A big thing, that. Almost a hundred and fifty miles through the mountains at a cost of about fifteen million bucks. His end of it wasn't to be compared to the construction outfit's part, but Biff had thought to find in this responsibility a stepping stone up to something higher.

Biff said: "Do I want to breathe?" in answer to the chief's query. He didn't want any kidding about this.

The chief studied him a minute. Finally he cleared his throat. "All right, Biff, you listen." The chief hunched his shoulders over the desk as he leaned forward. He glared right at Biff and his smile died.

"You know Hamilton Todd?" Biff's superior asked.

"Yes sir."

Biff certainly did know Hamilton Todd. He was the millionaire contractor who had taken over the real building of that main line. Todd was rated a construction wizard. After a slow start under another outfit whose contract had been suddenly cancelled, Todd had taken on the stupendous job. There had been a suspicion among the rank and file that certain interests on a competing railroad didn't care a whole lot about seeing this new main line completed within a reasonable period because of what it would do to the business on their own carrier. Something you couldn't prove, of course, but the job had certainly been bungled at the beginning, and Todd was now putting his dynamic personality into it.

"That labor racket trouble," the chief added. "We've developed several things definitely by our investigation. In the first place, Snap Kepper is the brains behind it."

"Kepper!" Biff was not aware he had spoken. His lashes came together in a squint. Kepper was the Northwest's Public Enemy No. 1AAA.

"The labor stuff was just a blind," the chief went on, "for the deeper reason for tying up the work. That's what we think. We're not sure. But I can't see Snap Kepper out for little dollar-per-week-per-man pay envelope stuff. Somebody's paying that yegg good dough to hold us back, and we've got as much chance finding out who, as we have of building steel to heaven."

**T**HERE was a certain youthful ferocity to Biff's features as he listened. He was a good-looking chap in a rugged sort of way, and when he scowled like this the girls would sigh. He took in the chief's information wondering. Now the chief paused, and Biff waited.

Presently the chief said: "You know Todd has a daughter?"



Biff colored. He knew too well. He nodded. "Yair." No use in going into the past with the chief. No point in telling about those days in college when Virginia Todd was the snootiest, the swellest, the grandest, the most glorious—Biff swallowed. His collar felt a little too tight. What the hell did Todd's daughter have to do with it?

"Todd hasn't much more sense than you have," the chief said. "Yesterday morning he threw Snap Kepper's chief dropper down two flights of stairs after the dropper had come to present certain financial demands—a statement that Todd pay or else."

"You mean," Biff's eyes were suddenly wide, "Todd's daughter—"

"No. Nothing about his daughter. This is what I mean. Here's where you come in. There's been more trouble up on the line. Last night. A rock-slide that nobody can explain. All right. Todd is going up there and run the works himself. He's fighting mad, and he's going to show the hoodlums they can't stop him. Todd's leaving on Number Thirty-one at four this afternoon. That'll put him there at the job by eight in the morning."

Biff nodded. Things were turning over inside him.

"This morning Todd received a threatening letter." The chief dropped his voice. "The letter told him he would never reach the new main line unless he decided to retract for throwing Snap's dropper into a basement. Todd showed the letter to the road's president and when the Old Man wanted to call in a squad of company dicks to protect Todd, he laughed in the Old Man's face. He said: 'To hell with that. I'll look out for myself.' He said to keep the police out of it because he didn't want to alarm Virginia. That's his girl. He's going to take her up to the job with him. He doesn't want to take a chance

on leaving her here. Somebody might make off with her."

Biff felt himself going tenser by the second. His hands were wet. He still didn't see where this concerned him. His puzzled stare deepened.

"The Old Man," the chief said, "isn't taking any chances. He's giving Todd his private car, and since Todd insists he wants no bodyguard, the Old Man told me to pick out a guy who nobody'd ever suspect, and let him ride the train to keep an eye on Todd. If anything happened to Todd, God help the new railroad."

Biff gulped. "And I'm supposed to be elected?" He couldn't believe it.

"Why not?" the chief grinned at him. "You're a company field engineer. Nothing suspicious about you riding Number Thirty-one. I've arranged for you to have a drawing room on the Pullman next ahead of the private car. The private car, of course, will be on the tail end of the train. Your drawing room will be on the end next to the rear."

"But look here," Biff protested. "I'm not any gumshoe. I can't—"

"You want to get back on the line, don't you?" the chief snapped.

"Well, yes." Biff glared at the floor.

"Well, then! You're picked! You ride that train. Keep your eye out for any suspicious characters, especially at stops. You know the kind. Don't let Todd suspicion that you're doing this. He'd never get over it. You see he gets there safely. I've told the president himself who I was picking for this job, so—"

Biff looked into the stony countenance. What a kick Virginia Todd would get out of knowing he had come down to this! It had been bad enough in the school days, waiting table, driving a milk wagon, doing almost any old thing and being snubbed by her for doing them.

"You got a couple company bulls," Biff said stubbornly. "They—"



"They look like bulls. You could see 'em a mile off. You don't. You look like a disappointed heavyweight with a lightweight brain. You go get some rest and food and get yourself ready. There's only one way anybody can get at Todd on that rear end, and that's through the front vestibule of the private car which'll have to be opened with an acetylene torch, provided you watch the Pullman aisle and see nobody goes through the vestibule that way. Got it?"

"Sure, but—"

"Remember. Snap Kepper says Todd won't get to that job. You see that he does. You do that, and—well, you'll have the railroad in your lap. Get going."

**T**RAIN No. 31 was a Chicago-Pacific Coast all-Pullman job. It made few stops. Mostly for operating purposes. Change of engines at division points, coal and water.

Biff stood disconsolately in the terminal station while the passengers boarded the train. Travel seemed unusually heavy. There were streams of people coming down the platform beneath the shed. Biff watched them from where he lounged against a steel column and bemoaned his fate. All a lot of silly tommyrot, he told himself. You read about such things in books. You never saw 'em happen in broad day on a sane and sensible railroad. He hoped Virginia Todd wouldn't see him. He was glad he didn't have to go into the private car. Just watch the aisle leading into the vestibule of that varnished wagon.

A couple of gentlemen with blue jaws, close shaven, went by. Biff wondered if they had guns. Pretty soon he began to see potential gunmen in everybody. He lit a cigarette and didn't want it. He crushed it under his heel. He was looking down at it when a rather exotic odor smote his nostrils and he looked up to

see Virginia Todd's eyes laughing at him.

Virginia Todd said: "Well, well, well, *well!* If it isn't Biff himself!" She stuck out a hand. He hadn't seen her in three years.

"Howdy," Biff said. He was confused. He mumbled something about it being a big surprise. He didn't mumble very convincingly.

"Meet the executive," Virginia said. "Mr. Norton. Biff Norton, dad."

Hamilton Todd smiled above a hard, fighting chin. "Not *the* Biff Norton. Not the egg who ran ninety-six yards against Harvard in the last two minutes of play to make the only score of the game! In the mud at that!"

Biff went all red. He twisted a toe around.

"The same," Virginia said. "Fancy meeting you here." She asked a lot of questions. People passed by. Biff gulped and answered confusedly. Yes, he worked for the railroad. Yes, he was going out the line to the new job. Oh, he was *so* surprised she was going to. She said she thought it perfectly swell. He didn't express any opinion. He kept looking around uncomfortably for gentlemen bearing machine guns and bad intentions.

He wasn't exactly clear on just when she breezed away or when he boarded his Pullman and slumped down on his drawing room seat with his door open so he could watch the aisle. All he knew was that she still was glorious, and grand, and beautiful, and she had asked him back to visit in the Old Man's private car with her, and she didn't seem at all snooty like she used to be at school. He sat there staring at the carpet waiting for somebody with a coil of rope or a couple of cannons to come barging through, and wishing that a swell girl like Virginia Todd didn't have a nickle to her name and could live on a field engineer's couple hundred a month.



After a while, just before dark, he went out in the car and took a look over his passengers. Evidently, by prearrangement, the ticket men hadn't sold much space in this particular wagon. An old lady with a lot of books, magazines and papers occupied a section toward the forward end. An elderly woman and a girl, obviously her daughter, were in another section. Two old men and a youth. A young mother with an infant. Nobody else. You didn't have to watch this lot.

The porter had Biff's dinner sent over from the diner. He made the flagman, a little fellow called Henny, share it with him. The flagman rode the Pullman because such menials were not supposed to hang around private cars. When the train made a stop the flagman went back through the private car, dropped off the observation platform, and did his stuff. When the engineer called him in he reversed the process. Biff wondered if he had been cautioned to watch that hind end. Biff wouldn't ask. He kept his own counsel.

**T**HE TRAIN changed engines about seven thirty. The berths were made up at nine. There was another stop at ten; when again engines were changed. Biff wished he hadn't pleaded an excuse to keep from taking up Virginia Todd on her invitation. He would like to go back. He looked at his watch and debated until ten thirty, and then decided it was probably best that he didn't go back.

The more time wore on, the sillier the whole thing seemed to him. Henny, the little flagman, had given way to a big, taciturn fellow at that last division point, and Biff didn't encourage the man in conversation. He all but closed his door, kept the light off inside the drawing room. He fixed himself so he could keep the dim aisle in sight. He didn't bother to take out the heavy calibre pistol the chief had in-

sisted on him taking. The pistol was in his bag.

No. 31, called "The Ghost" by the operating men because of the way she slid through the night on her roller bearings, half silent in her progress, twisted into the hill country, stretched its length across a short tangent, and leaned on the bend that approached the little water-stop of Valerie.

Biff checked his time-table against his watch and identified the stop by the hour. It was 11:52. Peering through the crack of his door, he saw the flagman pass through the aisle. He waited a moment, then opened his door wider. He stuck out his head. Instead of going through the vestibule into the now darkened private car, the flagman had opened the trap and was descending to the ground from the rear vestibule of the Pullman. Biff, one eye on the aisle, went back and looked out. He saw nothing but heavy darkness, and a short distance back the red and white dots of the flagman's lanterns. The flagman was somewhere in the vicinity of the private car's observation platform.

There was a freight train in the siding on his right, away from the depot. He could see the caboose far around the bend and knew the freight was headed in the same direction as the passenger train. He tried to find it on the company time-card, just to see whether it was a regular schedule. He found No. 651, and it was due to let No. 31 pass it here. It was listed as a fast freight, second class. The road had a reputation for running freight trains on schedule time.

Presently the engine blasted the call for the flagman and Biff, so as not to create any suspicion, left the vestibule and went back to his drawing room. Again he fixed the door. Again he prepared himself to take up this useless vigil.

He heard the two air hisses which told him the flagman was aboard, and the



answering bark came back from the engine. Then the train lurched ahead, none too gently, gathered speed and settled into a lulling roll.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Stolen Car

**B**IFF didn't know when he went to sleep, and at the time didn't know just how long he had been asleep. Being big and healthy, and sitting in a warm, dark room that way with the soft motion under you, sleep comes naturally.

It was the quick check of the speed and the sound of excited voices that brought him out of his doze. He sprang to his feet, dazed at first, then shoved open his door and saw the train conductor, the Pullman conductor and the porter at the vestibule door. The train was coming down to an emergency stop.

A wild panic seized Biff even before he got his mouth open. Then he was in the aisle demanding: "What's happened? What's happened?"

The conductor turned to him with, "Plenty. You're Biff Norton, aren't you?"

"Yeah," Biff snapped. "Don't tell me—"

"I ain't in any position to tell you anything," the conductor said. "All you gotta do is take a look." He waved his arm.

Biff looked. Into yawning darkness, punctuated now and then by flashes of lightning. He looked and a cold sweat broke out all over him. The private car was not on the train!

Shoving the others aside he went into the vestibule and looked helplessly again. Then he turned wide eyes to the conductor.

"But how—"

"Don't ast me," the conductor shouted. "How the hell do I know? I was up in the club car doin' my desk work. Eleven cars ahead of this one, young feller. We

passed Grayson a few minutes ago, an' the porter came a-runnin' into me an' said we didn't have our hind end with us."

The train came to a complete stop. The conductor reached up and jerked down the cord three times sharply. It was the signal to the engine to back up.

Biff turned to the porter. "God. The flagman. He's not on?"

"Naw, suh," the porter blurted. "Ain't seen him sence befo' we lef' Valerie. Ain't seen—"

"When'd you—how'd you find we didn't have the car—"

"Me? Ah was up in the gemmen's room, fo'wahd end, shinin' up shoes fo' the passengers. Ah bring back lady's pair 'cross the aisle there. Jes' happen look out the do' an' it come lightnin' right then. An', Lawdy! No cah! Ah stahsted me runnin' fo' the cap'n."

Biff, in wild panic, stared into the darkness as the train backed slowly. They all crowded into the vestibule now to watch intently for any sign of the missing car. And into Biff's half-dazed brain, a parade of questions pushed. When? Where? How? Who did it? Why had he dozed? If he'd only waited until the flagman got back on. If he'd only made sure—

The warning of the chief engineer smote him, drove the breath almost from him, hung it in his throat where his lungs pumped shallowly. "Don't let anything happen to Todd. Take him out of the picture and you've got the railroad tied into a knot on the new building." The words hammered into his mind like the hammering of a big engine's pistons under the force of steam.

Helplessly he stared at the dark and was conscious of the conductor pressing against him. The conductor's face was tense, grim. He was an old man in the service. A thing like this would go hard



with him. Losing the hind end of a train. Preposterous. Didn't they make air-brake equipment to take care of just such things? Wouldn't both ends of a parted train have the brakes set on them at once?

The conductor kept saying, over and over: "I can't understand it. I can't figger it out." He kept muttering to himself as he stared into the night.

And Biff Norton lived, while the train backed into the blackness, his conversation with his chief that afternoon. Word by word he heard his chief tell him of Snap Kepper's ultimatum that Hamilton Todd would not reach the new construction on this train.

A nameless dread assailed him as presently two patches of yellow light came into view and the train backed down on the lonely little telegraph office of Grayson. Mechanically, he looked at his watch. He was amazed to see that it was only 12:32. Just forty minutes since he had last looked out and seen the private car intact back there at Valerie. He knew Valerie was twenty miles east of this town of Grayson. The track was crooked over that twenty miles, and considerably up and down. He recalled the freight train that had been waiting at Valerie for No. 31 to get ahead of it. According to standard practice, that freight would pull out of Valerie ten minutes following No. 31's departure. The freight was somewhere between Valerie and Grayson now.

**A** COLD SWEAT broke over Biff's brow at this new possibility. If something had happened to the flagman that he hadn't actually got on, and there was no one protecting that car, wherever it stood, the freight had a good chance to plow into it, and maim or kill its occupants. Without warning! Maybe it was in that way that Snap Kepper had planned his strike at the millionaire builder who had so openly defied him.

The conductor was signalling with his lantern and the train ground to a halt at the Grayson platform. A white-faced operator, with staring eyes, came running out.

"I—I tried to get you stopped," the operator faltered. "I—I saw you—you didn't have all your train when you got by me, and I waved my lantern but—but nobody was looking."

Then the conductor said: "Number Six fifty-one? The freight train. When'd he leave Valerie?"

"Twelve thirteen," the operator answered. "Six minutes before you passed here. Where's somebody named Norton?"

Biff identified himself.

"The super wants you to report to him on the dispatcher's phone right away."

Biff went in and clamped the receiver to his ear. His knuckles were white and pink where his fist was clenched. He asked for the division boss.

"Great God, Norton," the super bawled, "what've you done?"

Biff explained with a trembling tight voice. He explained briefly.

"As soon as the Grayson operator reported you fellows by without that private car, I communicated with your chief, Norton. He told me to have you investigate, and if anything's happened to those people, to pull you out of service for investigation and send company detectives to the scene at once. Tell that conductor to back up against Number Six Fifty-one under control until he finds his tail end. Watch out sharp for the freight train. Soon as you can determine what's happened, report directly to me."

Biff relayed the super's instructions to the conductor. The old fellow looked bewildered. He said: "You can't do that. We might back into that freight train an' the private car an'—"

"Not if we hang red fire over us. We can see the headlight of the freight en-



gine." Biff snatched up the conductor's lantern and gave a wide, circular signal. The engineer whistled three times and got into motion. He knew that the freight engine, on discovering the private car, would not proceed on the theory that the passenger train would be back for it. At least it wouldn't proceed for quite some time.

Biff climbed aboard, and again with the silent conductor at his side, watched through the night. He lit several fuses, and stuck them around the vestibule on the outside so that the red flare of light they made would not prevent them from seeing the car when it came into sight.

The progress seemed to take an infinite span of time. Mile by mile—mile by mile. And then, suddenly, a vast aureole in the inky sky—

**T**HE passenger train crept down with its flare of red, its tense, tight-lipped conductor, and Biff Norton posed on the vestibule step, ready to learn the worst. The freight train was behind the private car which loomed ahead of the engine's silver blade, cutting off the direct beams of light as the passenger train closed in.

The conductor pulled the air cord down and brought the Pullmans to a stop. Biff was on the gravel—running. A group of lanterns were ranged around the front end of the private car. One separated from the others and came to meet him. Biff saw a dark, round face under a drooping hat brim.

"Are they—all right?" Biff panted. He kept going. The man turned and trotted at his side.

The man said: "Gone. All but the flagman. He's—"

Biff didn't need to hear more. He was into the group now and stared down at the ghastly features on which the lanterns shone. The sightless eyes of the flagman stared up at him.

"God in heaven," Biff said. He dropped to one knee, terror all but sinking him.

"Somebody sure socked him," the man with the floppy hat said. He then introduced himself. He was Feeny, railroad bull, who had been riding the freight train. "Whole back of his head caved in."

"Murder," Biff mumbled. He sprang to his feet and dashed up into the car.

**B**IFF'S search of the car was quick but thorough. Feeny was at his side. Feeny kept saying: "You ain't gonna find nothin' in here. I tell you I been all over everything. Gone. *Poof!*" He made a blowing sound through pursed lips. "Just like that."

The car was divided up, like all business cars, into a certain number of sleeping state rooms, office, kitchen, dining compartment, and the lounge at the observation end. Biff tried the rear door. It was securely locked. He examined the windows. They too were locked with the exception of those in the two rooms where the beds had shown occupancy.

Biff didn't need to be told which of the two rooms Virginia Todd had occupied. Her exotic scent of the afternoon, clung around it, caused things to happen inside him. There was no disorder, no appearance of struggle. Two traveling cases were near the wall, a toilet set was laid out. Everything looked as though Virginia Todd had simply got out of bed, dressed herself and flew through the window. Biff saw that the suit she wore that afternoon was not there.

The examination of the other room was no more enlightening. Hamilton Todd was known to be a man who, even in his late fifties, had a piledriver punch and a will to use the fistic training he had gotten in those long years of laying steel in the fever jungles and the frozen wastes of Canada. There was no evidence that he had attempted to use anything. Like



the girl's quarters, the engineer's room was without extraordinary disturbance. Todd's robe was across the foot of the bed. His pajamas were on the floor as though he had stepped out of them there. Nothing else.

Biff turned from his second round of the car with bitter disappointment written over his face, and a definite ache in his heart. He thought of his chief. He thought of how he had made a fool of himself in the chief's eyes a couple of weeks ago, and now again tonight—

And yet it wasn't his own fate that bothered him. He didn't even think of that. He was possessed with a mad desire to find the whereabouts of Todd and Virginia, deliver them safely if they were still alive, and then hammer the hell out of somebody for tricking him, or at least taking them right out from under his nose. He turned to the detective.

"When'd you fellows come up behind this car? What time?" Biff glanced at his watch. It was not quite one o'clock. All this within an hour. Incredible.

"Five minutes before we heard you fellers comin' back," the detective said. "Lucky the car was stopped where it is. The engineer had a chance to see it. He came down to a flyin' stop, but he didn't bump it. It was him who found the flagman dead an' the car empty. When I got over from the caboose, I seen him an' the fireman standing there, not knowin' what to do. Then the conductor come over an' we started the investigation."

Biff talked to the engineer. The engineer could tell him nothing. The conductor even less. The freight train had merely left Valerie at 12:13 after taking water, and had proceeded along its course some fourteen miles or so when the lights on the rear of the private car loomed up. The engineer said he thought, naturally, the passenger train had stalled and hadn't

sent back a flagman. He had all he could do to stop.

Doing a little mental arithmetic with the aid of his watch, Biff calculated as nearly as possible, the time at which the private car was separated from the rest of the train. He set the time at approximately 12:15, or twenty minutes after the Pullman left Valerie.

WITH the expert advice of the engineer on the freight train, and the help of the glum Mr. Feeny, Biff worked out the theory that, during the stop for water at Valerie, some person or persons had got underneath the coupling between the Pullman and the private car and had removed the safety chains, and other connections. They had evidently turned the angle cocks on the air hose of both cars so that later, apparently when the passenger train was drifting downhill with couplings bunched, the person or persons were able to simply lift the coupling lever and cast the private car adrift.

It was plain that whoever pulled the job had waylaid the flagman just as he was about to board the vestibule after being called in at Valerie. The flagman, judging from the dried blood in evidence, had probably been cracked over the head then and there, stowed in a corner of the vestibule, and left to die if death had not already come to him. A search of the flagman's body showed that his keys had been removed, and the raiders had thus gained entrance to the private car. After having cut the car off the train at their convenience, the unknown assailants had brought it down to a stop with the hand brake. The hand brake, in fact, was still set.

So far, so good. Biff reviewed his reasoning with a bursting head. What did it all lead to? Where were Todd and Virginia?

"Any highways close?" Biff asked suddenly.



"Nothin'," Feeny gloomed. He looked like he was about to cry. "Nothin' like that. Thought of it myself when I seen there wasn't nobody aboard. Not a danged road without you walk about eleven miles back, an' then it's nothin' but a little ol' gravel road."

"Field for an airplane to land?" Biff asked hurriedly. He was peering around through the dark.

"Naw," Feeny said. "Bet you couldn't land a plane within twenty miles of here. All rough badlands. You oughtta know. Naw sir. You know what I figger? I figger if Todd an' his gal was kidnaped, they was kidnaped back at Valerie right under your nose. Took right off there, an' this car was cut off in here to throw us all off the track. It can't be nothin' else. You can't take two people off a car in the middle of nowhere like this an' just lift 'em outta sight without you got some way of liftin' 'em an' somewhere to put 'em when you do lift 'em. You understand that?"

"And you can't cut off a car fourteen or fifteen miles west of Valerie," Biff retorted, "unless you've got somebody to do the job."

"We can't stand here all night," Feeny said. "We'll let Number Thirty-one couple into her lost car, and I'll ride on into Grayson with it and report. You'd better come along, Norton. Nothin' to be gained by stayin' here. We can call out the county officers to throw a dragnet over the roads leadin' from Valerie an' any other roads kidnapers might take. We can turn over this body."

"I haven't looked around yet," Biff insisted, and still he knew the detective was at least partly right. The trains couldn't be kept standing there.

"I have," Feeny said. "An' I'm tellin' you! It rained here all day. Ditch an' gravel's soft. I looked it over. There ain't a single track leadin' away from this rail-

road. Of course, if you wanna stay here and—"

The passenger train pulled out with the flagman's body and the detective. The freight crew waited until the required ten minutes should elapse after which it could follow. Biff borrowed a lantern from the fireman. Probably a crazy thing even to think about, this going back and cutting a circle around. But he wasn't satisfied. Feeny seemed to be in too much of a hurry to let things stand as they were. If Todd and Virginia couldn't be driven away in a car, and couldn't be flown away from the vicinity, it was a cinch there was someplace close in which to hide them, or there was some other avenue of egress.

With a puzzled frown on his goodly features, and his lantern held close to the ground, he struck back along the track keeping close to the standing freight. The gravel, as Feeny had said, told nothing. In the first place, ballast gravel is packed and tamped so tightly that it couldn't hold a track. It can be disturbed by footsteps, yes, but it leaves no print. It just shifts.

Biff went back half the length of the long freight train, inspecting every inch of the ground minutely. It wasn't an easy job with this yellowish lantern light, but he couldn't shake that strange feeling that if he kept looking long enough he'd come upon something.

About the middle of the train he decided to branch out farther from the tracks and circle back. The right-of-way ditch contained water. There was soft ground around it. He worked along this, looking for marks. He came to a thick fringe of brush growth, paused suddenly and the blood froze in his veins. He dropped to one knee.

The lantern showed plainly that somebody had been there. In fact it looked as though two bundlesome objects had been laid under the bushes. The ground there was very soft, and there was, under close



inspection, an impression in the earth as that which might be made by the herring-bone design of cloth. Cloth of which a man's suit might be made. The impression, where it showed most plainly, indicated it might have been made by a knee forced down hard.

There were footprints. They were fresh. They were heavy, and there was no indication that a woman's foot had been set down here. He rose from the bushes breathless. Not more than a few minutes ago, unless he was all cockeyed, somebody had crouched and lain right here, and—

The freight-engine whistle blasted out its bark for the flag. Biff came up with eyes wide. The flagman, from far to the rear, threw the highball sign. The engine lunged against its tonnage.

Things were whirling in Biff's harried brain. If somebody had been in these bushes just so recently, where could they have gone now. What would the way out be? He stared at the freight. Things started to click into place in his mind. The freight cars were moving, gathering momentum because the grade was fairly steep.

### CHAPTER THREE

Snap Kepper

**S**UDDENLY Biff made a dive across the ditch. He staggered, dropped his lantern, lost it. He didn't care. Unless he was stark mad, somewhere on that freight train was the secret to the whole affair.

Biff lowered his head and lunged up the slight fill. The cars were rolling by him at a good, stiff clip; and the footing was treacherous because of the way the gravel rolled beneath him. Settling into a fast lope, he reached out and caught a side ladder. He gave a leap for the stirrup, lost his footing and let go of the ladder

just in time to save himself from being hurled under the wheels.

Panting, lungs bursting, heart hammering, he clenched his teeth and made another try. The guy who ran ninety-six yards through the entire Crimson team wasn't going to let a measly freight train get out from under his fingers. Not when his honor, his job and a few other things depended upon it. Again grasping the side ladder of a box car he hoisted his feet in a flying leap. One caught the iron stirrup safely. The other slipped through, causing him to bang his shin. The pain was so intense he almost let go his hold. He clung on grimly, rested a long moment hanging there, giving himself a chance to get his breath.

The thought persisted that he might be all wet—that he might be rolling, with every turn of the wheels, farther and farther away from Virginia Todd and her father, and thereby being of no aid to them. The fear of what his chief was going to say now, burned up in him like a flame. He just couldn't be wrong. He swore beneath his breath. Not in a thousand years could he be wrong.

Hand over hand, inch by inch, he worked his way up the side of the car. The wheels clicked over the rail joints at a good thirty miles per. In a very few minutes they would be at Grayson. The freight train would probably stop because it was possible that the passenger train was losing a lot of time at Grayson while the dick was explaining what had been found. When the freight stopped, Biff figured, he could get the conductor and a few others to help him comb it. There wouldn't be much chance for Todd's abductors to get away. Always providing, of course, that he wasn't making an ass of himself by barking up the wrong tree.

The reasoning of the cinder dick, back where they had stopped, that Todd and Virginia had in all probability been



snatched off the railroad back there at Valerie and, by now, were a good distance away in somebody's keeping, kept forcing its way into his thoughts, dampening his faith in his own ideas. Still, there were those marks in the mud under the fringe of bushes along the right-of-way ditch—

It was some sixth sense that transmitted to him the warning. But it hadn't been transmitted fast enough. He was up on the roof of the car, on one knee, holding tight against the rock and bounce of the car before he saw the huge shadow creep up on him. The darkness was intense where the train curved its way through a gorge. The rock walls were close against the track. The engine and caboose were both out of sight, lost in the curves.

Flaring up suddenly, a pencil of light swept Biff's face. He stared into it and saw a gun poked at him. Then two men were over him. One was shouting to the other: "It's the punk that socked me on the construction job. The punk they put to watch—"

With a swift rush, Biff sought to defy firearms, numbers and the law of gravity. He was on one knee. He thought if he made it a sort of diving tackle, the man couldn't shoot. But the man evidently figured Biff would try something, having had first hand experience with him before.

Biff started the dive. He never quite finished it. In the midst of the attempt, a gun butt smashed down on his skull, spinning him over, shooting glorious lights through a brain that suddenly became engulfed in a vast darkness.

**S**NAP KEPPER, the public enemy with the 1AAA rating, was not a man to be defied. Slim, efficient, a tightly coiled spring under his flawless clothes, he held gangland in the palm of his hand. Possessed of a diabolical brain, his henchmen stood in awe at his cunning. When he said he had a little job to pull along the

railroad and then outlined just who was to take part and how each was to function, the whole machine was set up with precision. He called the play and every man was in his place to do his part. Nothing was too stupendous for him to undertake, and he never asked a single man in his employ to do a thing that he, himself, would not do. Let one man slip and his life was snuffed out without hesitation. Human life meant nothing in Snap's career. He played big games for big stakes, and he weighed the chances he took for what they were worth. He took a fiendish glory in the cleverness of his schemes which must be always spectacular. Like the Hamilton Todd case, for instance—

It would have been simple for Snap Kepper to take Todd out of the picture any one of a number of times. It would have been quite easy to snipe him off as he entered his car after the defiance he had shown in throwing that boy of Snap's down a couple of flights of stairs. But when Snap decreed that Hamilton Todd should die, he planned a death that would give Todd plenty of time to think while death was coming, and would, at the same time, show the railroad that Snap Kepper was power which could not be brooked. The fact that Biff Norton had thrown himself into the picture, was just something more to make Snap hum contentedly. He had expected that he might deal with Biff Norton at some later date if the kid got troublesome. He had not quite looked for the big engineer to walk right into the main picture. But now that he was here —

Biff came to life slowly. He came out of his darkness painfully. At first he couldn't quite make out that rolling, roaring sensation. Then he saw that gray light shone at what seemed a far distance. He tried to get the hum out of his splitting head and aching ears, but it wouldn't go.



Presently he tried to move. Moving was also painful. So he lay still through a long pause and fragments of memory flitted about and pieced themselves, little by little, together. They fell into a groove in his brain, suddenly clicked, and brought him taut and alert.

His first sensation was that of vast panic. Then he squinted and decided to take a careful look around. He didn't want to be socked over the head again. If there was any more socking to be done, Mr. Norton wanted to be right in there doing the bulk of it himself.

Peering about, he made out what seemed to be two squatting figures. One was very close to him. Then he determined that his resting place was the floor of a box car and from the smell, it was at least partly loaded with lumber. Yes, the dark shadow looming almost over him was a stack of freshly cut planks. So far, so good. The gray light seemed to be coming around the crack of a side door. Yes, that is what it was. The dim gray of a cloudy dawn. It was summer and this light came early. Possibly about half past four.

The roll of the car wheels changed to a creep and presently all was still. The train had come to a stop. Biff wondered if it were the same train on which he had taken that wallop over the head.

A voice spoke, whispering: "Kildare?"

A squatting form rose, went to the door, shoved it back ever so slightly. The man at the door said: "Yeah. Kildare."

Biff knew they were speaking of a station, a deserted little place on the way to the summit of the first mountain.

**F**ROM the forward end of the car, out of the darkness, there came suddenly a sound that seemed that of a moan behind a gag. Biff stiffened. And then, from without the car, a low whistle was answered by a whistle from the man at

the door. The door was shoved a little wider. A newcomer stuck up his hand, was pulled in.

"Got 'em?" the man asked. The other was pulling the sliding door shut, cutting out the little grayness that might have made seeing possible.

"All here, Snap," the man at the door said. "Todd an' his girl. An' one you didn't figger on. The punk, Norton."

Biff tensed and a hot flame surged up in him. So this was the big shot, Kepper! "O.K.," Snap said. "How's your brass?"

"You got a nose," the other answered.

Biff heard a sniffing sound. He wanted to sniff too. He didn't just understand all about this business. He didn't want to attract attention to himself. Not just yet. However, it seemed that he did detect a peculiar odor. Lying as he was, almost afraid to breathe, he merely waited. The train seemed to be stopping for a long time.

"No hitch?" Snap queried. He touched a match to a cigarette. Biff closed his eyes and lay inert.

"None," a thin voice said. "There's probably a dozen posses combin' the country back around Grayson an' Valerie. We got stopped at Grayson but nobody give us a tumble. We laid there thirty minutes waitin' for the passenger train to get goin', but everybody was too excited gettin' the sheriff, an' the coroner for that damn flagman. Hated like hell to bump him, but he almost throwed a wrench into the works, right smack at the start, in Valerie."

"What the hell's a flagman?" Snap demanded. "Gimme—"

The hushed voice died instantly. Biff waited and heard no sound for a moment, and then there came the crunching of gravel to his ears. A flash of light showed under the door edge. A brakeman was passing, walking over to the head end.



There was nothing more said for a spell.

Presently the train started with a bang. From where he watched, Biff could see the gang leader's cigarette glowing, then suddenly drop to the floor.

"Bring Todd here," Biff heard Kepper order. "An' that punk."

Again Biff closed his eyes, relaxed. He was not tied, he had made sure of that. He didn't know what was coming, but he realized that it was likely to be swift and terrible. He didn't know how much good he would be against these three. He lay very still.

A rough hand jerked his shoulder. He was limp as a rag. A rough boot kicked his ribs. He knew a light was on his face. He hoped he didn't wince. Then the light went out and he heard the thin voice say: "The punk's still dreamin' sweet dreams. From the looks of it mebbe he won't ever wake up."

Instantly Biff was tense again. Through the dimness he could see a man dragging a bound form down from the other end of the car. That would be Todd. The man was pulling him down from the top of the lumber pile. Biff wasn't certain, but he thought he heard the moan repeated. The rumble of the car was increasing.

"Take off the gag," Snap ordered.

Then, after a pause: "Well, Todd!"

Todd growled: "All right, Snap. You win. How much? I'll pay."

"You ain't got money enough to pay me," the gangster retorted. He kicked the bound millionaire in the side. "You had your chance once. You didn't take it. You just the same as spit in my face. You been spittin' in it for a long time. Head of that citizens' committee of a thousand, tryin' to get somethin' on me, trackin' me down. Yeah, an' you damn near did." Kepper laughed. There was something almost maniacal in the chuckle.

"Well," Kepper continued, "we square accounts. Another hour, maybe less. You

ain't gonna build that piece of railroad. Without you, it won't ever be finished. That's account number one, for the moment. That'll be enough. We'll forget about you brandin' me a public enemy, an' a few other things. I'll be big hearted. I'll just wipe that off the slate."

"I don't give a damn about myself," Todd retorted steadily. "Wipe me out here and now. But the girl. My daughter. You name your price to let her go before you erase me."

The laugh chilled Biff's blood. It cracked against his ear drums. "Now I'll tell one," Kepper said. "Let her off an' let her take up where you quit—tryin' to nail somethin' on Snap, eh? Listen, you! When you go, she goes with you. An' I'm throwin' in that kid, Norton, just for good measure. Watcha think of that?"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Hot Brass

IT was evident, from the sound, that Hamilton Todd was about to choke with rage, and couldn't do anything about it. Biff's eyes, now fully accustomed to the gloom which was being helped by the growing gray, took in the available space in the center of the car. The lumber was apparently piled at both ends. The space was perhaps eight by twelve. Not much for a lot of foot work.

"Take a good sniff, Todd," Kepper ordered. "Smell that? Know what it is?"

Biff, under cover of the wheel rumble, took a sniff and didn't have to be told.

"That," Kepper said diabolically, his voice high and thin, "is a hot bearin'. It's on the left front truck of this car. Every time the wheels turn over it's gettin' redder. Because my men treated that a long way back. They got it same as a time bomb. I told 'em how." The laugh became more pronounced in its frenzied glee. "In



a little while we're goin' over the summit an' start down the mountain. This train'll roll hard for the next thirty miles. No curves much. Just speedway. Somewhere in that thirty miles, that bearin' will burn off. You don't have to know any more."

Biff paled and chilled. He could picture the disaster now. He had seen a burned bearing throw a freight train before. One end of the car dropping suddenly, derauling. The following cars, coming at terrific speed, piling up and up in a devastating heap. Rails torn up. Probably fire. What a way to die!

"Take another look at that engineer," Kepper ordered. "Time we unloaded."

For the second time Biff gave a good imitation of a dead man. For the second time, the man who examined him reported back that Biff slept the sleep of the departed.

"If he wakes up, Todd can tell him," Kepper said. "He'll be locked in. He can't do a hell of a lot toward gettin' himself outta here."

Biff saw them all go to the closed side door. Their backs were to him. One man grasped the edge of the door. The train was running not more than fifteen miles an hour on its drag up to the summit. It would be easy for them to drop out, run alongside the car, slide the door shut and drop the hasp into place. If they ever got that far—

They wouldn't get that far. Not if Biff could keep them from it. He had been sent out of system headquarters yesterday afternoon to do a certain job. He had made a hell of a mess of it so far, but there wasn't anything to keep him from trying to make amends.

Biff had one advantage. They didn't see him coming. He was on his feet with the stealth of an Indian. He singled out the slightest of the three. He struck with the fury of a Kansas tornado. He struck and caught them hands down, caught

them before any one of them could make a move for a gun.

It was too bad for that slight gentleman. Biff used him for a temporary weapon. He yanked the man off the floor, smashed him viciously into the remaining pair. He followed with a slashing drive of fists, and fought them away from the door. Nobody was going to make a break for it if he could help it. The slight man came in for the first down. He tottered to his feet after bowling over the other two and came at Biff lugging out a gun. He never got it free of the holster. His chin cracked open, his head snapped back and he went down in a heap as Biff lunged in to stop the gun hand of the boss.

The little fellow took Biff's foot inadvertently in his stomach, but never felt the insult. Biff stepped on and over him, clinched with Kepper, and tried to kick the other man off from behind. Things were a little too close and confused right at this point to permit any gun work. Biff ducked his head, and bored into Kepper with one hard drive before he ducked free to keep from giving the second man any advantage. It was quite possible that one would try to club Biff over the head. Biff was not planning on a clubbing.

**H**IS strategy was in the nick of time. Another second, and—well, it would have been bad. Now he had them both in front of him, their backs against the lumber. Evidently one had lost his gun, and Kepper was trying for a shot. Kepper was cursing shrill-voiced, but Biff didn't hear him. Biff made another stabbing, jabbing dive, and all three of them clinched and rolled over. They were on the floor, kicking clawing. Biff took Kepper's companion in the groin, kicked him free, slugged him unmercifully across the mouth and head, and at the same time tried to plant a foot in Mr. Kepper's face.

The side of Biff's head was slightly



peeled by a glancing blow, and it staggered him. He tottered back to his feet, saw Kepper scrambling up, saw the other fellow wobble. Biff decided it was time to take Kepper's companion out for good, and he put everything he had behind the blow. Even as his fist connected with the other man's mouth, Kepper's gun barked almost in Biff's face.

Biff spun about, clutching his shoulder, and then he began to see red. His left arm felt about as useless as a drunken switchman on payday night, but he still had his right. He saw Kepper spring for the door. He became conscious, for the first time, that the click of the wheels had changed to a drumming roar, and with a sinking at the pit of his stomach he realized that the train had topped the summit and was opening out for the long run down the speedway. For just one flash, white panic fired him—the realization of what would happen if somehow he didn't get the train stopped.

With his left arm useless then, he sailed into Kepper with his right. The sweat of intense agony exuded from his pores, soaked his shirt and pants. With the fury of desperation he struck.

How long the fight thereafter lasted he did not know. The first inkling he had that it was over was when, with the whole left side of his shirt red and wet from the blood he'd spilled, Kepper lay stark and white beneath the clawing fingers of his good right hand.

Reeling, Biff wiped blood from his eyes, sunk to his knees by the straining figure of Todd, and went to work dumbly on the cords that bound the millionaire.

"You—take care—of Virginia," Biff panted, sucking in air laboriously between each word. "You—look after—her. I'll—try to—get us stopped. You—just give me a lift."

He dimly realized the cords gave way, and then Todd was on his feet, hot and

vociferous. "What the hell you going to do?" Todd demanded as Biff staggered to the door.

"You—give me a boost. You'll see."

It was a mad, desperate thing to try to do. Biff realized it as the morning air braced him, rushing in through the half opened side door.

"But you can't—" Todd was protesting vehemently. "If you'll give *me* a boost."

Biff tried to make Todd see. Biff didn't have enough strength left at the moment to help the two-hundred-pound hulk of the builder to the car roof. The builder could help Biff.

After he succeeded in getting the idea conveyed to Todd with broken sentences and with insistent haste, he got Todd behind him. Cautiously, Biff grasped the edge of the door, allowed most of his bulk to swing outside while he gripped his knees on the door between them. Todd's shoulder got under the seat of Biff's pants, and Biff worked up the door until his shoulder was under the edge of the eave. Grim death lay below him in the sickening blur of the backward rushing ballast. The giddiness came back, and he had to rest for a moment, while Todd's shoulder, under him, supported him.

**H**E hooked his good right arm up over the roof finally, pulled his left around to help support himself, worked his knees up to the last degree and then gritted his teeth. If he failed now, it would be all over but the funeral and a few flowers from friends.

His legs let go of the door, dangled in space. The left arm raised hell, but he struggled mightily, pulled himself up slowly, inch by inch, to the roof.

When finally he was on it, he lay still. He could do little else. He was as near to swooning as he had ever been in all his life, and he held grimly on to consciousness. He didn't know how far that



bearing had gone, but he couldn't take the chance that it would hold much longer. The smell was terrific. There was no flame of course, because the man who treated it evidently had washed the journal box out with kerosene and then thrown in emery.

After what seemed an eternity, Biff pulled himself erect, staggered to the end of the car, let himself down the ladder. If he slipped on this move—

The couplings nudged each other on the downward rush. They rattled together with terrific noise. They bounced dizzily and the gravel was a streak beneath them. Biff got down and straddled them. The car ahead of the box was a low-sided gondola. If it took a notion to act up under an emergency reduction of air, all of Biff's efforts might be to no avail after all.

Biff, holding to the end ladder with his bad hand, knelt on the couplers and reached beneath them. He felt for the angle cocks on each car's air hose, turned them off. Then he used his good hand and arm to lower himself so that his feet, dangling down above that roaring space, found support on the beam that extended from the brake shoes on one truck to that of the opposite trucks. Here he planted his left foot and felt out with his right, getting his shoe just under the air-hose coupling. The giddiness was getting worse and his strength was just about gone. With a quick upward jerk of his toe, he broke the hose. The iron couplings swished apart, exhausting what little air there was in the hose between the shut off cocks.

The climb back to the bumpers was harder than getting down where he had rested. All feeling had gone from his left arm. When, finally, he was safely on the end sill, he took off his belt, hooked it around that limp arm, and secured the arm to the ladder. Now, if he fainted—

Biff leaned far down, found the angle

cock on his car, opened it slowly. He heard the air pour out of the train line, felt the sudden grabbing of the brakes. He only hoped he could apply them gradually enough to keep from piling up the cars after all.

The couplers went taut, and Biff reached over to the gondola's angle cock with his foot, kicked it open, had the brake application then on the full train. Having done so he picked that moment to pass out of the picture.

THERE was a meeting in the office shack at the headquarters of the new main line construction job. The railroad's chief engineer sat in a corner grinning. Hamilton Todd, looking more like a first-class sand hog just out of a tunnel job than a millionaire builder, tracked mud over the floor, slumped heavily in his chair and bit the end off a two-for-five stogie. He spat accurately at the waste basket on the side of the desk.

They were sitting that way when the door opened and Biff came in. Biff didn't look any too well. He walked with a slight wobble to his knees. But he had good support. He had Virginia Todd with her arm holding his. She was rather radiant. In fact Biff looked sideways at her and figured she was just about the grandest, the swellest, the most glorious and—well, where'd he ever get that idea about her being snooty, anyhow?

He came in and the chief said: "Well, mug. How?"

Biff said: "The arm's getting fine now. Doesn't pain a bit. From what the doctor first said about it—"

"Yeah," Todd said. "From what the doctor told me, it's a wonder you've got any arm. I've been trying to make up my mind whether I want a guy for a son-in-law who would deliberately strap his shattered arm to a box car and then die on his feet and just hang there from it until a



couple of irate brakemen come along and get a load of what's happened."

Biff looked at the floor. He was red with embarrassment. "Wasn't much else," Biff said, "I could do. I didn't wanna be mince meat. I had an idea maybe I'd like to see Virginia once more, and I couldn't be doing her much good down under a whole flock of wheels."

The chief coughed. He rubbed his nose. "I don't suppose you'd think hard of the railroad if they passed you a little reward, would you, Biff?"

Biff straightened suddenly.

"For what?"

"You know, of course, that Mr. Todd was chairman of the Citizen's Committee of One Thousand."

"Yeah."

"There happened to be a few rewards out for certain jobs which were attributed to Mr. Kepper. Well, capturing him single-handle as you did, and bringing him and a couple of badly-battered droppers into camp like you did, some of those rewards are collectable. I mean the police have nailed three jobs definitely on Kepper through the confessions of his men. They total something like three thousand in all. Well, the railroad put another thousand to 'em. We sorta thought, that,

since maybe you and Miss Todd'll be taking a little trip before you report back on the job, you might like—"

He looked at Miss Todd. She nodded her head. She said: "Remember, Biff, I promised to live on your railroad pay, no matter how little, so if we can pick up a few extra dimes, we might as well do it."

"Who's gonna live on any railroad pay?" Todd thundered. He brought Biff facing him, startled.

"What's that?" the railroad chief engineer inquired.

"To hell with railroad jobs," Todd said. "It's all right to build 'em but I'd be damned if I ever let a son-in-law of mine work for one. I've just bid on a big job in Chile. Pushing steel over the Andes for a mining outfit. Biff's got what it takes to run a job like that. No, sir, when he gets back with Virginia—"

"Maybe I'd better wait and make the trip to Chile do for a honeymoon trip, too," Biff broke in, his vast elation showing in the sparkling of his eyes. "That way, we can save the four thousand, and have our honeymoon trip all paid for besides. It'll take ten days on a good slow boat to get down there. Whatta you say, Jinny?"

Jinny said: "Anything to save a dime."

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE**

**FREDERICK NEBEL**

brings back that big dick from Cosmos

— in —

## **LEAVE IT TO CARDIGAN**

What would you do if a strange girl called you up—made a date with you at a night club—then turned into a corpse while you were on the way down to meet her? Cardigan had been stood up before but never in quite that way. Watch his smoke as he clamps down on the gate-crashers who chiseled in on what he thought was going to turn into a large evening.

**DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE**

for

**DECEMBER 15th**



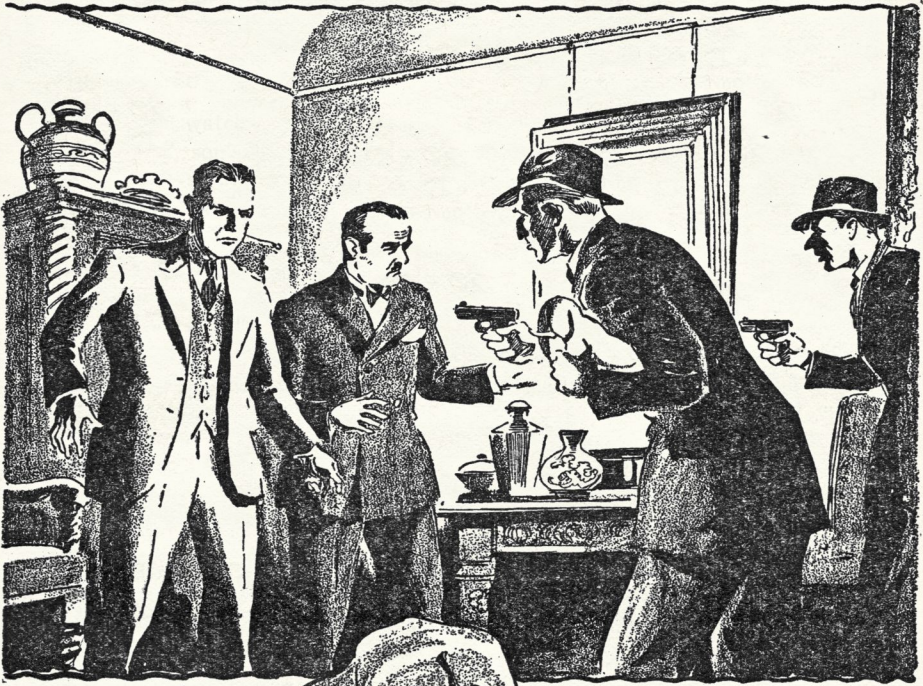
**It will be out**

on

**NOVEMBER 30th**



# The Jade Beast



"You'll have to come too, Mr. Carr."

A Johnny Carr Story

by

R. D. Torrey

Author of "Dice and No Dice," etc.

*"The Greeks may have a word for it but it's second-degree murder in plain American," was the way Carr put it when Lan and Mayen tried to pull a fast one with a jade whoozis that was half cat, half elephant.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Carr Gets a Client

THE phone rings about ten thirty and the girl at the desk says: "Lieutenant MacAndrews calling!" and I say: "Send him up!" I might as well because if there was anything Mac wanted to see me about he'd come up anyway.

By and by he knocks and I open the door for him and another man and Mac looks at my pajamas and the bed not made up and says: "Pretty soft for some people—I got a half day's work done." Then he says: "This is Mr. Lan—" and to the guy with him: "This is John Carr, the man I was telling you about."

I shake hands and say: "Land?" and he says: "No. Lan. L..A..N" and pulls



out a card and gives it to me. I take a look at him and figure he's cut it from Landous or Lanapoulas or some Greek name like that because there's Greek written all over him. He's short and dark and very smooth-looking—maybe forty.

Mac keeps looking at my pajamas with a disgusted look on his pan so I say: "I was trying to do something I know I can't do until about four this morning."

He says: "What?"

I say: "Trying to beat that creeper that Flynn's running."

Mac says: "Where was it last night?" and I say: "The Roslyn!" and to this Lan: "It's a traveling crap game."

Lan says: "I know!" so that's that. I can tell from looking at him that he's the kind that would know but I want to see if he'll admit it. I've always figured that a Greek kid's born with a pair of barbudi dice in his hands, they always got 'em in their pockets.

**I** ask them if they want a drink and they both say it's too early in the morning and then I sit down on the bed and they sit facing me and I look at the card he give me. It says—

HENRI LAN  
365 Laurel Drive  
Pasadena, California

IMPORTING EXPORTING

It takes more than that Henri business to change him from a Greek to a Frenchman but it's none of my business what nationality he wants to pick. We all just sit there and stare at each other for a minute and when Lan sees I ain't going to ask him what they want he says to Mac: "Maybe you'd better tell Mr. Carr about—" and Mac puts his hand up and says: "You tell it."

Lan says: "Well, I was going to San Francisco today and the man who was to stay at my house while I was gone didn't come this morning as we had planned. I telephoned him and finally drove to his

house here in the city to see what was wrong and he was—" He stops and looks at the floor and Mac finishes it with: "Dead!"

Lan says: "Yes, dead! I called the police at once and Lieutenant Mac-Andrews"—he waves at Mac—"came down and looked things over. I asked him who I could get to watch my house for me and he suggested yourself."

I don't get the set-up. Why should anybody want to hire a private dick for a watchman job? I say: "But why do you need a detective, Mr. Lan?"

He says: "This man was murdered. I carry my stock in my house, it's that kind of stock, and it is all very valuable. The insurance companies won't carry me up to it's full value."

Mac moves his chair so it's kind of back of Lan's and says: "This guy was murdered and Lan thinks that it may have something to do with somebody knocking over his place. You get it?" Then he rolls his eyes at the back of Lan's head and shakes his head first up and down and then sideways. I get Lan's angle all right but what Mac is going through all the motions for is by me.

I stall with: "I ain't doing nothing right now but I got some stuff coming up. How long will you be gone?"

"Not more than a week," he says, "I have to go or"—he looks apologetic at Mac—"I wouldn't leave with this happening like this. My business in San Francisco cannot wait."

Mac still is making faces so I say: "It'll be a hundred for the week," and he says: "That's fine. When can you come? This has already delayed me more than I like." I can see Mac holding up one finger behind Lan's back so I say: "One o'clock."

Mac grins and Lan looks worried and says: "I should be on my way before then."

I say: "That's the best I can do. I'll



have to see some people"—Mac nods his head on this—"and it will take until then to do it."

Lan says: "All right!" and counts out five twenties and then gets up and goes to the door and Mac follows him out but all the time motioning with his hand for me to stay in the room.

I get dressed and order breakfast brought up from the coffee shop and about the time I get through with it Mac knocks again and comes in and says: "I wanted to talk with you before you went out there."

I say: "I knew it was either that or a belly ache, the faces you were making."

He leans forward very confidential and says: "Johnny, this stiff had his throat cut damn near in two. But he didn't bleed hardly any."

I say: "Probably anaemic but let it go. I've just had breakfast."

He leans back sort of disappointed and says: "You don't get it. He wasn't killed there at his house, where Lan found him, but some place else and brought there."

I say: "Well, I didn't kill him so I wouldn't know."

He grunts and says: "Lan ain't coming clean with us, Johnny. This guy that was killed has worked for him about three years but we didn't find that out until we talked to the neighbors. Lan never said a word about it."

"What was this guy's name?"

"Nick Pappas. One Greek will always hire another Greek and that's what Lan is."

I say: "If Lan's clamming on you take him down and work on him." Mac just grunts. "You dope! This Lan is a big shot. He's got dough and friends and I ain't got either."

I tell him how he's breaking my heart but that after all he's the one that's working homicide for the city of Los Angeles

and not me and that the thing's his business, not mine. He looks sad then and says how he's just telling me this so that I'll be watching out for myself, and I tell him that I'm always watching out for myself and that the reason he told me this is so I'll keep an eye out for him.

This is true and he grins and admits it but says just before he goes—"Just the same, Johnny, you watch your step. This dead man's about the nastiest-looking stiff I ever see and this Lan ain't telling all he knows." He goes out but sticks his head back in and says: "I forgot to tell you. Lan's got a cowboy all the time—he's taking him to Frisco with him. Ike Malloy. You know him?"

I do and plenty well. I had a beef with him once at a road house and he took a sucker shot at me and knocked me colder than a wedge and when I come to he was gone. I know him too well. I say: "Yes, I know Ike!"

Mac says: "Well, be seeing you."

**T**HIS Lan's got a swell place out in Pasadena right in the nice residential district, and I can't see how he can run an importing and exporting business in a house like that.

He meets me at the door and says: "I had better take you around and show you what is here and where it is. You'll have a better idea of where any attempt at breaking in will be made in case one is." He talks like he looks—very soft and smooth and easy and kind of purry. He hasn't got any accent at all. It sounds like he's learned words out of a book instead of by listening to people talk.

He shows me around then. Pretty near all the stuff in the house, outside of in the back where he lives, is what he calls "almost a museum piece." Stuff like jade and funny carved tables and chests and old vases and old rugs and things like that. A lot of it is put around to look



as if it was being used but a lot of the smaller stuff is in glass cases against the walls, fixed so when they're opened a light shows on them. Even some of these rugs. He shows me a little one that he says is worth fourteen thousand.

He lives in the back of the place—very nice but nothing like the front where the people go, and while he's showing me this he tells me that he does a little general business with people that know him, old customers or people that old customers send to him, but that the most of his business is done on order. Somebody'll hire him to get something they've heard about in some other country and he'll get his agent there to get it for him and then make the deal.

He says that he's got at least two hundred thousand dollars worth of this stuff in the house and only blanket insurance for fifty of that.

The house is wired for alarms and he shows me all this but that don't mean a hell of a lot and I tell him so. A smart operator always has got that sort of thing lined out before he makes a move and there ain't an alarm system in the world that can't be beat if the guy knows what he's running into. Lan says he knows this and that's why I'm hired and then takes me and introduces me to the rest of the help.

Malloy I know already. He gives me a dirty look and don't offer to shake hands which shows he's half smart. We just say: "Hello," to each other and then Lan takes me to the kitchen and shows me the cook, who he says will watch the place in the day time when I'm sleeping. This cook is another Greek and has a name I wouldn't even try to get across.

He grunts at me and says something to Lan and Lan says to me: "He says for you to please keep out of the kitchen. He will call you when meals are ready."

I say: "That's O.K. by me!" and then I make a break. I say: "It's too bad that

Nick Pappas got killed. I'd have liked to met *him*." I got no particular reason for saying it, just think that I want to see Lan's face. When I crack this I'm looking right at him and he don't blink an eye. He says: "That was a shame. Nick had been working here for three years almost, taking care of the grounds."

He's careful—too careful. Neither he or Mac had said anything about what the guy's name was when they was with me together and he *should* ask me how I know what the guy's name was and how I know he worked for him. He passes this though I know damn well he knows Mac must've come back and talked to me. I know I've made a break the minute I speak but it's too late then and I think that he probably knew Mac was wise all the time.

After he shows me how the alarm system is turned on and off—the control is right by the front door—and after he tells me he wants it left on all the time, he collects Malloy and they get in a big coupé and start out. He never says a word about why he's in such a hell of a rush to get to San Francisco and I can't very well ask him.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Cook's Tour

I LOAF around reading and looking at the different junk until about six when the cook comes in to where I'm at and says: "Dinner is ready."

He leads the way back to the kitchen and we eat together without saying anything more than, "Please pass the bread," or something like that. He talks as good English as Lan though, when he wants to, and he learned to cook plenty good wherever he did.

When I get through and start to leave I say: "Swell dinner!" and he kind of grins, which shows a Greek is human and



likes a pat on the back same as other people.

I go back to the library and read until dark and then prowl through the house just to be sure everything's all right and about the time I get back to the library and settled down I hear a bell ring and go to the front door and peek out the little slide that's in the door. I see a bunch of law in uniforms and then I hear a noise behind me and look around and see the cook with a gun as big as they make. A Colt .45, just like I shoot; and the way he carries it he knows more than just how to cook.

He says: "Who is it?"

I say: "The law!"

He makes a face and says: "We'll act like we're not here."

"They've already seen me looking out and if I know my law they'll come in here with axes if we act like we're not here."

He says something in Greek that sounds like he doesn't like this and makes another face and turns and goes back to the kitchen and I turn off the alarm system and take the chain off the door and open it and a big red-faced mick that seems to be running the squad says: "You took your time." He's got stripes on his sleeves but he's in uniform like the rest of them.

I say: "Sorry, Sarge. There's an alarm system and I wasn't too sure how to cut it."

He looks down at what he's holding in his hand and says: "Then your name ain't Lan?"

I say: "Lan ain't here. I'm a private copper hired to watch this place and my name's Carr."

He looks down again and says just like he was reciting a piece: "This is a search warrant for the premises described as being located at Three Sixty-five Laurel Drive." He glances up at the number above the door to make sure he's at the right place and I try to stall him with:

"I'm sorry. Mr. Lan ain't here. He'll be back in a week."

THE big mick stands there holding his warrant like he don't know what to do and just then a little short stocky guy in plainclothes, who I ain't noticed before, slides up next to him and says something under his breath to him and the big mick says: "It don't make any difference whether Lan is here or not. This is a search warrant and good whether he is or not." He waves his arm and the three coppers with him come ahead and he comes in with 'em, with me backing out of his way and with the little short guy tagging them.

I say: "Can I see the warrant?" and he hands it to me and I look it over and see it's what he says it is so I tell him: "Just go ahead. I hope to hell you're careful because a lot of this stuff might break and I'll be the goat if it does."

He grins and says that they'll be careful and for me to come along with 'em if I want, so I close the door and put the alarm back on and the six of us go through the place with me helping 'em all I can.

It's all I can do. I don't know what they're looking for or why they're looking for it but I figure it's better for me to keep an eye on what's going on. I know damn well that if I make a fuss about it I'll be taken down to the station and charged with resisting and that won't help things. This big cop's the kind of bird that ain't too smart but wants his way when he knows what it is.

At that, he's a hundred percent. He don't touch a thing and don't let any of the squad either, and after they've shaken the front of the place down I lead 'em back to where Lan and Malloy and the cook live and they go through that the same way. When they look through the kitchen the cook just sits on a table and



don't say a word, which don't make me mad because I thought he'd raise hell with them and make jail and I'd have to cook for myself.

I notice finally that the cops seem to be looking around as if they don't know what they're looking for and don't expect to find it but that the little short guy is looking plenty close. I can't make him out, he don't act like he's a copper but I can't figure what he'd be doing there if he wasn't. By and by he drags behind to peek under something and I ask the big mick: "Who's the little guy with you, Sarge?"

He don't answer me for a while, but just pretends like he don't hear me so I do as good and pretend I ain't said a word.

The little guy is peeking under Malloy's bed and the mick and I are standing by the door and watching him and then the mick whispers: "It beats me. They just give me this warrant and told me to look the house over for anything that looks like stolen property. They just said that this fella was going along." He shakes himself and says: "A policeman does what he's told."

I could add something to this but I don't. I could tell him that Johnny Carr does everything a policeman tells him to do, that is, if the policeman's there to see that he does it and get tough if he don't. That's one thing about the law. They got the edge all the time and when that edge is helped by them having a search warrant I play on their side.

When they get through and start to leave the little short guy drags behind and says to me: "You ain't worked for Lan before, have you?"

I say: "Today's the first day I ever saw him."

He says: "You know Ike Malloy that works for him?"

I say: "Yes, the dirty rat! Too well."

He kind of grins at this and says: "If

I was you I'd watch my step with both of 'em."

I say: "Thanks! You're—"

He don't say a word but catches up with the mick and the rest of the squad and I turn off the alarm and let 'em out. The mick turns and says: "Thanks, fella. Be seeing you," and they go and I go back to the library and try and figure what it's all about and can't.

All I know is that Lan and Malloy are hot but what about I don't know and there don't seem to be any way to find out.

**A**BOUT an hour after this the cook comes in and tells me he's going to bed and that I'm to hold the fort by myself and I tell him goodnight. Then I dig up a bottle of good rye that I've spotted and take a drink and read until eleven and then go through the house again and then back to the library and take another shot. I do the same thing at twelve and again at one and am sitting there reading about half past one when I hear a little noise and look up and see in the library door a guy standing there holding a gun on me. He says: "Stick 'em up!"

I do just that. If he was close I might have a chance to knock the gun away but the way he's got me that's no dice. I can't jump across fifteen feet of floor without getting shot on the way so I don't try any foolishness. I raise my hands without getting out of the chair and two guys come in from the hall past him and grab my arms and lift me out of the chair. Then they tie my hands behind my back with a piece of sash cord and then my feet the same way. Both these guys look like some kind of foreigners and the head man has got a face that couldn't be forgot. He's got a bum ear that hangs down in front like a dog's ear that droops and he's got a nose that's been broken a dozen times if it was once. And it looks like he never did bother to have it set.

When I'm tied this guy comes over and



takes the gun out from under my arm and then he says: "You make no noise."

The house is set back from the street far enough that I could yowl at the top of my voice and never raise anybody so I say: "I won't!" and try and figure out just what breed of cat he is. He's got an accent that's a honey but one that's a new one on me. I know he's not wop or German or French but that's all.

They go out of the library and I hear 'em walk down the hall an' nothing more until in about half an hour I hear a siren on a police car and then I hear a bunch of feet running toward the back of the house and then I hear this alarm system turn loose and a big bell someplace on the roof starts clanging like hell. Then in a minute I hear a shot and then by and by somebody pounds on the front door.

I shout: "Break it down!" and then I hear an ax and pretty soon the same big mick that searched the joint earlier in the evening comes busting in with a gun in his hand. He sees me and says: "What's happened?" and I say: "Untie me."

He does and I start for the back of the house with him and two more guys in uniform right along with me. The cook's bedroom is on the second floor and looks out over the back yard and I head for there and go in and see the cook laying on the bed with his feet and hands tied. He's fixed up better than I was, too—he's got a towel wrapped around his puss and the towel holds another rag in his mouth so tight all he can do is gurgle. I yank this loose and we untie him and then he tells us that he went to sleep with his window open and that when he woke up a guy was standing by the bed with a gun on him. The guy tied him up and then let down a rope ladder through the window and two more guys came up and then they all went downstairs. I look out the window and see where a drainpipe from the roof comes right up alongside the

window and I show this to the mick and we figure the first guy was enough of an acrobat to climb it.

We look through the house and can't find where anything is taken and then the mick tells me that some people going by in a car thought they saw somebody climbing in the window and telephoned the cops. He tells me they saw one guy running through the back yard and shot at him but missed and that the guy beat it in a car that was in the alley. I figure the other two had made the car first and were waiting for this last man.

He telephones the station and by and by a printman comes out and looks the place over and dusts a lot of powder on this, that and the other and takes a few impressions and pictures and the rest of the rigamarole they go through and then they all go home. It's about five o'clock by that time and daylight so I go to bed and leave the cook to finish and tell him to call me at twelve.

He don't. He calls me at eleven. I wake up and look past him and see Mac-Andrews and Mac says: "I hear there was doings last night."

I get up and get dressed and tell him all that happened and he says: "Did you wire Lan about it?"

I say: "Lan never said where he was going to be."

**M**AC looks kind of sour and says: "That was really what I wanted to find out about. I wired Frisco and they were going to pick him up. I gave them what kind of a car he's got and the license number, but they missed him. I wanted him tagged while he was up there."

I say: "But not pinched!" and he says: "Hell, no. I ain't got anything on him. I just wish I had." Then he says: "The way this place is wired, how in hell did these guys get in and you not hear 'em?"



I say: "Cinch! This cook had the wires on his window hooked around so that he could open it without turning on the alarm. He figured because he was on the second floor he was safe."

Mac says: "You sure he wasn't in with these yeggs and let 'em in the back and let 'em tie him up so's it'd look good?"

I say: "When they heard the police car and ran out the back, everything worked. Every door is wired so that when it's opened it touches off a bell on the roof that sounds like a fire bell."

He looks disappointed and says: "This cook's a Greek and I never trusted a Greek." I ask him why and he says: "Like a damn fool I let one of them teach me to play barbudi once and I lived on coffee and doughnuts the rest of the month."

This barbudi is a Greek dice game and a honey if you don't all the time run out of money. I always do so I know how Mac feels. We go downstairs and I turn off the alarm and let him out and then turn it back on again and the cook goes out in the kitchen to get me some breakfast.

He's out there maybe five minutes and then I hear the bell on the roof go *CLANG—CLANG—CLANG*. By the time it's hit about three times I've got my gun clear and am out in the hall that leads back to the kitchen, and just then I hear a gun back there. I slam through the kitchen door and see the cook laying over the sill of the outside door and see it's wide open, and I jump over him and into the yard and see a guy running towards a car that's parked in the alley back of the house.

I shout at him: "Stop!" but the bell on the roof's making so much noise I never do know whether he hears me or not, but whether he does or not he doesn't stop running. I stand still so I'm good and steady and settle on him and just as he gets to the car I let go. He falls against

the door but catches himself with his hands and a guy from inside the back leans out and tries to help him in the car and I aim for this one—what I can see of him over the one I've shot—and try it and shoot too low. I can see the guy I've already hit once jerk as the second slug hits him.

The guy that's trying to lift him in lets go and ducks back out of sight, and the car starts and the guy I've hit just slides off as it pulls away and goes down. I run out to the alley as fast as I can, figuring I may get a pop at the car, but just as I get to the alley it makes it around a bend so it's no dice.

I look at the mug that's laying there and see I took him center in the back with the first one and in the back of the head with the other. The bullet went on through and come out his face and I figure the guy that was hauling on him got ticked, but I don't figure hurt very bad because after a bullet goes through all the bone that's in a man's head it's lost so much force it can't do much harm. A .45 like I shoot has got a hell of a lot of shocking power but it isn't so good on penetration.

I run back to the kitchen and see the cook's managed to drag himself back inside but is still laying on his face so I turn him over and see that he's been shot in the belly. He's passed out so I leave him there and go in and shut off the alarm so the damn bell on the roof'll quit ringing and then call the law and tell 'em to bring an ambulance and a surgeon.

The clerk at the desk says:

"They're on their way already. I'll send the ambulance after them."

I hang up the phone and start to go back to the kitchen and see if I can do anything to help the cook, but before I get started I hear a siren coming so I stop and let the law in. It's the same big mick that's been here twice before and



the little short guy's with him, the same one that looked the place over. They dash in and I lead the way to the back and show 'em the cook and the stiff out in the alley and about this time the ambulance and the surgeon comes and we load the cook on a stretcher and into the ambulance and they take him to the hospital, though the surgeon says he won't come to before he dies.

They load the stiff that's in the alley into the morgue wagon and about the time it pulls away with him I miss the little short guy and say to the mick: "Where's your friend?"

He says he don't know and we look for him and find him snooping through the house again and the mick says: "Le's go."

The little guy says all right and they start to leave and the mick tells me they'll print the dead man to try and find out who he is and that he'll phone what they find back to me. Just as they leave the little guy turns and says to me: "This is a bad place to get careless in!"

This leaves me something to think about while I'm waiting for the Mick to call. In about an hour he does and says that there's no record in either Pasadena or Los Angeles of anybody with his print classification and that they're going to put his picture in the paper and hope somebody knows him and tells them about it.

That settles that night. I'm out a cook because Riley, that's the mick's name, calls about five that afternoon and says that he died about three hours after they got him to the hospital so I got to do my own cooking.

The next day Mac comes over again and says that the San Francisco police ain't picked up any trace of Lan and am I sure he went to San Francisco. I tell him that all I know is what Lan told me

he was going to do and that's all I hear from Mac or anybody else.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Cat's Elephant

NOTHING happens for five days then and then Lan comes home. It's about six in the evening and I'm in the kitchen opening tin cans for dinner when I hear a car pull into the driveway and then the front door bell rings. I go to the door and peek out the little slide and see that it's Lan and that Malloy's with him and I let 'em in, after turning off the alarm. The first thing Lan says is: "I've been reading the papers. What a hell of a watchman you are."

I slide kind of to the side of the hall so that both he and Malloy are in front of me and can't gang up on me if there's fireworks and say: "You rat! Open that pan again to me like that and I'll knock your teeth out the back of your neck." Malloy starts to move ahead and toward me and I tell him: "You start something, baby, and I'll finish it."

Lan says: "No, no, Ike!" to Malloy, and to me: "I'm sorry, Carr! I guess I'm excited."

I say: "Wait until you find out what happened before you blow your cork then. I get excited too."

He says very nice: "I'm sorry. It's because I'm so worried." He heads past me for the library and Malloy follows him like a pet poodle but giving me the bad eye all the time. I go in there with 'em and Lan asks me to tell them just what happened and I do and then Lan says: "And you don't know who this little man is? The policeman wouldn't tell you!"

I say: "I don't think it was because he didn't want to tell me. I don't think he knew. He acted like he was told to take the little guy along and mind what the little guy said."



Lan and Malloy look worried and then Lan says: "Come on, Ike. Let's go and clean up before we eat."

I'm still sore about the crack he made in the hall so I say: "There's no more cook so it looks like you'll have to open your own canned stuff. I won't." I don't like him any too well anyway and I figure that I'll be damned if I cook for him.

He don't get mad or at least he don't show it but just says that he'll phone and have dinner sent in and then he and Malloy go to the back and upstairs where their rooms are and I sit down in the library and wait.

By and by Malloy comes back without Lan and sits across from me and stares at me and it takes me about five minutes to get sore enough to do something about it. I say: "Is there something you want?"

He says: "Nothing you can give me!" and then laughs very snotty and says: "I remember once at a road house I gave you something you didn't want."

I get the idea plenty now. I can't figure why he does, but he wants to start something—the way he's sitting in his chair and the way he's holding the bottom of his coat with his left hand so he can get at the gun under his arm is plenty tip-off. I'm sitting sort of on the small of my back and got both hands on the arms of my chair and with him ready like that I'm behind the eight ball so I stall for time.

I say: "Yes, you bet. And then took a powder before I come to—like the heel you are."

I straighten up a little in the chair and he comes out with the gun before I have a chance at mine and says: "This time you ain't going to come to." He don't cock the gun but just holds it on me. I figure that he thinks he can work the double action on it in plenty of time in case I make a play.

I say: "What in hell's the idea? You high or just crazy?"

He grins at me and says: "What d'ya mean, crazy?"

I say: "Crazy. MacAndrews, in the city, knows I'm here and Riley, one of the cops down here, knows it too. You must be crazy."

He laughs this nasty laugh again and says: "Sure! I'm going to load you in the car and dump you out on the highway. They may think something's phony but thinking and proving's two different things. They think I killed Nick Pappas too, but they can't prove it and you won't be able to help 'em on it."

I'M still stalling. This chair I'm in is pretty heavy and I've got a good grip on the arms of it and he's only sitting about five feet away. I say: "Didn't you?" and he says: "You know damn well I did. What the hell did MacAndrews plant you over here for? What was this little guy you're so proud of shaking the place down for? Knowing ain't proving. D'ya think I'm going to sit back and—"

He gets this far and I lift myself up by my hands on the chair so that my feet are aimed at his puss and kick out. I land on his face and neck and he goes back, with his chair on top of him and I land on my back on the rug, between his chair and mine. I get up just as he wins his wrestling match with his chair and gets up, and I manage to grab his arm with one hand and the gun with the other before he can shoot.

I got both hands busy trying to hold his right arm and this gun, and that leaves his left free and he starts smacking me in the face with it—hard, too. I get clear of him and see how he's standing and tramp down with my heel, aiming for his instep. I hit his shin first but there's still some power left when my foot slides down it to his instep and he howls like it



hurts plenty and bends over until his head is about even with my waist and I bring my knee up in his face.

It'd knock any ordinary man out but this guy is an ex-pug. It just straightens him up. I put one leg back of his knee and shove him in the chest with my shoulder and he goes backwards, off balance, and when he does I let go of his arm and the gun and when he hits the floor I kick him in the face.

He can really take 'em. He's dazed some but he rolls away from me with me following him and trying to jump on him and put him out but I can't land solid the way he's whirling and all the time his head is clearing. Finally, after he's rolled half across the floor, he gets hold of my leg and yanks and I go down too. When I fall I manage to twist so's I can get hold of the gun and he don't expect this and lets go but it don't do me any good because I fumble it and drop it just as I get it.

We roll around on the floor there for another minute that seems like an hour and I'm getting all the worst of it. He's bigger than I am and he can hit about twice as hard and he's doing it. He's got a knack of putting his weight behind a punch, even when he's on the floor the way he is. I'm just having one hell of a time keeping him away from the gun but I manage it until he cracks me on the adam's apple with a good solid smack.

It don't put me quite out but there's time for him to get to his knees and get the gun and then haul himself up by holding onto a table and get to his feet. Then he starts aiming the gun at me and I start rolling away from him. He's in bad enough shape that it's hard for him to get me lined up and all the time I'm rolling I'm yanking my own gun out from under my coat and I finally end up against a davenport just as he shoots at me and misses.

I shoot back but just as the gun kicks in my hand I know I've shot high and hit him in the shoulder instead of low enough down to stop him. The slug whirls him partly around but he turns back and starts to lift his gun again and I take him again and then once more for good luck. I was lined on his belly the second time and he tipped ahead towards me as he fell and I figure the third one ought to have hit him in the head.

Maybe it didn't need that last one but a guy that tough is too tough to take chances with. He might still be able to shoot.

I manage to get to my feet an I'm so shaky it's a hell of a job. All I can do is manage to hold on to my gun and not drop it. I stagger over to him and turn him over and see I've called my shots—one high in the shoulder—one through the belly—and one right through the top of his head and ranging down through it. He's plenty dead. Then I get a hunch and turn around so's I can see the door and here's Lan standing in the doorway and holding a damn dinky little automatic about half-raised.

I don't know whether he'd have guts enough to shoot at me or not. Maybe with my back turned like that he might. I do know the minute he knows I see him he tries to hide the gun behind him.

I say: "Drop it on the floor."

He does.

"Get in here."

He does that, too.

Then I say: "There's the phone. Pick it up and say 'I want a policeman!'"

I'd do it myself but I figure I'm too shaky to walk that far for a minute.

He looks at me and says: "Wait a minute, Carr!"

"Why?"

"Listen! We don't need the law on this."

Maybe he don't but I do. A self-



defense plea goes a lot better if the law is told about it right off the bat. The room and my face'd show self-defense but if I wait before I call, the law might figure I ain't leveling.

I keep looking at him and he says: "Now listen! Give me time to get out of here with a fair start and then call the law."

I say: "Get out of here where?" and he says: "For five thousand dollars you wouldn't care, would you? Cash!"

I'M still shaky but not so shaky I can't think. I stall him and ask: "But what of this shooting? There's liable to be law here whether they're called or not!"

He waves his hands and says that the room is so sound-proofed that nobody could hear the shooting. I ask him what the hell was the matter with Malloy, trying to pick a beef, and he hems and haws and says he don't know, which makes him out a liar.

Finally I say: "If I'm protected, maybe I wouldn't care where you go."

He says: "Oh I'm not going to stay away. It's just that I've got to get away now and that I'll be held as a material witness. I'm for you—not him." He waves at the body. "I'll back up any story you tell, if you'll give me a break now."

I say: "O K!" and tell him I want him to sign a statement that he saw the whole thing and that it was self-defense. He don't want to do it and puts up an argument and all the time I keep wondering what in the hell he wants to make a sneak for now, but can't make it add up. He finally says he will and sits down at his desk and writes it out and gives it to me and then says: "And now I can go, I'll be back in three or four days and I'll get in touch with you."

He gets up and starts for the door and I get up to tag along with him. I'm still trying to figure his angle. I know he got

Malloy to try and knock me off and it's no part of my plan to let him go anyplace, though he don't know that.

When I made him come in the room he left the door into the hall about half open and just when he gets there I hear a clunking noise and he falls back and almost into me and then goes to the floor. He's only about six feet in front of me. I look up at the door and see the same big guy that had broken into the house the first time—the same lop ear and the same broken nose. He says in the same funny accent to me: "Maybe he won't be back in three or four days."

He's got the gun he smacked Lan with pointed at my belly so I raise my hands without being told and a guy comes past this big man and takes my gun and stands over where he can watch me.

I say to this lop-eared monkey: "How in hell did you get in?" and he smiles very nice and says: "Through the back while you and this"—he reaches out and nudges Lan with his foot—"were arguing."

I wonder why the alarm never rang and remember I never turned the damn thing on after Lan and Malloy came home. I can't figure how the big lug knew this though, but in a minute he says: "I figured that I'd have time to do my business here while your alarm system was bringing the police and yet have time to be away but there was no necessity of that." Then he bows at me and says: "Thank you."

Lan's out colder than a wedge and the big guy looks him over and says something to the guy that's watching me that I don't understand but which I can see means for him to keep an eye on me and then reaches down and picks Lan up and dumps him on the davenport.

He goes out to the kitchen and brings back a wet dish towel and slaps him across the puss with it a couple of times and Lan opens his eyes and says: "Mayen!"

The big boy nods so hard his lop ear



almost falls off and says: "Mayen! That's right. Then he bends over Lan and says: "Where is it?"

Lan says: "I'll not tell you!" and this Mayen grins like this was good news and starts to lift the gun he's holding.

Lan sings out: "I'll tell! I'll tell!" and Mayen looks sad and says: "I'd as soon make you."

He makes Lan get up and follows him out of the room and by and by when they come back Mayen's got about the funniest-looking whoozit I ever saw tucked under one arm. It's about a foot high and looks like half elephant and half cat. It's a kind of pretty bluish green and doesn't seem to be very heavy, though this Mayen's so big and husky he could have carried that big a chunk of lead and never showed it.

He says something to this guy that's watching me that I don't understand and then says to me: "I'm sorry, but I must protect myself. I'm going to have to take you along with Mr. Lan."

I say: "Take me where?" and he waves his hand that's got the gun in it and says: "You won't be hurt. The only thing is, don't make any noise."

I'm still trying to figure out his accent. He talks very plain but kind of as if he had to think of what word he wants to say. He's got the lightest eyes I ever saw in a man, almost white and looking like marbles. He's smiling but his eyes don't show it. The other guy says something to him and he growls something back and waves the gun at Lan and then at me so we go out the front door with him trailing us and into a sedan that's parked about half a block from the house. The other guy gets in the driver's seat and this Mayen gets in the seat with him after he puts us in the back and turns and leans over the seat so he can watch us and then we start.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Greek Meets Greek

WE go through Los Angeles, keeping on San Pedro Boulevard, and then right on through. When we get past Compton this Mayen says to me: "I take you on a little trip on the ocean. You act all right and you'll be treated all right."

I say: "Why take me?"

"I can't take a chance on leaving you anyplace."

He shuts up and I think this over and can't see it makes sense. What he means is that he can't take a chance on knocking me off and having me found someplace. Whatever he's going to do to Lan I'd be a witness to and from the look in this bird's eye he knows a dead man can't go on a stand and testify.

We get to San Pedro and the driver eases down a street that leads to the docks and stops the car and gets out and this Mayen waves his gun at Lan and me and says: "Get out and keep quiet."

They make us walk out on one of these docks to where a launch is tied and make us get down in it and then we start out through the harbor. There's not a chance for me to make a break on the way and pretty soon it's too late. The guy that drove the car is running the boat and Mayen is watching us but he don't really have to watch me. I can swim but not very good and in about five minutes the launch is far enough out from shore that I know I couldn't make it back.

We go almost out the harbor and pull up beside a big boat and Mayen makes us climb a ladder and up to the deck and then makes us go downstairs into a cabin and puts the guy that's been with us all the time to watch us and then goes back on deck.

Just as soon as he goes Lan says something to this guy and the guy talks back



to him and then Lan turns to me and says: "This man's a Greek. He can't talk English."

I say: "What's Mayen?" and Lan says: "He's half Russian and half Finlander. He's captain of this ship—it's a Greek boat though."

I say: "What's the idea of the snatch?"

"I guess he wants to hold me up for money. I've had some dealings with him and he knows I've got some. That's all I can think."

I say: "What was the whoozit he made you give him at the house?" and he tells me it's another of what he calls "museum pieces".

We sit there and wait and Lan fidgets around and talks a little Greek to this sailor and by and by the Greek comes out with a pair of barbudi dice and Lan says to me: "You play barbudi?"

I say: "I have!" and he says: "We might as well, to pass the time away."

When they searched us at the house all they did was take our guns away. I got about a hundred and thirty dollars and Lan's got close to five hundred and the sailor's got about twenty-five. Lan sizes this up and winks at me and takes the dice and puts out fifty on the table and the Greek puts his twenty-five on half of it and I take the rest and Lan pitches the dice and they show deuce Trey which is no dice.

Barbudi's a Greek game but a good one. I always think a Greek can smell one because if one's started in a back room with the door locked, inside of fifteen minutes there'll be a dozen Greeks there and all with money in their hands just like they come out of the air. You win with a six-five or double ace, Treys or fives and lose with an ace-deuce, fours or sixes and all the other points are no dice. To show how the Greek boys trust each other, the dice are very small and so rounded that you

can't call a point with 'em like sometimes you can with a set of regular dice.

Lan makes a second pass and they show two fours and the dice go to the sailor because he's on the right. It goes left to to right instead of right to left like a crap game. He takes 'em and leaves his fifty on the board and Lan takes forty of it and I take ten and the mugg rolls six-five and collects. I'm getting interested and so's Lan. Interested enough that when the boat starts just then I think what the hell difference does it make because I'm behind the eight ball just as bad one place as another.

**WE** go on like that for about fifteen minutes with the sailor going like he can't miss. Every time he gets the dice he goes over for two or three passes and Lan never gets across. Every time Lan gets the dice I buck him but ease up on the sailor and because I just about break even when it's my dice I'm about sixty ahead when Lan's about broke. It's a fast game. The sailor gets the dice and throws a wad of money down and Lan takes fifty of it with the last fifty he's got and I only take ten of what's left.

The sailor looks at Lan and grins and says something in Greek to Lan and Lan says to me: "He says it's no good for you to try and make your money last because you aren't going to have any use for money any more. He says you might just as well let him win it off you as have it taken off you."

It's what I've figured but I hate to have it told me. I look at the sailor and he grins at me like he was sorry and shakes his head too bad and just then the boat stops. With the engine quiet like that we can hear a lot of shouting on deck but it's all foreign so I don't know what it means but the sailor does all right because he drags out the gun he's shoved into his waistband and starts over to the door that



opens on the steps we come down, in a hell of a hurry.

He gets his back to me when he does this and I dive at him and get him right at the knees. He drops the gun and falls back sort of on top of me but he's a little guy and I don't have any trouble in twisting around and socking him on the jaw. I do this and he goes out and about the same time Lan reaches for the gun that's skidded across the floor. He ain't in any hurry and I jump and beat him to it and jab him in the belly with it and say: "Back up."

I take a look around and find some rope underneath some built-in seats along the wall and tell him to face the wall and tie his hands behind his back. He meaws like hell about this and says: "Why tie me up?"

I say: "It looks like it's going to be every man for himself and you'll be just one less to watch."

I lay him on one of these seats and tie his feet and then get the sailor, who's still out, and lay him on another of these seats and tie him up the same way.

The shouting is still going on up above so I take off my shoes and see the gun I took off the sailor is full of shells and open the door that goes upstairs real easy and sneak up them so I can take a look.

I see plenty. There's enough noise going on so's I could have left my shoes on and done a tap dance and nobody would hear it. Everybody that I can see is lined up along one side of the boat and staring over and everybody's talking at once. I see Mayen standing there right close to me—it's about fifteen feet to the side of the boat, and I sneak up a ways to where a clear place is on the side with a boat hanging there that I can hide behind so he can't see me, and look over to see what all the excitement's about.

There's another boat, maybe a hundred yards from us, and it looks about half as

big as ours. We look like we're maybe four or five miles from San Pedro and this other boat is between us and the town so that it's outlined plain. Between us and this other craft is a rowboat coming our way and it looked like there's about a dozen men in it. Just as I see this there's a shot comes from the front of our boat and Mayen shouts something and busts away from this rail and comes tearing back past me and goes in a house affair that's on the deck and right level with where I'm standing. He don't see me at all.

I go over to the side of this deck house and look in and see him pulling a rifle off hooks on the wall so I go to the side of the door and when he comes out I clout him on the head with my gun and hit plenty hard. He goes down and I know he's going to stay down for some time. I grab the rifle and look and see it's loaded and then stand back so all these guys along the rail are outlined and then I shout: "Everybody stick 'em up."

Some of them turn and some don't. I see a guy about fifty feet down with a gun in his hand and when he comes up with it I try one at him and he goes down and the minute I shoot all those that ain't turned turn plenty quick.

I shout at them again and swing the gun back and forth and they keep turned and watch me instead of the rowboat. By and by these guys in the boat hail us and I say: "A couple of you birds let down that ladder so's the company can come up!" And there must be some of them understand English because two of them do this.

THE first guy up is the little short guy that was at Pasadena looking through the house, then comes a guy in uniform and then a bunch of sailors. Seven or eight of these. The guy in the uniform sees what the score is and has the sailors



watch these guys I've been watching and then he and the little short guy come over to me and I put the rifle down and let them take over.

The uniformed guy says: "Did you shoot at our boat?" He's got a gun in his hand and it's pointed at me.

I say: "Hell, no! I shot at that guy that's laying on the deck over there."

He goes over and looks at this bird I've shot and the little guy says to me: "Where's Lan?"

I say: "Now wait a minute. Who're you?"

He says: "Arthur Josephs." He pulls out a gold badge that I see is federal and I say: "I got Lan on ice downstairs."

He tells me to wait a minute and goes down the line of men that the sailors are watching and comes back with the uniformed man and says: "I guess we missed him. He must have got away."

I say: "Who got away?" and he says: "Karl Mayen. The captain."

When I smacked Mayen he fell in the shadow of this little house and he's hard to see. I say: "There he is!" and point him out and the little guy gurgles like he's found his sweetie and reaches down and puts cuffs on him.

Then we take him downstairs to where Lan is and the first thing Lan says when he sees the uniformed man is: "Let me loose! I've been kidnaped."

It's a good bluff but it don't get over. The uniformed man looks at Josephs and Josephs says: "All in good time." He looks at me and says: "What do you want him for? Tied up like this."

I say: "I'm taking him back to Los Angeles to turn him over to the homicide department. He hired a heel named Malloy to kill a guy named Nick Pappas and then he hired him to kill me because he thought I knew something about it. This last kicked back on Malloy." Then I say to Lan: "The Greeks have probably got

a word for it but in American it's second-degree murder."

The little federal man grins at him and says: "There's other words too. Such as possession of stolen property and conspiracy to evade payment of duty on imports and false entry on citizenship papers and false income-tax reports and a lot of words like that." He waves at Mayen then and says: "He's in on a lot of things like that, too."

He sees the little half elephant and half cat thing that Mayen brought from Pasadena with him and says: "That will get them plenty right there. That cinches 'em."

I say: "What in hell makes that so important?"

He laughs and tells me that the thing was made out of jade, in China, long before any of the Chinese jade workers ever saw an elephant. Somebody from some other country told them what an elephant looked like and they tried to make a model of one but they weren't sure of their dope and put cat in the doubtful places. It seems the thing was stolen from a San Francisco collector and that Josephs knew Lan had a sale for it and figured sooner or later it'd turn up at Lan's house. This is what he kept looking for and now that he's got it it makes Lan a fence and Mayen a thief.

On the way back from Pedro I learn all I didn't know before. Lan and Mayen have been working together—Mayen bringing stuff in from foreign places and Lan selling it for him. They didn't pay duty on this stuff at all and this little Josephs has been watching them for some time trying to hang it on them. Mayen swipes, or has somebody swipe this elephant doo-hickey and Lan don't pay him off for it so Mayen tries to steal it back while Lan's out of town trying to sell the thing to somebody. The first time he tries it he gets scared away, and the second time one of the guys with him gets panicky



and kills the cook. The little federal man starts watching the house after this and sees Lan and Malloy come home and then sees Mayen and another guy come in and take Lan and me and the elephant thing out and he follows us and gets a coast guard boat to help him make the pinch.

He don't know but he thinks Lan had the elephant in a handbag with him while he was gone, I suppose because he couldn't find it in the house.

He's got a case against Lan and Mayen without this thing at all but he ain't taking any chances on not making it stick.

About this time we get in to Pedro and take Lan to Los Angeles and turn him over to MacAndrews and the next day I go up with him and get cleared on killing Malloy. It's a cinch—Lan's statement would do it alone without putting in anything about them being afraid of me on the Pappas business, and wanting me out of the way on that to help.

I don't see Mac then for about a week and then he says: "Both Lan and Mayen figured they couldn't beat any of that federal stuff or stolen property and took the rap on all of it. Homicide slid out on it—we knew damn well we couldn't stick Lan for having Malloy try and kill you

and, with Malloy dead, the Pappas killing wouldn't hold any better. We know he hired Malloy to do it but knowing and proving is two different things. Mayen'll get at least ten and Lan twenty and up and they'll both get deported afterwards so what the hell."

I say: "What made Lan have Malloy knock Pappas off, d'ya suppose?" and he grunts and says: "We won't ever know. Pappas probably crooked him some way and he found it out—none of them guys ever leveled in their life."

I ask about the guy I shot on the boat and Mac tells me he was only shot through the ham and not hurt much and is getting along O. K.

There's been something bothering me every time I think of it and I figure maybe Mac might know the answer. I say: "How come Lan ever hired Malloy to cowboy for him? You'd think Lan would have hired a Greek—one Greek always hires another Greek."

He says: "Not always. Lan hired you." Then he laughs and says: "Malloy's name was Makalous, you dope. The closest he ever came to Ireland, in spite of that name Malloy, was when his boat came across the ocean from Greece."

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# Murder in the Rain



by Oscar  
Schisgall

Author of "Palooka Death Pawn,"  
etc.

"Recognize her?" Cavender asked the doorman.

*There outside the Polo Club in Cavender's coupé she sat—a stiffening, bloodstained corpse—peering with sightless eyes out into the rain. Why had she picked the wealthy sportsman's car in which to die. Or what ghost hand had lured her there—only to stab her to the heart then vanish in the storm?*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Park Avenue Murder

**T**HE taxi slogged through the rainy dimness of Park Avenue to stop at the canopied entrance of the Polo

Club; and the slim girl in brown tweeds sprang out as breathlessly as if she had been running. She thrust a dollar into the chauffeur's hand, forgot to pause for change. She would have rushed straight into the club's sacrosanct doors if the



buff-uniformed attendant, hastening out at that moment, hadn't halted her.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said significantly. "This is the Polo Club."

"Of course!" she snapped. "I can read. I want—"

"I'm sorry, madam. Ladies are not admitted."

That jolted her. She looked at the doorman in bewilderment which slowly changed to downright dismay, and in an incredulous small tone she repeated: "Not—admitted?"

"On Wednesdays only, madam. This is Saturday."

"But—"

"I'm sorry, madam. Perhaps you'd like to send a message in to someone?"

His quiet firmness and formality seemed to confuse her as she stared into the dim lobby. It occurred to the doorman that her young face, though attractive enough, was extraordinarily pale and tense and nervous. In truth, abnormal tension possessed her whole slender figure, so that she stood rigid, her fingers pressing tightly into her purse.

"Scared," he thought in surprise. "Scared stiff of something."

He saw, too, that she wasn't the sort of girl who might be expected to call at the Polo Club even on Wednesdays. For one thing, there was nothing particularly chic about her clothes. The sport suit, a little outmoded, had the undistinguished cut of a cheap store; her hat was obviously inexpensive, despite its enchanting tilt over one eye. A shop girl, he decided. He glanced lower to discover sadly worn heels on her brown shoes. Worst of all, her stockings were wet, as though confessing she had done considerable walking in the rain before stepping into the taxi. The sort of women who came to the Polo Club as guests were never permitted to walk in rain. And the doorman, something of a snob at heart, was dis-

posed to lift his chin and scoff—though he had to concede this girl was rather pretty.

"Listen," she said of a sudden, chop-pily. "Do you know if Mr. Cavender—Mr. Paul Cavender—is in there now?"

"Yes, madam. He is."

"I've got to see him!"

"If you'll wait in the foyer," he suggested, "while I send in your name—"

APPARENTLY the idea of waiting in the foyer annoyed the girl. She saw several men there; not only pages and the desk clerk, but a few members who had gathered to talk outside the cloak room. She shook her head jerkily, frowning; mumbled bitterly: "No, thanks!" With a hint of exasperation she sent a glance behind herself, along the rain-thrashed sidewalk. A score of cars were parked near the club; cars glistening in the wet darkness. One of them, near the corner, held her eye; then she turned back with abrupt decision.

"All right," she said. "If you'll give me paper and a pen, I'll send in a note."

"Surely, madam. Will you step into the foyer? You'll find them at the desk."

He opened the door, and the girl swished past him.

She granted no attention to the men near the cloak room who turned to regard her curiously. Still frowning, she consumed scarcely a minute in writing her brief message. She sealed it in one of the club's brown envelopes, gave it to the doorman, and said tersely: "See that Mr. Cavender gets it right away, will you? I'll wait outside."

"There's no need to go outside, madam," he hastily assured her. "You can wait right here. The rain—"

"That's all right. I don't mind rain."

She was out before he could object. A little startled, he blinked after her. He watched her hesitate under the canopy; watched her clutch her jacket collar about



her throat and move deliberately into the rain, out of sight. Then he looked down at the unaddressed envelope, shrugged, and summoned a page.

"Take this to Mr. Cavender," he directed. "I think you'll find him at dinner—with the police commissioner."

**I**N a corner of the dining room Paul Cavender was distributing his attention between a savory *chateaubriand*—incomparably the best steak he had tasted since returning from London a week ago—and the ponderous, good-humored, silver-haired commissioner of New York's police, Julian P. Tanney.

They were both in evening clothes. They were both in excellent spirits. And Cavender was eulogizing Antoine's cooking. He was a tall man, gaunt and lank, yet endowed with a dark, mocking handsomeness which, when he smiled, became almost as dazzling as an Arab's. And he was smiling now, when the page brought him the brown envelope on a silver salver.

"The doorman asked me to give you this, sir."

Paul Cavender glanced down at the letter in some wonder. He touched a napkin to his lips, put it aside, and looked somewhat apologetically at the police commissioner.

"Mind, Tanney?"

Tanney, smiling, waved a large hand. "Go right ahead. Letters from doormen are always amusing."

The page was about to say something about the lady in brown tweeds, but reconsidered and remained quiet. He bowed and moved away.

Paul Cavender, tearing the envelope, stared at a bewildering message. It had been written in a small, swift, feminine script, so hurriedly that the ink had splashed. And it begg—

Mr. Cavender,

Please, please come out as soon as you possibly can! You'll find me waiting in your car. You don't know me, but I've run into a terrible mess that concerns you, too; and I want to tell you about it before it's too late. It's about the demand for money. Please come!

Evelyn Forde.

Cavender's thin brows arched high in surprise. He read the note again, as if it were a riddle, then hastily bent forward to appease his astonishment with a gulp of wine. As he put down the glass, he tendered the paper across the table.

"Look, Tanney," he said. "Is romance dead?"

The commissioner scanned the message quickly, then narrowed his eyes. "What is this?" he demanded.

"Your guess is as good as mine."

"Who is the woman?"

"Never heard of her," Cavender assured him, rising. "Nor do I know what she means by that line about money. It sounds like a movie, eh?"

"But you're going out—"

"Of course. If you'll excuse me a moment—though it's a shame to do this to Antoine's dinner—I'll have a look at her. After all, we can't keep the lady waiting in the rain." He grinned. "We're gentlemen, Tanney—gentlemen."

He went to the cloak room, got his hat and coat, and nodded to a few friends in the lounge. When he stepped out of the door, he found that the rain was battering the sidewalks more furiously than ever. Moreover, it was penetratingly chilly, and Cavender shuddered.

"I'll send for your car, sir," offered the doorman.

"No. I'm walking."

Cavender turned up the collar of his coat and strode rapidly toward the corner. He hunched his shoulders against the downpour, drew in his chin. Park Avenue seemed utterly deserted by all



pedestrians except himself; but there was plenty of whizzing, hissing, splashing traffic in the gutter, and the lights—red and green, dropping corkscrew reflections into the wet pavements—filled the night with strange glamor.

He saw his sixteen-cylinder Roamer coupé—a long, sleek, black car streamlined for speed—close to the corner. Vaguely he could discern the girl's blond head through the streaming windshield. And he thought a little grimly: "Some day somebody I've sent to jail is going to get me out like this—to be shot."

He chuckled without mirth on the thought; then reached his car.

Cascades were pouring from the brim of his hat when he opened the door. He was about to step in, with a chilled "Brrr!", to establish himself beside the strange girl and listen to whatever she had to say. But Cavender, with one foot on the running-board, suddenly halted. He stared.

Evelyn Forde was looking with hypnotized fixity at the top of the windshield. Her arms hung at her side limply, the gloved palms turned upward. At her breast, between the lapels of the brown tweed suit, her blouse was darkly, horribly discolored—a stain that filled the car with a warm, sickly-sweet odor. Blood. Blood still oozing down into her lap—

Cavender's breath was stifled. His very heart seemed to cease beating. And as he gaped at the girl's still, pallid face, a new chill trickled through him.

His hand moved forward tentatively, uncertainly, as though to shake her. But he knew, even before he touched Evelyn Forde, that she was dead.

**S**TRANGELY, Paul Cavender remained quite calm. Unnaturally calm—despite the sudden rapid thudding of his chest. He looked at the girl with a frown; let his survey fall down her body to the

floor of the car. Her purse lay there, closed, but he could see nothing of the weapon which had killed her.

Very quietly he closed the door.

When he peered along the gleaming sidewalks, from left to right, he saw nobody about except the doorman at the Polo Club. To him Cavender abruptly called, above the hiss of passing traffic: "Tom! Oh, Tommy! Come here, will you?"

Tom McHargue, the doorman, came running with a polite, "Sir?"

"Take a deep breath, Tom, and don't go panicky. There's a dead woman in my car."

"Wh-what?" McHargue's eyes widened; his face lost color as he blinked at the coupé. "A wha-at, sir?"

"Have a look."

The uniformed man pressed his eyes, half frightened, half unbelieving, to the car's window, then violently recoiled with a whispered, "My God!"

"Recognize her?" Cavender asked stiffly.

"Of—of course, sir! She—she's the woman who came to see you!"

"The same, eh? I wanted to be sure." Cavender's mouth tightened to a slit. "Was she alone when she asked for me?"

"Yes, sir!" hoarsely. "She drove up alone in a cab, Mr. Cavender, and ran right up to the door!"

"Anybody meet her when she went out?"

"I d-didn't see anybody, sir. I was in the foyer."

The tall man nodded; adjusted the collar of his coat. "Stick around while I fetch the police, Tommy. And don't look so ghastly. You're no child." He started briskly toward the club, but halted ten feet away to toss back over his shoulder: "By the way, Tommy, did she ask you which was my car?"

"No, sir!"



"She didn't, eh?" Cavender slowly frowned down at the rain bubbling on the sidewalk. Then a slight sound like a grunt escaped him, and he straightened to his angular height. "All right, Tom. Play watchdog. I'll be back in a minute."

Despite the protesting stares of half a dozen attendants, Paul Cavender strode into the club's dining room without removing either his dripping coat or streaming hat. Members looked up from their dinners in astonishment not free of indignation; a few candidly scowled their displeasure. At the Polo Club so gross a breach of etiquette couldn't be permitted even the owner of thirty million dollars.

Cavender gave the stares no heed. Taut of face, he crossed the large room to the corner occupied by the police commissioner. The silver-haired official had been dining at that same table at least twice a week for the past four years. But no one had ever approached him as did Cavender now, leaving a wet trail across the carpet. Julian Tanney rose in his ponderous way to whisper a reproving: "For God's sake, Paul, what's the matter with you? This is no way to barge in here!"

"Forget it," snapped Cavender, halting. He spoke so softly that no one out of the corner could possibly have heard him. "Stiffen up and look official. I've got a corpse for you."

"Eh?"

"The body of the girl who signed herself Evelyn Forde. In my car. I found her stabbed to death."

Despite all his experience with crime, Julian P. Tanney parted his lips and shut them again with a curiously fish-like effect. He squinted, tilted his large gray head as though he couldn't have heard correctly.

He said sharply: "You found the woman dead?"

"And no weapon in the car," Cavender went on grimly. "So it's probably murder. Better phone for your men and

come out with me." He sent a swift glance at the staring faces in the dining room, then finished in a whisper, "And don't say anything in here, will you? No use causing a riot. They don't have to know."

"But Paul—"

"Why ask me things I know nothing about? Come out and see for yourself."

He picked up Evelyn Forde's note, which he had left on the table; read it again swiftly, stuffed it into a pocket, and followed Commissioner Tanney out of the room. His lean, dark face was oddly tense. Somebody asked: "What's up, Cavender?" But he merely shook his head as he vanished. After all, he didn't quite know himself what was "up."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Extortion Note

THE police commissioner stood in the downpour, staring into the open door of the Roamer coupé at the dead blond girl, and whispered heavily: "You're right, Paul. Stabbed. Stabbed to the heart. And in your car—"

Paul Cavender said nothing. He kept his hands in the pockets of his drenched coat. One of them gripped the note. Fully four inches taller than the commissioner, he frowned down at the rigid body. He watched Tanney pick up the girl's purse, open it. The street lights afforded sufficient illumination to reveal its contents. The first thing Tanney drew out was a folded envelope. It contained a bill from a department store, and it was addressed—*Mrs. Evelyn Forde, 1223 Decatur Avenue, New York City.*

"We won't have to hunt her address, anyhow," Tanney muttered. He turned his head to peer searchingly at Paul Cavender. "Look here, you're sure you never knew her, Paul?"

"Positive," firmly.

"Then why—"



"—did she come to me? Why was she murdered in my car? Tanney, I don't know."

The commissioner swung his eyes irritably to the pallid doorman.

"Tom," he rapped out, "if you'd been out under the canopy, where you belong, nobody could have approached this car without your seeing him!"

"I—I'm sorry, sir, but—"

"And, where are the chauffeurs of all these other cars, anyhow? There are usually two or three hanging around."

Tom McHargue stammered: "It got to raining so hard, sir, that they all went down into one of the basement rooms. I promised I'd call them when—"

"Oh, never mind. I suppose Mr. Cavender's chauffeur is down there, too?"

Cavender quietly put in: "No, Tanney. I drove here myself tonight. Lewis isn't with me."

The commissioner frowned along the dark length of Park Avenue, blazing with traffic lights. Very soon, he knew, the police cars he had summoned at the club would come screaming toward this corner. By morning the newspapers would probably be making a sensation of the case: a woman murdered on Park Avenue, of all places, in the automobile of a millionaire, with hundreds of other cars passing within a few feet—and not a policeman around to be of use.

The commissioner muttered something indistinguishable.

Paul Cavender bent his lanky figure like half a parenthesis and peered intently at the dead girl's face. It retained an expression not so much of horror as of pleading. Even now, in death, there seemed to be a prayer in her staring, porcelain eyes. That look must have come there when some man—or woman—had opened the door of the coupé to drive a knife into her chest.

"She must have died instantly," Cavender whispered.

"Obviously," snapped Tanney. "If she'd lived even a few seconds, she would have writhed in agony. There'd be blood on the upholstery of the seat. But there isn't. It's only on her clothes."

"And here on the dashboard, where some of it spurted after she was stabbed and—"

The howl of a police car's siren interrupted. Commissioner Tanney promptly turned to squint toward the oncoming automobile. Without looking at Cavender he said tersely: "Paul, I'll have to appropriate your car for a day. We'll go over it for fingerprints."

Cavender said dryly: "After this you can have the car. I don't want it. As for fingerprints, if this rain left you any, it'll be a miracle."

"Well, I believe in miracles," grimly. "By the way, Paul, what do you think she meant when she wrote she wanted to talk to you about a 'demand for money'? That seems to be our biggest clue right now."

"I haven't the faintest idea," Cavender said softly, still studying the corpse.

"Has anybody been demanding money from you?" Tanney challenged in suspicion.

"No."

"Good Lord, man, isn't there *anything* you know about this business?" with a groan. "After all, the whole thing seems to revolve around you!"

Cavender said gravely, with his eyes on the dead face: "I really know no more than you do, Tanney. We're both starting from scratch. We both know nothing except the woman's identity. It—it should be interesting to work on from that!"

**I**T WAS after midnight when Paul Cavender finally reached his penthouse, forty-four stories above Central Park. He



was frowning while he gave his wet hat and coat to Saki, the tiny, white-jacketed Japanese butler.

"Anything new?" he asked, his voice faintly husky.

"Yessuh. Forty-seven telephone calls."

Cavender lifted his brows. "Forty-seven?"

"Yessuh," insisted Saki. "Plenty newspaper reporters."

"Oh, I see. Well, if they call again, tell them I'm not at home. Is Lewis here?"

"Yessuh. In kitchen."

"Send him in."

Cavender was lighting a cigarette in his immense drawing room when Harvey Lewis, his chauffeur, entered. Lewis stopped respectfully in the door, waiting. He was tall, beautifully proportioned; but he missed being handsome because, in his brief career as a pugilist, his face had been sadly battered. He had a room beside Saki's at the rear of the penthouse, thus being always conveniently on call.

Cavender, still frowning, tossed his match into the fireplace. He said: "Lewis, you'll have to run down to police headquarters tomorrow to pick up the coupé."

Lewis exhibited no surprise. "Police headquarters?" he repeated. "Yes, sir."

"So you know what happened tonight, eh?"

"The newspaper men told Saki, and Saki told me. I—I was wondering, sir, if we ought to tell them about her telephone calls."

That startled Cavender; he swung around from the fireplace to stare at Lewis.

"Whose telephone calls?" he demanded.

"Oh—I—why, I thought Saki must have told you," Lewis faltered in some confusion. "There was a Mrs. Evelyn Forde who phoned here several times while you were in London, sir."

"Phoned here!" stiffening. "What did she want?"

"She didn't say. Simply asked if you were back."

"When—"

But Cavender stopped himself. He stopped because he suddenly spied a white envelope on a table. What struck him about it was its special-delivery stamp and the fact that his name and address had been printed upon it with a pen. He went to it, scowling, just as Saki appeared at the door.

"When did this come, Saki?" he snapped.

"This evening, suh. Just after you go out."

Cavender tore the envelope and found two sheets of paper. Upon them a long message had been printed—to disguise handwriting, he guessed. He stood still, reading the letter. As he read, his lean face grew hard and strangely pale and astonished; and his deep-set dark eyes began to burn. He swallowed when he reached the end; read the communication a second time.

**B**OTH Saki and Lewis watched him in silent surprise. It wasn't often they could see the good humor shocked out of their employer. They saw him abruptly swing to the telephone, his eyes actually flashing now.

"I want police headquarters," he said sharply. And a minute later: "Is Commissioner Tanney still there? I'd like to speak to him. Mr. Cavender calling."

The commissioner was still on duty, despite the hour. His voice sounded brusque, metallic. "Yes, Paul?"

Cavender said tightly: "I've just received a letter which may explain the 'demand for money'!"

"Eh?" with a start. "From whom?"

"Unsigned."

"What do you mean? What sort of—"

"Listen," Cavender interrupted with unnatural quietness. "I'll read it to you." And he quoted the letter—



"Cavender:

For the past six years you have been dipping your amateur hand into New York's underworld. You've been playing Sherlock Holmes, and because you have thirty million dollars as well as the friendship of the police commissioner to back you up, you've managed to be what the newspapers called 'brilliant'. You've smashed crimes and sent criminals to jail. And it's high time you paid for your pleasure.

"You don't know me. You won't ever know me. I intend to be a kind of ghost hand in your life—until you deliver to me a hundred thousand dollars in cash in small bills, nothing higher than twenties. I am not threatening you personally, Cavender. If I did that, you could have all the private detectives and police you needed to protect you night and day. So I won't touch you. But—you have a great number of friends and quite a few relatives. I'm sure you wouldn't want to see any of them die. They will, however; I will kill one of your friends or relatives every week—maybe two a week—until the money is turned over to me. And if you think I'm bragging, I'll prove I'm not by starting this week.

"A hundred thousand dollars means very little to a man like you. It means everything to a man like me. As soon as you decide to pay up, put a personal ad in the *Record*. Just say, 'Yes, P. C.' You'll get another special delivery letter telling you where and when and how to deliver the money. Until I see that ad, I'll be busy on your friends. Their lives, Mr. Cavender, are in your hands."

Cavender finished: "And that's all!"

From Tanney there came across the wires a slow, astounded, "Well—well—well!" And then: "So that was what the woman meant. She must have known about the letter."

Cavender agreed. "So it seems. By the way, have you located her husband?"

"No. Not yet. My men are still at their apartment, but he hasn't shown up. Mighty queer, Paul."

"Of course," Cavender muttered with a frown, as if talking to himself, "if her husband was the one who sent the letter, she might know—"

"She shouldn't have gone to you with

her knowledge," rasped Tanney. "What the devil did she think the police are for?"

"Well," Cavender pointed out, a dry laugh in the words, "people don't always like to go to the police. The results are often too drastic. That's why they come to private detectives—amateurs like me—who can't arrest them. Besides, this letter concerned me, Tanney."

"She made the biggest mistake of her life in going to you," the police commissioner vehemently declared. "And there'll be her grave to prove it!"

Cavender shrugged. He asked: "Will you let me know if you locate her husband?"

"Yes. In any case, I'll drop in on my way home for a look at that letter. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to sit down," quietly said Paul Cavender, "and think."

Cavender slipped into a purple dressing gown, lit a slender panatella, and settled in a commodious chair beside his fireplace. He frowned and stared unseeing into the red embers.

Perhaps it was true, he mused, that he was at last reaping the results of meddling in crime. Perhaps he should have devoted himself and his fortune to the lumber industry, instead of to his strange, almost fanatic interest in criminal psychology. And yet, he felt, the type of work he did could have had no great influence upon anyone determined to extort \$100,000 from him.

One thing was certain. If the mad plan of this unknown plotter was to be smashed, the man himself must somehow be identified and arrested.

It was an amazing threat the fellow had made—to attack Cavender's friends and relatives. An original twist to an ancient crime. Yet the very threat offered a clue.

"He must be somebody," Cavender thought, "who knows who my friends are."



On this speculation he dwelt for almost an hour, finishing two cigars and prodding a hundred ideas slowly through his brain. It was almost two o'clock in the morning when the doorbell briefly buzzed.

The sound startled him.

He sat up with a jerk, mechanically glancing at a clock. Then he remembered that Commissioner Tanney had promised to call; that both Saki and Harvey Lewis were asleep. So he rose and went to the door himself.

### CHAPTER THREE

Mr. Forde

**B**UT when he opened it he didn't confront the commissioner. He stared, instead, at a stranger.

The man was short, muscular, stolid. He had a powerful head set upon massive shoulders, and he was scowling grimly, his mouth an uncompromising slash. Rain still dripped copiously from the brim of his gray hat, and his hands were hidden in the pockets of a wet black overcoat.

"I'm looking," he said quietly, "for Paul Cavender. I guess that's you."

Cavender was about to answer when, glancing beyond the man, he saw something that stunned him. The door of the elevator was open, and the lift was motionless. It couldn't descend because its uniformed operator lay on its floor, either dead or senseless, his wrists bound behind him with his belt.

Cavender's mouth opened. He stared back at the stocky man—and saw a blue-steel automatic emerge from the fellow's pocket. It pointed straight, steadily, determinately, at his chest.

"Back up," the man softly ordered.

"What the devil—" in a whisper.

"If you'd rather be shot here, that's all right with me. I'm giving you a chance to back up."

Cavender snapped: "Who are you? What do you want?"

"The name," said the man, "is Forde. William Forde. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Her husband?"

"Exactly. Her husband. Now back up—or I'll blaze away right where you stand."

Though he was dazed, Cavender saw no immediate alternative to obeying. He moved backwards through his foyer, into the drawing room. William Forde, closing the door, followed him. There was now a curious, twisted, merciless smile on his thick-set face, but his automatic never wavered.

Cavender, raising his voice in some hope of rousing Lewis or Saki, began: "I don't get this! If you—"

"Shut up!" flatly. Forde sent a swift glance around the room. Then he added: "You'd better talk in whispers. The moment somebody steps in here, I shoot. Understand? After that I'll take my chances. Maybe you noticed I left the elevator ready for a quick get-away."

"Yes," Cavender said after a pause. "You make yourself quite clear." His eyes narrowed as his poise began to return. He went on quietly: "Suppose you explain what all this is about, Forde. I still—"

"As if you don't know!" bitterly.

"No idea at all."

"Don't try to lie to me! The only reason I'm letting you live on for a few minutes is that I—I want to know exactly how far my wife went with you."

"Went with me—"

"You know what I mean."

Cavender said: "Whatever you mean, you're wrong. Your wife didn't go anywhere with me. I never in my life even saw her—alive."

"Don't lie, I tell you!"



"I wouldn't dream of lying," levelly said Cavender, "to an automatic."

FORDE stood motionless a while, breathing heavily, his narrowed eyes searching. He seemed to be trying to peer behind Cavender's face for truth. But the twist of his lips slowly became more menacing and uglier. He said thickly: "Listen, Cavender. I've been the fool long enough. From now on I play the game my way!"

"What exactly does that mean?"

"It means this! I know damned well that for the past month my wife has been running around with somebody else. I've tried to act dumb and blind, in the hope that she'd quit. But she didn't quit. And I got fed up! Understand? Fed up! Tonight I made up my mind to follow her and see for myself who it was she'd been meeting. I told her I'd have to work late, as I've had to work late so often this past month. But I was waiting outside our house when she left. I followed her. I saw her take that taxi, and I took one, too!"

He stopped, breathing harder than ever, and his eyes actually flamed.

"So," Cavender urged softly, "when you discovered she'd come to a man's club and climbed into a man's car to wait for him, you lost your head and—killed her?"

"No!" harshly. "I didn't kill her, Cavender. But I believe you did!"

Paul Cavender didn't at once reply. He studied Forde intently, let his eyes drop for an instant to the steady, unswerving automatic.

Then, looking up again, he said quietly: "You're wrong. I didn't kill your wife—I found her dead in my car. And once more I must tell you I never saw her before tonight. In fact, I've been in London for the past month; got back only a week ago. I feel that if you and I put what we know together now, we might—"

"I still think you're lying!" viciously interrupted William Forde. "Tonight she went straight to you!"

"Yes. Because of the letter."

"What letter?" sharply.

"This."

The unknown extorter's note still lay on the table. Cavender indicated it with a gesture. He saw Forde frown at the thing in uncertainty. But suddenly the heavy man grimaced with contempt.

"What are you trying to put over on me?" he demanded. "Think I'll fall for it? Making me read that letter so you can take a chance and jump at me?"

Cavender couldn't restrain a tight little smile. He shrugged and said: "All right. Suit yourself."

"I'll read it," snapped Forde, "when I'm ready." As he spoke he snatched up the sheets and stuffed them into his pocket. "As for you, Cavender—"

"Just a second! You say you followed your wife tonight when she came to the Polo Club?"

"I did! What of it?"

"If you saw her go into my car, you must have seen who else went to the car a minute later and stabbed her—unless you did it yourself!"

For a moment Forde was silent. He began to shake his head, slowly, automatically, with a kind of a fatal rhythm.

"No, Cavender, I didn't see who did it."

"How's that?"

"If I'd *seen* you do it," Forde went on, ignoring the question, "I'd have shot you dead right there, on the street."

"How is it," Cavender insisted, "that you didn't see what happened?" While he spoke, he repeatedly glanced at the automatic, seeking a wild chance to leap—

"Because," answered Forde, "when I'd seen Evelyn go into that club, I felt dizzy, crazy. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't picture her running around with the sort of man—the millionaire class—"



she'd find in that building. She didn't seem to fit into that sort of picture at all.

"So—so I let my cab run on three or four blocks. Tried to figure out what to do. Finally I stopped, got out, and walked back. I couldn't tell how long Evelyn would stay in the club. But I decided to wait outside, across the street, to see who come out with her. I saw you and another man—the police commissioner, I guess—go to your car. But I didn't know what had happened till the police cars came. Then I slipped into the crowd that gathered—and saw her there—dead in your car—" Ford paused, gulping hard. His muscular face went gray. "I—I guess I lost my head. I walked around in the rain for hours before I—came to. But I'd heard people in the crowd whisper your name, say it was your car. That's why I'm here."

"You came deliberately to murder me?" slowly asked Paul Cavender. "Simply because you suspected—"

It was then that sounds came from the rear of the penthouse. Either Saki or Lewis was awake, possible on his way here. When Forde heard the noise, he sucked in a swift breath. His face instantly hardened, and his eyes gleamed savagely, malignantly.

He drove out through his teeth: "I've let you talk, Cavender, but I don't believe you! My wife wouldn't have gone to you without a reason! It's because of you she's dead! So—*take it!*"

And William Forde fired.

CAVENDER saw the sudden upward jerk of the automatic. He saw its red flash, heard its angry crack. Instinct more than reason hurled his lean figure sideways to the floor. He dived toward a chair.

But not quite fast enough.

Something hot ripped through his right

forearm. He felt a stab of agony that made him shut his eyes fiercely. As he struck the floor, another shot banged through the drawing room—the bullet slicing splinters out of a table.

Possibly Forde thought his first bullet had struck squarely. Or perhaps he was confused by the sudden shouts which broke from the rear of the penthouse. Whatever the cause, he spun around suddenly, cursed, and raced for the door.

Cavender saw him go.

He sprang dizzily to his feet and seized a bronze book-end from the bullet-gashed table. It was the only weapon he could grasp at the moment. His arm ached furiously, and blood was streaming down over his hand. Yet he lifted that book-end, hurled it with all the strength he could muster at the back of William Forde.

It flew across the drawing room. Just as Forde reached the door, the bronze weight crashed squarely against the back of his head—

Not a sound came from the man. He stumbled forward a few steps, the automatic dropping from his hand. His knees crumpled. Then he pitched forward to sprawl motionless on the floor, within two feet of the outer door.

That was when Lewis, in yellow pajamas, dashed into the drawing room.

The disheveled chauffeur gaped first at his employer, at his bleeding right arm; jerked his head around to gape at the still figure on the floor of the entrance hall. And all he could force out was a hoarsely whispered: "Holy heaven!"

Cavender's whole being throbbed madly. He ran across the drawing room to fall on his knee beside Forde. The back of the man's head looked split; it was bleeding hideously. He turned an ashen face to Lewis and snapped: "Phone for an ambulance!"

"What on earth—"



"Don't ask questions now! Phone!"

Utterly colorless, Lewis gasped: "Yes, sir!" and flung himself precipitately toward the instrument. Saki was in the room now; a round-eyed, trembling Saki who stared without speaking. Cavender told him sharply: "Bring a pitcher of water! And whiskey! Quick!"

"Y-y-yessuh!"

Lewis, from the telephone, blurted: "Your arm, Mr. Cavender! Did he—"

"Never mind my arm! Get that ambulance!"

And at that moment, for the second time within fifteen minutes, the doorbell buzzed.

Saki, already halfway to the kitchen, halted in confusion and began to return. But Cavender waved him away. He rose himself, picked up Forde's small automatic in his left hand, and yanked the door open.

This time, however, he had no need for a weapon. The caller was the gray-haired Commissioner Tanney.

Tanney stood dumbstruck, supporting in his arms the insensate figure of the elevator operator. The uniformed boy was still bound; he sagged in the commissioner's embrace, his eyes closed. Another attendant, who had brought Tanney up in the second lift, stood in the background speechless.

The police commissioner blinked in at the prostrate William Forde. He swung his eyes to Cavender's red-dripping hand, to the automatic.

"Good God!" he finally gasped. "What—what in heaven's name is going on here?"

"Come in," Cavender grimly invited. "Come in and bring your friend. You're just in time to help bind up an assortment of wounds."

**I**T WAS almost three o'clock in the morning before Cavender and the po-

lice commissioner could sit down without confusion to the whiskey and sodas which Saki served. Sinking deep in his chair, Cavender drew his first easy breath in more than an hour.

His right arm hung temporarily useless in a sling. The bullet had cut deep, though not quite to the bone, and the ambulance physician had been able to dress the wound quite satisfactorily. William Forde, however, had been carried away to the hospital without having regained consciousness; it seemed, very much to Cavender's genuine concern, as if the man's skull were fractured.

"Well," wearily declared Tanney, "you've had quite a night of it, Paul—quite a night!"

Cavender didn't reply. His dark hair disheveled, he frowned down into his whiskey glass. Absently he stirred the liquor, sipped some. He had already told the commissioner all that had occurred, and Tanney now muttered: "It looks, from many angles, as if Forde may have murdered his wife in insane jealousy, just as he came to murder you."

"Possibly," slowly granted Cavender. "But that, of course, wouldn't explain her connection with the letter."

"No-o— By the way, where is it?"

Cavender drew the extorter's communication from his pocket, where he'd thrust it after retrieving it from the unconscious William Forde. He gave it to Tanney without a word; then turned to brood over the empty fireplace while the police commissioner read. There was a long silence in the room, save for the steady hammer of rain on the windows. From the kitchen came the muted voices of Saki and Harvey, Lewis, who, apparently, were finding it impossible to retire.

Finally Tanney placed the letter on the table. He frowned, tugged at his lower lip, elevated one brow. He lifted his eyes



to regard Cavender narrowly, even quizzically.

"Paul," he said at last, "a hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money."

Paul Cavender smiled mirthlessly. "But I'll pay it."

"Don't be a fool! You leave this to me—"

"Sorry. I don't want to see anybody I know murdered—because I tried to save a few dollars."

"Very generous and noble of you, I'm sure," said the commissioner. "But you make me feel as if the police force is useless." He looked at his large hands. "Besides, are you convinced this fellow, whoever he is, will carry out that ridiculous threat?"

"I think he will, Tanney," said Cavender, his brows tightly contracting. He peered hard into the hearth. "If he's the same man who murdered Evelyn Forde to silence her, he's proved more than adequately that he's in earnest, and desperate. Most men would be desperate, Tanney, with a hundred thousand dollars at stake!"

"Ye-es, I suppose so. Still—"

"As I see it, he's the man with whom Evelyn Forde has been—well, 'running around,' as Forde puts it. She probably learned of his criminal intentions and balked at the murder part of the plan. To forestall him—possibly to save him from the consequences of his madness—she came to warn me tonight. Certainly she knew I was to receive this letter; thought I'd already got it, in fact. But he was too quick for her. Somehow he silenced her before she had a chance to tell me what she knew."

"All very lucid," agreed Tanney, with a faint suggestion of sarcasm. "All we have to do now is discover the man with whom she's been running around."

"That shouldn't be too difficult."

"Perhaps not for an amateur detective," said the commissioner, rising. "But for

the police department it's a pretty neat little poser. However, our men are working hard."

Saki entered with coffee on a silver tray and sandwiches on a platter. Tanney suddenly grinned and rubbed his hands.

"That's an inspiration!" he declared.

For the first time in hours, Cavender smiled. As he reached for a sandwich, he said to Saki: "Just one more thing; call the *Record* office—"

"Suh?" Saki, with his odd accent, dreaded telephone conversations.

"Never mind. Tell Lewis to do it. Tell him to get the *Record* office on the wire. Whoever answers will probably refuse ads at this hour, but have Lewis say this has to get into the next edition—by order of the police commissioner. I want an ad in the personal column. Just: 'Yes. P. C.'"

Tanney quickly looked up, frowning. "So you're determined to pay, Paul?"

"Fully determined," answered Cavender, munching the sandwich. "But I shall look to the police department, of course, to help me get the money back."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Excursion To Death

THE advertisement brought amazingly quick results. By two thirty the following afternoon Cavender received a special-delivery letter printed in the same manner that had characterized the extorter's first communication. A little pale, his arm useless in a sling, he stood beside a high French window in his penthouse and read—

Cavender:

I'm glad to note in the *Record* that you have decided to be sensible. I shall expect you to follow my directions exactly, without any deviations; if you don't comply with them, the results will be the same as if you had decided not to pay. I trust you understand I'm in deadly earnest.



First, have the \$100,000 in small bills, as I previously wrote. Have it wrapped in waterproof oilcloth. Tomorrow morning, at ten, you or your representative—in any case, *one man only*—is to drive your Roamer car along Route 22 out of New York. You are to remain on that road always, driving the hundred odd miles which brings you to the cross road to Great Barrington, Mass. At that cross road turn around and start back for New York. Thus you will have a 220 mile round-trip. Somewhere along that 220 mile stretch you will hear four quick gun-shots. When you hear that signal, stop at once. Place the package of money among the trees or shrubs at the right of the road. Then get into the car and drive back to New York.

But remember this. If you are not alone—or if your representative is not alone—our agreement is off. I will begin the series of killings I promised. Also, I shall consider our agreement void if any other car—follows or precedes yours tomorrow. Your Roamer coupé must be alone! And you are not to let the police know of these directions. That is all.

Again the letter was unsigned.

Cavender smiled grimly. "The 'ghost hand' directing my destiny," he murmured. He meditated a while, staring out of the window into Central Park far below. Then he glanced around at the white-jacketed Saki, who was clearing a cocktail table.

"Lewis back from headquarters?" he asked.

"Yessuh. He take car to garage. He be home five-ten minutes, Misseh Cavender."

"All right. Tell him I want to talk to him."

ONCE more Cavender gazed out of the window. The police, he had learned had discovered no incriminating fingerprints on his coupé. If any had been there, on the outside, the downpour last night had effectively ruined them. Moreover, they had not been able to learn the identity of Evelyn Forde's "gentleman friend." Cavender inhaled a long breath, shook his head, and went to the telephone.

This time it was a vice-president at the Merchants Bank whom he called.

"Cavender speaking," he said quietly. "Have you that hundred thousand ready for me?"

"Oh! Yes, Mr. Cavender."

"Small bills?"

"Mostly twenties. It makes quite some bulk, by the way."

"So I should imagine. Well, thanks. The money will be called for between nine and ten tomorrow morning. I simply wanted to be sure there'd be no delay."

When he left the telephone, Cavender thrust a cigarette into his thin mouth, and Saki hastily came to light it. Puffing thoughtfully, the lean man returned to gaze out of the window. He remained there for some ten minutes, until Lewis finally appeared, ready for instructions, his cap in his hand.

Cavender peered at the chauffeur appraisingly through a cloud of cigarette smoke. Lewis looked big, capable, confident of himself, and certainly self-sufficient. He seemed to satisfy his employer, for Cavender nodded. Then he motioned with his free left hand to the letter on a table.

"I want you to read that, Lewis."

"Sir?"

"Read it. Because I'm going to ask you to represent me tomorrow morning—in dealing with a murderer. If you're willing to go."

Lewis was visibly startled. Somewhat shaken, too. He read the letter in silence, his eyes slowly widening. When he finished he blinked slightly, as if dazed.

Cavender asked: "Does the idea of going frighten you?"

"Why—no—but, gosh, Mr. Cavender," he whispered, "I—I never heard of anything like this! Drive two hundred and twenty miles, hunting a signal—"

"That," said Cavender, "is the clever part of the scheme. The police can't tell



which spot in over two hundred miles to watch."

"And you—you want *me* to go with the money?"

"Only if you're willing, Lewis. There may be some risk, I warn you. On the other hand, I don't think anything will happen to the man who delivers the money. If it did, nobody would ever dare, hereafter, to pay extorters."

Lewis swallowed hard. He frowned down at his cap irresolutely. Shifted his considerable weight on his feet.

"With this useless arm," Cavender dryly explained, "I can't drive myself. And according to the letter, only one man may go. I don't particularly care to trust a stranger with a hundred thousand in cash. Too great a temptation, I should think, to jam down the accelerator and dash off for—say Canada. And if I tell the police or ask their help—that's against the letter's instructions. So—"

"I'll go!" suddenly snapped Lewis. He looked up determinedly. "You can leave it to me, Mr. Cavender."

"Thanks," said Cavender, nodding. "I knew I could count on you. I may be a fool for paying, but in the long run—I think we'll come out on top!"

"H-how, sir?" asked Lewis, astonished.

Cavender turned to the window with his strange, tight smile. He whispered: "You'll see, Lewis. Just do your part tomorrow. Leave the rest to me!"

**D**ESPITE the warning in the anonymous letter, Cavender did eventually telephone his plans to Commissioner Tanney; that much, he felt, he owed his friend. The information was personal, not official. As a result, he was just sitting down to a solitary dinner when Saki announced a surprise visit by the commissioner himself. Julian P. Tanney entered briskly, flushed by a November wind. He

pulled off his hat, waved aside an invitation to dinner.

"Dropped in for a minute only," he said. "Paul, I think we can catch your nemesis tomorrow—if you and your chauffeur will cooperate!"

Cavender lifted startled brows. "How?" he demanded.

"Tell Lewis to stop at the first telephone he passes after getting that four-shot signal and depositing the money. He's to call the nearest station of the state police."

Cavender exclaimed: "Good Lord, are they in on this, too?"

"I've been in touch with them," tersely. "Tomorrow morning their radio-equipped cars will be stationed along Route Twenty-two at five-mile intervals. They'll be hidden in side roads. As soon as your chauffeur sends the news, telling where he's deposited the money, the police cars will be notified by radio. Then they'll converge on the spot. Every automobile within a twenty-mile radius of the place will be stopped and inspected. I don't think your bandit will be able to drive through that police cordon with a bulky package containing a hundred thousand dollars!" Tanney pushed a hand back through his gray hair. "If he's caught, the state police have agreed to send him straight down to our own headquarters."

Cavender leaned back from the table with a wondering smile. "You haven't overlooked anything, have you, Tanney?" And then: "How's Forde coming along?"

"Still unconscious," muttered the commissioner, scowling. "The doctors say he'll probably pull through, but so far we haven't been able to get a word out of him." He suddenly rose. "Well, I've got to shoot along. Will you ask Lewis to come to headquarters when he returns to the city tomorrow?"

"I will, if you want him."

"I'd like to have a first-hand account



of what happens. Drop over yourself if you like."

## CHAPTER FIVE

**P**OLICE COMMISSIONER TANNEY was in a restless, irritable mood the next afternoon. Seated at his desk, he found it difficult to concentrate on routine affairs. As he had feared, the newspapers had made a considerable to-do about the woman murdered outside the Polo Club on Park Avenue. He felt that if the state police succeeded in trapping the murderer this day, it would be more than a triumph; it would be a vindication of police efficiency.

So he awaited a report with tense impatience, and at twenty minutes past two his desk telephone trilled. A deep, staccato voice informed him: "Mr. Commissioner, we've just had a report from Harvey Lewis, the Cavender chauffeur. I've got him on the wire now, sir. Shall I switch him to you? He's calling from a gas station six miles below Pawling."

"Yes!" eagerly snapped Tanney. "Put him on!" A moment later he was demanding: "Well, Lewis? What happened?"

"I got the signal ten minutes ago, sir. About a mile north of this place. Four quick shots."

"And—"

"I did exactly as directed, Mr. Commissioner. Deposited the package of money among bushes at the right of the road, drove away, and called the state police from this phone five minutes ago. I guess you ought to be hearing from them soon, sir."

"Good!" commended Tanney. "I don't suppose you saw anyone near the spot where you left the money?"

"No, sir."

"Have you informed Mr. Cavender?"

"No, sir. I'll call him now."

"All right," said Tanney crisply. "After

that come straight down here to headquarters."

"Yes, sir. I ought to make it in about two and a half hours. Anything else, sir?"

"No. You've done your part!"

Commissioner Tanney leaned back and rubbed his large hands. A curious little smile, an anticipatory smile, flickered over his heavy face. After a time he called Cavender's home but found only Saki there. So he settled back to await a report from the state police.

And in less than half an hour it came!

A crisp, excited voice in the receiver told him: "Lieutenant Danworth of the state police talking, Mr. Commissioner. About the Cavender case!"

"Yes?" quickly. Tanney's hand tightened on the instrument as he leaned over the desk. "What is it, Lieutenant?"

"The report as I just received it, sir, is this: Harvey Lewis, the Cavender chauffeur, went off a bridge with his car, dropped eighty feet to railroad tracks, and has been rushed to a hospital. I'm afraid he isn't going to live, Mr. Commissioner."

Tanney sat stunned. He wanted to blurt a question, but for the moment no words escaped him. It seemed that hours passed before he finally forced out a shocked: "How—how did it happen, Lieutenant?"

"The state police were stopping every car on the road. They naturally stopped Lewis's coupé, also. They searched it, as they searched all the others, and one of the troopers opened the rumble seat. Hidden in there he found Mr. Paul Cavender."

"Wh-what!" gasped the commissioner. "He what?"

"Found Mr. Cavender in the rumble seat, sir. Hidden. He was quite cramped, and his bandaged arm was causing him considerable pain. But the trooper recog-



nized him, sir. From newspaper pictures. He helped Mr. Cavender to the road. Lewis, the chauffeur, seemed to have been more amazed than the troopers. They report that he sat for a while as if paralyzed, as white as a ghost. He was still behind the wheel of the car, and the motor was still running. As soon as Mr. Cavender was out in the road, Lewis seems to have yelled something which nobody caught. Before the troopers could stop him, he stepped on the gas and streaked away. They say he hit it up to at least eighty an hour."

There was a pause. Commissioner Tanney, pale despite himself, said thickly: "Go on, Lieutenant! What happened?"

"The troopers went after him, sir. They put on all possible speed. But they couldn't catch up with that powerful Roamer. It was when Lewis tried to take a sharp turn into a bridge—at about seventy-five an hour—that his car skidded. Witnesses say it crashed right through the bridge rail and flew out over the tracks. By this time Lewis is at the hospital."

"Where's Cavender?" cried Tanney.

"I understand he and the troopers went back to recover the package of money. Mr. Cavender said he'd explain things to you in person this evening, as soon as he returns to the city. Lewis, of course, was the extortioner—and the murderer of that woman on Park Avenue."

**T**HOUGH still bandaged, Cavender's arm was no longer in a sling. He used it quite freely that evening when he dined with the police commissioner in their favorite corner of the Polo Club's restaurant.

They were at cocktails, awaiting the first of Antoine's delicious courses, when Cavender said: "After all, Tanney, we had a clue staring us in the face from the very outset, didn't we?"

"Now listen," began Julian P. Tanney, with a hint of his usual good humor, "if

you expect me, the police commissioner of New York, to play Watson to your Holmes, forget it. I'll admit, confidentially, that I'm bubbling over with questions. But officially I refuse to ask them. I even refuse to concede an amateur detective stole this case from me. Now what were you saying?"

Cavender smiled.

"I was saying," he resumed, "that we had an obvious clue from the outset—the fact that Evelyn Forde went into my car that night; she knew, without asking, which car was mine."

"Quite true."

"That had me guessing," Cavender confessed, frowning at the cocktail glass. "But when I learned she'd been running around with some man during the past month, while I was in London, the explanation occurred to me as pretty obvious. Lewis, you see, had the use of the car while I was gone. If he'd been taking some woman for drives in it—if he was her unknown admirer—she'd know the Roamer coupé."

He paused while the waiter set *hors d'oeuvres* before them. Then he went on: "The longer I considered Lewis, the stronger became the possibility of his guilt—much as I hated to think it of him. Still, there we were. Lewis had been working for me almost a year, long enough to have a pretty good knowledge of my friends and relatives, as he put it. And a hundred thousand dollars would mean a great deal to a fellow like him. According to what he said in the hospital this afternoon, just before he died, he'd never intended to tell his plan to Evelyn Forde. But he got drunk with her the other night. Wanted her to run away with him. Promised her wealth in a kind of drunken braggadocio—"

"So that was why the woman came to you," muttered Tanney, with a scowl. Like Cavender, he quite forgot the *hors*



*d'oeuvres*. He drew a quick breath. "All right, Paul. Go on."

"It seems she begged him to give up the idea, but he flatly refused. He'd been planning it, dreaming of it, too long. Then she left him with the threat that she'd go straight to me and tell—to prevent him from committing murder. That was on the fatal night. She phoned my apartment for me; she'd phoned there quite frequently in the past, for Lewis—and he was afraid her phone bills might show that, so he lied about it—said she'd been calling me. When she called Saturday night, Saki told her I was at the club. Lewis overheard and rushed over to Park Avenue to—well, to prevent her talking. And he did."

"That's his confession?" demanded Tanney.

"His last words, yes," Cavender said gravely. Then he sighed and tasted the *hors d'oeuvres*. "When I got the idea that he might be guilty," he went on thoughtfully, "I made a test. Had him phone the *Record* the other night to insert my ad. Remember?"

"Yes, of course!"

"An hour later, when he was asleep, I

cancelled the ad myself. It never appeared. But Lewis, knowing he'd placed it, didn't trouble to watch the *Record*. He took it for granted the ad was printed. Mentioned it in his second letter. Then I knew I had the man."

"Yet you trusted him with a hundred thousand dollars!"

"Just to clinch the case, Tanney; just to clinch it. I was at my garage at eight this morning. I paid the mechanic there to break the rumble seat lock, so I wouldn't be locked in; and paid him to keep quiet. It never occurred to Lewis to hunt for me in that back seat. He drove out of New York with the money which he got at the bank, with my O. K. I was behind him all the time, with an automatic in my pocket. He never received those signals, of course; yet he got out and hid the package of bills where he could return for it in a few weeks or months—or even a year. I pushed up the rumble seat's lid just far enough to see where he concealed it; and got it back within an hour. The rest—well, the rest you already know." Cavender suddenly smiled. "Shall we forget it now and do justice to Antoine?"

FEATURED IN THE DECEMBER 15TH ISSUE



## A SMASHING LONG MYSTERY NOVELETTE

— by —

T. T. FLYNN

### THE RED WIZARD

which brings back

*Izzy O'Shea*—that amazing young investigator who looks and acts less like a detective than any crime-fiction character you've ever met—and his partner *Blacky*—as well as *Martin Sadler*—militant newspaper publisher and crime-buster—and *The Brain*—that sinister emperor of evil who was never more than a voice on the telephone, yet managed to maneuver his human crime pawns to strike the heart of a whole city with horror.

Dime Detective Magazine for December 15th will be out on November 30th



# THE GIRL FROM



*They called him Pokerface, for apparently nothing could ruffle him—not even murder. And when the Watson case brought him to the Moyden Morgue and pitched him head-long into a corpse-filled horror chamber, he only lit another cigarette and smiled. He didn't believe there was a cadaver "living" able to put him in a spot from which he couldn't blast himself.*

**T**HE stocky man from the Missing Persons Bureau sat uncomfortably in a modernistic chromium-and-red leather chair, shook his graying head, complained gloomily: "If that's all you

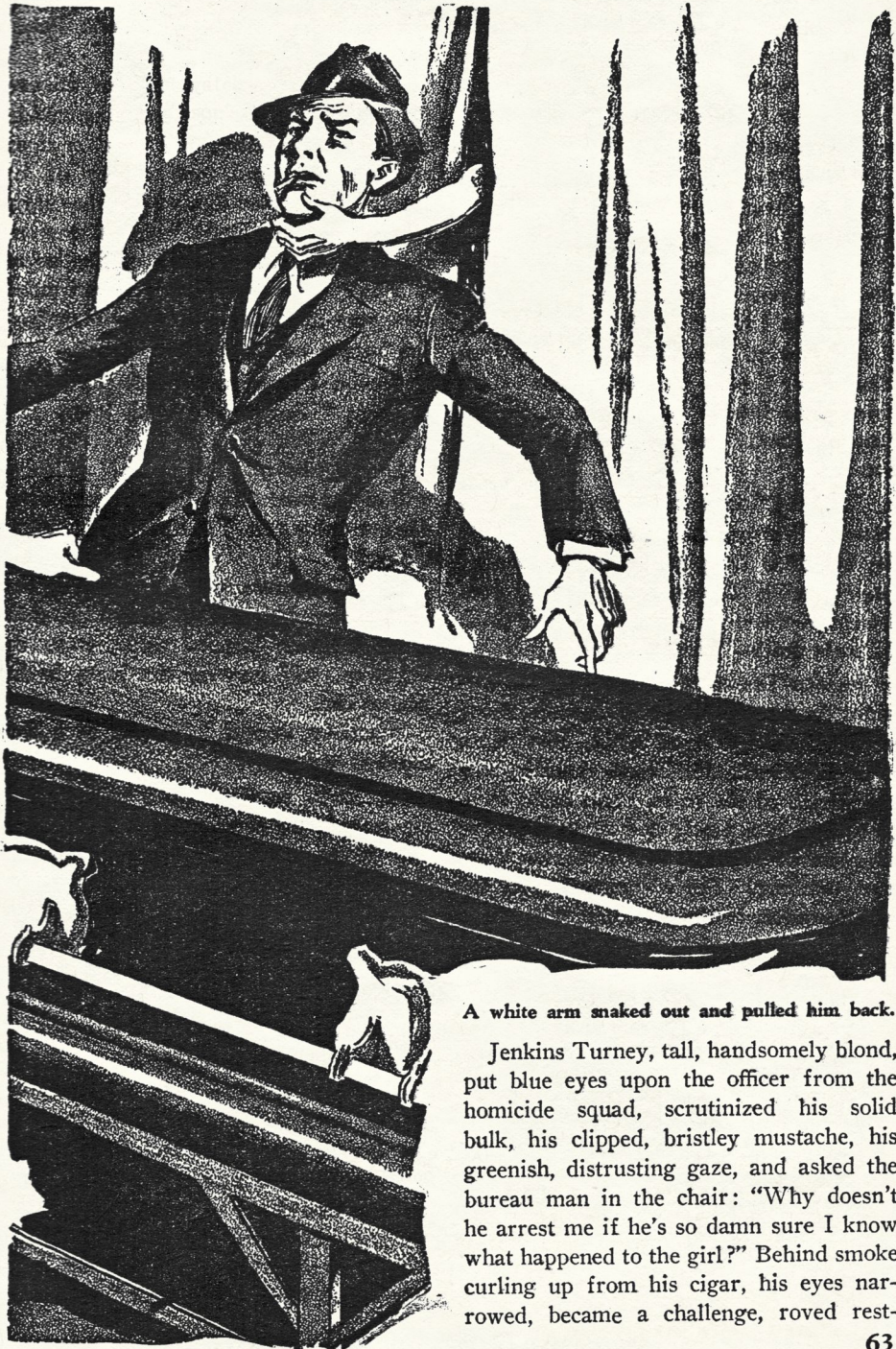
know about this Marion Watson or Lucille Tracey or whoever she is, I guess we—"

"Hell!" Lieutenant Schall snapped. "He knows more'n he's told us!"



# THE MORGUE by Russ Meservey

*Author of "Race Racket," etc.*



A white arm snaked out and pulled him back.

Jenkins Turney, tall, handsomely blond, put blue eyes upon the officer from the homicide squad, scrutinized his solid bulk, his clipped, bristly mustache, his greenish, distrusting gaze, and asked the bureau man in the chair: "Why doesn't he arrest me if he's so damn sure I know what happened to the girl?" Behind smoke curling up from his cigar, his eyes narrowed, became a challenge, roved rest-



lessly to the corridor, then back again.

"You're asking for it!" Charley Schall growled. "But we're not in such a hurry, Mr. Turney. There's people I want to see first. I told you what I've done since that tip was phoned in this morning. You've got your chance now. You better take it and tell us the truth!"

Jenkins Turney, waving the cigar away from his healthy face, showed the hard gleam in his blue eyes. "I'm telling you. I grant I play around a lot, Lieutenant. And I'm poor at remembering womens' names. So I call them all Lucille Tracey. I insist upon being introduced to them that way. I even introduce them to my friends as Miss Tracey. It's safer that way. I don't know your Marion Watson!"

"This tip," the bureau man stated, "said Marion Watson, the missing dame, could be identified by photographs as one of your Lucille Traceys. We'll try it out here and there. If she's still alive, O.K. If she's dead—" He shrugged.

Jenkins Turney stood up, eyed the corridor door beyond the ultra-modern living room of his apartment again. His glance was impatient. He strode longleggedly the length of the room, came back, stopped, said in a sourly defiant voice: "I've told you all I know about a Marion Watson—nothing! The photograph you say you found in her room is too smeared to be recognizable—by me at least."

"Human blood smear," Schall growled. "With your prints on it in red."

**T**HE corridor door opened, closed noiselessly. A vague odor of pepsin floated into the room. The person following the faint odor came in silently, stopped at the edge of the thick, pale orange carpet, stood motionless with his right hand in his coat pocket. He wore a dark blue suit, blue shirt, blue tie, black shoes, a snap-brim felt hat of bluish

shade. He was slightly built, not tall, fragile appearing.

Jenkins Turney, seeing him first, said with a twisted smile: "Well, hello, Pokerface," but without surprise.

The slight man at the edge of the carpet neither nodded nor moved the cupid-bow lips in his olive, oval face. A cigarette dangled from one corner of his mouth, its smoke dissipating the vague odor of pepsin. Dark, wide-set eyes under drooping lids with long, curling lashes, slid over the room, settled on an indefinite spot midway between the man from the bureau and Lieutenant Schall.

Jenkins Turney asked with pointed politeness: "I suppose you all know each other?"

Schall growled, "Pokerface!" grimaced with down-turned lips. "So it's you now! He got to his feet. "O.K. Play it. I'll be going."

The slight man took the dangling cigarette from his lips with tapering, thin-boned fingers, stepped away from the doorway, still keeping the hand in his coat pocket.

"Good-by, copper," he said in a flat, toneless voice.

His thin, smallish hand replaced the cigarette in the same corner of his mouth and he leaned slightly backward against the wall beside a chromium ash stand. His dark, almond-shaped eyes still clung to the indefinite spot between Schall and the man from the bureau.

"Come on, Harry," Schall urged the stocky man in the red chair, and went to the door. Turning, he glared at Pokerface, rumbled: "You keep your heat out of this town, softie! You'll lose that roscoe license you've got and then where'll you land? Behind an eight-ball made out of knuckles, dearie! You're just a runty, punk gunman. My meat!"

Pokerface said again in that flat, toneless voice: "Good-by, copper."



JENKINS TURNEY went to the corridor door, shaking hands with the bureau man and Lieutenant Schall, saying with mock cordiality: "I trust, gentlemen, that you'll find your Miss Marion Watson, or somebody." He shut the door on them, locked it, came back into the living room, blew cigar smoke through tensed, parted lips, flopped down in the chromium-and-red leather chair.

Cigarette smoke trickled out through the slight man's nostrils and his moody eyes, swerving, steadied on Turney's ruddy face.

"I phoned you," Jenkins Turney said abruptly, "because I'm in one honey of a jam! This isn't the first time, perhaps, but it's the worst. Listen, Pokerface. Two weeks ago I set up a girl in one of my buildings—for the usual. Last Tuesday night, four days ago, I dropped in on her. She accused me of playing around with other women."

He shrugged, stared a moment at Pokerface's motionless expression, waved his cigar angrily. His words came out hard, harsh.

"What the hell? They're all Lucille Traceys to me. I'd told her that in the beginning and I told her so again. She raised a row, and accidentally got a nose bleed when I shoved her away from me against the dressing table. I didn't poke her, although she had it coming. She got blood on an unframed photograph of herself and threw it at me. Naturally, I picked it up, to keep the carpet clean if for no other reason. Then she went into the bathroom and I left."

Pokerface's frail hand removed the cigarette from his lips. He squashed it out in the stand-tray, produced another one, lighted it, dangled it from his lips, letting smoke trickle through his nostrils. He did not move from the wall.

The cigarette scarcely wiggled in his mouth when he said: "Shakedown."

"Murder!" Turney snapped. "Somebody reported her to the Missing Persons Bureau. The police found my fingerprints in the blood on her photograph. Pretty?"

Pokerface said, without removing the cigarette: "It's a pinch."

"They're waiting for more evidence, or waiting for me to run," Turney grumbled sourly. "Millionaire real-estate operator indicted for murdering mistress. God! I haven't had time to get scared yet. I might beat the case, too, in court."

"No," Pokerface said. He lifted his left hand part way, moved his tapered fingers one at a time as though counting. His sombre eyes stayed on Turney's blond features.

"By God!" Turney swore. "They'd do that, and they will! I'll have a swell chance with half a dozen or more Lucille Traceys parading in front of a jury." He shut his eyes, put his hands to his head.

Pokerface removed the cigarette, flicked ashes into the stand, dangled it again from a corner of his mouth.

Jenkins Turney took his hands from his head, opened his eyes, blinked rapidly, scowling. "The police have my prints. This Lieutenant Schall told me they'd already wired the War Department at Washington and gotten them. He's stalling me along. What in hell's he waiting for, before he—"

"The broad's body." Pokerface's cigarette wiggled. His voice remained flat, unchanged. "Who tipped you?"

"The manager of my apartment building the girl was in. The police got her name from a phone call. Marion Watson. I had her in there as Lucille Tracey, as usual. Damn! That'll only make it worse when a jury sees the others they scare into testifying against me. And I can't alibi all my time for those four days! I don't even know where to begin."

Swearing sourly, he shoved up out of the chair, began pacing.



Watching him, Pokerface tamped out his cigarette stub, lighted another, scratching match against thumbnail, still using his left hand. He put a small pellet of pepsin beneath his tongue without removing the smoldering cigarette, stepped away from the wall.

"I'll deal for you," he said when Turney's back was toward him.

Jenkins Turney whipped round, demanded: "What—"

Cigarette smoke mingling with the faint odor of pepsin trailed back over Pokerface's thin shoulders with his toneless words, "When they call." He went silently out through the corridor.

Down on the street he crossed to the opposite side, said: "Move, copper," to a plainclothesman leaning against the fender of a long, blue roadster. He got behind the wheel, took his right hand from his coat pocket, drove rapidly toward midtown Minneapolis.

Late afternoon sunlight still warmed the autumn air; between apartment buildings and the colored leaves of trees, it reflected off the blue roadster's polish with a hard gleam, made the slight figure seem smaller still behind the wheel. The roadster murmured past a red light without slowing, and gray ash blew back from Pokerface's dangling cigarette.

THE sloppy man in shirt sleeves and striped trousers laid a five spot on the edge of the pool table, droned: "Eight ball in the side off the ten." He chalked his cue with a professional flourish.

Pokerface laid five on the five, leaned against the wall. His dark, almond eyes under drooping lids, gazed across the poolroom into a mirror reflecting himself. A telephone jangled up front. He put a slim hand to his blue tie, adjusted the knot.

"Ah-h-h, watch this shot!" the sloppy man urged.

Pokerface's eyes clung to the mirror. The ten ball clicked against the eight, sliced it slowly toward the side pocket. The eight touched the projecting edge of green-covered rubber, wobbled, stayed there. The sloppy man swore.

"Eight in the corner," Pokerface said flatly. "Bank."

The shirt-sleeved player grinned sardonically, laid ten on the two bills, stood back, still grinning, shaking his head.

Pokerface chalked his cue without looking at the tip, left the cigarette dangling between his lips, bent over the table, sliding the cue back and forth between tapering fingers with a wrist movement like a violinist's.

"Pokerface!" a harsh voice bellowed back from the front of the poolroom. "Telephone!"

The cue-ball clicked the eight hard, bounced it against the corner of the rail, whirled it diagonally across the table. Pokerface straightened. The eight rattled into the corner pocket, disappeared. He racked his cue, picked up the ten and two fives, went toward the front.

Turney's voice over the phone crackled, "Jenkins Turney," in his ear. "A call came. Somebody will talk to me at the Hennepin Club. I don't know who. A man's voice. He just said that and hung up."

"What time?" Pokerface asked.

"Eleven tonight. What shall I—"

The dangling cigarette wiggled. "Be there. I'll be around." The phone went dead under slender, tapering fingers. Pokerface strolled casually to the street.

The long, blue roadster, lights dimmed, rolled fast through dark, tree-lined streets, slid to the curb in front of an unpretentious red-brick apartment house set flush with the sidewalk.

Pokerface slid from behind the wheel, went silently into the building, down a barren hallway. Around a corner, on the



ground floor, he knuckled a scarred door lightly. The door opened and a frowning brunette in a purple, soiled house dress stared past the glow of his cigarette. The frown became a hard smile.

"Whitey," Pokerface said in a dull monotone. "Rodded." The glow dangling from the corner of his mouth jerked up and down a little, then stopped.

The brunette went back inside, leaving the reek of whiskey behind her.

Pokerface put a pepsin pellet under his tongue. The glow of his cigarette moved through the hallway, across the sidewalk, into the car. In its rhythmically recurring flare, his long, curling eyelashes gave his dark face a drowsy look.

**W**HEN Whitey Hodge lunged across the sidewalk from the darkness of the red brick building, the cigarette arced, comet-like, out into the street, spattering faint sparks. Producing another, Pokerface thumbed a match.

In its sudden light Whitey Hodge, getting into the roadster beside him, loomed monstrously large. Thick, stiff blond hair showed beneath a battered brown fedora. A blotch of freckles scored on the reddish, heavy-jowled face, making the skin seem redder still. A speckled bow tie emphasized the expanse of vestless white shirt covering the barrel chest. The match went out, fading Hodge's dark brown unpressed suit to hulking black.

Pokerface snapped the ignition and dim-lights, asked: "Sober?"

"And sad," Whitey Hodge declared in a gruffly good-natured voice. "It ain't like the good old days when a guy could put a speak owner on for a bottle. They want dough now. I had to sock a bartender for Molly's bottle, and then I had to sock a cop for tryin' to stop me."

The blue roadster purred away from the curb. Pokerface, slumped deep in the seat behind the wheel, swung left at the

second corner, his cigarette whipping, glowing brightly in the wind, his dark eyes on the rear-vision mirror. He pulled sharply to the curb, stopped, parked on the wrong side of the street.

"Fun," Whitey grinned.

A dull black, unwashed coupé tire-whined turning the corner behind, rolled past, slowing, parked near the next corner ahead. Nobody got out of it. Pokerface wheeled away from the curb, drove slowly on past the coupé, eyeing it without attempting to hide his interest. At the intersection he turned the roadster around.

"Fix a tire," he said, tossing aside his cigarette.

He drove alongside the coupé, stopped, gazed insolently into the face of Lieutenant Schall at the coupé's wheel. Sitting beside Schall, the squarish face of Sergeant Oscar Olsen was visible, annoyed.

"Hello, coppers," Pokerface said in his flat, toneless voice.

Whitey Hodge got out of the roadster, went round it's long hood, stood leaning idly against the coupé's rear fender.

Lieutenant Schall grimaced, growled: "What a coincidence!" and said to Oscar Olsen: "It's Pokerface and his knuckle man, Whitey Hodge, out for the autumn air. Imagine meeting them—"

The roadster's motor, clutch disengaged, roared, drowning Schall's words. When Pokerface eased up on the accelerator and the racket died to a soft purr, Schall's greenish eyes were cat-like, glaring.

"Tailing me, copper?" Pokerface demanded sullenly. He stuck another cigarette in a corner of his mouth, thumbed a match, drew in smoke, slid a quick glance at Whitey.

"When I do—" Schall grumbled.

Pokerface thrust the lighted match suddenly toward Schall's face, tromped down on the accelerator, engaged the clutch. A



shrill whistle of escaping air was lost in the rumble of the roadster's engine as Whitey leaped on the running board, swung his bulk over the back into the seat. The roadster ripped down the street in second gear, whirled left at the corner, shot into high.

"The damned valve stem stuck or I would of flattened their rubber quicker," Whitey complained ruefully. "Where we headed for?"

Pokerface nodded; his lips said, "Hennepin Club," as he adjusted the left windshield wing. He swung right three blocks further on, stepped the roadster up to sixty-five. There were few traffic lights. The long, blue car jumped them without slowing.

SOFT, sensuous music floated across the wide veranda which half-circled the lighted building. Dancing couples were swaying, grotesque shadows against the veranda's dark flooring as they drifted past open windows. This gave the exterior of the Hennepin Club an unreal sense of weird movement that carried over the veranda rail and was finally lost amongst tree trunks and low, thickly leaved branches.

Jenkins Turney, alert, defiant, was listening nervously to a portly, dignified man in a black frock coat. They stood in shadow a few paces from the veranda steps, against the wall of the building. Window lights on either side of them blotched the veranda flooring with rectangles of clearer visibility across which weaved twin blotched dervishes of darkness, like an intermittent, ghostly parade.

Along the wall Pokerface, cigarette glowing rhythmically, drooping beneath a dark blue down-tilted hat, moved across a rectangle of light, came on past the two men, went down the steps, stopped against a tree trunk.

Jenkins Turney's worried, shifting eyes

followed Pokerface's slight, silent form. "I'll go with you, Moyden," Jenkins said sourly to the portly man.

"It's the only way to be sure," Moyden said. "See for yourself."

Turney and Moyden went into the club, came out wearing hats and top coats. They walked round the building to the parking space behind, got into a black sedan, rolled along the drive toward the main road.

A new Ford roadster weaved out of the parking lot, followed the sedan. The Ford had no lights on. There were two men in it.

Sliding behind the wheel next to Whitey, Pokerface said: "More cops," started the car, trailed the Ford, driving in darkness.

"Easy," Whitey grinned. "Run 'em in the ditch."

"Got to," Pokerface said tonelessly.

He drove on the left side of the highway, keeping the tail-light of the black sedan in sight. He moved up on the Ford rapidly. Driving with one hand, he took a long, high-powered electric flashlight from the roadster's door pocket, passed it to Whitey.

"In the eyes," he said.

Whitey grinned again, nodded, crouched forward in his seat. The blue roadster came abreast the Ford, edged over, keeping pace, almost scraping the Ford's fenders.

"What th' hell you tryin'—" a gruff, surprised voice shouted from behind the wheel of the Ford.

Pokerface held the two cars together, wheeled closer still. The electric torch in Whitey's hand flared, glared directly in the driver's eyes. Leaning suddenly far over the side of the seat, Whitey's free hand gripped the Ford's steering wheel, jerked it to the right.

"You dirty—" the gruff voice barked.

The blue roadster rammed ahead as the



Ford went off the road, down a steep gully. A revolver blasted from the Ford—three shots in quick succession. The slugs whined over Whitey's head. The tail-light of the sedan was a faint speck far up the concrete highway.

"The guy drivin'," Whitey scoffed, "was Morrison, the dumb dick!"

Pokerface was putting a cigarette in a corner of his mouth. He used the car's electric lighter on it. When the fag glowed he said: "They'll phone in." He replaced the lighter, put the flash back in the door pocket.

The tail-light ahead was closer. It disappeared at a right turn.

Picking it up, the blue roadster weaved through streets that rapidly became dismal with dark houses. The Mississippi River swept by under a long bridge.

"Saint Paul, by God!" Whitey grumbled. "We wasted our time with them Minneapolis cops in that flivver."

Pokerface shook his head, snapped on the sidelights as the houses changed to apartment buildings. "They'll phone in anyway."

The sedan ahead threaded through the city, climbed a long hill into a cheaper section, swung into a shabby block of stores and squat brick flats. At the far corner a newer building, three-storied, showed the only dim lights in the block.

The sedan swung right around the corner, nosed against the building, horn tooting, as the roadster rolled past down the street.

"Get out," Pokerface said and slowed, pulling to the curb. "Watch them."

Whitey Hodge leaped to the sidewalk, swung round, hulked his way back to the intersection. Pokerface drove around the block, parked in front of an all-night restaurant a half block down from the newer building on the corner. He locked the car, gave Whitey the keys when he met him in an alleyway.

"They drove inside," Whitey said. "It's an undertakin' joint." He made a wry face, screwing up the freckles on his nose into a blotch. "I brought me rod, but how in hell you goin' to stick up a stiff?"

"Wait here," Pokerface said. "I'm going in."

Whitey lurched back into the alleyway, watched the slight, dark figure move silently across the street, round the corner.

**T**HERE were palms in the dimly lighted windows, a bell button on the frame beside the door. Pokerface rang, lighting a cigarette as he stood waiting. The match, flaring, showed dimly, flickeringly, the same oval face, the same curling lashes. But in the depths of the dark eyes, in the rounded set of the fragile jaw, in the compressed, cupids-bow lips, an inscrutable fearlessness, bordering on insolence, made the features appear implacable, mask-like. The door opened.

A young man in white jacket, indifferent of expression, confronted Pokerface, asking in a casually expectant tone: "Yes?" as though he already knew all the answers.

"I got a phone message," Pokerface said somberly. "There's a dead man at Sixty-two Fifty-four Watkins Street. Pick it up right away."

The young man stared at him. "That's a long ways away—"

"I'm supposed to wait here," Pokerface said flatly. "Relative."

He stepped inside the door, stood with his back to the wall, his cigarette dangling, his right hand sunk deep in his right coat pocket, his dark-blue snap-brim tipped at a sharp angle over his forehead so that only the lower half of his steady, moody eyes showed.

"The name?" the man in the white jacket asked.



"Get the dope out there," Pokerface said curtly.

Beside the heavy drapes over double doors at the rear were two stands of fresh flowers. The furniture was formal, stiff.

"If you're going to wait, you may as well sit down," the attendant advised and went out through the drapes saying, "Sixty-two Fifty—"

Pokerface stood silently, his almond eyes staring at the drapes, his drooping cigarette smoldering. An elevator made swishing noise back of the drapes. Pokerface went toward the noise, parted the curtains, stepped quietly beyond into almost complete darkness.

The room was a small office, with telephone, roll-top desk, a black safe. An automobile motor rumbled further back in the building. Footsteps came up from below.

Pokerface went back into the reception room, stood against the wall again. A gilt sign, across from him, read: *Moyden Mortuary*.

The footsteps came toward the front and Jenkins Turney came into the room. He was solemn, sunk. His shoulders drooped. His eyes were angry but without defiance. He stared at Pokerface, stopped. Moyden came in behind him.

"You can see the position I'm in, Mr. Turney. There's the girl in that casket and you've recognized her and you've seen the death certificate. If the police—" He saw Pokerface, demanded: "What are you doing here?" smiled abruptly, professionally, added: "Oh, you're waiting for that body from Watkins Street. Sit down, sir. Sit down."

Pokerface gazed indifferently at Moyden without acknowledging his presence. In the light of indirect lamps Moyden's jowls were pinched by a wing collar circled by a black tie. The front half of his head was bald. His hands were pudgy, yet large, capable.

Jenkins Turney, staring past Pokerface, nodded gloomily and said to Moyden: "All right, Mr. Moyden. I'll pay the girl's funeral costs. I'll pay you with a check now and it will be honored in the morning. You can have the body removed from the casket and cremated before then, I presume."

"Certainly, Mr. Turney," Moyden agreed soberly. "And the ashes will be disposed of, as I suggested." He gestured toward a chair and a table, watched as Turney sat down, wrote out a check.

THE cigarette hanging from Pokerface's lips had gone out. He put the butt in an ashtray on the table. His eyes, darkly impassive, slid over the figures on the check. He went back to the wall, sat down in a stiff-backed chair, kept his eyes on the table legs.

"There you are, Mr. Moyden," Jenkins Turney said, handing the check to the mortician. He rose and moved toward the street door. "I'll want to view the ashes."

"In the morning, Mr. Turney," Moyden promised. He went to the door with Turney, let him out, came back and looked sorrowfully at Pokerface. "Death is a sad, sad thing, Mr.—"

Pokerface stuck another cigarette in a corner of his mouth, thumbed a match into flame, blew smoke through his nostrils, still looking down at the legs of the table.

Another mortuary assistant in a white jacket came part way into the reception room through the drapes, motioned Moyden, whispered to him. Moyden nodded, went back with the assistant, saying with professional politeness over his heavy shoulder, "You'll excuse me a few minutes?"

Their footsteps went down around the stairway somewhere back beyond the office. When there was no other sound,



Pokerface got up, moved silently between the drapes, crossed the office, stood beyond it a moment in a square, dark room from which opened the grillwork of an elevator.

Stairs circled it in a spiral. The elevator was down below. He went down, the dull glow of his cigarette the only sign of his movement. The stairway ended at a square room similar to the one above, but with doors leading off. The doors were closed, light came from under two of them, and there was an odor of disinfectant and the fainter fumes of gasoline and oil.

Moyden's voice, his words indistinguishable, made muttered sounds through one of the doors. Pokerface crossed the room, listened, went to the second door where a strip of light showed, listened again. No sound came through the panel. He opened the door, slipped inside, closed it after him.

There was a single small light near the middle of the room. The room was long and resembled a hospital ward except that white curtains were strung around the beds and the place was chilly.

He went down the aisle slowly, stopping at each curtained bed, peering through the curtains. Nine of the beds were occupied by cold, silent figures. At the foot of eight of the beds a cardboard tag dangled. There was written the name and address of the occupant, the date of entry, the date of the funeral. The ninth bed had no tag.

Standing back between two curtained beds, Pokerface took the cigarette from his lips, dropped it, mashed it with his heel. The door at the end of the ward through which he had entered made no sound as it opened, but Moyden's heavy tread came down the aisle.

The frock-coated undertaker went past along the aisle to the far end of the ward, through another door. Pokerface stepped

silently to the edge of the curtain, watched the mortician coming back, pushing a rubber-wheeled cart upon which lay a black, silver-trimmed casket.

Moyden stopped at the next bed down from Pokerface, parted the curtains on the bed that had no tag at its end, peered at the form there a moment. When he put the curtains back in place, Pokerface stepped out into the aisle, stood facing him across the casket.

"What's in the box?" Pokerface demanded in his toneless voice.

Moyden jerked, stared at the slight, dark figure confronting him, said angrily: "You—what do you mean, wandering round down here?"

"What's in the box?" Pokerface asked again in a dead, flat voice.

Moyden shrugged, put a smile on his lips. "The poor earthly remains of Marion Watson." He started to come toward Pokerface round the casket.

"I like to see dead broads," Pokerface said. He moved quickly round the opposite side of the coffin, stood in front of the curtained bed that had no tag. "Open the box."

Sweat beaded Moyden's bald brow. "Certainly," he grumbled. His pudgy, capable hands slid over the end of the casket, shot suddenly across the top, clutching at the slim figure beyond.

Pokerface danced back, struck the end of the bed behind him. A thin, cold feminine arm snaked outward from the white curtains, encircled his neck, drew him backward, down on the bed.

Moyden's bulk sprang round the casket. Pokerface made a faint, strangled sound as the mortician's fists began smashing into his thinish face. The dim light in the ward seemed to fade—

CONSCIOUSNESS came back to him with a sense of whiteness that became draped curtains around a hard bed. He



lay there a few moments, remembering, thinking. There was a white sheet covering him.

Pokerface pulled the sheet away, felt of his face. His lips were swollen, broken, so that the cupid's-bow curve no longer was visible. His thin nose had been bleeding but had stopped, and his right eye was partially closed. He moaned feebly as he got up from the bed, wobbled out from the curtains.

The dim center light of the ward was still burning. Directly in front of him, in the aisle, the black casket on rubber-covered wheels was a long, bulky object with silver handles that had no immediate value. He leaned against it, felt in his right-coat pocket. His gun was gone. He fished a cigarette and a match from the other pocket, inhaled smoke. The dangling cigarette, glowing, moved along the aisle, stopping at each bed, disappearing between white curtains, reappearing again.

**E**IGHT of the occupied beds were still occupied. The ninth, tagless, upon which he had been beaten, was mused and stained with some of his blood. He went to the door opening on the square room where the elevator was. The door was locked. Voices murmured beyond it, but without sense. He went back along the aisle to a door at the other end which was also locked.

In the dim light of the ward, Pokerface, coming back toward the black casket, looked like a sleep walker who had fallen down, bruised himself badly, and gotten up without awakening. He stopped at the coffin and ash fell off his cigarette onto the smooth surface.

He tried to lift the lid, found it fastened down. He went to the other end and tried again. A section of the top,

about a foot and a half long, came up on hinges.

Pokerface stared down at the face, neck and shoulders of a girl. Against the rich satin upholstery the features were sharp and palely beautiful like tinted wax. His hand, trembling a little, moved forward and downward and rested very lightly on the thick glass which covered the opening.

He stood there looking down, frowning into the fixed/cold face behind the glass. His hand began moving over the surface along the edges, tugging at the glass and the casket where the cover fitted. The glass would neither slide aside nor lift up.

His eyes were almond slits of cold, stolid darkness without highlights, or glint. He unbuttoned his vest and shirt, palmed a small automatic which had dangled from a cord around his neck. Wrapping a handkerchief around the butt, he began tapping the glass over the face in the casket.

When the glass splintered he picked out the pieces until he could reach inside. He thrust the automatic in his pocket and touched his fingers to the face and throat lying in the casket.

The neck and face were ice-cold—but not soft.

He drew his hand away, let his breath out between swollen lips drawn tight over small, white teeth, and put his hand back inside again.

When he tried to push up the eyelids they did not move. He plucked at them, pinched the nose of the face, pulling upward. The head lifted a little and he shook it.

Then the face came off.

Underneath the mask was another face but it was unrecognizable. The nose was gone, the forehead was battered in, the mouth and chin were squashed down into the throat. The coloring was purplish-blue and green, with streaks of mangled gray higher up.



Pokerface dropped the mask back, straightened the face, closed the black casket lid over the broken glass cover above the face. His hands were shaking and his own face was no longer dark—but ashen.

HE WENT round the casket, heeling his cigarette on the floor, lighting another one. He tried the door at the end of the aisle again. It was still locked. He took a long drag off his cigarette, took the gun from his coat pocket, aimed it at the door lock.

The gun roared twice, jerked in his hand.

He opened the door, stepped quickly, silently out into the square room, stood facing the white-coated attendant who had first met him.

The man swore at him, eyed the gun, stared hard at Pokerface's battered features, stopped swearing. Coming closer, he said: "You stalled me, damn you! There wasn't any body at that address."

Pokerface put the gun on him. "You had a ride," he said flatly. "Where's your boss?"

A feminine voice screamed shrilly from one of the rooms.

Pokerface said in his toneless, monotonous voice: "Where is she?"

The young attendant froze in his suddenly crouching posture. "She—" His voice became sick with suspicion, fear. He stared wildly around. His eyes, shifting, rabbit-like, stopped on a crack of light under one of the doors. "The operating room—"

Pokerface watched him spring, saw the sheer desperation and panic in the attendant's face as he dove.

Sidestepping, sliding on silent feet toward the door of the operating room, Pokerface heard Whitey Hodge's bellowing voice upstairs, heard heavy, pounding feet hit the stairway, coming down.

The attendant sprang to his feet again,

whirled at the operating-room door as Pokerface turned the knob. The attendant's shoulder crashed against the slender legs of the slight man with the gun, toppled him over. But not before the gun made a single blast, aimed at the door lock of the operating room. The lock splintered.

Pokerface struggled to his feet with the attendant clinging to his wrist as Whitey lunged across the room. He kicked open the operating-room door, slipped through, his gun weaving.

"Hold this punk!" Pokerface said.

He felt the attendant's grip on his wrist loosen. Whitey Hodge's laugh gurgled deep in an angry throat.

"Fun!" Whitey exclaimed. "Yeah!"

Bent over a mortician's operating table, Moyden's right hand was poised. He lowered it slowly, carefully, gripping a thin surgeon's knife. Above the naked, bound, writhing form of the girl on the table, a large glass container of wine-like fluid, its bottom ending in a long rubber tube was held in a chromium stand. There was a blood-tray at the side of the girl's arm, with a drain leading off into another container that was empty. Moyden's free hand was over the girl's mouth.

Pokerface shot. It was as though his gun fired of its own volition.

Moyden spun round, lunged at the slight, slim figure facing him. The thin knife in Moyden's hand slashed forward, downward, then upward as the mortician hurled himself at his assailant.

Pokerface danced aside. His gun blasted again, then twice more.

Moyden rocked back, spun forward into the second and third shots. He rolled in midair, hit the floor on his back, kept rolling, kicking, until he was sprawled against the wall near the door. His feet drummed on the floor, his body jerked, stiffened, lay quiet.

Pokerface put his automatic back in his



coat pocket, took the crumpled cigarette from his mouth, put a fresh one in, thumbed a match. In the flame his dark eyes flickered to the woman on the table. He picked up the surgeon's knife, began cutting the girl loose.

Whitey Hodge came into the room, dragging the white-faced, white-coated attendant. The other attendant stood unexpectedly outside the room in the room beyond, started to move away cautiously, was whirled backward, sideways, spun into the operating room by a burly cop.

**B**EHIND the cop, Lieutenant Charley Schall and Sergeant Oscar Olsen wore grim faces, their hard eyes on Pokerface's back.

"Get this, runt!" Schall rumbled as Pokerface turned, faced them. "It's a pinch. And you're it—you dirty little—"

Whitey Hodge's freckled features snapped into a hard, happy grin. His right fist swung, hooked Schall on the point of the jaw, sent him in an easy arc back on his haunches. Schall stayed down, glasseyed.

"Fun," Whitey glowered.

Sergeant Olsen reached for his gun, stopped as Pokerface's automatic made a sharp bulge in his pocket.

"Hold it, cop," Pokerface said, stepped lightly to Moyden's body.

Still holding the gun on Olsen, nodding at the girl sitting nude on the operating table, Pokerface frisked Moyden, stood up holding a slip of paper—Jenkins Turney's check.

He crossed back to the operating table, flicked the check before the girl, said: "A hundred grand, you louse!" to her. "Talk it out."

Sergeant Olsen muttered: "Now, now, give the gal a break. Cover her nudity, Pokerface. Don't be so damn tough with her."

The girl broke into a stream of abuse,

aimed at nobody, everybody. When she finished, Whitey rammed up to her, hoisted her in one arm, ripped the curtain off one window, wrapped her in it, set her down again.

"For you, sweetheart, you punk copper," he said to Olsen. "You're a married guy. You can't take it. Yeah!"

Lieutenant Schall hoisted himself up, wavered, clung to the stand holding the big glass container of embalming fluid. His glazed eyes hit upon Pokerface, became glaring, frigid.

"Nuts to you!" the girl said to Schall. "Keep off! You got nothin' on me. I'm Marion Watson, you mug. Marion Watson!" She said it with venom, stared sourly, moodily at the body of Moyden, suddenly sprang from the table, threw herself upon his body, weeping violently.

Pokerface flicked the check at Schall. "I'm a punk gunman. Remember that, cop." He handed the check to Schall. "Read it and weep."

Schall, eyeing the check, growled in his throat. "What—"

"What you don't know," Pokerface said.

Schall glared at him, glared at the girl, went to her, jerked her back from the body of Moyden. "Tell it!" he growled. "Tell it or I'll—"

She screamed as he pulled her off the body. Her voice shrilled, becoming gradually quiet as she talked.

"That dirty double-crossing—" she pointed a finger at Moyden's body, began crying, brushed tears aside. "I don't care what happens now! I don't! I don't! He framed me, the dirty double-crossing—"

"We heard all that," Pokerface said and lighted another cigarette.

"Shut up, you sneakin' little rod!" she screamed at him. "It's your fault, damn you! Your fault this went to hell! Moyden"—she aimed her finger at the corpse again—"he framed me into making



a pass at Turney. He promised it would be simple, easy with all the Lucille Tracey's hanging over him. I made the play, got him into a fight, hit my own nose like Moyden said I should do, and got blood on the picture I threw at him—my picture. He got his prints on it and ordered me out. Then he left, left me cold. I was beginning to go for him, too."

"I bet," Schall growled.

"You wouldn't know, you punk cop!" she screamed again. "Then I scrambled. Moyden hid me out here, parked me in with the stiffs, while he went and shook down Turney for the hundred grand."

"Swell murder set-up," Olsen exclaimed.

"And you shut up, too, you—cop!" she said in a low, penetrating voice. "I waited, and Turney identifies the dummy in the casket that Moyden has got fixed up to look like me. And then this little punk"—she put wild eyes on Pokerface—"wanders in and picks trouble with Moyden. He loses his head, Moyden does. He grabs for this little pansy. And I grab

the runt from where I am in the stiff bed, so Moyden can give him a job. He does."

"Swell!" Lieutenant Schall agreed. "What there was of it."

"You're right, cop!" Marion Watson went on. "Moyden would of killed me if it hadn't been he left the runt alive. He was in a rush—I didn't know why then, but I do now—Moyden got panicky to rub me out. He got scared and figured he had to have a real corpse, a real body-and-flesh Marion Watson. See? See? The dirty double-crossing—"

Pokerface, lighting another cigarette, dangling it from a corner of his mouth, pocketed his gun and nodded to Whitey. "Come on, Swede." He eyed Lieutenant Schall solemnly, indifferently, touched a delicate finger to his lips, shifted dark eyes at Schall's swelling jaw.

"Even Stephen," Pokerface said.

He put a pellet of mint under his tongue. Whitey lurched out the door. The dangling cigarette followed, trailing smoke tinged with the fragrant odor of mint.

**FOR THE DECEMBER 15th ISSUE**

## **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

has written a complete, long, mystery-horror novelette

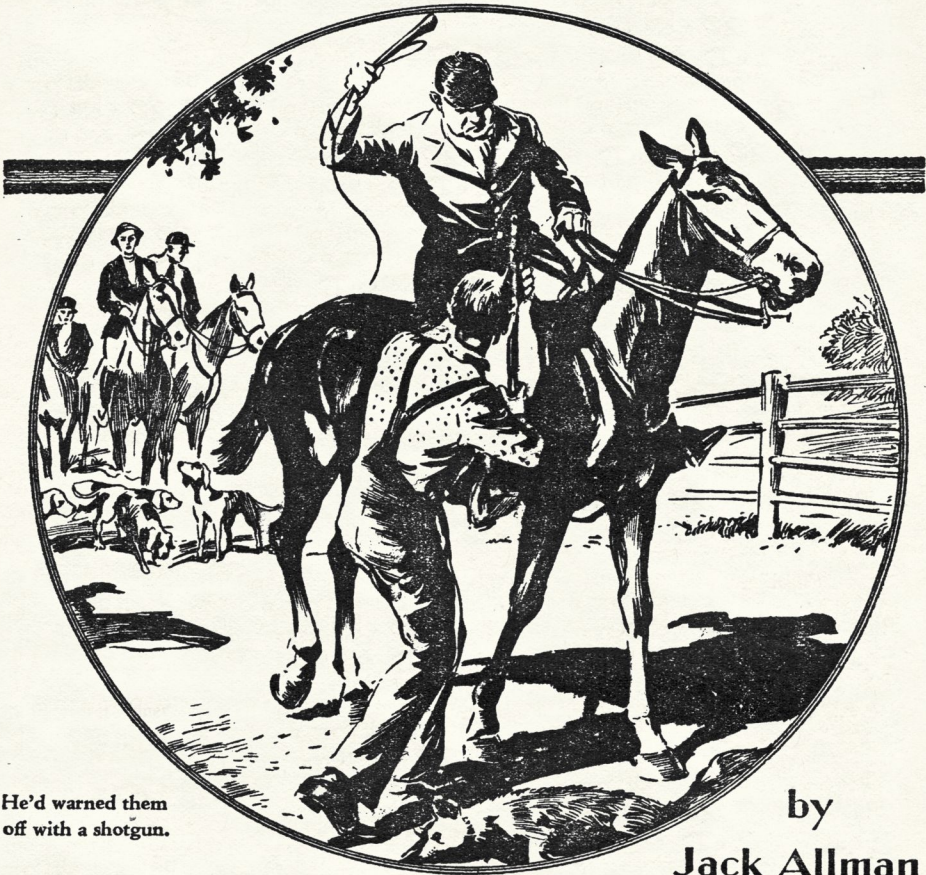
# **S U I C I D E   H O U S E**

*It's the SMALL, WESTON & BURKE story you've been waiting for so long and it takes you to a house where, one after another, the tenants commit self-murder for no apparent reason. Now with the fourth successive body dangling there from its beam the story opens and—*

**DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE for DECEMBER 15th will be out on  
NOVEMBER 30th**



# Homespun Homicide



He'd warned them off with a shotgun.

by

**Jack Allman**

*Author of "Murder, R.F.D.," etc.*

*Lem Parker didn't pretend to be smart like the city dicks that made fun of his efforts to solve the Hanneford kill. But homespun methods can work out, even in homicide, and a city slicker can be as much of a yokel as any country bumpkin when a killer's loose.*

**T**HE murder of J. Harmon Hanneford was the biggest thing that ever happened in peaceful Middle Valley; and it broke right under Lem Parker's nose, so to speak.

At breakfast, that wet September morning, the little middle-aged deputy sheriff mentioned to his wife that Hanneford had sent word he wanted to see him. Something about neighbors shooting

pheasants on the huge Hanneford estate.

Mrs. Parker sniffed. Not at Lem's breath this time, but at mention of the wealthy manufacturer whose wild parties were the talk of the community.

"Oh, somebody shooting Mr. Hanneford's Chinee pheasants! Ain't that too bad." There was acid on her tongue. "Someone ought to take a shot at *him*. It's a perfect disgrace the way he car-



ries on. That bathing party for instance, and his poor little wife away at the time."

Lem didn't say anything, but he wasn't so sure about this "poor little wife" business. He had seen the startlingly beautiful Mrs. Hanneford riding the bridle paths quite a lot recently; and always she had been with that handsome artist fellow, Rankin.

To Lem, born and raised there in the little rural community, this wasn't quite right. The neighboring farmers didn't do those things, and they had rather set ideas on how people should conduct themselves—even the few rich, like Hanneford, who had moved in and built estates of the wooded hills which were no good for crops.

Middle Valley was within fifty miles of New York City, but it might just as well have been a thousand for all the difference it made to those who farmed it.

They went to bed with the chickens, and they needed light by which to eat breakfast. Those away from the highway still used kerosene lamps because not enough would sign up to pay the light company for running in a line of poles. Besides, it cost a lot of money to wire those hundred-year-old houses.

Things were much the same with them as it had been with their fathers. Of course they had cars and battery radios, and sometimes they drove to Portchester or across the line to Greenwich, Connecticut, to a picture show; but for the most part they lived as they had when children.

The women folks still baked their own bread and churned their own butter. The men ordered their clothes and most of their farming equipment from big mail-order catalogs which were still useful even after the new issue arrived.

**L**EM pushed back from the table, cleaned his teeth by suction, then loaded his mouth with a three-fingered

pinch of Honest John Longcut. He took his blanket-lined canvas coat from the nail behind the kitchen door, crammed a shapeless felt down over his stiff, sandy hair and told his wife he'd be back for dinner. That meant noon. Supper was what you ate at six o'clock.

A few minutes later he rattled out of the yard in his old Model T, splashing the little puddles that filled the ruts. He swung down the crossroad and turned onto the concrete highway. Lizzie chattered her protest at thirty miles, but Lem held her there, placidly-chewing his cud and spitting wide over the curtainless side.

He was a little thrilled at having Hanneford send for him. Nice to visit those big estates. Bowl right in. Made a fellow feel the importance of being a law officer.

In his eighteen years as a deputy Lem had lost none of his ardor for the job. It gave a fellow a chance to get around, to see things. He swung off the highway and ground to a stop on the bluestone drive.

When no one answered his ring at the gate, Lem gave his scraggly mustache a tug. Funny, there must be ten or twelve servants around some place. Through the ornamental iron bars he could see parts of the big stone house set in the middle of a huge lawn studded with blue spruce. Not a soul around.

Lem looked at his thick silver watch. Just eight. Maybe that was a little early for a rich bug like Hanneford. Probably had a drunken party after the hunt the day before and left orders not to be disturbed by cars coming in.

Deciding to return an hour or so later Lem walked back to the car. While worming his knotty little body in behind the wheel his knee hit the horn button on the steering column. There was a raucous blast.

Lem turned the flivver around in a



hurry. Hanneford was a big man, one who could do a fellow harm if he got riled up at something. He didn't know, of course, that J. Harmon Hanneford was lying dead from a shotgun wound on the shore of his own private lake. That the reason no one had answered his ring was because the entire household was at that minute gathered around the body.

**H**E pulled down the highway a piece and stopped. What the devil else was it that he had intended to do today? He scratched his head but it didn't do any good. He reached back over the seat and drew a gallon glass jug out of the tonneau. Hard cider always helped him to think.

His Adam's apple worked like a pump plunger as he swallowed one of the two inches of champagne-colored liquid. He smacked his lips, set the jug back, and wiped off his mustache with the heel of his hand.

Oh, yes. The report about funny doings at the Armour cottage. Good time to investigate while waiting for Hanneford to get up. He ran down to the lower corner of the big estate and turned off onto a little-used road that showed fresh tire marks. He went over the report that had reached him.

Big cars running in and out, mostly at night. Four or five well dressed men around who looked like city fellows. One was carried into the house when they first arrived a week before. There were no women living there, though one had come up and spent the night.

All the information had come through kids, and from their parents to Lem. That was after one of the men had slapped one of the boys and run them away. He was awful mean, they said, and he swore something terrible, only they couldn't understand all the words.

Yes, good idea to look them over, mused

Lem. Might be kidnapers or something with an eye on the children of one of the estates. He drove down along Hanneford's line and off onto the slope that led to the New York water supply reservoir.

As Lem pulled out into the clearing he saw that there were two cars in the yard. He chugged through the wide gate. Everything was overgrown, the steps, the path to the outbuildings. The Armour cottage was usually rented all summer, but this year no one had taken it till this outfit dropped in at the very tail end of the season.

Lem swung his car over onto what had once been a lawn. He mounted the creaky steps and saw faces peering out at him through dirty windows. He rapped and the door swung open.

The man who demanded what he wanted was of fair size. He had a pearl-gray hat on the side of his head and the butt of a cigarette dangling from his lips.

Lem wished he had taken the rest of the hard cider. He pulled his shield from an overall pocket, flashed it in the palm of his hand. "I'm a deppity sheriff," he said, "and I've come to find out your business here." First glance had convinced him that the outfit wasn't there for any legitimate purpose. He had a little trouble keeping his voice firm, but he wasn't exactly frightened. There wasn't a cowardly bone in Lem's body, and he had a lot of confidence in the power of that shield.

The fellow stepped back, invited him in. Lem made just one step when the roof seemed to fall on him. Stars and sky-rockets broke in a burst of flame before his eyes. Then all was black.

**L**EM awakened with a groan. Gingerly he felt of the lump and cut on top of his head. In a second it all came back to him. He jumped to his feet, looked out the window. The cars were gone. He



knew they would be. He looked at his watch. It was a little after nine. He'd been out almost an hour.

He looked around the cheaply furnished summer cottage. There were plenty of empty liquor bottles, some bandages with dried blood on them, a soup bowl plumb full of cigarette butts, and many more on the floor around the small stove.

Lem went out and sat down on the steps. He took a chew, but it hurt the top of his head to move his jaws. His brow knotted, and even that hurt as he tried to remember the license number of the front car. New Jersey, he knew, but he just couldn't recall the number though he had made a mental note of it as he drove in.

Buick sedan—dark green. Useless to try and get any further.

His mind jumped back to the strange matter of getting batted over the head so quickly. Must be gangsters of some kind. Didn't want him to get a look at them. Maybe that kidnaping idea was right after all. What would gangsters be doing way up there.

Buick sedan—dark green.

Maybe they were counterfeiters. Nope. There would be presses and things. And there was nothing in the house but the original furniture and the rubbish they had left.

Buick sedan—dark green. Lem started to scratch his head and yelled, "Ouch!" Then his eye fell on old Lizzie. He hurried over. The jug was still there. He drained it.

Then he stood there with one foot on the running board and gazed off into far distances. Buick sedan—dark green—number—

He snapped his fingers, repeated the numerals aloud. Yep. He had it. That was the number he had read all right. He jumped in and horsed the flivver out of

the gate and up the road for all she would stand. The empty jug bounced around in back.

He struck the highway at Hanneford's corner and tore up toward his own home, stopped at the gas station. They had a booth phone there. He put in a call to New York, got the police department and gave them the details in a low voice so that the station attendant wouldn't hear. Best to keep this thing to himself for a while. The bunch around there would kid the pants off him if he told them he'd been rapped over the head and had his gun taken away from him.

ON the way back to Hanneford's he cut in a side road and pulled up to Dobe Martin's place. He handed out the empty jug.

"Fill 'er up, Dobe," he said. "I'm on the trail of somethin' big." Just as well, Lem figured, to have them prepared in case the New York police did want that New Jersey car and its occupants. He'd get credit for routing them out of Middle Valley anyway.

Dobe smiled to himself as he put his key in the root-house padlock. Lem Parker sure took his job seriously.

Lem knew that the fellows laughed behind his back, but he didn't care. What difference did it make? What if they did call him the Hard Cider Sleuth? He got in a laugh once and a while himself. A last laugh. Like the time he got Gil Tollop for the murder of Tom Scobey at the mail box. Everyone had said, "Accident," till he got Gil's confession.

Let 'em laugh, that was Lem's attitude. Being a deputy sheriff was far more important than tilling around or milking cows. He had a hunch that a lot of them envied him his chance to bat around the county with his nose in every little excitement. Let 'em laugh.

"Hear 'bout Hanneford and Lark Wes-



ton?" asked Dobe returning with the jug."

"You mean the pheasants. What makes you think Lark's poachin' again?"

"No, the fox." Dobe laughed. It was a good joke about that fox, and it wasn't often anyone had a chance to tell Lem Parker about happenings in Middle Valley. Lem got around a lot and usually knew everything that was going on.

"What about the fox?"

"Hanneford had some friends up from New York yistidday. They gits out with the horses and them yelpin' hounds and turns a fox loose."

Lem nodded. He had known about the hunt, had seen Hanneford and his friends out many times. Red coats. Black velvet caps. A fellow with a horn to call the dogs.

"Well," continued Dobe, "they rides hell bent after him and damn if he don't run right up through the pasture by Lark's house. Lark sees 'em coming and is there with his shotgun. Shoots the fox right under the noses of the dogs."

"N-o-o-o! Can you beat that?"

"Yep, and ain't Hanneford mad! He cusses Lark out and Lark cusses him right back. Says Hanneford should orter pay him 'cause the dogs tear the fox to pieces. Hide and bounty's worth something to Lark. 'Course, he's mad at Hanneford anyway. 'Member, they ran about ten horses right through his acre of egg-plant 'bout two months ago."

Lem remembered. It wasn't the only complaint of that kind. The state troopers were going to take care of it.

"And now here's the good part." Dobe tried to be dramatic. "Lark tells Hanneford just what kind of a guy he thinks he is, and you know Lark. Hanneford don't like it a bit in front of all his swell friends. He reaches down from his horse with one of them stubby whips and slaps Lark right across the face with it."

"Slapped him with a crop! Well, I'll be—*humph!*"

"Right across the face. Lark ups with his gun and threatens to shoot Hanneford. He even pulls the trigger, mind you. Yes, sir, pulls the trigger, but it's an old single-barrel and he's already shot the fox. He runs into the house for a shell and the bunch swing outta the yard. All Lark gets to shoot at is the last of the dogs an' they're too far away."

"*H-m-m-m!* That's a habel of a mess." Lem took a long swig from the jug he still held in his hand.

ALL the way down to Hanneford's Lem thought over this bit of news. Maybe that was Hanneford's reason for sending for him last evening. Maybe it wasn't about the pheasants at all. And then again that might be his way of getting even with Lark Weston. Accuse him of shooting on his estate. Everyone in the valley knew how much Lark hunted and fished, and it didn't make much difference to him on whose property, either. Nor whether the season was open or not.

When Lem reached the drive he almost tore the tires from Lizzie, stopping. There were three cars parked before Hanneford's gate and there was a speed cop holding back some people. He motioned him to keep on going, but Lem pulled in and parked beside the officer's motorcycle. He showed his shield, and got through after learning the bare facts that Hanneford had been found shot to death.

Arriving at the shore of the lake he found a number of the servants and Bill Hartwig, a state sergeant. Bill gave him only a curt nod of recognition when he said hello. It was like pulling teeth to find out what had been done. It was plain that the sergeant felt that he wouldn't be needing the deputy's help.

The curt replies didn't bother Lem, he continued to ask questions till he found



that the coroner had been sent for. That the servants who were there now had been on the scene when Hartwig had arrived, and that he was holding them there. That there was another state trooper keeping the rest at the house. No one else could leave the estate.

"Find anything? Any clues around?" asked Lem.

Hartwig gave a wave of his hand, as if to say take a look. Lem did. He walked down to where Hanneford's body lay about thirty feet from a small dock-like affair on which lay two canoes bottom-side up. Beside the body lay a fly rod still jointed together.

He wore a waterproof fishing coat. The charge from a shotgun at close range had ripped a big hole above one pocket, had torn out half of Hanneford's side. There was a scar on the cork grip of the rod where one of the shots had nicked it.

Lem fanned his thumb across the end of his nose as he sized up the dead body of the millionaire. Like hard cider it seemed to help him think. He walked down the grass-grown trail toward the stone fence that marked the northern boundary of the property. No place could he see anything that looked like a track in the wet grass.

At the fence was a locked gate, beyond it an old cross road that was hardly ever used. Out on the road Lem found tracks indicating that a car had been turned around. The night's heavy rain had almost washed them away. The second bar of the brown-painted gate had a little sliver torn loose, exposing the natural wood. Someone had climbed it recently.

Lem noticed on his way back that he was a couple of hundred feet from the gate before the trees thinned out enough for him to catch the silvery glimmer of the artificial lake. It wasn't a big lake, perhaps three or four acres in area; a hollow in which the water had been im-

pounded by the dam Hanneford had built across the lower end. He had stocked it plentifully with big-mouth bass.

THE coroner arrived just as Lem re-joined the group near the body. Hartwig was a biggish rawboned fellow who looked really neat and trim in his fine uniform. He strutted about quite a bit as he herded the servants back to the manor house. Lem tagged along.

Mrs. Hanneford said she was nearly prostrated with this terrible thing that had happened, but realized it was her duty to try and help the police. She dabbed at her eyes with a lace handkerchief as she talked. Lem realized then that it was her eyes which made people remember her beauty.

They were large and brown, but the odd thing was their shape. They were extremely long, and drooped at the outer corners. Lem had never seen a picture of Mata Hari or he would have recognized the type.

She had a wealth of unbobbed hair with a color all its own. It was neither red nor brown, nor was it coppery. Lem would have called it roan, for, at first glance, it looked like mixed red and white. One had to look closely to see that each hair was the same color. She held an emerald-green dressing gown at her throat with a small white hand devoid of rings. Lem recalled that her riding habit was green, too. Always she had been wearing the dark green outfit while on the bridle paths with Rankin, the artist.

Mrs. Hanneford's story was straight and simple. They had returned early from the hunt because of that embarrassing affair at the house of one of the farmers. They had eaten and their guests had driven back to New York. It had started to rain and Mr. Hanneford—Harmon she called him—had decided it was a good evening to cast for bass.



He had changed clothes and gone down to the lake alone. She had retired, only to be awakened this morning and told that her dear Harmon had been foully murdered.

"What was this affair at the farmer's house?" asked Hartwig. She told about the run-in her husband had had with Lark Weston, and she told it just about as Dobe had related it to Lem, only she put great stress on Lark's threat.

Hartwig jumped on this information with both feet. He asked all kinds of questions and Mrs. Hanneford said yes, that her husband had had trouble with Weston before. Had caught him shooting pheasants on the estate. Had sent him off with a warning the first time. She wasn't sure, but she thought Harmon might have threatened him with arrest when he caught him just a few evenings ago. She never mentioned about the time they ran their horses through his patch of eggplant.

Lem kept his mouth shut. He had to. There was no place to spit in that beautiful big room. He just stood there listening, twisting his hat, and hoping that Hartwig wouldn't notice the lump on his head and ask questions. He would keep that dope about the gangsters to himself until he heard something.

The New York police might not be able to get any line on the car, but they would surely be able to identify the man he described, the one who had let him in. It isn't every gangster who has a tuft of white hair in his left eyebrow, a cauliflower-shaped right ear, and a scar on his chin. It was a good thing he had noticed all those things before they socked him.

And if it happened to be a "snatch gang"—Lem had picked that one up out of a detective magazine—there was the answer. They had been up here to grab off Hanneford.

Wait a minute. That didn't make

sense. Why would they have shot him? Hanneford wasn't armed. And if they had shot him why would they have stuck around since the murder was committed—about eight or nine o'clock last night?

Lem fanned his nose with his thumb. And how about those tracks out there by the gate. They were clear across the estate from the Armour cottage.

Then there was this threat of Lark Weston's. Lark had a pretty fast temper all right, but would he still feel like shooting a man after he cooled off? It hardly seemed likely. Not after what he had said in front of all those witnesses. Still, a crack across the face with a riding crop might make a fellow stay mad a long time.

LEM left off trying to solve the thing on the evidence in hand and stood there admiring the clever way Mrs. Hanneford had of accusing Lark without coming right out and saying she knew he had done it.

Lem wondered why she would be so cagey about it. It would be a clever method of throwing the suspicion off the real murderer in case she knew who it was and was trying to protect him.

After Hartwig had finished quizzing Mrs. Hanneford and the servants he and the other trooper started to leave. Lem sprayed a rose bush with nicotine enough to kill all the aphids in the country. He turned to Mrs. Hanneford who stood in the door.

"Was this painter fellow, Mr. Rankin, on the hunt?" he asked.

Mrs. Hanneford seemed a little taken aback by the sudden question. She held her dressing gown a little tighter around her throat. The nails of her other hand whitened where she gripped the jamb.

"Why, yes," she said, quietly. "One of our guests couldn't come for the hunt. I sent one of our chauffeurs over to get Mr. Rankin to take his place."



"What time'd he go home?"

"Shortly after dinner? The same driver took him back."

"I see. Where was Mr. Hanneford at the time? Fishing?"

"Just getting ready as I recall it."

"Almost dark wasn't it?"

"Almost. And just starting to rain. That's what made Harmon suggest fishing."

"Oh, he suggested fishing? Who to? Rankin?"

"Yes, Mr. Rankin," said Mrs. Hanneford after a moment of hesitation. "He was too tired. Preferred to return home."

Lem thanked her and walked down to the drive with the trooper.

"What the hell was the idea of that line of questioning?" asked Hartwig.

"Oh, just an idea." Lem explained about having seen Rankin a lot with Mrs. Hanneford.

"Bosh," snorted Hartwig. "What in hell you trying to build a case out of a flirtation and thin air for when we already got something to sink our teeth into? I got the dope out of her, didn't I? It's Weston just as sure as hell. Notice how I led it out of her?"

"Didn't take much leading," said Lem. "That's what got me to thinking."

"Aw, nerts. You hick bulls are all alike."

**L**EM managed to get a long drink out the jug while pretending to fix his battery wires. It made him feel a lot better. He took the state trooper over and showed him the mark on the gate rail and the tracks where a car had turned around.

On this second trip they found something else too—the plain imprint of a gun butt on a bare spot in the grass close up against the gate.

"It does look as though there might be something to this," said Hartwig. "Not

much doubt but what this is the way the murderer came in, but that don't help us much. If we could only get a line on the kind of tires it might, but there isn't a chance; that heavy rain last night, and the ground being so hard after the long dry spell."

Further search revealed nothing, and they argued all the way back to the main gate. "How he got there isn't of any particular importance," said Hartwig. "You know as well as I do that Weston's the man."

"No I don't," said Lem with a little heat. "I been raised with Lark, know him pretty well. After thinking it over I don't believe he'd do a think like that. Now this Rankin—"

"Bah! Come on, lead the way to Weston's house."

Lem stopped at the gas station and called his home. The message had arrived. The bunch of crooks at the Armour cottage were cheap policy racketeers from Newark. They had been hiding out from a rival gang who had shot up one of their leaders.

Hartwig fumed at the delay when Lem came out, but the little deputy was too busy thinking to pay any attention. He had a swig from the jug before he started old Lizzie on up the road.

He'd been smart in saying nothing about his run-in at the Armour place, but this news did away with that bunch as suspects. He was as anxious to have a talk with Lark as the trooper was. And if Lark could establish his innocence he would concentrate on Rankin. He didn't have much to go on, he admitted to himself, but ever since Mrs. Hanneford had mentioned that he had been on the hunt—

Lem pulled up in front of the Weston house with the trooper at his heels. They walked around to the back where Mrs. Weston met them on the porch, her face red from a morning over the preserving kettle.



Lark wasn't home, had been gone for a couple of hours. Hunting, probably, he had taken his gun. Under Hartwig's snappy questioning she said that Lark had been home all the evening before, that he hadn't used their car that morning; but it was pretty plain that she was lying. She stuttered over her answers, looked helplessly at Lem and wrung her apron with her big red hands.

After Hartwig told her they would wait and she had gone inside he said to Lem: "Look. Look at his car. Look at the ground."

Lem saw that Lark's old car was parked over dirt that plainly showed the beating of rain about it. It had been parked there after or during the storm. There was no garage and the tool shed where he kept it in winter had been temporarily fenced in as a shelter for a batch of late broilers.

"She's lying like hell," continued Hartwig. "Why? If you think she ain't protecting him you're crazy. This is the end of the trail, Parker."

**L**EM spat, shook his head, fanned his nose. "Nope. I ain't convinced by a long shot." He explained why. The word of Hanneford's killing wouldn't leak into the back roads before evening probably. Mrs. Weston, it was a cinch, didn't know anything about it. If she were lying—and she no doubt was—it was for some other reason.

"He's told her he shot him. He's maybe beat it. Bet that's what he's done," said Hartwig walking rapidly to his car. "Waste of time waiting here. He'll never be back."

"Nope, she'd been more excited if she knew he was wanted for murder, and besides, they ain't no place for Lark to go."

"What do you mean, no place to go? He's got the whole United States."

Lem shook his head, did his best to explain. Lark couldn't just pick up and run like that, not even if he had killed someone. "He wouldn't know where to go, what to do. He ain't never been to New York but once in his life."

Hartwig laughed at him, but Lem was serious. He said maybe he could get something out of Mrs. Weston alone. He went inside.

"Now look, Madge," he said. "You was fibbin' about Lark being home yistiddy evening. I want to know why." He thought it best not to tell her about Hanneford just yet.

She swore she was telling the truth, but Lem kept at her till she admitted that Lark had been gone. She showed him two big bass. Lem whistled at the size of them. Only one place in that part of the country where they came that big, and that was out of the New York water-supply reservoir.

"Shouldn't been afraid of me," he said. Everyone knew that Lem more or less closed his eyes to things like that unless there was a direct complaint. Politicians from the city fished there under protection—what harm if the farmers nearby took a few.

"That's what they want to see Lark about, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Weston. "This fellow with you. 'Isn't he a game warden?'"

Lem grinned. Damned if he was going to worry her. Facts of the matter were he had once courted Madge, still liked her. "He's sot on waiting," he said, "but I think I can talk him into going with me."

**I**T wasn't such an easy job. Without any idea of where he might find Lark, Hartwig made up his mind to stick around in hopes he would show up. He laughed at the idea of Mrs. Weston lying simply because her husband had been fishing where it was forbidden.



"Give you my word Lark ain't going to run off," said Lem. "Come and let's talk to this Rankin feller. 'Tain't but a leetle way."

At last Hartwig agreed to go. Waste of time, he said. Cinch that Weston was the man they wanted. They went in the trooper's roadster.

"Now look," said Lem as they ran up the wooded road to Rankin's house. "You did all the talking at Hanneford's. Let me handle this."

"O.K.," said Hartwig, "But if you drank less of that hard cider you'd have fewer of these foolish ideas."

Rankin lived in a rambling one-story bungalow that belonged to a New York widow. It was rented furnished every summer, but this was the first time it had been occupied by a bachelor.

When the artist had moved in there alone no one had thought anything of it, but when it got noised around that he had women visitors—well—that was food for gossip.

There was a well near one corner and a single car garage off to one side. Lem noticed as they passed that Rankin's coupé was in it. Rankin himself appeared on the porch as they drove up.

He was a tall, spare fellow in his middle thirties. Austin Welles Rankin he called himself, and he wasn't at all bad looking if you liked long and wavy black hair, milky skin and a soft mouth with a penciled moustache on the upper lip. He was wearing white flannel trousers and a soft shirt with the collar open. Lem thought he was a bit fidgety as they mounted the steps.

"This is Sergeant Hartwig," he said. "We're investigating a rather terrible accident."

"Accident?" There was no feigning the surprise he showed. He waved an arm. "Come in," he said. "Come in." He led the way and they stepped through French doors into a big room.

A glance showed Lem a littered table, canvases scattered about, an easel with a picture on the pegs and a drape over it. There was a shotgun, a rifle and a flyrod in one corner. The hall leading to the kitchen and the bedrooms led off one end.

"Accident, you said," repeated Rankin. "Where? When? How can I help?"

Lem ignored his invitation to a chair. "You didn't give any liquor to the Hanneford chauffeur that brung you home last night, did you?" he asked.

"Liquor? Why, no, of course not. Drink with Mrs. Hanneford's chauffeur? Silly." He treated the question as though it had been an insult. "What happened? Did he have a wreck on the way back? It was wet."

LEM waited a long time. If Rankin had driven down to where those tracks were on the cross road he would have known that there was no wreck, unless almost at the gate of the estate. At last he had to answer.

"M-m-m-m," he said. It might have meant anything.

"Well, if he was drunk he didn't show it when he drove me home, and he didn't have anything here, you can bet on that."

"Alcohol and gasoline don't mix," said Lem, and then with a wink, "but I don't happen to be driving right now."

Rankin seemed glad to laugh. "Maybe you fellows would like a little highball?" he said. Lem nodded eagerly and Rankin went out toward the kitchen. "See if I can find something," he called over his shoulder.

Lem winked again, this time at Hartwig. He stepped up and lifted the drape from over the canvas on the easel. Hartwig was standing where he could see it.

"Baby! Not so bad. Say, this guy is good," he said enthusiastically, but in a hoarse whisper.

Lem nodded and glanced at the trooper's face. Evidently the sergeant didn't



see what he did. It was a nude woman in a Diana-like pose. The body was just sketched in, but the head and shoulders were complete, and it was the head and face of Mrs. Hanneford. There was the same roan hair and the down sloping eyes. It was her to a T.

"Here we are." Rankin was back with the drinks. Lem took his absently. He was thinking. So they were that thick, were they? What was Middle Valley coming to? Women posing before men in the nude! He took half the drink in one gulp.

"Evidently you keep cooped up here pretty well, Mr. Rankin," he said. "If you'd have been out of the place here today you'd have known of the accident."

"Yes, busy with my work," said the artist. "First time in days that I've been out was yesterday. The hunt. My car's on the fritz."

"Yeah?" Lem showed interest. "Fellow's lost without a car up here in the woods."

"And mine's been on the bum for three days."

Lem felt a sinking feeling in his heart. Maybe it was Lark after all. This fellow was too calm, too much at ease. And with his car broken down it couldn't possibly have been him. It would have taken him over an hour to walk to Hanneford's place. This would have been way after dark.

ON the porch as they were leaving Lem said after a glance at the garage: "Maybe I can give you some help on your car. I'm kinda handy thataway."

Rankin took him up in a hurry, said he would get his pocket flash on account of it being hard to see under the hood in the garage. He reentered the house.

"For cripe's sake come on," snapped Hartwig, impatiently. "Let's get back to Weston's. Satisfied now, ain't you.

Whatin'ell you want to tinker around with his car for?"

"Got a hunch," said Lem. "I play hunches. Won a five-pound box of candy onct on a punch board, and just because a girl's name happened to pop into my head."

"Hunches! Nuts!"

"Never can tell. If he's covering up he might make a slip."

They walked over to the garage and Lem saw that the car was clean as a whistle. It had been rubbed down with a polishing rag. Rankin came and Lem took the flashlight. He opened the hood, played the light, touched this and that.

At last he played the light steadily on the main fuse, from the way the oil and dust was wiped off it looked as though someone had been fussing with it. He wondered if Rankin might not have changed a good one for one that was blown out. It would be a good way if he should happen to want it to look as if he couldn't use the car.

"Did you monkey with this fuse?" he asked.

"Fuse? What's that. Oh, there. Darned if I know. I tried everything I guess."

Hartwig was pacing back and forth beside the car. He poked Lem in the ribs, perked his head toward the door. He was anxious to go. Lem nodded.

"Give me some tinfoil off your cigarettes," said the little deputy. He wrapped the foil around the tiny glass cylinder with its metal ends, shoved it back into the clips.

"Try it now," he said.

Rankin crawled behind the wheel. When he stepped on the starter the engine took hold with a whirl. He grinned and said something that was drowned by the roar of the motor.

Lem didn't hear him. His eyes were glued to the windshield wiper. It was whipping back and forth across the glass.



He looked quickly at Hartwig. The state trooper was facing Rankin through the windshield, but he seemed indifferent to everything except his impatience to go. The artist reached over and cut the motor, climbed out spluttering his thanks.

Lem knew it was now or never. If Rankin was guilty now was the time to accuse him. He reached to the hip pocket of his overalls and realized his gun was gone. He had forgotten that. It didn't stop him for a second. He whipped his knotty little figure around between the artist and the open garage doors.

"Just as we thought, Rankin," he said. "You lied. You had the car out in the rain last night or your windshield wiper wouldn't be working. You're under arrest for shooting and killing Harmon Hanneford."

The artist wheeled toward Lem, glanced over the hood to where Hartwig stood with amazement written all over his face. He had looked right at the windshield wiper but hadn't registered the significance of it being left turned on.

"You saw the trouble with Weston yesterday and figured this would be a good chance to pin it on him," continued Lem. "You ran down there after the driver brought you home, caught Hanneford when he returned from fishing. Put the cuffs on him, Bill."

Rankin was taken by surprise. His naturally white face became even paler. He tried to speak, choked. His eyes filled with fright as Hartwig grasped the situation and started around the front of the car. He let out a scream that was almost

womanish. His fingers formed claws and he tried to reach Lem's face. Lem socked him in the belly.

Rankin was between the two and there was little room for fighting. Hartwig grasped his arms from behind, while the artist kicked and squirmed, and made damaging statements involving Mrs. Hanneford. Hartwig knocked him out with a clean one to the button.

"The rat," he said. "Ain't got guts enough to take it alone."

**T**HEY got Rankin into the roadster between them. He sat there, a spineless lump, gnawing at his lips, staring straight ahead through eyes that were glassy with fright. He sat that way while Hartwig drove Lem back to his own car at Weston's.

Lark wasn't home yet, but Hartwig didn't care. He had the confessed murderer of Middle Valley's richest citizen on the seat beside him.

"I'll take him straight into White Plains," he told Lem as the little deputy got out. "This'll make 'em sit up and take notice. Grabbed off in a few hours."

Lem shook his hand. "And remember, Bill," he said. "Get my name into that there newspaper report. Just somethin' so I can show the old lady. I'm going to get habel for not getting home for dinner like I said I would."

The roadster tore off down the crossroad. Lem reached into the back of the flivver. Good thing he'd got that old jug loaded this morning.

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE**

**GRIPPING SHORT DETECTIVE STORIES**

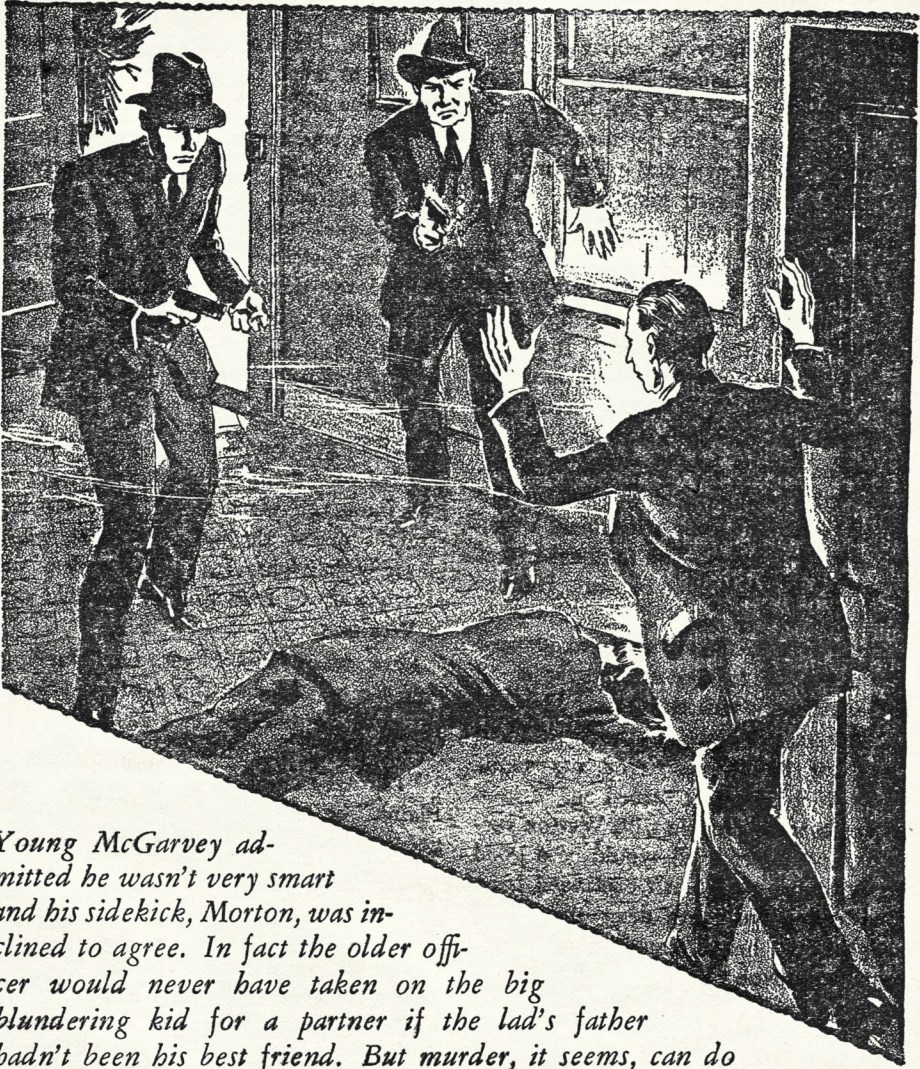
*by*

**O. B. MYERS—W. W. VAN DALE—and other features**

**Out NOVEMBER 30th**



"Better come in and say hello," Morton invited.



*Young McGarvey admitted he wasn't very smart and his sidekick, Morton, was inclined to agree. In fact the older officer would never have taken on the big blundering kid for a partner if the lad's father hadn't been his best friend. But murder, it seems, can do wonders toward turning even the callowest calf of a copper into a—*

## PRIZE BULL

by Donald Barr Chidsey

*Author of "The Body on the Balcony," etc.*

**T**HE house was a big one, very grand and a show place even in Brickell Avenue. It was ablaze with light, and loud with syncopated music.

"They don't seem to be worrying much about it, whatever it is," McGarvey complained. He was young, and this was his first night as a detective. He had been



hoping for a good assault case, at least.

"Swell affair," Morton grunted. "This is the Wetmore dump. You know—Wetmore Cough Drops."

There was a patrol sedan at the front entrance, and McGarvey parked close behind it. A Negro in a white coat, who carried a folded umbrella, offered to put the car elsewhere.

"You leave it right here!" McGarvey shouted—and Morton winced.

Two uniformed cops and a man in full evening dress were on the veranda. The cops were unfeignedly glad to see Morton and McGarvey.

"These fellas'll talk to you. We don't know anything except that we got a radio call to stop here and see who yelled for help," they said.

"Utter nonsense! My wife and I are entertaining, and we don't want policemen running all over the estate!" Wetmore shouted.

McGarvey barged into the group. "Too bad," he boomed, glaring at the cough-drop king. William T. Wetmore was small and flabby, and extraordinarily pale. His features seemed as unsubstantial and almost as colorless as a *charlotte russe*. Morton was tempted to stick a finger into one of the cheeks, to see whether it would leave a hole.

"If you don't want cops, why did somebody call us?" Morton asked.

"You're crazy! Nobody called you!"

"Yeah? Well, some woman yelled for police headquarters, and then she made a gurgling sound in her tonsils—and hung up. The operator tried to get her back but the line was dead," the detective retorted.

"Absolute nonsense! The operator must have made a mistake."

"Well, this is Hill, Two-four-four-six-four, ain't it?" Mort asked.

"Yes, that's my number, but I'm sure nobody called any such message from

here. Either my wife or myself, or else our son, has been within a few feet of that instrument every minute for the past two hours or more. Plenty of others have too. You can see it through the glass here," Wetmore pointed out.

Yes, the telephone was in full view; and guests, all unaware of the fuss on the veranda drifted back and forth past it. An orchestra was playing. On the right, people were dancing, and on the left of the entrance hall they were standing in groups, talking, drinking.

"It must be some mistake. I don't want my guests disturbed and—"

"We won't disturb them." Morton, irritated by his new partner's noisiness, opened the door, pushed through, picked up the telephone. No buzzing, no humming. "It's dead all right," he said sadly.

A BUTLER was informing William Wetmore that he couldn't seem to find William Wetmore, Jr. The host made an impatient gesture.

"He must be around somewhere! I want him to talk to these men. Mrs. Wetmore needs me inside. Did you try upstairs? I saw him go up there a little while ago."

Morton said to the butler: "Wait a minute." To Wetmore he said: "Maybe there's an extension upstairs, eh?"

Wetmore snapped his fingers. "Of course! I'd forgotten all about it, in the excitement. There's one in my own bedroom—in the back of the house."

The butler went first, to guide them; McGarvey, a close second, was trying to look grim and forbidding. Wetmore cast a final glance around the main hall, like a man who fears a tongue-lashing from his wife; and Morton—slow and patient Morton—plodded along in the rear. Music swirled up after them.

Downstairs everybody seemed to be having a good time. Wonderful parties



the Wetmores gave. They had lots of money, and didn't care how they spent it. Wetmore, Jr., an only child, had been burning up the local night clubs. The magnate's wife was a notorious plunger in the gambling rooms. Wetmore himself didn't do much except sign checks, but he did that well and often.

"Should be an upstairs maid here," he grumbled. "We had her here to take care of the wraps."

The rear of the mansion faced Biscayne Bay, and the master's bedroom was there. McGarvey pushed ahead of the butler and threw open the door. For an instant he stood in the threshold, his bulk obstructing the view. "Fer Gawd's sake," he said slowly. Then he sprang into the room.

Morton snarled from the doorway: "Don't move it! That's in a funny position, and I don't want it moved till we get pictures!"

McGarvey announced over a shoulder that he hadn't been born yesterday—all he was trying to do was find out if she was dead.

She was dead all right. Morton knew this at a glance. Wetmore knew it too, and sat down suddenly, looking as though he were about to be sick.

"My God," he muttered, "the whole party will be spoiled!"

"Shame," growled McGarvey.

She had been pretty—a brunette, small, about twenty-three, dressed in a black uniform. Her face was dark purple, and her eyes, wide open, bulged hideously. She lay on her back. A gayly figured sport scarf was tied very tight around her neck, from behind. There were five or six slashes in her side just under the left armpit, and the rug below these was wet with blood.

"This that upstairs maid you were talking about?"

Wetmore seemed not to have heard, but the butler nodded.

Morton knelt beside McGarvey. Gingly he pressed a forefinger into the bloodstain on the rug, and then he withdrew the finger and stared at its tip. He looked as though he were about to sniff it, but didn't. Instead he poked carefully at the slashes in the dress.

McGARVEY watched him sidewise, awed. He was very eager to appear experienced, a real detective, but he knew as well as everybody else on the Miami force, that sheer sentimentality had been the reason for his promotion from harness. His father, killed in a recent gun battle, had been Morton's partner for many years, and everybody had liked him. Young McGarvey was lucky, and he knew it, and it made him nervous—which in turn made him loud-mouthed, violent. His greatest luck, he thought, was getting this assignment as Morton's sidekick. Morton was the best detective in Florida—the best in the world, if you asked young McGarvey. Morton'd been his hero for years.

"Some of these go right through and some don't," Morton mused, "but even the ones that do ain't very deep. Funny."

"She was choked to death! Garroted!"

"Sure." Morton pushed his finger into the bloodstain again, and again he stared morosely at it. "There's an awful lot of this stuff—"

McGarvey had withdrawn a note from one of the uniform pockets. It was brief, and it made him blush—but it gave him something to do, something to bluster about.

"This girl's name was Ellen?"

"That's right," Wetmore said. "Ellen Wilcox."

"You ever fool around with her?"

"Of course not! I resent that question! What right have you to—"



"All right then. Did she ever make any passes at you?"

Wetmore shrugged. "I don't like to talk ill of the dead, but she was rather—well, flirtatious. At least she was when she first came to us, about two months ago. I gave her to understand that I didn't approve of such conduct."

"Just the same, you didn't mind writing her hot letters, huh?"

"See here! I won't stand for any such remarks!"

"Your first name's William, ain't it?" McGarvey thrust the note under Wetmore's nose. "Well, is that your handwriting or ain't it?"

Wetmore's eyes grew very large, and he seemed to rush to the edge of sickness all over again. Once more he sat down.

"That—that's not my handwriting. No."

"I hope you're telling the truth," McGarvey stormed, "because it's going to be easy to check."

Morton, studying the note, asked quietly: "Mr. Wetmore, didn't I hear you say you saw your son come upstairs a little while ago?"

"Why, I—I—did I say that?"

"You did. And his first name's William too, isn't it?"

McGarvey started for the door. "Hell! I never thought of that!" He shook the butler. "Come on, James. You point this kid out to me."

"And first," Morton called, "make sure you tell the boys out front that nobody leaves the place. Tell one of 'em to take the car and run down to the nearest phone and get the headquarters gang here." He sighed, returning to his survey of the room. "Looks like an all-night job," he told nobody in particular.

**T**HE telephone was a French type instrument, on a little table near the bed. It was dead, like the instrument down-

stairs. French windows opened upon a large balcony, more like an upstairs veranda. Morton locked the hall door, and beckoned to the palpitating millionaire.

"Don't want anybody to come rubbering in here," he explained. "You better come along with me, huh? Show me around out back." They went out.

The balcony was roofed by awnings, and the floor was dry. There were a few pieces of wicker furniture. At a corner of the house, within easy reach, an electric wire had been hacked loose.

"There's what happened to the phone, anyway."

An outside stairway, independent of the house itself, led to the garden. With a flashlight, Morton found a few footprints, which he was able to follow as far as a concrete walk leading back to the garages. The large concrete apron in front of the garages, and a stretch of concrete driveway crowded with the cars of guests, made further search impractical for the present.

"How come there are no chauffeurs hanging around out here?"

"We asked them into the kitchen when the shower started," Wetmore replied.

Morton returned to the footprints. They led away from the balcony stairs. They were blurred, but apparently small, narrow. The rain, the first in many weeks, had been brief, and the ground was still hard. Morton, himself, weighed one seventy, yet his own feet left no lasting prints in this grass. Moreover, the mark of the heel was plain, emphatic. A man running does not ordinarily make heavy heelmarks.

They went back to the bedroom. Somebody was hammering on the hall door, and when Morton opened it McGarvey tumbled in, breathless.

"No sign of young Wetmore anywhere. Nobody remembers seeing him for the past half hour, but several people



saw him come upstairs then. Nothing in the maid's room, but here's some stuff we found in young Wetmore's room. See; the handwriting matches that note perfect! And these are some pictures."

He frowned upon the master of the house. "Looks pretty bad for your son. I might as well tell you that right now."

**CAPTAIN MONTGOMERY** got down to headquarters early, and attracted by an odor of rank cigar smoke, looked into the office Detective Morton shared with young Detective McGarvey.

"Geez, don't you ever go to bed?" he asked.

"I been thinking," Morton explained apologetically.

"Don't strain yourself. They pick up that Wetmore kid yet?"

"I been thinking," Morton said, "that it wasn't young Wetmore after all. I explained it to the kid, too, but he says I'm nuts."

"Garv gets things right sometimes."

"When?"

"Don't be too tough on that kid, Mort. He's got to learn, hasn't he? After all, he means well. And he just about worships you."

"That's nice."

"I know you'd rather work alone, but you really ought to have somebody around with you. You got to admit Garv drives a car good."

"Yeah."

"And he's got plenty of guts," the captain added.

"So has a prize bull, probably. But since when have I been putting in requisitions for prize bulls?" Morton demanded.

"Garv's husky too. That might come in handy sometime."

"Yeah, if I should happen to have some railroad ties I wanted busted in half,

or a court house I wanted tore down, he'd probably be a lot of help."

"Anyway," said the captain, "I got to agree with him about you being nuts on this thing. It's as plain as anything could be that young Wetmore had an affair with that maid and wrote her some foolish notes, and she was trying to hold him up. He just overlooked one of the notes when he ran out."

"In the middle of a party, when she'd be as busy as him?"

The captain shrugged. "Maybe she threatened to go downstairs and expose him before all those people, if he didn't disgorge. He got panicky and tried to stab her. She jumped for the phone, and he started to choke her with the first thing he could find."

"What would young Wetmore be doing with a knife? And even supposing he had it, why should he slash her five or six times in the side instead of sticking it right into her? Any damn fool would know that that isn't any way to kill a pretty young blackmailer! And why should he go stamping off on his heels, making deeper prints than even I made? He only weighs"—Morton glanced at the description form from which the general alarm had been sent out—"a hundred and twenty-two. And as I get it, he was practically sober last night, for a change." Morton picked up a large photograph. "Course, I'm no doctor. And we won't get the autopsy for a couple of hours yet. But the way that girl's face looked, I'd be ready to bet she was killed by strangulation and not by any pin pricks in her side. People that're dead already don't bleed much, and there was an awful lot of blood there." He tapped the photograph. "I don't like the position of that body. Something funny about it. It looks to me somehow as if it had been placed that way, and couldn't maybe that mean that somebody wanted it to look as if the



cuts in the side were responsible for all the blood?"

"Maybe? But in that case, where did the blood come from?"

"That," Morton explained, "is what I been thinking about."

ONE other item among the papers which littered his desk interested Morton. It was a freshly printed tack-up calling for the arrest of Henry M., "Henny," Pirbright, alias Pincher, alias Potts, etc., etc. A very bad man, this one. A specialist in violence, and undoubtedly a killer. It never had been possible to make a murder rap stick to him, for four years before he'd been sent to the state prison at Rayford for a life term on a charge of manslaughter. Now he was free, after a sensational break the previous day. He was wanted, dead or alive. Preferably—the tack-up all but said in so many words—dead.

Morton put on his hat and went to see James Corlis, retired sheriff. These two sat in a couple of creaky rocking chairs and chatted of old times. Corlis said it was too bad about McGarvey, senior, and Morton said it sure was—there was one good guy, old McGarvey. Corlis asked what Garv's son was like, now that he was a detective, and Morton said that it was sort of like having a smallish elephant travel around with you except that you could probably teach an elephant some tricks. Corlis said, well the kid would learn, give him time. Morton said he doubted it.

Then suddenly Morton put his question. Corlis was amazed and hurt.

"What the hell makes you think I'm that kind of a guy?"

"I know. I know. But this is mighty important, Jim. Maybe even a matter of life and death." He leaned closer, and his face was grave. "Listen, Jim. Somebody turned in Pirbright four years ago

—that's a cinch! You didn't get any vision from heaven!"

"So what?"

"Well, does Henny himself know who it was?" Morton asked.

"Sure he knows. The guy knew Henny was going to get life or else he wouldn't have dared to squeal. It was fixed."

"Henny," Morton pointed out, "never was spilling over with the milk of human kindness. He wasn't going around turning the other cheek."

"I'd thought about that."

"This guy's still in Miami, maybe? I'm looking for a guy that was in an awful hurry about something last night. And while I don't think that Henny would have the nerve to come back here, still and all—"

"If I could be sure," said Corlis, "that you wouldn't even loosen up to that youngster you got working with you—"

It was Morton's turn to look hurt. He clucked his tongue.

"I'm ashamed of you, Jim."

Corlis, former sheriff, relighted his pipe. He made quite a ceremony of it, and afterward, without looking at Morton, he said: "It was Joey McIntyre."

Then, for some time, they chatted further about the old days, agreeing that it had been better when Miami was a nice quiet place where nice quiet people came to live, and you weren't forever stumbling over drunken millionaires—when the beach was still just a sandbar, and Biscayne Boulevard and Flagler Street were crossable by poor fools afoot—when Coral Gables was the name of a farm, and the Peacock out in Cocoonut Grove was considered a most acceptable hostelry in spite of the fact that it charged a whole dollar a day American plan—in short, when cops still had time to sit around like this and talk.

"Well, thanks for the dope," Morton said, when finally he rose.



McGARVEY was opening windows. "Smells like an alligator farm on a hot day. What's new? They tell me outside that there's no word on that Wetmore kid yet."

"We ain't looking for Wetmore now."

"What d'yuh mean, we ain't looking for Wetmore?" The junior partner started to bluster—but he stopped when he saw that Morton was paying him no attention. Whenever he was in doubt, which was much of the time, young McGarvey tried to cover it by acting tough. It impressed some people; but it did not seem to impress this cool, gray, impersonal man. McGarvey, indeed, was not at all sure of what Morton thought of him, and he was worried about this. If Morton didn't like him, didn't like to work with him, McGarvey would be paired off with some other detective. "Well then—who do we look for, huh?"

"A guy named Joey McIntyre. Know him?"

McGarvey simply couldn't understand this. "What the hell has that tin-horn got to do with it?"

"You do know him then?" Morton persisted.

"Sure I know him. Saw him only day before yesterday. They tell me he's broke as hell and can't even manage to borrow anything any more."

"That's fine. Go out and scrape up some more stuff like that. I want to get a shave and some breakfast, and I'll meet you here in two hours."

"Want me to pick up McIntyre, if I find him?"

"No. If he's in sight at all he's not the man we want."

But Joey McIntyre, McGarvey reported later, was not in sight. Nobody had seen him since the previous afternoon. Garv had been to his hotel room, searched the place, found nothing of any significance.

"He's been hanging around the dog

tracks, and losing plenty. Don't seem to be working any particular racket, but he's been boasting that he'll have a flock of jack soon. The only guy he goes around with these days is Louie Washman, but I can't locate Louie either."

"Women?"

"None that he goes around with where anybody sees him, but occasionally he's been seen driving with a small brunette, nights."

Morton smiled. "Small brunette, huh? Wouldn't be she'd look like a maid maybe?"

McGarvey gasped. "Say, I never thought of that!"

"The other servants said Ellen Wilcox had a boy friend but she wouldn't talk about him and he never came to the house. Used to park down the street and she'd walk down and get in. He had a big, old sedan, they said. Well, Joey drives a five-year-old Cadillac sedan."

"Say, you sure do find out things, don't you!" McGarvey's eyes were bright with admiration. "Joey McIntyre's the last person in the world I'd have figured to be mixed up in anything like this. How'd you ever get that hunch, anyway?"

Morton asked: "You see that runt, Silvers?"

"He wasn't in. Don't come on till two o'clock."

"We'll get him then," Morton decreed. "Sammy Silvers knows more about the bad boys in this town than they do themselves."

The autopsy report would have caused almost any cop but Wentworth L. Morton to break into I-told-you-so's. It said that death had been caused by strangulation and that the superficial cuts on the left side apparently had been inflicted afterward.

There was a wire from Providence, R. I., the late Ellen Wilcox's home city. The Providence police knew nothing of



her. There were other odds and ends like this, nothing of importance. There was no further word of the escaped convict, Henry Pirbright. Morton took another long look at Pirbright's likeness on the tack-up, and he smiled mirthlessly. Certainly a tough customer. Thin gritty face, loose mouth, eyes that were narrow and hard. Better shoot first if you should meet up with this Pirbright proposition, Morton reflected.

At two o'clock Morton and McGarvey spread their elbows on the lunch counter where Sammy Silvers did the waiting. Silvers was a tiny, jumpy fellow. He loved Miami, and his greatest fear was that some day the cops, knowing what they did about his past, would chase him out. He had ears as big as the city itself, and could be useful.

"Geez, you guys ain't here on business, are you?"

"Just wanted to ask you a few questions, that's all, Sammy."

Silvers glanced nervously toward the kitchen, then to the left, toward the sidewalk entrance. He rubbed his hands on his apron.

"We figured you wouldn't like it to be here, so we parked the car up the street a little ways, near Flagler. We'll see you there." They started for the door, Sammy Silvers was whispering rapid, passionate protests. "You better come," Morton said gently.

McGarvey took the wheel. Morton sat in back. And presently Silvers came scuttling along like a frightened rabbit. Morton opened a door.

"In here, Sammy. I knew you wouldn't disappoint us."

**B**Y four thirty Silvers, his apron on again, was back behind his counter, while Morton and McGarvey stared across a flat expanse of weeds toward a pink stucco house. They were behind a

clump of pines, almost the only cover for half a mile around.

"Lousy lay," McGarvey decided. "We're not even sure they're in there, either. Might be better if we walked up, just casual."

"No good. We both walk cop, no matter how hard we try not to. They couldn't miss us."

Once a realtor had fondly hoped that the city would grow out to this house; but the city, after great dreams exploded, hadn't; so the house stood alone. The sidewalks already had cracked and crumbled, and the street itself, though paved, was losing a long and soundless struggle to the encroaching jungle. The street led nowhere. There were no houses beyond this one, none near it.

"Suppose we just dash up in the car and jump out?"

"Suppose we don't. They'd know the shake of a department Chevy just like they'd know the gait of a cop. And yet if we call a squad, and it turns out nobody was there, we'd get the merry tee-hee for months. Tell you what. You drive over to the Trail and ask my friend Ben Green for a loan of one of his delivery trucks. Tell him it's for me. He runs a market just below Twenty-sixth. I'll stick around here."

Through a considerable wait, for this was far out, Morton saw no sign of life around the pink stucco house. But this fact did not dishearten him. Silvers had said that the place was well stocked with food, and that Joey McIntyre kept it rented in another name for just such emergencies as this one. Joey could lie low there for a month or more, Silvers had said, and nobody would be any the wiser.

Joey McIntyre spoke of himself as an "operator," by which he meant that he thought himself a big-time gambler. So he was, too, sometimes. But he had



his ups and downs, like most gamblers, and recently the downs had predominated. Joey, once a dandy and very loud of speech, had degenerated to a mere hanger-on, a no-account crook and petty racketeer. He still lolled back in his big old sedan, while his friend, and faithful body-guard, Louie Washman drove; he still smoked cigars and talked big; but it was generally believed around Miami that his day had come and gone and was unlikely to return.

Still, you never knew. Joey wasn't stupid. Washman might be, but not Joey. And Washman, whatever his mental shortcomings, was no slouch with a pistol. Neither was Joey himself, for that matter. Altogether, Morton didn't like it.

McGarvey was perspiring, and very red of the face, when he jounced into sight.

"A pal, that guy Green! I mention your name, and look what I get! This thing ought to be in the Smithsonian Institute."

Morton climbed in. "Let's hope it gets us to the house," he said.

McGarvey did not diminish speed as they approached the discouraged, undernourished-looking house. But directly in front, he ground the brakes down, and he and Morton piled out and ran to the porch.

On the porch the only article of furniture was a taboret bearing, reluctantly, a lard tin filled with chalky earth in which some poor plant had long since languished and died. Two windows and the front door faced upon this porch. Morton and McGarvey got close to the wall, on either side of the door, and Morton knocked.

Nothing. Only the echoes.

McGarvey whispered: "You know, I got a hunch they're in there anyway. I just feel that!"

Morton nodded solemnly, and knocked again, very hard.

The whole place was horribly still. It

had the air of a house which never had been occupied at all—a dream unfulfilled, a hope gone sour, gathering dust. The pale pink stucco, scorched by the sun, peeled listlessly, leaving grayish blotches upon the walls. In front, weeds fought for possession of a discouraged, almost invisible pathway and a preposterous little garden-gate. Creepers and rank grasses, hedging the building on all sides, seemed to try to blot out its existence.

The detectives tried the front door and found it locked. They walked around the house, trying to peer through window glass encrusted with grime. They had the feeling that somebody was watching them.

The back door was locked. It was flimsier than the front door.

**T**HEY returned to the front. McGarvey was all for smashing in; but Morton didn't like to move without a search warrant. After all, they didn't know who owned this place, and they had no proof that any criminal was here. Getting down to it, Morton reasoned, they had very little proof of anything at all; and a busting-in party might result in a nasty kick-back. They were acting, really, on a hunch. The law doesn't recognize hunches. Jim Corlis, Morton knew, could not be expected to make public his secret. It was certain that Silvers would not sign his name to any statement or affidavit—would not repeat his evidence, scant enough anyway, before another person.

"Aye tank we go home," Morton decided.

"Personally, I'd take the chance," McGarvey boasted.

"You would. But not when you've been a cop as long as I have."

They started away, clawed at by a twitchy temptation to jerk their chins over their shoulders, for each still felt that somebody was watching his every movement.



THEY had almost reached the idiotic little gate when a scream sounded from the house. A scream—then a scuffle of feet, a dull, thumping sound, and silence. McGarvey spun on his heel, raced up to the porch, threw his weight against the front door.

Morton sprang after him, growling something about kids who read too many magazines.

There was a sound like a couple of boards slapped together. Within a few inches of McGarvey's head a spray of powdery splinters appeared, and below that—one long splinter leaned jaggedly, looking foolish.

Morton snatched the taboret and hurled this through the window on the right. He grabbed McGarvey and led him, crouching, underneath the window on the left, over the porch rail, around to the back of the house. "Use the meat on *this!*" He helped, swinging in unison with McGarvey's enormous body. Three pushes did it. The lock snapped and the door whanged back with a crash that sent scared little echoes tumbling madly all through the house.

Morton dodged against a wall, McGarvey ran straight in. Morton saw a large shadow, fired twice. The shadow seemed to wave like a black sheet in a breeze. There were two other explosions: McGarvey was shooting, and small blasts of flame sprang from the shadow. Morton fired again, and the shadow slid to the floor.

After a moment, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, Morton saw that this had been Louie Washman—who wasn't going to do any more shooting. Morton cocked his revolver, cleared his throat soundlessly. When he heard a thin grating from ahead he called to his partner: "Scamper around front, Garv, and burn that baby down the second he sticks his head out."

Silence for a moment. McGarvey, bewildered, instinctively obeyed that cool, hard voice. He started to back away.

Then a frightened whine. "Lay off, you guys! You got no right to bust in here!"

Morton cackled: "Better come back and say hello, Joey. Reaching. Otherwise you get every chunk of lead we have, which is plenty."

"You guys got no right—"

"Are you coming?"

Joey McIntyre always had been yellow. They heard him drop his gun. Slowly, shuffling his feet, he crossed the front room, entered the kitchen. His hands were high, his thin, small face glittered with sweat.

There was no need to worry about Washman, who was emphatically dead. They turned McIntyre around, frisked him, marched him into the front room. There, on a cot, was a young man in dirty dinner clothes. His left shoulder had been crudely bandaged with torn-up shirt-tail, and blood was caked a rusty brown upon this; but upon his forehead was a fresher wound. He was motionless, and his eyes were shut.

"So he let out a yawp and you smacked him, huh?" Morton sneered.

McGarvey picked up the gun McIntyre had dropped, went into the kitchen and scooped up Washman's gun.

"We ought to get a doctor for this kid," Morton said. He looked around the room. The floor was covered only by dust, and there were two cots, a couple of straight-back chairs, a table strewn with newspapers, dope sheets, copies of the daily racing form. In one corner, unexpectedly, was a telephone. It was on the floor. Morton picked it up. "This thing ain't connected, by any chance?" It was. Morton got headquarters, asked for Captain Montgomery. The switchboard man wanted to know if he'd heard about the murder.



"What—another one?"

"Just a little while ago. Just got a flash on it. Guy chucked out of a car out near the Gables. Friend of yours too, I think. Little jerky guy—name's Sam something. Works in a chile joint on the boulevard near the end of the causeway."

**M**ORTON's eyes grew thoughtful. So somebody else had been asking Sammy Silvers questions. Somebody who had been in too much of a hurry to prod Sammy with only gentle threats.

"Don't know whether he's really dead or not, but he certainly absorbed an awful shellacking if he ain't, from what we hear. Because—"

"I thought I asked for Montgomery," Morton said to the talkative operator.

While he waited for the captain to answer, Morton placed the mouthpiece against his chest and said to McGarvey: "I hope you're not hungry, Sherlock Holmes, because we got another job right away."

"Where do we go from here?"

"We don't go anywhere. We just sit here and wait."

"For who?" McGarvey queried.

"For a guy that just found out the same thing as we did, only faster, and who ought to be ambling in here any time now. As soon—"

Captain Montgomery's voice came: "Uh-huh?"

"Cap? Listen—here's what I wish you'd do. I wish you'd send—"

Somebody in the kitchen doorway quietly but very clearly said: "Hang up easy, copper, and put it down, and then raise 'em."

McGarvey wheeled, gasping. Morton moved only his eyeballs to see a man with a thin, gritty face, loose mouth, eyes that were narrow and hard. This man held a large automatic pistol in each hand.

"Take it easy, copper. No slam-bangs. I got time for all I want to do anyway, and I don't mind doing a little more if it's necessary."

Montgomery, at headquarters, was rasping: "Well, what the hell is it you want me to send, and where the hell should I send it, and what the hell's the matter with you anyway—you don't say anything?"

McGarvey had the good sense to remain motionless. Morton, very quietly, very carefully, hung up; quietly and carefully he replaced the telephone; then he raised his arms. McGarvey, too, had raised his arms. As for Joey McIntyre, he was in some outer region of terror, beyond sanity. He had virtually fainted on his feet; and the only thing about him that moved was the sweat rolling pauselessly down his face and dripping off his chin in cold, pear-shaped drops.

"I been waiting four years for this." Out of a corner of his mouth, without moving his head or eyes, Henry Pirbright called: "Sol!"

It had been known, from the nature of the break, that Pirbright had received outside help. The man who came into the room now was a stranger to Morton, as he was to McGarvey. He was heavy-set, sharp-featured, quick in his movements, no southerner. Dark eyes were utterly cold, face expressionless. In his left hand he held a cocked revolver, but he didn't point this at anybody.

"Turn around, cops."

They turned, faced the wall, and presently a hand went over their persons, removing guns.

"I been waiting four years for this," Pirbright repeated softly. "You guys can turn around and look, if you want. It don't mean a thing to me. As long as you behave yourselves I won't hurt you, much."



THEY turned, keeping their hands high. McGarvey, usually given to big talk when there was any trouble, now was silent. But the phlegmatic Morton began to talk rapidly.

"The state'll save you the trouble, Pirbright. We're pinching Joey on a murder charge right now, and he'll get everything surer'n hell, because that guy on the cot's going to make a perfect witness."

Pirbright smiled a little. "I don't trust the state. Four years I been promising myself this fun, anyway." He stared somberly at Joey McIntyre. "But when did this louse ever get the guts to croak a guy?"

"It wasn't a guy, it was a girl."

"It would be," Henry scoffed.

"Joey'd been playing around with her on the quiet. She worked for the Wetmores, the folks of this guy on the cot. Rich as hell. Joey wanted to promote a little blackmail, so she giggled a flock of come-on at the old man himself, but it was no soap. Scared his wife'd find out, I suppose. Then she went to work on this kid instead, and he acted up something scandalous. Joey was deep in the soup and he was counting on coming back with some notes this kid had written. But then he heard about you busting Rayford and he decided it'd be best to blow. Only he didn't have any money, and he couldn't borrow any. So he thought he'd better close the deal right away, irregardless. The Wetmores were giving a blow-out, but Joey had his punk drive up to a place nearby and he went in the back way, upstairs, and got hold of the girl."

The telephone started to ring. Captain Montgomery had caused the call to be traced, and was trying to get Morton back. But would Montgomery have sense enough to chase out to this place with a squad?

Nobody stirred. The bell made a terrific noise in that dim place. Morton wetted

his lips, and the instant the ringing ceased he resumed hastily: "She was probably scared, but she got word down to the kid to meet her in the old man's bedroom, and there they tried to shake him down. All Joey was thinking about was getting some runaway dough. He didn't care how much of a jam he got the dame into."

Pirbright said: "He wouldn't. Not that guy."

"But the kid laughed. What the hell did he care if the girl started a breach of promise action? His old man had plenty. And as for his reputation—hell, that couldn't be any worse, no matter what came out. He's the kind of a kid would be proud of a thing like that anyway, instead of being ashamed. So he tells them to go do things to themselves. Then Joey starts to get panicky and—"

The telephone bell again. Montgomery, sore, had been bawling out the operator, Morton guessed. The bell rang and rang. They all stood listening to it, not moving, and it rang for a long while. When it had stopped the room was filled with bewildered, jumpy little echoes that stung the eardrums.

"So then what?" Henry asked.

"Maybe the kid got tough. I don't know. Anyway, Joey lost his head and pulled a jack knife with a spring handle that I took off him just a few minutes ago, and he gives it to the kid in the shoulder. Meaning to get the neck. The kid goes down, probably fainting from shock and pain, and bleeding like a pig. He looks deader'n hell.

"Then the girl lost *her* head. A little blackmail was one thing, but killings were out. She snatches up the telephone, hysterical, and starts to yell for headquarters. Before she gets put through Joey grabs her around the throat. He grabs a scarf that happens to be handy, and he garrots her. He hangs up the phone, and then he runs outside and slashes the wire where



he'd seen it come into the house. He knows that otherwise the operator might start ringing back and somebody downstairs might answer—because this is only an extension. He's hoping that the operator never even heard the girl yell, but he can't count on that.

"He comes back inside and finds the girl dead, but not the kid. The kid's moving maybe, or maybe groaning. So Joey—"

"This is all very interesting," said Pirbright, and wagged one of his pistols, "But I think we better cut it short. Your boy friends might be coming out for a look pretty soon, and I got a job to do here."

"I want to tell you what a clear case we got against him!" Morton said.

"That wouldn't make any difference to me. I got my own case."

MORTON hurried on. "Joey realizes the kid isn't dead, by an inch or more, and that when he comes to, he'll be able to identify him. He knows he can get out of the place without being seen, and he figures why not take the kid along with him? Why not make a snatch out of it, and at the same time put away the only murder witness? He's always thinking of getting dough, because he's got to have it to breeze, and he figures he'd better breeze a long, long ways to be safe."

"Then he figured wrong. I'd have followed the mug to China!" Pirbright cut in.

"He starts to pick up the kid, who doesn't weigh much, but then he sees all that blood and he gets what he thinks is a bright idea. He throws the girl's body down there and slashes her a bit above where the blood is, thinking that'll fool somebody, but being too dumb to know that people don't bleed after they're dead like an autopsy will show. Then he picks the kid up, and walks out with him the same way he came in, and joins Wash-

man, who's waiting, and they come out here."

McGarvey was gaping at him like a boy watching a sleight-of-hand artist extracting bowls of goldfish from his coat pockets. But Pirbright shook an impatient head.

"That's mighty bright, copper, and I appreciate your telling me about it, but I got something else to do right now."

Pirbright started to walk toward Joey McIntyre. He was holding both guns rather high.

"If you guys want to watch this, it's O. K. by me. Only if you don't like things like this, you better turn the other way right about now."

It was horrible to watch that slow walk across the room—that deliberate, cold-blooded walk, that cold-blooded smile on Pirbright's mouth. McIntyre himself seemed past all emotion, even fear. He gave a little wheezy sigh, and, still with his eyes wide open, slid to the floor in a swoon. Henny Pirbright grabbed him gently, almost lovingly, and yanked him up to a kneeling position. He placed one of the pistols squarely against McIntyre's face.

McGarvey yelled: "Hey, you can't do that!" and sprang at Pirbright.

Sol took a step forward from the kitchen door, firing. McGarvey staggered, half-turned, but plunged straight on for Henny Pirbright. Pirbright was shooting his whole gun out into McIntyre's mouth. McGarvey punched him in the left ear and they both crashed to the floor.

It made Morton a little sick. He howled something meaningless, and dived at Sol's legs.

Even in that instant, even through the thunder of guns, Morton heard the siren's wail. And even in that instant he cursed all cops who worked sirens just for show-off purposes, while driving through streets



where there was no traffic and where there were no blind corners.

Yet it was the siren which saved his life. He got his arms around Sol's knees and hugged them tight, pulling his own legs up underneath him. He felt rather than heard an explosion against the top of his head, and he felt a burn of pain there. His ears thumped and his eyes felt flame-seared.

They went down, Sol twisting so that Morton was underneath. Then, inexplicably, Sol wasn't there. He was running out through the kitchen, leaving Morton on the floor.

For Sol too had heard that siren.

Morton got to his knees, got to his feet.

Henry M., "Henny", Pirbright, alias Pincher, alias Potts, etc., etc., had a gun in each hand still, but a semi-conscious McGarvey clung insanely to the right wrist, while the left was in the grip of a wholly unconscious, and, in fact hideously dead, Joey McIntyre. McIntyre must have made one last convulsive grasp at that wrist.

Pirbright swerved, pulling away, cursing wildly. McGarvey's grip broke, and the big detective fell flat upon his face; but the lifeless fingers of what had been little Joey McIntyre were fingers of steel. Morton, bellowing, hit Pirbright full in the chest with both hands at once, and knocked him over backward. Morton fell upon him, madly battered his head against the floor. Then, when Pirbright was still, Morton sat upon him.

**T**HAT was the position in which Captain Montgomery and the others found him a few moments later—sitting on top of what seemed to be a tangle of corpses, moaning, holding his head between his hands.

They lifted him, walked him around the room. He wasn't badly hurt, only stunned. After a time he shook his head, wiped his

face, pushed them away without comment.

Captain Montgomery said: "Henny Pirbright, eh? I thought you two were supposed to be working on that Wetmore case?"

"They got mixed up somehow," Morton muttered.

He rode back in the ambulance with McGarvey. He was all right now, not even dizzy any longer, though his head ached. Garv had a broken shoulder and he'd lost a lot of blood, but he was conscious.

"That was a break, that guy Pirbright busting in like that," McGarvey cried. "What do you suppose he was sore at Joey about?"

"I wouldn't know." Morton put his elbows on his knees and held his head between his hands, rocking a little. "The only thing I wish is that they'd have a little consideration for a guy's head and stop working that damn siren out there."

McGarvey cleared his throat nervously. "Mort—I don't know, maybe this is a bad time to ask you—"

"What's the matter with you now?" Mort groaned.

"I just thought—I mean, don't you think we get along all right? Don't you think maybe we'd make a couple of good sidekicks, like you and my old man used to be—maybe?"

"Your old man had brains."

"Yeah, I know. I know I'm dumb. But I thought maybe—"

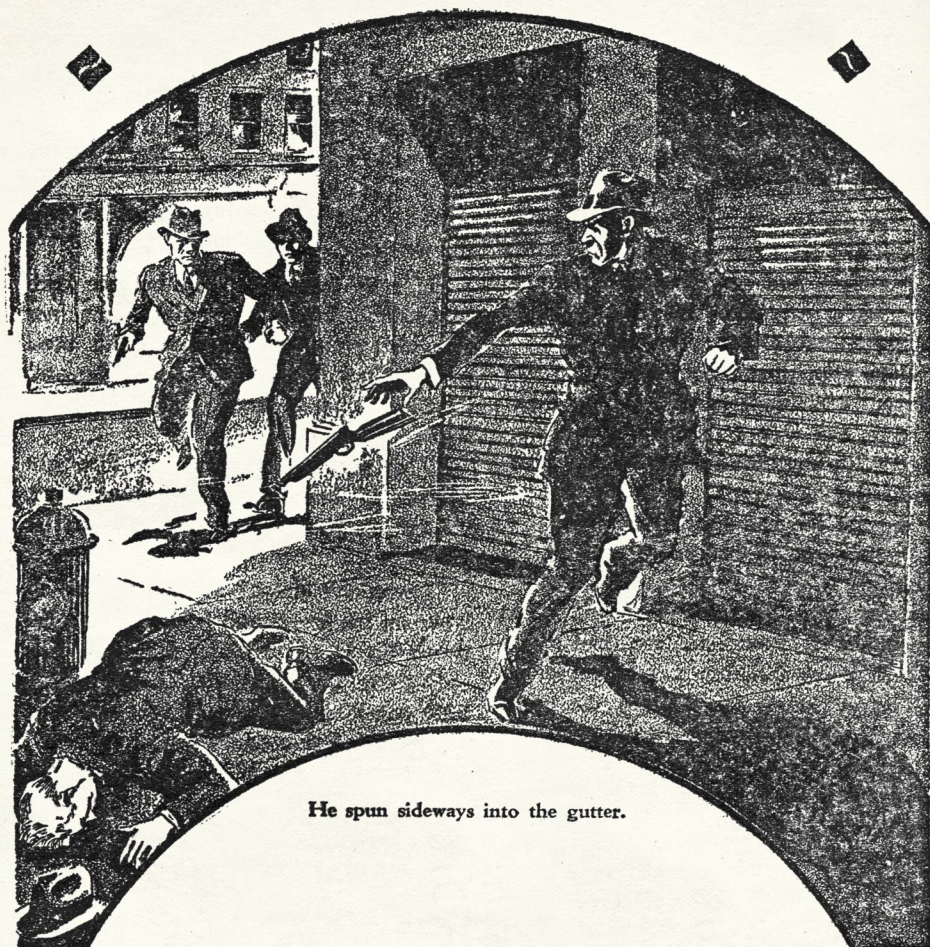
"Sure, you're all right, kid. Don't mind me. I always get crabby when bullets have been creasing my knob like this. Sure, I guess we ought to get along all right. You'll be swell to have around in case we run out of gas and I need somebody to carry the car on his back."

"You mean that? I mean, no kidding?"

"Sure."

"Geez, that'll be swell," said young McGarvey.





He spun sideways into the gutter.

## IT'S YOUR OWN FUNERAL

By Maxwell Hawkins

*Author of "Indian Trick," etc.*

*It was a very smart silver-handled coffin and the flowers and other accessories that had been ordered heralded a highly successful funeral. The only thing lacking was the corpse—until "Mr. Smith" got busy and provided same.*

**H**E WAS a small man, not more than five feet five or six inches tall. Thin, too, with flat cheeks and a long narrow nose that flared slightly at the nostrils. His light gray fedora

was tilted down over one of his dark eyes, which were too close together, and whose lids had a way of drooping down over them, as if to shield the thoughts that lay behind.



Cutting across in the middle of the block under the elevated, he paused in front of a three-story building. It was brick, an old building but showing signs of renovation in recent years. On one side was a delicatessen, on the other, a paint store.

He looked up. There were curtains in the third-floor windows, indicating that someone was living there. The windows of the second floor were blocked by thick black shades. His glance finally dropped to the big plate-glass window with the wide door beside it. Behind the window were two large artificial palms in green tubs.

The man in the gray hat stood on the sidewalk a moment and studied the sign on the glass. His thin lips moved inaudibly as he read the lettering.

**JACOB KAVAS**  
Funeral Director  
Private Chapel

With a little shrug he crossed the sidewalk, opened the door and entered. It was a comfortably furnished room; a rug, a table in the center, and around the walls several chairs and a sofa. On the table were three or four magazines, all out of date. The place had a faintly unpleasant odor; it might have been a mixture of wilted flowers and embalming fluid.

At one side of the back wall was a closed door. But at the sound of his entrance, it was opened abruptly and a man appeared. He was a short round man, with a bald head and a pudgy face, wrinkled always from his effort to look cheerful in an occupation filled with woe.

"You Kavas?" the man in the gray hat asked. His mouth barely moved; he spoke as if hating to part with his words.

The round man nodded, beamed. "That's me. Jacob Kavas. In business right here for the last seventeen years.

I've arranged some of the handsomest funerals in the neighborhood Mr.—" He paused, rubbing his hands together with fingers extended.

"Smith."

"Mr. Smith, in a time of sorrow like this, you may be assured of courteous service, careful attention to the details of placing a dear departed one in a final resting place. We—"

Smith made an impatient gesture. "Never mind all the gab! I came to arrange for a funeral—a good send-off."

"You've come to the right place," Kavas said. "Now I would suggest that perhaps if you—"

Again Smith cut him off. "I know just what I want. Never mind suggesting anything."

For the first time, Kavas seemed to become aware of what his customer looked like, to see the hard glint of the dark eyes in the thin swarthy face. Before, he had been too busy noting the signs of prosperity; the big diamond ring, the brightly polished shoes, the gray topcoat with the flared lapels and pinched-in back.

"Certainly!" Kavas agreed ingratiatingly. "Often my clients have their own ideas. I'm only too glad to carry them out in every respect."

"I'll want a hearse," Smith said.

"Naturally."

"And six hacks."

"We have beautiful seven-passenger limousines. Nothing better in the city."

"Yeah?" The dark-eyed Smith paused, let his eyelids droop in thought. "I'll want some flowers. Can you fix that up?"

Kavas' eyes sparkled at the prospect of a pay-back from the florist. "With pleasure. The finest flowers. I have a friend who is in the flower business now twenty years."

"Gimme about two hundred dollars' worth."

The sparkle in Kavas' eyes increased.



SMITH was silent for a moment. Finally, he said: "Better take this down."

From an inside pocket of his shiny black coat, Kavas produced an old envelope and a pencil. He poised the pencil with an attentive air, his round head cocked to one side, an unctuous smile on his face.

"About a dozen big wreaths," Smith said.

"A dozen wreaths—large," Kavas repeated, writing it down.

"And about a dozen of them sprays."

"Yes, sir."

Again Smith lapsed into silence. "I'd kind of like one of them horseshoes of pink roses," he said at last.

Kavas looked up from his writing with an expression of horrified surprise. He shook his head. "Excuse me, Mr. Smith!" he exclaimed. "But that's all wrong for a funeral. Horseshoes is for a man who's opening a new business and somebody wishes him luck."

Smith's dark eyes fixed themselves on Kavas' round face. "I said a horseshoe of pink roses," he said coldly. "I'm paying for this."

Kavas seemed about to protest further, then he caught the glance his customer was bestowing upon him. His pencil met the paper. "One horseshoe—pink roses," he murmured, his disapproval expressed by a slight shaking of his head.

"And a coffin!"

"Of course. Now we have—"

"I want a coffin," Smith cut in harshly, "with silver handles!"

"Yes, sir," Kavas said meekly, making a note.

"And get this! I want solid silver. None of your plated stuff!"

"Solid silver, they'll be!" Kavas hurriedly assured him. "Sterling handles. Three on each side."

Smith nodded approvingly and put his hand in his pocket.

"What's the nut?" he asked.

"I—I beg your pardon?" Kavas asked, looking bewildered.

"The cost."

"Oh!" The rotund undertaker looked toward the ceiling and made a mental calculation. At last he said: "With the flowers and all, Mr. Smith, it will be eight hundred dollars."

The man in the gray hat pulled a bankroll from his pants. When Kavas saw it, an expression of deep chagrin clouded his usually cheerful face. He'd overcharged, but he could have gone even higher.

Peeling eight one-hundred-dollar bills from the roll, Smith handed them over and said: "There's just one more thing. A nameplate on that dead-box."

"Yes, sir. What name?" Kavas asked, lifting his fascinated glance from the banknotes in his hand.

A trace of a smile distorted Smith's tight lips, a cold sardonic smile. It was the first time he had appeared anything except grimly businesslike.

"The name," he said slowly, "is"—he thought a moment—"the name is Thomas—Wilkins—Farish. Get that?"

"Yes, sir. Thomas Wilkins Farish," Kavas replied. "And where is the deceased? That is, where shall I send for the body?"

The eyelids dropped low over Smith's eyes. That icy smile reappeared. "I'll let you know about that later." He stepped close to the round little undertaker. His hand was in his coat pocket and he shoved it forward.

Kavas felt something hard press against his side. It was an unpleasant sensation. But the look in the close-set eyes, that were glittering from beneath the lowered lids, was even more unpleasant. Little beads of sweat popped out on the undertaker's bald head.

"And don't you crack about this deal!" The voice was filled with menace. "A



word out of you, and it'll be your own funeral!"

"No—no, Mr. Smith! Not one word will I breath!"

"O. K." said Smith. He turned abruptly and passed out the door to the sidewalk.

Kavas stood, the money in his hand, and watched the slender, nattily dressed figure pass the plate-glass window. When it had disappeared from his view, the undertaker puffed his plump cheeks and then exhaled slowly. With an ominous shake of his head, he returned to his private office, just behind the reception room.

A tall youth, with oily black hair that was continually tumbling down over his eyes, was sitting at a desk. He looked up with a question in his glance as Kavas entered.

**T**HE undertaker mopped his brow and laid the eight banknotes on the desk. The black-haired youth stared at them with popping eyes.

"For seventeen years, I have been in business," Kavas said solemnly. "But never yet before have I had a man come in and pay down cash to bury somebody who isn't even dead yet!"

"What do you mean?"

Waving his arms with excitement, Kavas explained to his young assistant what had happened.

"How do you know this party ain't dead yet?"

"Joe," Kavas said, "if you had felt that gun in your side, you would know that the party isn't dead yet. But he will be soon, or my name isn't Jacob Kavas!"

Joe brushed the hair out of his eyes with a practiced movement. "Looks like somebody's going to get bumped off."

"Why do you think I'm so worried, huh?" Kavas asked with annoyance. "Am I worried because a man pays me eight hundred dollars for a six-hundred-dollar

funeral? Joe, you don't know the under-taking business yet, even if you have worked for me two years." He sat down heavily in a chair across from his assistant.

"Better call the cops," Joe said.

Kavas looked at him with alarm. "My God, Joe! Don't do that!" He shook his finger to emphasize his words. "Joe, you didn't have that gun in your ribs. That fellow means what he says!"

"If it was me, I'd call the cops," Joe said.

"Listen," replied Kavas sharply, "you get busy and call the casket company and get a silver-handled casket over here quick. And you be sure the handles are real silver. He might come back to look it over," he added dolefully.

Joe reached for the telephone, and Kavas rose from his chair. He paced back and forth across the office, his fat face a picture of anxiety. He picked the money up, gazed at it long, earnestly, put it back on the desk.

"It's not worth it," Kavas muttered. "If I'd known what he was up to, I wouldn't have taken the job—not for eight thousand dollars would I take it!"

"They'll have it over here in an hour," Joe announced, hanging up the phone.

"That's good," Kavas nodded.

"Now all we got to do is wait for someone to put in it," Joe said realistically.

Kavas threw up his hands. "Don't talk like that!" he exclaimed. "Isn't my trouble enough, without you should remind me of it?"

"All right," Joe said, lighting a cigarette. "But if the cops find out you knew this party was going to be bumped off, they'll probably send you to the chair. If it was me, I'd rather take a chance with this guy shootin' me than the cops burnin' me."

Kavas stared at his bland assistant with horror-filled eyes. His pudgy face was



ashen. "Joe—Joe—" his voice broke. "Joe you don't really think they could do that to me for not telling, do you?"

"Well, I dunno," Joe said. "You'd be an 'excessory' before the fact, or something like that. Anyway, you'll be in a lot of hot water. But maybe they'll let you off with ten or twenty years in Sing Sing."

"Oh, my God!" Kavas groaned.

"I'll look up the number for you." Joe picked up the telephone book. "You ought to call headquarters and have 'em send a detective up here. That's the best way." He brushed his hair back, thumbed through the pages.

Kavas slumped down in his chair. He clasped his fat hands, shook them up and down with short jerky movements. His eyes ranged from the money to the telephone and back to the money again. He looked miserably at Joe.

"The number," Joe said, "is Spring Seven-three-one-hundred."

For a moment, Kavas looked at him blankly. Then, little by little, his hand reached out, and he picked up the telephone.

"Maybe, you're right, Joe," he muttered.

**W**HEN the man who called himself Smith had left the funeral parlors of Jacob Kavas, he walked briskly down the street to the first corner. He turned there and halfway down the block entered the dim hallway of a five-story tenement. He climbed to the third floor and knocked on a door—two short, three long knocks.

After a brief wait, the door was opened a crack and a face appeared. Instantly, the door was thrown wide and the man in the gray hat entered.

"Did you fix it, Checker?" the man who had admitted him asked.

"Yeah." He pushed the door shut, slip-

ped the bolt into place. Then he laughed and looked at his companion, a stocky, blue-jowled individual with a nose that at some time had been knocked off center.

"An eight-hundred-dollar send-off," he said. His thin face crinkled into an evil grin. "But it's worth every penny, Mike," he added.

The crooked-nosed Mike also grinned. "Checker, it takes you to think up a gag like that. Orderin' a guy's funeral before you have him rubbed out. Geez!" he said admiringly.

Checker tossed it off. "Well, we gotta have some fun in this world," he said dryly.

"When this story gets around—"

Checker wheeled on him instantly. "Wait a minute!" he snapped. "This story ain't gonna get around—not for a long time yet!"

"O. K., fella!"

"Where's Tom?"

"I don't know. He ought to be showin' up soon."

Checker was thoughtful for a brief moment. "I got it all set. Monkey Garvie's gonna do the job. Two hundred bucks. That guy'd kill his own grandmother for a sawbuck, when he wants hop."

"He know who it is?"

"He'll know when he reads the papers."

"How about the undertaker? He may squawk to the cops."

Checker sneered. "Him? Say, he's still shaking in his shoes. I threw a scare into him that'll last till Christmas."

"We'll be in the clear."

"We'll be two miles away with plenty of witnesses, when Monkey lets him have it," Checker growled. A reminiscent smile crossed his sallow face. "I ordered a silver-handled coffin. Real silver. Nothing too good for Tom," he added dryly.

Mike laughed. "And after the funeral, we beat it over to Allentown."



"Yeah," Checker nodded. "We beat it over to Allentown and get the dough." His eyelids drooped for a moment, then he said: "There was almost fifty grand in that haul, wasn't there. Well, it'll split two ways a lot better'n three, eh fella?"

"I'll say it will, Checker!"

Mike gave Checker a funny look. Checker caught it, stepped close to his stocky companion and stuck out his lean chin.

"Listen!" he said. His voice was soft, but it had a note of warning in it, a dangerous note. "Don't get any ideas that it might be better if all that Farmers' National dough went to one guy. It's going to me and you! See!"

He stepped back and walked into the other room. It was in the rear and had two windows, which looked out upon a gloomy and littered court. The flat had three rooms, all told. This one contained a table and half a dozen chairs. In the front room were two cots and in the middle one was another cot.

Checker poured a drink from a bottle on the table. As he raised the glass to his lips, there was a knock at the door. Two short, three long. He gulped the drink, set the glass down hurriedly.

"That's Tom," he said. "Let him in—and watch your step!"

**T**OM Farish entered the back room with a trace of swagger in his walk. He was about Checker's height, but more solidly built. His face, with blue eyes and a stub nose, was faintly freckled. It had an expression of Irish good humor and devil-may-care about it. Mike followed at his heels.

"Have a drink?" Checker asked.

"Sure!"

Tom poured a drink; Checker strolled to the window and started out into the bleak court, his hands clasped behind his back. When he had finished his whiskey,

Tom dropped into a chair, lit a cigarette, flipped the match into a corner. He blew a cloud of blue smoke through his nostrils.

"When are we going to get that dough in Allentown, Checker?" he asked "I'm getting low. I don't seem to be able to hold onto my money the way you do." He grinned wryly.

"The dames take it away from you," Checker said over his shoulder.

Tom laughed. "Always a sucker for a blonde." He frowned slightly. "I couldn't see any idea of stashing it in Allentown, anyway. We could have brought it right into New York with us."

"And if we got picked up on the way—where'd we be? We'd have to jam our way out." He turned and faced Tom. "I fixed that hiding place over there beforehand, so we could breeze on into New York and let any of 'em stop us that wanted to. When things weren't hot, we could go back and get it."

"You got brains, Checker."

"Yeah."

"Yeah. But things are cool now."

Checker nodded. "You said it. We're going over to Allentown—tonight!"

"Suits me. How about you, Mike?" Tom asked.

"O. K. by me," Mike said.

"And then we cut it three ways. That's it, isn't it?" Tom said.

"As soon as we get back to New York. Right here in this joint," Checker replied. "And I'm working on a new job. Something big. But it'll take time to get the lay of it."

Tom got up, walked to the table, poured a drink. Then he shook his head. "Count me out," he said quietly.

Checker's eyelids dropped down over his eyes, and Mike, behind Tom's back, winked at him.

"What's your idea?" Checker demanded.

"You heard me. Count me out of the



next. And the next and the next!" He took his drink.

Checker sneered faintly. "Going straight, huh?"

"Call it that, if you want to," Tom shrugged. "I'm stepping off. And the new missus won't stand for the racket. So I'm going to be a business man, or something of that sort."

"That blond Cusick dame?" Mike asked.

Tom nodded.

"Always a sucker for the dames," Checker said softly.

"Only one dame this time," Tom grinned. "You two guys can get along without me."

"Oh, we'll get along without you, all right," Checker replied. His thin lips were twitching nervously. Abruptly, he became brisk, all business. "Here's the set-up. We don't pull out of here in a mob. Mike'll pick me up in Newark at one thirty." He paused thoughtfully. "You seeing your girl friend tonight?"

"Sure. Every night!" Tom grinned.

"I thought so. O. K.! Mike'll pick you up first. Where do you want to meet him, Mike?" He looked at the stocky Mike from beneath lowered eyelids.

Mike appeared to consider. "She lives on Second Avenue, don't she?" he asked.

"You know damn well where she lives!" Tom said. "You dropped me off there lots of times."

"Yeah. I forgot for a minute," Mike said nervously. He caught a scowl from Checker and went on. "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll meet you in front of the Ajax Storage Company warehouse. Right at twelve forty-five. You just be walkin' along, and I'll slide up and you hop in. How's that?"

"That's a good idea," Checker put in quickly. "Nobody'll recognize either of you. It's pretty dark there."

"Why in hell not pick me up front of Flo's house?" Tom asked.

Checker took a step toward him. "That's the way you'd do it. Let everybody know you and Mike were starting somewhere at one o'clock in the morning. Listen, Tom, I'm running this show."

"O. K.! O. K.!" Tom replied good-humoredly. "You're the brains, Checker. In front of the Ajax warehouse. Twelve forty-five. I'll be there!" He picked up his hat, jammed it on his head. "Now, I'm stepping out and spend some of that Allentown dough," he chuckled.

"You be on time!" Mike called after him. "I don't want to keep runnin' around the block waitin' for you!"

CHECKER and Mike were sitting at a table in Eddie Klee's Grill. Eddie had once run a clip joint uptown. But the Times Square sector had grown too hot for him. With Repeal, he'd moved down to the lower East Side. The bottles on display behind his bar all bore state tax seals; the stuff he served his customers was a stranger to any tax. It came in over the Long Island front.

Eddie knew both Checker and Mike. So did his bartenders. So did half a dozen of his customers, who were at the bar or sitting at the tables. That's why Checker and Mike had chosen Eddie's joint in which to pass the time, while Tom Farish was going on the spot.

Checker drained his glass, took out his watch. "Twelve thirty," he murmured. "He's probably saying good-night to that Cusick dame."

Mike laughed. "He's saying good-bye, but he don't know it."

At a quarter of one, Checker said: "Monkey's just about blasting him now." He shrugged and rose from the table. "Wait here a minute," he told Mike.

He walked to the front door of the grill and looked up and down the street.



At the corner, he saw a big figure standing close to the building. A thin smile flashed over his face. He slipped out the door of the grill and circled the block, approaching the policeman from the opposite side.

"Hello, Murphy!" he exclaimed jauntily. "How's it going?"

The big Murphy looked him over from head to heels with anything but a friendly manner. "You still out of jail?" he said.

Checker forced a laugh. "Hell, yes! They don't want me for anything."

Murphy grunted.

"What time is it, Murphy? I got a date down at Eddie's at a quarter of one."

Deliberately, the policeman dug his watch from his pocket and held it so the rays of the street light fell on it. "You'd better move along, then," he said. "It's almost ten of—now."

"Thanks!"

Checker headed toward the grill, whistling to himself. Murphy watched his slender, dapper figure until it had disappeared into Eddie Klee's place; then he turned and sauntered up the street in the other direction.

"Well," Checker murmured with a satisfied air, as he sat down at the table. "I just buttoned our alibi up tight." He told Mike of his maneuver with Murphy.

Mike nodded. "We're in the clear. But if they happen to grab the Monkey, he may squawk."

"Not a chance! He's more scared of me than all the cops in New York," Checker said confidently.

"I don't trust them hopheads."

"Forget it!"

"Monkey comin' here?"

"Yeah. I gave him fifty so he could get junked up for the job. He gets the hundred and fifty after he's done his stuff. The pay-off's here."

The waiter brought two more drinks. Mike gulped his, but Checker, a cautious

drinker, merely sipped at the glass and then crooked his hand around it. Eddie Klee came from behind the bar and sat down with them for a while. Checker made a point of looking at his watch.

"Quarter past one," he said. "What'n hell's keeping Tom?"

"You waiting for Farish?" Klee asked. "Yeah."

"He was in here about eight o'clock. All dolled up."

"Goin' to see that blond Cusick dame," Mike growled.

Klee laughed and returned behind the bar. Checker leaned over toward the crooked-nosed Mike and lowered his voice.

"Monkey should have been here before this."

Mike scowled darkly. "Think anything's gone haywire?"

"Geez, I hope not!" He sank a white tooth into his thin lower lip. Then he raised his glass and drained it. "All we can do is wait a while."

A little later, Klee sent over a couple of drinks on the house. This time, Checker absentmindedly drank his right off. He was beginning to feel the alcohol. It filled him with a recklessness alien to his nature. He had the waiter bring two more.

At a quarter of two, he got up from his chair.

"Listen, Mike," he said in a low tone. "I'm gonna see what's happened."

Mike raised his bleary eyes. "What you mean?"

"I'm going over to see if Monkey did his stuff."

"Sit down!" Mike said. "Don't be a chump. Monkey's O. K. Monkey did his stuff. He'll be here for his dough." He took hold of Checker's arm. "That spot'll be lousy with dicks. If they pick you up around there—what the hell!"

"Nobody's gonna pick me up. No dick's even gonna see me," Checker replied. His sallow face was grim. He shook Mike's



hand from his arm. Started to leave.

"Sit down!" Mike said again.

"It won't take me more'n a minute to find out what's happened," Checker replied. "You wait here. I'm coming right back. If that damn Monkey has slipped up, I'm going to blast him, by God!"

"Sit down! Before you blast yourself into the hot seat!"

"You wait here," Checker repeated. He walked toward the door with a steady gait.

**T**HE night air cleared Checker's brain.

He was thinking clearly as he started up the street toward Second Avenue, but the fumes of the drinks still stirred an unusual recklessness in him. He knew it wasn't a smart move to go prowling around the spot where Tom was to be bumped off. But he had to know what had happened. Whether Monkey had done his stuff; whether the cops had grabbed him if he had.

You couldn't figure your moves, unless you knew what had happened, Checker told himself. If Tom had escaped the ambush and was wise, he'd have to be on his guard. Tom was good-natured Irish till he got mad. Geez, he was a wild man, then!

Checker was too busy with his own thoughts to notice that two men had watched him leave Klee's Grill. They were following him now, increasing their speed to try to overtake him at the corner, without breaking into a run and so give him warning that they were after him.

But Checker, impatient to reach the scene of Tom's bumping-off, stepped up his own pace unconsciously. There was a taxi parked at the corner. He hopped in, slammed the door and said to the driver: "Cut over to Avenue B and go south. I'll tell you when to stop. Step on it!"

The driver dropped the flag and the cab lurched forward. Checker sat on the

edge of the seat and kept looking out the windows. He glanced back and saw there was another taxi about a block and a half behind them, but there was still considerable traffic on the streets, a number of pedestrians on the sidewalks, and he thought nothing of it.

His taxi swung around a corner and headed south. Checker slid his hand inside his coat. The automatic beneath his left armpit gave him a feeling of confidence.

The neighborhood changed. The street was darker, there were fewer people walking and fewer cars passed them. When they'd gone about a mile, Checker leaned forward and tapped on the window.

"Pull up at the next corner, buddy!" he ordered.

The driver nodded. He guided his cab to the side of the street, put on the brakes and ground to a stop at the corner. Checker opened the door and stepped out. He stood beside the taxi and put his hand in his pocket. As he was removing a bill from his roll, he glanced up and saw the second taxicab drawing up to the curb a short distance behind.

Checker stiffened. He dropped the banknote into the driver's hand and kept his eyes on the other cab. His right hand slipped inside his coat, closed on the butt of his gun.

The door of the other cab flew open and two men jumped out. They were big men, and in a flash Checker had them placed. Dicks! He could tell 'em a mile off. They started toward him and one of them called out: "Just a minute Alberti! We want to talk to you!"

**O**RDINARILY, Checker would have gone to meet them with an air of easy bravado. They didn't have anything on him; he could usually bluff it out. But this was different. This was a hot spot.



He hesitated only a fraction of a second, then he wheeled and started running down the street as fast as his slim legs would carry him.

He expected a burst of pistol shots to follow him. But nothing like that happened. Well, by God, if they didn't drop him with a slug, he'd get away! He could outrun any cop on the New York force. Even as a kid, he'd been able to sprint away from them. He increased his speed. Still no shots.

That puzzled Checker, worried him. He couldn't understand it. He glanced over his shoulder and saw that the two detectives were pursuing on foot. But he was widening the distance between. For an instant, the idea of shooting it out occurred to Checker. But he cast it aside. Naturally cautious, he'd long ago made up his mind he couldn't fight seventeen thousand cops.

Again he glanced over his shoulder. This time he saw a flash, heard the crack of a gun. This wouldn't do! They might happen to hit him. At the next corner he turned and put all his strength into a dash up the cross street. If he could make the next corner, he'd give them the slip.

He was vaguely aware of passing a long row of closed steel doors. A warehouse of some kind. As he neared the far end of the big building, a man stepped out from the shadows. He was a man with a wrinkled Simian face and unnaturally long arms, which he raised at Checker's approach.

There was a sudden thunderous roar—a brilliant orange flash.

The impact of the charge sent Checker spinning sideways and forward into the gutter. His face plowed along the hard pavement for a dozen feet. He ended in a tangled, bloody heap. Half his side was blown away. He gave one convulsive twitch and then lay still.

The man with the long arms glided over,

to him, looked down. The sound of running feet, as the detectives rounded the corner, caused him to glance up again hurriedly. He tossed his sawed-off shotgun into the street and took to his heels, his long arms swinging grotesquely.

The detective in the lead stopped in his tracks. His gun came up; he took deliberate aim. As fast as he could pull the trigger, he emptied his weapon at the fleeing figure.

The man with the long arms pitched forward on his face, slid a few feet and rolled half over. His knees were drawn up and his ugly face was contorted into a hideous grimace. Through the back of his head was a ghastly hole, where the slug had torn its way into his brain.

After the two detectives had examined the shattered body of Checker Alberti, they moved over to the still form on the sidewalk. One of them flashed a light in the dead man's face.

"Well, Jim!" he exclaimed. "It looks like you've put that hophead, Monkey Garvie, out of the way!"

THE jailer opened the cell at nine o'clock and let Tom Farish out. Tom's clothes were wrinkled; his beard had sprouted during the night. His temper, also, was somewhat ruffled, but underneath his anger was a feeling of anxiety. He wondered whether pinching him had anything to do with the Allentown job.

"Say!" he growled to the jailer, "I want a mouthpiece! What's the idea locking a guy up and not even booking him?"

The jailer shrugged wearily. "Don't ask me no questions, young fella. I don't know none of the answers." He beckoned with his thumb for Tom to follow him.

They moved along a hallway into the front room of the precinct station. There were only a few people there—the desk sergeant, a couple of uniformed policemen, a watery-eyed old man sitting on a



bench, and one of the two detectives who had picked Tom up the night before.

The detective called Tom over to him. "Farish," he said with a faint smile, "we're going to let you go."

"Let me go, huh?"

"That's right."

"Well, why in hell did you pinch me to begin with? Me, just on my way to see my girl. You haven't got anything on me. You didn't even book me. What's the idea?"

"Take it easy, son," the detective said goodhumoredly. "We only wanted your company for the night. For safe-keeping."

"Oh, yeah. So what?"

"Yes," the detective nodded. "If we'd thought it necessary to keep you longer, we'd have found some kind of a charge to put against you."

"You haven't got anything on me!" Tom flared.

The detective was patient. "Not a thing. I could hold you for questioning, but what's the use. We've closed the case on those two punks. Glad to be rid of 'em." He tapped Tom on the shoulder. "We did you a big favor, me boy."

"Favor! You call it a favor making me sleep in that lousy cell all night?"

From under his arm, the detective drew a folded newspaper. "It sure was! One of your pals got knocked off last night. A dopey named Monkey Garvie blew him to pieces with a shotgun. Read it on your way home. And now beat it, before I change my mind!" He started Tom toward the door.

"What? Who got knocked off?"

"Checker Alberti! We were trying to take him in for—for safe-keeping, too," the detective said. There was a funny expression in his eyes. "But he could run too fast."

On his way to the apartment hideout in the tenement building, Tom read the

account of Checker's death several times. Each time he read it, the vertical lines between his blue eyes deepened. It looked damn funny! Checker bumped off in front of the Ajax warehouse. That's where Mike was to pick him up. They were to meet Checker in Newark.

Well, he'd find out more about it later. Anyway, it was all over now. He'd have to arrange a good send-off for Checker. Tom's natural good humor began to reassert itself, to soften the suspicions that had crept into his mind.

He paid the taxi driver off and climbed to the third floor. The place was deserted. No sign of Mike. He sat down and twisted the paper in his hand.

The bottle on the table caught his eye; it was about a third full. He got up and walked over to pour a drink. As he was about to lift the bottle, he saw that it was resting on a sheet of paper, which was covered with scrawled writing.

It was a note from Mike. He read it slowly, finding some trouble in deciphering the almost childish handwriting.

Tom—Checker got killed. Read the papers. I went to Allentown for the do. Will bring it back rite away and split with you—Mike.

Tom gave a short laugh, mirthless, cynical. He felt pretty sure Mike'd come back with that money. Mike was scared of him; Mike was yellow. He'd be afraid of getting blasted if he tried anything funny. Tom shrugged. Well, what if Mike didn't come back with it. He didn't care. He'd promised Flo to cut out the racket and he could get along without that lousy dough.

He took a drink and left the apartment.

**K**AVAS was in the reception room of his undertaking establishment, when Tom entered. His round face wreathed



itself into a look of proper commiseration, mingled with cheerfulness.

"I want to see about a send-off—a funeral," Tom said.

The rotund undertaker rubbed his hands briskly. "Yes, sir. At a time like this, we are prepared to—"

"This guy's down at the morgue," Tom broke in.

"We'll get the body. Now, Mr.—"

"Name's Farish."

Kavas started, his mouth dropped open. "Wh-what?"

"Are you deaf?" Tom demanded. "I said Farish! Tom Farish! I live right around the corner."

For the moment, Kavas seemed on the verge of collapsing. His knees shook. First, his face became fiery red, then a ghostly white. "Not—not—" He wet his lips. "Not Mr. Thomas Wilkins Farish?"

"Yeah. What the hell!" Tom started at him with squinting eyes. "How did you know?"

"My God!" Kavas gasped. With excited gestures, breathless. Kavas told about the visit of Checker Alberti, who'd called himself Smith, the day before. And about his ordering a funeral. How he had stressed the silver-handled coffin with the nameplate on it.

"What'd this guy look like?" Tom demanded.

Kavas described him.

Tom drew a deep breath, blew it out noisily. This confirmed the suspicion he'd formed when he read the account of Checker's death. He drew one corner of his upper lip down between his teeth and spoke out of the other side of his mouth.

"Listen, fella! You put a new nameplate on that coffin! And you put on it: Anthony Alberti. Better put 'Checker' right underneath."

"Checker?"

"Yeah. He used to be a checker in a shipping room." He was silent for a moment. Then he muttered to himself:

"That would be that rat's idea of a joke. Ordering my funeral first." He turned back to Kavas.

"You say this guy Smith paid for the funeral?"

Kavas nodded.

An odd little smile appeared on Tom's freckled face. He made a clucking sound with his tongue against his teeth. "O. K.! Well, Smith's right name is Alberti. He's the guy down at the morgue. You give him his own funeral, see!"

Kavas' eyes popped, he gulped a couple of times. "Yes—yes, sir," he finally managed to blurt out.

Tom sauntered to the door. Before he left, he turned once more to Kavas. "I'll let you know where to plant him."

"Yes, sir."

"Do a good job on this send-off!"

"Yes, sir."

"Nothing's too good for Alberti!"

"Yes, sir."

"You see—" Tom paused. His lips curled; he bobbed his head slowly up and down. "You see—he was my pal!"

**M**R. JACOB KAVAS, undertaker, and Joe, his black-haired assistant, were in the back room. On a slab at one side was a lumpy object, covered with a white sheet.

"Now, Joe," said Kavas, "I'm going to teach you something about the undertaking business. You see that fellow there?"

"Yeah," Joe replied. He brushed his black hair out of his eyes with the back of his hand. "He's pretty messy."

"It's not that I'm talking about."

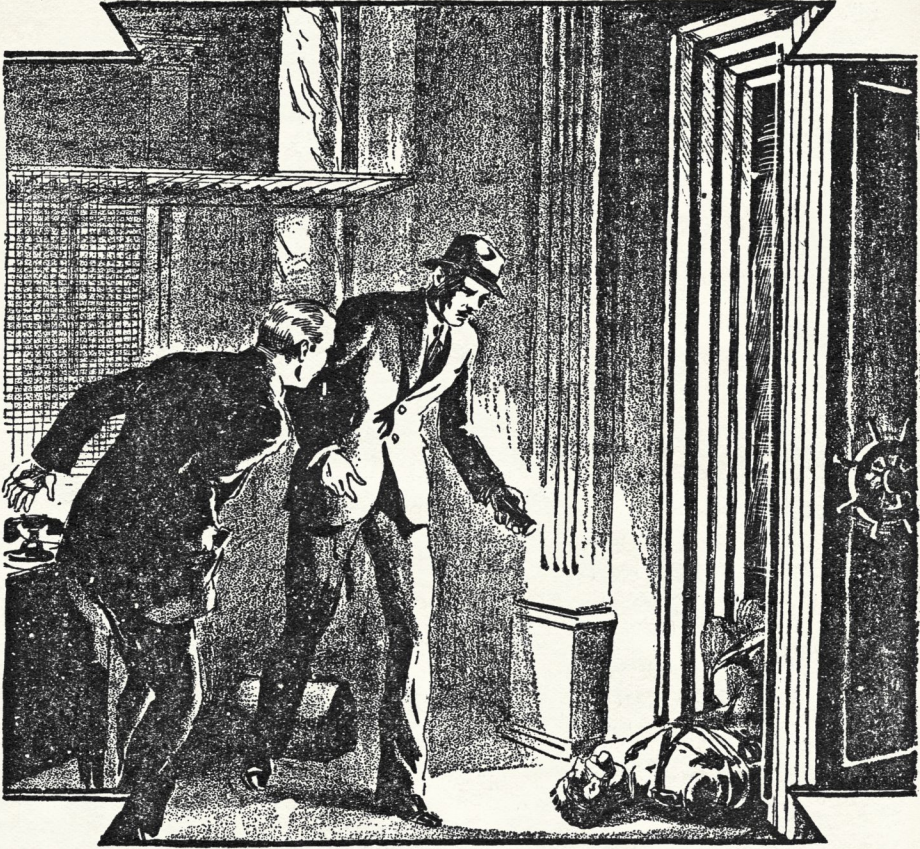
"No?"

"No. That fellow," Kavas said earnestly, "isn't good enough for a silver-handled coffin. He's a bum."

"Yeah."

"You send that silver job back to the casket company. We'll bury him in one of them sixty-dollar specials—with the plated handles!"





The trussed-up body fell at his feet.

# CHOSEN TO DIE

by  
**Leslie T. White**

*Author of "Bargains in Murder," etc.*

*It was the prettiest murder frame Martindel had ever found himself in—gilt-edged, steel-barred and time-locked against cracking. But those who had stuck him there hadn't taken into consideration the fact that their dupe's wife was the smartest criminal lawyer in town—and just enough in love with her husband to play mouthpiece for him and not double-cross or chisel in the usual way.*



## CHAPTER ONE

## Robbers' Plea

PHYLLIS MARTINDEL was jerked from the depths of a sound sleep with an abruptness that left her breathless and moist with perspiration. She cocked her head, listening, but the apartment seemed all too silent, like a morgue peopled with the dead. Propped upon one elbow, she sought to force her eyes to pierce the darkness but the tarnished silvery glow that seeped through the single window mellowed into opaque shadows before it reached the bedroom door. She leaned over and touched the broad shoulders of her husband and seemed to absorb some of his great strength from the contact. Her heart ceased its mad fluttering as she tried to recall what had awakened her.

Then she felt, rather than heard, the door swing open!

The limp hand suddenly became a bony talon that tightened on her husband's flesh. "Hey! What's the idea?" he grumbled thickly.

She shrank against him. "Duke! There is—there is someone in the apartment!"

He gave her a playful bunt with his head and then his lazy voice drawled out of the darkness beside her. "Say, Phyl, just because you're married to a detective don't be so damn suspicious. Oh, well, if there's anyone here tell 'em to g'wan away and come back at a decent—" He stopped abruptly as the sudden glare of a flash blinded him.

"Keep your hands away from that pillow, Duke!" a tense voice commanded from the shadows behind the source of light. "Get 'em in plain sight on top the covers!"

Duke Martindel arched his neck and blinked into the beam. Very slowly he spread his big hands on top of the counterpane, then shot a sidelong glance at his

wife. "Darling," he grinned wryly, "is this guy calling on you or me?"

A shadow moved across the wan light of the window. The shades were carefully drawn, then a wall-switch clicked and the room was flooded with light. Martindel pushed himself erect and stared at his guests.

They both had guns on him, but there the similarity ceased. The big man at the foot of the bed had apparently dressed hurriedly for his visit, for even the up-turned collar of his black topcoat failed to hide the fact that he wore no tie. Close-cropped gray hair bristled from the brim of a derby that shaded his tiny close-set eyes—eyes that reminded Martindel of twin bullet holes in a cantaloupe. His square jaw and heavy jowls were tinted a deep purple by a stubble of beard and he carried a scar that coursed upward from the corner of his thin mouth to the criss-crossed sack under his right eye. It was the first time Duke Martindel had ever seen stark fear in Sam Skuro's eyes.

"Get up Duke!" growled Skuro. "You're goin' places."

Martindel felt the convulsive clutch of his wife. He turned his head and looked at the man who had drawn the window shade.

"Well, Gus Nuene! Since when have you and Sam gone into the kidnaping racket?"

The man addressed as Nuene gave his neck a nervous jerk. He was very tall and very thin like a giant crane and the angled bridge of his hooked nose made it seem as though he were perpetually sighting a shotgun. He was all straight lines and angles.

"This isn't a snatch, Duke," he announced. "We got a job for you."

Martindel chuckled without pleasantry. "I maintain an office, boys."

Sam Skuro made an impatient gesture with his gun. "Pile out, Duke," he



growled. "We're in one hell of a hurry. This is on the level."

Duke Martindel glanced at his wife and a thrill of pride suffused him. She looked very young and very cool lying there with her round blue eyes fastened on Skuro's gun muzzle. Brown hair tumbling around her bare shoulders made her look like a school girl rather than a clever lawyer and the wife of a well known detective. Duke grinned in spite of himself.

"Phyl," he said in an audible stage-whisper, "you're the legal brains of the family. What would you advise in a situation like this?"

**P**HYLLIS MARTINDEL was scared—Duke could tell that by the way the nostrils on her little turned-up nose quivered—but she prided herself that she could match her husband's cool wit, so she tried it now. "Darling, they seem to be clients of yours."

The detective's quick laughter brought a dark scowl to the swarthy features of Sam Skuro. "Listen, Duke, this is no time for wise-crackin'. There's big dough in this for you."

Nuene took a step nearer the bed. "Ten gran', Duke! That's more than you private dicks can make in a year on a straight job."

Martindel chuckled. "Straight job? Now that's a word I didn't think you boys included in your vocabulary; you, Gus Nuene, the slickest con-man in town, and Sam Skuro the veteran peterman! Why, Sam, you must be well over fifty! You were cracking cribs when I was in short pants."

Skuro leaned over the foot of the bed. "Duke, you got a reputation in this town. Everybody that knows you at all knows you left the police department and went into private practice because the department went crooked."

"Part of it did," Martindel admitted.

Skuro nodded vigorously. "All right, then, part of it; the biggest part. Well, you wouldn't sit by an' see them frame an innocent man, frame an' hang him, would you?"

The detective drew up his knees and locked his hands around them. "Sam, you old fraud, you couldn't be innocent of anything."

Nuene said: "You know Harry Washburn, Duke?"

Martindel nodded. "Sure. He's the grand jury investigator. We teamed on the force when I was in harness."

Sam Skuro's gun sagged. "Listen, Duke, before my God, I didn't kill Washburn!"

The detective stiffened slightly. "Well, who said you did?"

Skuro opened his mouth as if to say something, apparently changed his mind and swivelling, walked over to a small radio near the bed. With trembling fingers he rotated the dial. Then he stepped back and listened as the cool, impersonal voice of the police announcer droned out of the instrument.

". . . railway stations, apartments, rooming houses and small hotels. Repeating general order to all cars. Description of wanted men as follows: Sam Skuro, age fifty, six foot one, two ten, gray, close-clipped hair, bullet head, dark complexion, scar running from right corner of mouth to right cheek-bone. Skuro is a three-time loser, dangerous criminal. Gus Nuene, confederate, probably holed up together. Nuene five eleven, thirty-eight, gaunt and angular, dark and sleek, well dressed, thin hawk-face, cold gray eyes. Take no chances in arresting these men as they are wanted for murdering investigator Harry Washburn. All cars will patrol their . . ."

Sam Skuro switched off the instrument. Both men kept their eyes on Martindel's sober features.



Duke spat: "Cop-killers!"

Skuro caught the bed post. "We didn't, Duke! I'm tough, I've cracked a lot of cribs in my day, slugged a lotta guys, but before my God, Duke, I never drilled a guy." He paused and amended the statement by adding, "I never drilled a guy in the back!"

Martindel's voice was cold. "What did you come to me for?"

"We're bein' framed, Duke. With our records any jury in the world would sink us. We're innocent, we need help."

Martindel gave a dry laugh that lacked mirth. "What you birds need is a lawyer, not a detective. You better speak to my wife."

Nuene shook his head. "No, Duke, a lawyer can't help us out of this spot."

"Have you got an alibi?" Martindel asked.

The two visitors exchanged glances. Nuene answered through tightened lips. "We can't use it, Duke."

Nuene shot another glance at Sam Skuro. The latter gave his head a perceptible nod. Nuene turned back to the detective.

"Duke, we'll lay our cards on the table—cold. But first we want your word that under no circumstances will you tell the law."

**M**MARTINDEL shook his head. "I can't give my word on that. If they subpoena me into court, I'll have to talk." He smiled sardonically. "However, if you boys hired a good lawyer and told her your troubles, she would be able to protect your confidences by the laws of privileged communications."

Phyllis swung around. "Darling! I don't want—"

"Go on, boys," Duke interrupted. "Tell the attorney your troubles."

Nuene nodded to Sam Skuro; Sam be-

gan to talk. "Harry Washburn was diggin' up a lot of graft dope—"

"Skip it," Duke cut in. "We know all about Washburn's activities."

"Well, he knew too much so he got bumped at five minutes after twelve."

"Ask him who bumped him?" Duke suggested to his wife.

Skuro answered before Phyllis had a chance to repeat the query. "I don't know that. It was framed to look like Gus an' me did it."

"How do you mean—framed?" asked Phyllis.

Skuro shrugged helplessly. "Phoney evidence—I don't know just what. A friendly stoolie tipped me off just in time to the raid or we'd have been—" He ended with a shudder.

"They want us—dead," contributed Nuene.

"Where were you at five minutes after twelve?" Phyllis Martindel wanted to know.

Both men hesitated, then Sam Skuro heaved his shoulders. "In the main vault of the County and Suburban Bank!"

Martindel laughed harshly. His wife gasped.

"They were cracking the bank, darling," the detective told her drily, "when Washburn was murdered."

"Couldn't you prove that?" Phyllis asked. "It would be better than being charged with murder!"

"Not much better," Duke put in. "Sam and Gus are both old offenders, if memory serves me right they each have three convictions behind them."

"That's right," Nuene admitted wearily.

"And that means they'll get life even if convicted for cracking the bank."

"It means," Nuene corrected drily, "that unless you prove us innocent we'll both be killed by the cops. We heard they don't aim to make any arrests in this case ;



they don't want to chance it to a jury in case anything slips up. It's a frame, I tell you, Duke!"

"But how," protested the charming lawyer, "can we prove you innocent when you are guilty of something else?"

Skuro bit his lip. "Your husband will know how to handle that, ma'm."

"You tell me," suggested Martindel.

Nuene spoke: "For ten gran', Duke, we want you to frame us innocent!"

Duke Martindel whistled softly and dropped his feet over the edge of the bed. "That's a new one," he mused aloud. "They are guilty of one crime and want to be framed innocent on one they did not commit." He shook his head. "I don't want any part of it, boys. You're a couple of bad eggs that should be frying up in the big house."

His wife caught his arm. "But, Duke, if they didn't kill Washburn, you wouldn't want to see them—" She stopped, embarrassed.

"They robbed a bank," he reminded her. "I'll be compounding a felony if I monkey with that or try to cover it up."

Nuene interrupted. "We thought of that, Duke, so we got a counter proposition. Suppose we give you the dough we got out of that crib—fifty thousand, it was—and you go and make a deal with the manager. It's a small, independent bank and I don't think the manager would want any publicity about the job if he could recover his dough on the quiet."

"Any damage done?"

Nuene shook his head. "Not much. We stuck up the watchman and gagged him with tape. Sam opened the vault like it was a can of sardines." He glanced at his wrist watch. "It's not three yet. If you beat it out to the manager's house, offer to return the dough and pay for any damages, I think he'll listen to reason. We're on the level about this, Duke, we don't

want to dangle for something we didn't do."

Skuro contributed: "The manager's name is Mayhew Henderson. He lives at Two Sixty Carthay Circle. He's home tonight—we checked all those angles."

"The money?" Duke asked.

"We'll leave it on your back door step."

"Where will you boys be?"

Skuro shook his head decisively. "You don't need to know that, Duke. We'll get in touch with our"—he gave Phyllis Martindel a glance—"our attorney when the time comes."

"How do you know I won't run out on you with the money?"

"Two reasons," Nuene replied. "First, you're a square dick; second, you'll want to know who knocked off Washburn by shooting him in the back."

Sam had already backed out of the room and now Gus Nuene followed. As the door closed, Martindel grinned at his wife.

"Well, Mrs. Martindel, how would you like to go to Europe on sixty thousand—"

"No thank you, Mr. Martindel. Now will you be on your way to Carthay Circle." She placed a tiny foot in the small of his back and prodded him out of the bed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Murder Frame

**D**UKE MARTINDEL brought his roadster to a stop diagonally across the street from a large, brick mansion. He turned the beam of his spotlight onto the white numerals painted on the curb, saw they were 260. Then he climbed out and approached the darkened house.

It took considerable argument to convince the sleepy butler who answered the door that the matter was of sufficient importance to disturb the slumber of his master. But the sounds of the verbal ex-



change succeeded where the reasoning had failed, for a stubby little man appeared at the head of the stairs and demanded to know what the trouble was. Before the servant could speak, Martindel cut in.

"Mr. Henderson, I am a detective. I have some very urgent business to discuss with you relative to your bank."

Henderson gave an astonished grunt and padded down the stairs, his slippers clap-clapping on the polished surface. He dismissed the butler with an imperious wave of his hand, tightened his robe around his full figure and led the way into a small reception room off the hallway. Without sitting down, he faced the detective.

"Now, sir," he demanded. "What business have you to discuss?"

Martindel let his eyes sweep the banker in a cold, appraising stare. To him, every man was a subject to be dealt with differently and he wondered how best to approach the rather delicate matter he had to discuss. Henderson, he readily surmised, was not a man that would have any sympathy for others; there was a tightness around his small, thin mouth, set as it was in his chubby face, that suggested cruelty. He stared at his visitor with a haughty frown, but Duke saw a tremor of fear in the depths of his eyes and it heartened him. He made his approach accordingly.

"Mr. Henderson, if your bank was burglarized, your vault rifled, it would be rather awkward from a business point of view, would it not?"

The banker's eyes bulged. "Burglarized? Why what are you trying to say?"

"Your bank was burglarized last night. The vault was cleaned!"

Henderson collapsed into a chair. "Are you from the police?" he gasped.

Martindel shook his head. "No, I am a private detective."

"You represent the insurance?"

"I," the detective put in flatly, "represent the burglars."

Henderson gave a startled grunt, then groped for the telephone. Before he could lift the receiver, Martindel pinned his hand down.

"Wait a minute," he suggested quietly. "You would do well to hear me out."

"You can't blackmail me!" blustered the banker.

"I'm not trying to blackmail you. I have with me the entire amount stolen and enough extra to make good any damages incurred by the entry. It is a most unusual circumstance, but I want to return the money on behalf of the criminals on the one condition that you make no report of the incident. I believe, if you will consider the matter from all angles, you would be well advised to agree. If your clients knew that your vault could be opened like"—he grinned as he recalled Gus Nuene's apt simile—"like a can of sardines, you would lose a lot of business."

Henderson hesitated and his hand slowly came away from the instrument. "What about Chris Foy, the watchman?" he queried huskily.

"Foy is all right, so I understand," Duke assured him. "I'm confident he will keep his mouth shut under the circumstances. He is now bound and gagged at the bank."

"You have the money with you?"

"In my car. I suggest that you dress and come with me. We will liberate the watchman, return the money to the vault and let the matter drop."

Henderson squinted at Martindel. "I don't understand why you are doing this. Do you expect a reward?"

"No. I expect nothing—from you. My reasons, on the other hand, are no concern of yours. Are you going to come, or not?"

Henderson ran a chubby hand across



his moist forehead as though the matter was too much for his comprehension.

"How do I know this isn't some trick to get me to open the bank?" he asked defensively.

Martindel shrugged. "You don't know, but you cannot afford to take a chance that I might be right. If someone discovers the burglary before we get this money back, you know what will happen to your depositors. They'll walk out on you. I'd suggest that you pile into some clothes and make it snappy."

Henderson nodded. "I'll be ready in five minutes," he promised and hurried from the room.

**H**E was ready in six minutes by Martindel's watch. He came into the room dressed in a conventional serge suit, but a too obvious bulge in his right coat pocket warned the detective that he was armed. Duke frowned impatiently. It irritated him when untrained men carried guns. With a curt nod, he led the way out of the house and across the street to his roadster.

Henderson hesitated before entering. "Where is the money?" he demanded.

Martindel swore softly, walked to the rear of the machine and unlocked the turtleback. He opened the portmanteau and held the beam of a small pocket flashlight on the contents. It was bulging with currency and negotiable bonds.

"Satisfied?" he growled.

Henderson bobbed his head, edged into the seat and sat warily in one corner. The detective stretched his lanky frame under the steering wheel, depressed the starter and toiled the machine into motion.

The ride was made in silence. The banker crouched on the extreme end of the seat and it was quite apparent that he did not trust his companion. But Duke Martindel was indifferent to that. There was nothing he had to discuss with May-

hew Henderson and he wanted time to mull over the strange situation in which he found himself.

Perhaps he was a plain damn fool. He knew he could trust neither Gus Nuene or Sam Skuro as far as he could throw them with a broken wrist; he was too experienced a veteran to believe that quaint old fairy tale about honor among thieves; that was plain hooey. He sought to mentally marshal his facts, slim as they were. First, Nuene and Skuro were scared—they had to be plenty terrified to return fifty thousand in loot. Both men were veteran criminals, but they were the old-time craftsmen, not the modern, back-shooting assassin of today. Duke nodded to himself—yes, he was inclined to believe the precious pair when they said they did not kill Washburn. If they had killed Washburn in looting the bank—they would hardly be willing to return the loot. It would appear logical for them to use the money in making a get-away.

But Harry Washburn was dead! Duke had heard that officially from the police broadcast, and Skuro and Nuene were accused and suspected of the crime. Yet it was easy to find a motive why certain people and factions might want the relentless investigator out of the way. Duke had worked with Harry Washburn back in the days when he was in harness and even then, Washburn was a cold-blooded, tenacious man-hunter. There was something about the way he tore into a case that chilled even his co-workers. But he was a smart dick, uncompromisingly honest, and he had risen rapidly, although cordially disliked by his associates, and when the grand jury picked him out of the entire force to investigate certain underworld activities in the city, dislike turned to fear.

Duke knew what it was to be feared and disliked. He had chucked the police force when things became too raw for his



taste and opened a private bureau. He had made good on several well paying cases and wisely invested his surplus. Honest coppers, like old "Skipper" Dombey, grizzled pilot of the detective bureau, favored him, gave him tips and did what they could to help him along. But the department was under the thumb of Inspector Egan of the uniformed men. Egan hated two things—Duke Martindel was both of them.

A cheerful grin stole over Duke's tanned features as he recalled Phyllis booting him out of the bed. What a girl! Even after some three years of marriage, Duke continued to marvel at his luck in winning her. They had met when she visited the police department as a member of a law class studying criminal procedure. The day she passed her bar examination they were married. Since that time, she had only practiced law when it was necessary to extricate her adventurous husband from some escapade. Yet Duke invariable insisted that she was the real business head of the family and that he merely worked for her. It tickled him immensely when she begged him to quit the detective business, with its attendant dangers, and then the first case that looked as though some innocent party might be in trouble, she insisted that he take it and straighten it out.

THE sudden looming up of the County and Suburban Bank before him broke up his reverie. He stopped the car at the curb in front of the building and switched off the engine.

"All right," he grunted at Henderson. "Let's go."

The other hesitated, moistening his lips. "I warn you," he jerked huskily. "If anything is—"

"Don't be a damn fool!" cut in Martindel. He opened the door and stepped to the sidewalk.

Henderson followed reluctantly. He paused, glanced suspiciously up and down the deserted street, then hurried across the sidewalk and keyed open the front door. He started to enter, changed his mind and stepped aside for the detective to proceed him.

Duke gave an impatient snort, knuckled open the big door and strode inside. The foyer was dimly illumined by a night-light that bathed the empty cages in pale shadows. The thick marble pillars, cold and stark, reminded Duke of a mausoleum. Some strange unfamiliar dread began to come over him. He glanced around but could see no sign of the watchman. Casting a quick look over his shoulder, he found Henderson watching him through narrowed eyes.

"Where's the vault?" he asked.

The banker jerked his head toward the rotunda. As Duke passed the end of the cages, he saw the vault door ajar. He pushed aside a brass rail and strode over. He shot another glance at Henderson, then gripped the big handle and swung the door outward. He jumped backward with an unwitting gasp of surprise.

For the trussed-up body of a man tumbled out of the dark recess of the vault and fell at his feet!

Martindel rasped a curse, whipped out his flash and turned the light on the features of the man on the tiled floor. One quick glance was sufficient; the man was dead.

"Foy!" choked Henderson.

Martindel dropped to one knee beside the corpse. The watchman had been beaten about the head until it was but a pulpy mass. Ropes wrapped around his body held him mummy-like and the dirty strips of adhesive tape across his dead lips added a grim touch to the horror of it all. The detective's jaw tightened and the veins along his temples swelled. He



pushed slowly erect and turned to Henderson.

"I don't understand—" he began, then stopped abruptly as he found himself staring into the tremulous muzzle of the banker's gun.

"You dirty crook!" rasped Henderson. "Don't move or I'll kill you!" His rotund little body was doubled into a half-crouch as he backed toward a desk.

Martindel stiffened. "Be careful of that gun," he suggested drily. "It might go off."

"It will go off if you move before the police get here!" promised Henderson. He put his left hand behind him and patted the desk as he searched for the instrument.

Duke Martindel bit his lip. He was in probably the worst predicament of his eventful career. If the police caught him now—he shuddered. He turned his attention to Henderson. The latter was just picking up the receiver.

Duke gauged his distance. Henderson stood about ten feet away. The gun was aimed in the general direction of the detective's broad chest but the muzzle wavered in a restless arc. Duke heard the receiver make metallic noises, saw Henderson open his mouth to speak, then he jumped—

He went feet first like a player sliding for a base. The gun roared over his head—the marble foyer amplifying the sound. Then his feet struck Henderson's legs and with a terrified bleat, the banker flopped on top of him.

Duke's powerful arm closed around Henderson's throat, choking the cry before it was born. He rolled over, came to his knees then releasing his strangle hold, he caught the other by the tie and jerked him into a sitting position. Henderson made one futile attempt to cry out just as Duke's fist reached his jaw. The bleat turned into an indifferent *whoosh* as

the air left the tubby body and Mayhew Henderson cradled his head on the mosaic floor and temporarily lost all interest in the encounter.

Martindel combed his fingers through his hair and stood up. The telephone lay on its side, the receiver squawking imperiously. With a soft oath, he pronged the thing and recovered his crush felt. He jammed it on the back of his head, carefully wiped the handle of the vault door so as to eradicate any fingerprints, and moved swiftly toward the front of the bank.

He was directly in the middle of the foyer when the barred front door suddenly swung inward and three blue-coated figures barged inside. The pale moonlight glinted on blued steel. A cold, venomous voice knifed the stillness.

"Hold it, Martindel!"

Duke Martindel froze immobile. He rasped the one word: "Egan—" and made a run for it.

A gun belched in his face. His head exploded and he went down—cold.

## CHAPTER THREE

### French Leave

DAYBREAK filtering through the grimy little window of the headquarters' interrogation room, fell in wan splashes on the weary features of Duke Martindel. With clothing disheveled, his shirt front stiff with dried blood and a turban of bandages crowning the upper portion of his head, he sprawled in a hard-backed chair in the center of the battered room. There were four other men present, but Martindel's eyes were focused unwaveringly on the tall, gaunt figure that stood before him, silhouetted by the tiny window.

Inspector Egan was a thinnish man whose gauntness was deceptive. Like a puma, his muscles were so evenly divided



over his frame as to be unnoticeable. His face was long and narrow and the features sharp, fox-like, and his salt-and-pepper brows, when he frowned, formed a straight unbroken line across the upper part of his face. This tended to thrust his colorless eyes into a pocket of shadow and give to them a metallic luster that was disconcertingly impersonal. No man on the department had ever seen him smile. He was shrewd and intuitive; he seemed to smell a situation before it was possible to know by any other means. Few men liked him personally, but he had the knack of winning the respect and blind obedience of his men. It was rumored that he was the real power behind the city government, but such rumors were always whispered furtively, for Wyatt Egan was not the type of man to oppose unless one was prepared to prove his accusation.

"Talk?" he asked Martindel.

Duke shrugged. "Sure. I didn't kill Chris Foy."

Egan tugged at his nose. It seemed to lengthen in his hand. "It was a two-man job—who was your partner?"

"I didn't have a partner, Egan; I didn't need one."

"That your story?"

"Part of it."

"What's the rest of it?"

"I didn't crack that vault."

One of the other cops laughed. Egan rocked on his heels meditatively. When he spoke, his voice was low, controlled as though he were holding himself back.

"You killed Chris Foy, Martindel, then tried to put one over on Henderson. Don't forget, we found fifty thousand bucks in the turtle-back of your roadster. How do you explain that?"

Duke shook his head. "I'm not going to try," he said wearily.

"You had ten thousand dollars in your pocket," Egan went on. "You know where that came from, don't you?"

"Sure, but you don't."

"Wrong," corrected Egan drily. "We checked the serial numbers of those bills and found they were part of the loot stolen from the Seaside National Bank last month. Talk yourself out of that one."

Duke Martindel swore softly and covered his chagrin by gingerly patting the bandage around his head. From the neck up he was just one big ache; a slug from Egan's gun had creased his skull and come, literally, within a hair's-breadth of killing him. And now, with throbbing head, he found the predicament almost too much for him. The evidence was damning—he could not dispute that fact.

He tried to reason it out in his mind. Although satisfied that Sam Skuro and Gus Nuene had deliberately framed him for the burglary and the murder of the watchman, Foy, he could see no point in explaining the matter to Inspector Egan. In the first place, he had been caught red-handed and would be, in any case, considered an accomplice of Skuro and Nuene. As such, his testimony would be worthless in court and he would be regarded equally guilty with the other pair. Then, too, the police were perfectly satisfied that Skuro and Nuene were the murderers of Washburn; they neither would be, nor could be, induced to change that theory.

A sharp commotion in the corridor outside broke in on his musing. Egan scowled and started across the floor when the door swung open and a woman darted into the room. Her eyes settled for an instant on the group, then with a little cry, she ran to the prisoner and threw her arms around him.

"Duke! Are you hurt, darling?" she whimpered.

Martindel jumped to his feet. "Phyllis!" Then he grinned ruefully. "No, Phyl, Egan shot me in the head where it



couldn't do any damage." He cast a glance over his shoulder where the inspector was growling at a desk sergeant.

The latter was fuming embarrassedly. "I couldn't stop her, Inspector!" he apologized. "She walked right past me an' headed for this room."

Egan swung around. "You'll have to get out, Mrs. Martindel," he snapped.

Phyllis Martindel drew herself up to her full five feet. "I will not!" she retorted.

"The hell she does, Egan," put in Duke. "She's my attorney, in case you don't know."

Phyllis slapped a folded document on the table. "Here is a writ for Duke's release."

Egan pushed it away from him. "You keep a supply of those damn things all filled out."

The girl gave him an icy stare. "I think you will find it in perfect order."

Egan picked it up. Without unfolding it, he turned to Martindel. "Duke, I happen to know that you had two visitors earlier this morning; Sam Skuro and Gus Nuene. We want those two. Where are they?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," Duke told him.

Egan tugged at his nose. "We know definitely that they came to see you. After they left, you went out. Now I want to know what business they had with you that prompted that. You're in a bad spot, Duke, so you better talk. In any case, I can take you before a magistrate, put you under oath and either force you to talk or put you in the position of an accomplice, because the only excuse you could give for not talking is that it might tend to incriminate you."

Martindel grinned maliciously. "I'm only a dumb private dick, Egan; I work for my lawyer. Skuro and Nuene came up to see her because she's their attorney

as well as mine. They didn't tell me a damn thing."

The inspector's eyes retreated into a deeper socket of shadow. "I'll make her talk," he growled.

Phyllis shook her head. "I don't think you will!" she challenged him testily. "If you know anything about legal procedure at all, you know that an attorney cannot be forced to testify to any conversation with a client. That is a privileged communication, you murdering old crook!"

Egan sniffed; it was the nearest he ever came to laughter. "You make a fine pair—a shyster mouthpiece in skirts and a crooked, double-crossing gum-shoe. That's like marrying a jackal and a skunk."

Duke smiled thinly. "You're well up on zoology, Egan, but then, that's natural. Now, how about this writ?"

Inspector Egan turned slowly and walked over to the window where he stood straddle-legged, his hands behind him, staring into the street below. Finally, after a moody silence that lasted for nearly five minutes, he swung around and shook the crumpled writ at the Martindels.

"You win this round," he growled. "I'm not ready to tip my hand yet. This case has a lot of angles and if I resisted this writ, I'd have to go into court and show my evidence right now. When I'm ready, I'll have you picked up, Duke, but in the meantime, don't either of you try to leave town. You can beat it now."

Phyllis sniffed disdainfully and proffered a pack of cigarettes to her husband. Duke came slowly to his feet, paused with irritating nonchalance to light his smoke, then with a cynical grin for the somber-faced coppers, he turned and limped out of the room.

**T**HEY tramped down the dingy stairs in silence. At the front door of the station-house, she gave his arm a squeeze.



"Drive, darling?"

Duke grinned, shook his head. "You drive, Phyl. I want to think." He crossed the sidewalk and opened the door of his wife's coupé.

Phyllis slid under the wheel and Duke lolled beside her, his head resting against the top of the cushion. As his wife tooted the little car into the early-morning traffic, she laughed.

"I'll bet you're thinking what a smart little wife you have," she chided. "I don't know what you would do if I didn't keep yanking you out of tight spots all the time, you big baby."

Duke grinned. "It would be mighty dull, Phyl. You invariably yank me out of one spot, all right, but you drop me into the middle of a tighter one."

"Meaning—"

Duke tried a smoke ring—and failed. "Darling," he asked, "Do you look good in black?"

"Hideous! Why?"

"Then you better watch your step unless you want to be wearing a widow's garment."

A tinge of terror crept into Phyllis' voice. "What do you mean, Duke?"

"I mean that something's up," he told her dryly. "Why do you suppose Egan turned me loose?"

She hesitated. "Why, the writ—"

"Nope, darling, wrong. Old Egan could beat that writ without half trying. All he had to do was to show to any magistrate that I was captured in a bank in the wee morning hours with a dead man and fifty thousand bucks in my car and—" he made an eloquent gesture with his hands.

"Then why did he turn you loose?" she protested.

Duke shrugged. "Egan tried to kill me; he wants me—dead. Perhaps it is just his personal animosity, perhaps it is something else."

"You think he knows you had nothing to do with the bank robbery—"

Martindel sighed. "I'm not sure. Did you hear from Skuro or Nuene?"

"Sam Skuro called; he left a number where we could reach him in an emergency." She fished a slip of paper out of a pocket and handed it to him.

"When was that?"

"Just before I left for the station."

Duke flipped his cigarette stub into the street. "By the way, how did you know I was down at headquarters?"

"Somebody telephoned. They told me you were in a jam and needed an attorney—they should have said a nurse. I didn't recognize the voice." Anxiety crept into her tone. "You didn't tell me why Egan turned you free, Duke."

DUKE pushed himself erect in his seat. "I can't answer yet, except to say that there must be a damn good reason, otherwise he wouldn't have done it. Don't underestimate old Egan, he makes a fox look like a moron by comparison." He reached up and adjusted the rear-view mirror so that he could see behind without turning his head.

"Don't drive so fast, darling," he suggested.

"Why—" Phyllis asked, startled. "I always drive—"

"Because you're making it tough for those dog-faced flatfeet of Egan's to stay on our tail."

She whistled softly. "You mean they are following us, Duke? Shall I lose them?"

"Uh-uh. I know a better way. We don't want them chattering up our own apartment, so drive to Chelsea Street. I know a nice quiet family hotel. You remember it, darlink; I took you there for a couple of days right after I gave you that nice mink coat."

Phyllis shot him a malicious glance.



"You know very well I never had a mink coat."

Duke chuckled. "Pardon me. I got us confused with two other people."

Phyllis Martindel brought the coupé to a stop before a small hotel that was sandwiched in between two austere apartment houses. A bell-hop ran across the sidewalk and yanked open the door.

Duke handed him a dollar. "Put this bus in a safe place, son. We won't want it for several hours; I need some sleep." He left the hop in charge of the coupé and crossed the sidewalk. As he pushed open the door of the hotel, he glanced over his shoulder and saw a sedan drift slowly past.

"I don't understand how you can talk of sleep at a time like this," sighed his wife. "I never felt less like sleeping in my life."

Duke chuckled. "Well, Phyl, keep it a secret then," he whispered as they approached the desk.

**A**FTER exchanging the usual greetings with the hotel clerk, Duke picked up the pen and wrote *Mr. and Mrs. Duke Martindel* in bold letters across the registry card. "And now," he told the clerk, "we want a room with a southern exposure. I am very particular about rooms."

The clerk picked up a key ring. He signaled to an assistant to take his place and then he circled the counter. "The only rooms we have with a southern exposure, Mr. Martindel, face on an alley at the rear," he said doubtfully. "I'll be glad to show you what we have." He led the way to the elevator. As the lift started to rise, he told the operator to stop at the sixth floor.

Duke interrupted him. "That's too high. My wife has a very poor heart; she likes something nearer the ground than that. Don't you, darling?"

Phyllis gave him a quick grimace. "Of course," she acquiesced.

At the clerk's command, the elevator paused at the second floor and they got out. The clerk showed them a room on the southwest side.

"How do you like this, Mrs. Martindel," he inquired.

Before Phyllis could reply, Duke cut in. "No, this won't do. How about something on the other side of the hall."

The clerk shrugged and led the way across the hall. As they passed through the door, Phyllis whispered: "Have you gone completely crazy?"

Duke winked. "Don't forget, I was shot in the head."

The next room seemed to please the detective, although it appeared identical with the other one. But the clerk was used to cranky customers, so he politely inquired if there was anything else they wanted.

Duke nodded. "Yes, I want perfect quiet." He tapped his bandaged head significantly. "I had a slight accident and I intend to get a little rest. Please put a *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door and a plug in the phone. Under no circumstances do I wish to be bothered. If there are any visitors or phone messages, kindly get the name or numbers. Is that plain?"

"Certainly, sir," agreed the clerk. "I will see that you are not interrupted."

Duke handed him a bill. "Since we had no baggage, I will pay in advance for the room. Put the receipt in my mail box." He dismissed the clerk with a wave of his hand.

As the door closed, Phyllis sank on the bed and made a weary little gesture with her hands. "Crazy! Crazy as a loon! A murder charge hanging over your head, the police trying to kill you and you come to a respectable hotel and act like an old maid on her honeymoon."



"No such thing," he corrected her, "As an old maid on a honeymoon."

"Be serious, Duke," Phyllis begged. "What in the world made you do this. Why, you said yourself that the police were following you. They will be sitting down in the street waiting for you."

"Exactly, darling. That's what I'm counting on. Do you know why I didn't take that room across the hall? Well, this room has a fire escape, the other did not. I am very timid about fires, you know."

Phyllis grimaced. "Oh, you fool! I see it now. You went to all the trouble of renting this room and telling those monstrous lies, just to sneak out of here and lose the police. I could have lost them in five minutes."

He kissed her. "Remarkable, Watson! But I don't want to lose them; I want them sitting out front and I want headquarters to believe I'm holed up here asleep. You can bet your sweet little life that right this very minute, a scared desk-clerk is repeating my orders to a couple of Egan's bloodhounds."

"So what?"

"So I take French leave through that window and get in touch with that double-crossing Sam Skuro. After that, well, who knows."

Duke hurried into the bathroom. He carefully unwound the bandage and found that the wound had caked over. He gingerly adjusted his hat and came back into the bedroom. Phyllis still sat on the edge of the bed looking very crestfallen.

"Oh! Duke, why did you get mixed up in this terrible affair. Let's take a boat to Europe, or someplace."

"I offered you that, Mrs. Martindel," he reminded her with a grin, "but you chased me into this, literally kicked me headlong into it. Now I've got to get out of it. Bye." He brushed her cheek with his lips, crossed the room and raised the sash.

The alley appeared deserted. The fire escape was the type that descends with weight, so Duke eased his bulk through the window and turning, blew a kiss to his wife. "I'm glad you have a weak heart, darling. Hope it's over me."

Phyllis wrinkled up her pert little nose at him. "Conceited idiot!" she jeered as he softly closed the window behind him and disappeared.

Once on the alley level, Duke swung west. At the first street that intersected the alley, he turned south until he located a drug store. Inside, he found a phone booth, dialed headquarters and asked for Captain Dombey. When he finally heard the low, quiet voice of the veteran detective on the wire, he said: "Hello, Skipper. This is Martindel."

Dombey grunted in surprise. "I wasn't expectin' a call from you, Duke."

"I imagine not. Are you working on the Washburn case, Skipper?"

"We're all workin' on it, in a way," Dombey replied cautiously. "The drag-net's out for Skuro an' Nuene."

"Preferably dead, eh?"

Dombey gave another noncommittal grunt. "I heard somethin' like that," he admitted dryly.

From his pocket, Duke fished out the memo his wife had given him. "I think I can locate that pair, Skipper," he said, "but I have reasons for wanting them taken alive. How about it?"

The copper agreed. "That's all right with me, Duke. What's the angle?"

"Call the telephone company and get the address on this telephone number." He tilted the slip of paper so that the light fell across it. "Hempstead Two-four-two-o-six. Then pick up an extra gun for me and meet me alone."

"Where?"

"Drive down Market. Go slowly after you pass Glendale Avenue. I'll hop aboard if everything is O. K."



"I'll be there in twenty minutes," the copper promised and hung up.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Trap For Rats

CAPTAIN DOMBEY looked just what he was—a straight cop. Nature had molded him for the task; years in harness had sculptured his character in deep, seamed lines. He was broad and strong, built close to the ground, with powerful neck and ham-like fists, the better to fight when the going was rough. His crag of a jaw might represent bull-headed aggressiveness, or perhaps just strength of character.

Time had mellowed nature's work by carving deep channels along his leathery old face, by crowning his massive head with thick silvery hair, and by giving to his voice a low richness that stirred the listener. Through twenty years of departmental intrigue, of crime, of hatred and tragedy, old Skipper Dombey had gone his quiet, sure way, doing his work as best he could, sticking, helping, fighting.

As Duke Martindel swung onto the running board of the Skipper's machine, he felt all those things in one quick rush of confidence.

Dombey wasted no words in idle greeting. "That number you gave me—it's a roomin' house on Chester Street. Want to go there?"

Martindel slipped into the seat, nodded. "Who killed Washburn, Skipper?"

Dombey grunted. "I'll bite. It was supposed to be Sam Skuro an' Gus Nuene."

"Couldn't have been. They got an alibi."

Dombey glanced sideways. "How do you know, Duke? You were supposed to be robbin' a bank."

Martindel nodded grimly. "Sam and Gus framed me on that, Skipper." He

briefly recounted the series of events that had transpired since the moment he was awakened to find Skuro and Nuene in his room.

Dombey remained silent. At length he shook his head deliberately. "Nuene might pull that, but it don't sound like Sam Skuro. Sam has slugged too many men to make a mess of it like you say Foy was."

"That's the rub," Duke growled. "Foy was either beaten to death and then gagged, which would be silly, because any fool could have seen he was finished, or else he was bound and gagged and then battered, which would be needless brutality."

"That's what I can't figger," Dombey contributed. He took a gun out of his coat pocket and pushed it toward his companion. "I don't think you'll need this; I've pinched Sam a dozen times an' never had to use one."

Duke tested the balance of the revolver, flipped open the cylinder and checked the load, then shoved it into his pocket. He was about to speak, when Dombey suddenly slowed the machine.

"What's this?" he growled. "There's the dead wagon in front of the roomin' house I was headin' for."

Duke felt a queer, unfamiliar tightening around his diaphragm as he glanced through the windshield. A crowd stood in a great semi-circle around the coroner's small black truck and uniformed policemen were seeking to clear a path for traffic.

"Looks like we was late," Dombey commented morosely. He pulled over to the curb and stopped. "You wait here, Duke. I'll mosey over an' prowl the joint." He slipped out to the sidewalk and melted into the excited throng.

Duke slumped in his seat, jerked his hat down until the brim rested on the bridge of his nose and lighted a cigarette.



Intuitively he knew the answer, but when Dombey came back to the car five minutes later, he verified it.

"Sam an' Gus got it," he grunted laconically. "Resistin' arrest."

Duke felt a little sick. It came to him suddenly that he had not eaten since the day before. As though the veteran read his mind, Dombey suggested.

"Let's get a cup of coffee, kid." Without waiting for a reply, he piloted the car around the first corner and drove until he came to a small, counter lunchroom.

COFFEE warmed him, stirred him out of his apathy. "I counted on Sam," Duke mused glumly. "He was my one alibi. Now Egan's got a fine set-up; he cleans up the Washburn killing by fastening it onto Skuro and Nuene and then bumping them off. I'm the goat on the murder of Chris Foy."

"It's bad," Dombey admitted.

"Bad, hell!" Duke retorted with a rueful grin. "It's terrible. Now I see why Egan turned me loose; he wanted me to lead him to Skuro. With them out of the way, I'll be next. They'll try to knock me off for resisting arrest!"

Dombey shook his head slowly. "Listen, Duke, nobody'll knock you off while you're with me."

"Thanks, Skipper, but you can't be with me always."

"That's what I was thinkin', Duke," Dombey said quietly. "The safest place for you right now is in jail as my prisoner. Why not let me book you on suspicion, then take over the case an' have my boys prove you didn't do it."

Duke laughed without pleasantry. "Skuro and Nuene tried to let some one prove them innocent, Skipper. They got a free ride in the official meat-wagon. No, I'll go it alone for—" He stopped as the waiter paused in front of him.

"Say, mister," said the waiter, "you're wanted on the phone."

Duke frowned. "You must have made a mistake. No one knows I am here. What name did they ask for?"

The waiter shrugged. "It's a dame. She didn't ask for you by name. She said there was a tall, good-looking young guy sittin' in here with a cop."

Dombey sniffed. "G'wan, Duke, that must be for you."

Martindel rose, walked to the rear of the lunchroom and picked up the receiver that dangled from a wall phone. Clapping it to his ear, he growled: "Hello?"

"It's your shyster mouthpiece," came the familiar voice of his wife. "I just thought you might be interested to know that two men have been following you."

Duke started. "Where are you, Phyl?"

"Across the street, in a drug store, you idiot. Knowing you need a wet nurse, I followed you after you left the hotel. This pair picked you up when you met Captain Dombey."

"Cops!"

"I don't think so, darling. They are young and sleek-looking. One—the tall one—walks with a limp in his left leg. The other is squat and tubby. He seems to walk on his heels."

"Where are they now?"

"Sitting in a green sedan halfway down the block. Now, you fool, will you go to Europe with me?"

Duke grinned wryly. "Can't just now, darling, I've got a business engagement. but will you please go home and quit playing detective!"

"Who is your engagement with, Mr. Martindel?"

"Two mugs in a green sedan, Mrs. Martindel," said Duke, as he pronged the receiver.

Duke's first impulse was to repeat to Dombey what Phyllis had told him, but by the time he reached his stool, he



changed his mind. The copper gave him a quizzical, sidelong glance.

"Someone you know?" he inquired.

Duke shrugged. "A dame who saw us enter. She tried to date me up. Called from the drug store across the street."

"That's the hell of bein' good-lookin'," grunted Dombey, then changed the subject by asking: "Well, what did you decide to do?"

Duke lighted a cigarette before answering, finally gave his decision. "I'm not going to risk my life in a courtroom, Skipper; I'll take my chances outside where I can do my own fighting. As it stands right now, I'm framed for a bank job and a murder, neither of which I committed. I know that Sam Skuro and Gus Nuene didn't kill Washburn. They're a pair of crooks, I'll admit, and they're better off dead, perhaps, but they did not murder Washburn."

"All of which doesn't help you," Dombey put in drily.

"Admittedly, but it does explain things. For instance, I committed a crime—compounded a felony when I sought to square that bank job by returning the money. Even a regular city cop has to break the law many times in order to get around some legal red tape in settling a more serious offense, but when a private dick gets tripped up, he's in a jam."

"You haven't any evidence as to who did kill Washburn," Dombey pointed out.

Duke shook his head. "Not yet."

"That 'yet' is the trouble," Dombey grunted. "If your hypothesis is correct, if the reason they released you was so you would lead 'em to Skuro and Nuene, then you've served your purpose an' your number is up about now. You won't have a chance even to get started, Duke. No you better come in with me."

Martindel grinned, but shook his head. "By the way, Skipper, do you know a couple of mugs, one tall—that walks with

a limp in his left leg, the other short, squat and gives the impression of walking on his heels?"

Dombey frowned, massaged his forehead with gnarled fingers. "Sounds like Louis Nagel an' Tubby Arnison. Nagel's a tall flashy-lookin' wop from St. Louis. Arnison used to be a stoolie for Egan before he graduated into the money rackets."

"Arnison still stool?"

Dombey snorted. "You tell me, kid."

"Guns?"

"Yeah—Nagel anyhow. Tubby's just a dirty little rat that started out snatchin' purses."

Duke pushed to his feet, jockeyed a coin down the counter and faced the copper. "Thanks, Skipper. My appreciation and all that. I'll be seeing you."

The old man shoved erect. "Wait a minute, kid, I'll tag along a while."

Duke gave his head a decisive shake. "Thanks, but I'd prefer to go it alone. There's a lot of angles to this and there's no use of you risking your pension on a losing bet. You can do me one favor though—if the breaks go against me, keep an eye on Phyl."

Dombey grunted. "I'll marry her myself the day she's a widder." He gave the younger man a friendly punch on the chest. "You're just a headstrong damn fool, Duke."

MARTINDEL grinned, swung around, and leaving Dombey staring after him, barged outside. He cast a quick glance across the street, but could see no sign of Phyllis. A whimsical smile twitched the corner of his mouth, then he let his gaze wander casually down the block. The green sedan was parked within a hundred yards of where he stood. His smile vanished. His hand brushed against the hard lump in his pocket where the gun reposed and he felt the impulse to run



amuck. He felt stifled, as though a great unseen web were slowly tightening around him. The sacrificial goat! But why? What was back of it all? Why were these mugs tailing him? How did they know where to pick him up? No one knew that but Dombey and himself. For a brief moment he felt the urge to charge the green sedan and gun out the pair, but almost immediately reason prevailed. That would be suicide and get him no place, except, perhaps, the morgue.

A cruising cab offered a chance to meditate. The driver caught his signal and a moment later he was comfortably ensconced in the tonneau. Up until the moment that the driver asked him where he wanted to go, Duke had been undecided, but when the question was suddenly propounded, he gave directions for reaching a small cottage in the mountains just back of the city. As the driver turned back to his task of piloting the swaying cab, Duke risked a hasty glance out the rear window. The green sedan had swung in line behind.

He had no plan. The tiny cottage suggested itself because of its isolation; he wanted to get these two hoods alone someplace where he was not likely to be disturbed. It was situated on the edge of a small lake; Duke and Phyllis had spent their honeymoon there.

He wanted, first to know why these men were tailing him and who sent them. He fished a cigarette out of his pocket and tapped it musefully against the window. Abruptly the possible answer came to him. Egan! Egan had released him on a writ when he might well have been held; Egan had sent his flat-feet to follow him, and now two hoods magically appear on his tail. That was too coincidental, especially since one of the pair was a stoolie of Egan's. There was only one possible explanation—Egan, knowing that Duke was friendly with Dombey and often

called when he was in trouble, had tapped the wires on all the Skipper's calls. That would explain the appearance of the two mugs at the rendezvous.

A grim, cynical smile twisted the corner of Martindel's mouth. He could use more direct methods in dealing with two known criminals than with the police. His fingers slipped into his coat pocket and massaged the checkered butt of the gun Dombey had given him. Perhaps Tubby Arnison could be induced to wag his tongue.

The cab suddenly swung into a clearing and stopped before the little cottage. Duke stepped out and handed the driver a bill.

"Want I should wait, mister?" asked the man at the wheel.

Martindel grinned, shook his head. "No. I'm expecting friends." He waved the cab away and mounted the steps to the wide veranda that encircled three sides of the little cabin. He opened the front door, walked swiftly through the dust-covered living room and let himself out a rear door. A short run brought him to the fringe of trees that formed a hedge around the cottage. He took out his gun and padded in a great arc until he came to a spot where he commanded a view of the front of the cabin.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Duke Makes A Killing

THE cab was gone. For a few moments he could see no sign of human life, then his sharp eyes picked up the outline of a man standing in the shadow of a tall tree. Even as Duke watched him, a second man—a short, fat fellow—eased out of the brush and joined his taller companion.

They held a whispered consultation, but their words did not reach the detective. However, their meaning was obvious, for



both drew guns, examined them briefly and slipped them into convenient pockets.

Duke sized them up. The tall one—Nagel, if Dombey was correct—was swarthy, and vicious-looking. His close-set eyes, thin mouth and the way he carried his head low, like a bull, suggested that he would be a tough nut to crack. His squat companion, on the contrary, had a moon-face that looked soft and flabby. He had eyes that could easily cradle fear. Coupled with a killer of Nagel's type, Tubby Arnison might conceivably commit murder, but if left to his own devices, Duke surmised that he would slide into rackets that carried with them a lesser chance of physical liability.

Nagel suddenly stepped into the clearing and approached the cottage; Arnison drew his gun, braced it against the tree and covered the veranda.

Duke's teeth bared in a cold smile. So that was it? Nagel was going to lure him out while Arnison shot him from ambush! He melted back into the trees and silently made his way to a spot directly back of the stubby little gunman. Then he eased forward—

Tubby Arnison's first indication of misfortune came when Duke pressed the cold muzzle of his revolver against his well-rolled neck.

"Not a sound!" Martindel reached forward and removed the gun from the tremulous fingers. "Now call to your partner and tell him to come back here!" He increased the pressure of the gun on Arnison's neck. "Any tricks, mug, and I'll part your hair from the inside!"

Arnison nodded, terror-stricken. He lifted his voice and jerked huskily, "Hey, Louis, come here a minute!"

Nagel glanced back, hesitated and then started to retrace his steps. When he reached a point about halfway across the clearing, he suddenly jerked to a stop. Perhaps some animalistic instinct warned

him of danger, for his hand suddenly streaked toward his pocket.

Martindel saw it coming. He took a quick swing at Arnison's head with one gun. As the squat hood toppled into the brush with a squeal of pain and terror, he jumped into the open.

"Don't try it, Nagel!" he warned.

The St. Louis gunman flung a curse at him and brought his gun up shooting. Duke's first shot was high. Before he got in a second, a slug from Nagel's gun tore into his leg, turned him halfway around and dropped him on his hands and knees. He rolled over, braced one elbow on the ground and fired twice in quick succession.

Nagel was dead before he hit the ground!

Duke rolled over hastily, expecting trouble from Arnison, but the tubby little assassin was clinging groggily to a tree, trying to wipe the blood out of his eyes. Duke inched over to a sapling, pulled himself erect and tested his leg. It was numb now and refused to hold his weight.

He dropped Arnison's gun into his pocket, picked up his own, and turned the muzzle on the fat man. "Snap out of it, Tubby," he rasped harshly. "Amble out there and grab hold of your boy friend. Drag him into the bushes here. We may be having company. Step lively."

Arnison wavered, wet his thick lips and looked at the gun. Duke let his thumb toy with the hammer. That decided the gunman. He mumbled something unintelligible and swayed across the clearing. He hesitated a long time before he could bring himself to touch his dead confederate, but at last he caught Nagel by the ankles and dragged him into the surrounding trees.

"Now," commanded Duke, "we'll go into the house where we can have a nice, quiet chat. Get going, mug!"



ARNISON moved with surprising alacrity. Duke broke off a branch to serve as a walking cane and hobbled after him. It was painful work limping up the four steps to the veranda for he had to keep his eyes fastened on the waddling bulk of his prisoner. But at last he made it and pushing into the cottage for the second time since his arrival; dropped into a chair near the door. He let his eyes settle musefully on the other's flabby features.

Arnison stood with his back to a small table in the center of the room. He was a man close to forty with watery eyes that shifted constantly. His red, bulbous nose was criss-crossed with little purple veins and his puffy cheeks seemed to drag down the skin under his eyes like a St. Bernard's. Periodically he opened his mouth as if to speak, but no words came.

It was Martindel that broke the stillness.

"Arnison, I'm not going to fool with you. I'm going to ask you some questions and I want smart answers. First, who sent you after me to make this kill?"

The prisoner wagged his head. "We weren't goin' to bop you, fella. You got us all wrong. This was just a heist, see! We saw you pass down the state highway an' tailed you—"

The roar of Martindel's gun drowned his words. He gave a shrill bleat of terror, clawed at the fleshy part of his leg and toppled on his face.

Duke's voice was chilled. "That didn't hurt you much, Arnison, but it's a sample of what you can expect if you keep on with those lies. Now I happen to know you picked up my trail down in the city about the time I met Captain Dombey. Who sent you after me, Arnison?"

The hood sobbed, dragged himself to his hands and knees and crawled toward the detective like a cur dog. "S'help me, I don't know," he whined. "Nagel got the

orders from somebody, but I don't know who. Nagel's dead now an'—"

Duke leaned forward. He cupped the gun in the palm of his hand and struck the hood across the side of the head. Arnison yelped and fell on his face, grovelling.

Martindel straightened. "I know different, Tubby. Talk, or I'll shred you to ribbons. I've no compunction about killing you; none whatever. For the last time—who sent you two guns after me?"

Arnison slowly lifted his head and stared at Duke through a veil of blood. "I can't, s'help me! He'd kill me—"

Duke raised his gun to the level with the other's battered countenance. "O. K., Tubby, if you'd rather have it now." He thumbed back the hammer.

Arnison hesitated until he heard the second click of the gun, then terror seized him. "Wait!" he bleated. "I'll talk!" His head fell forward into his arms and he sobbed out the name so huskily that Martindel had to lean forward to catch it.

"Egan—"

Duke's mouth contracted. "Why?" he rasped.

"He wanted you dead for the bank job!" choked Arnison.

DUKE grunted, leaned back and contemplated the man on the floor. So his guess was correct—Egan had made a deal with these two rats to remove him. His scowl deepened. What good was this information? If he returned Arnison to the city, the stool-pigeon would deny his accusation the moment he was under the protection of the police. Even if he didn't, it would be the word of a known criminal against a police official; Duke knew he could not get to court with anything as slim as that.

Duke pulled himself erect, hobbled across the room and picked up a telephone. He pulled it as far as the cord



would allow, then placed it on the floor.

"Tubby," he commanded grimly. "I want you to make a call, a very important call."

Arnison lifted his head and stared. The detective canted his head toward the instrument. "Crawl over to it, Tubby. Call Inspector Egan, tell him Nagel shot me, but that he got it as well. Suggest that you found something of vital importance and ask him to come out here. The idea is, Tubby, that unless Egan comes to this cottage, you're going out the hard way."

Arnison choked. "You want me to lure Egan here? My God, guy, you don't know what you're askin'!"

Duke squinted along the barrel of his gun. "Have you ever seen what happens when they take you to the morgue, Tubby? How they rip you open down the middle, stick a water-hose into you to wash out your insides. If I shoot you in the head, for instance, they'll cut off your skull to see where the bullet went. They'll—"

"Cut it!" screamed the gunman. "Cut it, I tell you!"

"There's the phone, Tubby," Duke suggested drily.

Arnison inched toward the instrument on his stomach. His tremulous fingers fumbled with the receiver as he sought to remove it.

"Easy, Tubby, easy," cautioned Martindel. "I'll hold you responsible if Egan doesn't show up, so don't let him smell a rat."

Arnison sobbed aloud, shuddered convulsively, then took down the receiver. In broken sentences he jerked out the number of headquarters, but by the time he got the inspector on the wire, his voice was reasonably cool.

"Arnison, chief. I don't want to talk over the phone, see, but can you come up here right away?" He shot a sidelong glance at Duke, then shut his eyes as

though to blot out the vision of the gun muzzle. "We—Nagel got him, chief, but you better come. I found somethin', see. I—yeah, we're up in a cottage on Bear Mountain." He choked out the directions for reaching the cabin, then slowly cradled the receiver.

Duke grinned cynically. "He's coming?"

Arnison shuddered. "He's comin'!" he sobbed and dropped his head in his arms.

WHEN the noise of a car reached the cabin about a half hour later, the stage was set. Duke Martindel stood back of the entrance door, leaning on the top of a chair. Tubby Arnison, still trembling with terror, crouched on another straight-backed chair beside the center table, facing the front door. Brakes ground outside, then the motor died. A car door slammed.

Arnison mumbled something. Duke wagged the gun. "Easy, Tubby," he whispered. "Easy."

Steps pounded up across the veranda, paused a moment then the door swung open. Egan strode into the room.

"Well, Arnison, where is he?" demanded the inspector. Duke reached out and slapped the door shut with his free hand. "Right here, Egan! No, don't reach for that gun. You can't make it!"

The uniformed man swiveled like a cornered hobo. For a brief instant he seemed undecided whether to go for his gun, then he slowly elevated his hands.

"What is this?" he snapped.

"This," Duke told him drily, "is a show-down. Arnison here has been telling me some interesting things, Inspector, things that corroborate some old-time suspicions of mine."

Egan flashed a venomous glance at the quaking stoolie, then turned back to Martindel. "You're a damn fool, Duke!" he commented. "Put down that gun!"

"You're right, Egan, I am a damn



fool," Duke admitted. "But I'm not going to put down this gun until we settle a few points of interest. First, I'd like to know what excuse you have for putting a couple of hoods on me!"

Egan shrugged. "You're crazy. You can't prove a thing."

"Who said anything about proving it? I'm curious, that's all, damn curious. For instance, I'm curious to know how it happened that Harry Washburn was murdered at the exact moment that Skuro and Nuene were cracking the County and Suburban Bank, how you appeared at the bank just as I was leaving." His mocking smile vanished into a scowl. "And, lastly, Egan, I'd like to know why you deliberately shot at my head."

"We don't take bank robbers alive," growled Egan, "not after they kill a watchman."

Duke sniffed. "But you weren't supposed to know that Foy was dead when you walked in there. That's another point I'd like cleared up, Egan—the killing of Foy. Sam and Gus didn't kill him, I didn't, so who did?"

"You can't talk your way out of this mess," Egan threatened.

Duke grinned sardonically. "I'm not going to do the talking, Inspector. Tubby here, for instance, knows a lot of interesting things."

Egan ponderously swung his head. Arnison winced before the cold glitter of those colorless eyes. "S'help me, chief, I ain't—" he choked to a stop.

Duke hefted his gun. "Well, Tubby, make up your mind. Don't be bashful—this is a nice, chummy get-together. Now what do you know about this business?"

Arnison pulled himself erect, his fingers tightened around the back of his chair. "My God, you wouldn't murder a man in cold blood?"

"Don't be a fool!" rasped Egan. "He's bluffing you."

Duke smiled, but said nothing. His thumb dragged back the hammer of his revolver and in the silence of the dusty room, two distinct clicks were audible. Arnison's voice rose to a shriek.

"Bluffin' hell! I ain't gonna die, I ain't, I tell ya."

Martindel had hoped to provoke an argument between his two captives and thus glean some of the truth back of the tangled mess. He well knew Egan's vicious temper and he counted on Arnison's fear of death to form a verbal explosion of some sort. But he was hardly prepared for what followed.

Arnison was trembling from head to foot. "You got me into this, Egan!" he shrilled. "He'll shoot me down like a dog. I won't die—s'help me, I won't, I tell ya—"

Duke swung his eyes to Egan to see how the latter was taking it, when Arnison flung the chair!

With one leg injured and unable to bear his weight, Duke had propped himself against the chair in front of him. Arnison's wild fling struck the chair, knocked it from under him and he fell headlong to the floor. As he went down, he tried to swing his gun, but Egan kicked it from his hand and it bounced across the room.

Duke cursed his own carelessness, rolled over and tried to drag himself erect. Then he paused. He saw Arnison swing and pounce toward the revolver. Just as the crook reached it, a gun roared. Arnison gave a startled yelp, pirouetted once and sprawled in a corner.

Duke jerked his eyes away, brought them back to Egan. The inspector was lowering his own service revolver and a faint dribble of smoke curled from the muzzle.

"There goes a perfectly good witness," Duke drawled cynically.

Egan turned. "You won't need any



witnesses," he growled. "Not where you're going."

Duke gave up trying to pull himself to his feet. He sat back on the floor and looked into the relentless features of the policeman. "So it's like that, Egan?"

The inspector nodded. "Just like that." He stepped sideways so that he could get a clear, unobstructed shot at the man on the floor.

Duke sighed. "Just one question. Why was I framed on that bank job?"

Egan drew back the hammer of his gun. "You can ask Arnison that when you meet him in hell."

Abruptly a gun thundered into the silence. Duke's first impression was that Egan had fired. The inspector stood with his arm still outstretched, but now his gun had vanished and his hand was dripping blood.

Duke called on his waning strength to drag himself erect. He jerked around to face the hoodlum, but Arnison still lay inert where he had fallen.

Then a door opened and Captain Dombey and Phyllis came into the room. Dombey covered Egan. Phyllis gave a little whimper and ran toward Duke, arms outstretched. He swayed forward to meet her. The floor rose suddenly. He went out.

**D**UKE recovered consciousness in the hospital to find Phyllis sitting on the edge of the bed, holding his hand. "Take it easy, darling," she whispered, and he saw that she smiled through her tears.

"How'd I get here?" Duke wanted to know.

A familiar voice answered from the foot of the bed. "They started to put you in the meat wagon," Dombey growled, "but your wife wouldn't stand for it. Was afraid they'd get their loads mixed, I guess, so you made the trip in an ambulance."

Duke winced as he tried to move his leg. "Say, where's Egan? Did you kill him?"

"Naw," grumbled Dombey. "We're savin' him to hang. I'll try to get passes for us all—we can make a day of it."

Phyllis shuddered. "Not the Martin-dels," she assured the grinning copper. "They are going to Europe."

Duke groaned. "They can't hang him without more evidence than we got. Gosh, what a lousy shame you didn't show up before Arnison was killed." He frowned at them both. "Say, how did you two happen to show up?"

Dombey chuckled. "Well, it's a long story, but I figured as long as you didn't want the date with the swell-lookin' jane in the drug store, I'd mosey over. I dated her up myself an' we ambled up here. By a strange coincidence, you was here."

Duke scowled at his wife. "So," he sneered, "you don't trust me? You follow me—"

"Oh, shut up!" Phyllis said.

"About Arnison," Dombey butted in, "he ain't dead. Egan's slug creased his skull, but it didn't do him no damage. However, me'n the doc made him think he was slated for the long trail. Did he talk? Ha!"

"Plenty. First, he says—" Dombey stopped as a physician motioned him to silence.

"Our patient has had enough, I'm afraid, Captain," the doctor said firmly. "The details can wait until—"

"The hell they can!" shouted Duke. "I want to know why Egan framed me?"

Dombey turned at the door. "O.K. You was in the way. Egan wanted a goat for the Washburn kill, so his stoolies tipped him off to the fact that Sam Skuro an' Gus Nuene were set to crack the bank at midnight. Egan set a watch on the bank job and sent Arnison an' Nagel out to bump Washburn. According to Arnison,



Nagel did the actual kill. Egan had Skuro and Nuene followed so that they couldn't establish an alibi, but somebody tipped Sam off by telephone and he an' Gus beat it over to your place."

"Humph!" grunted Duke thoughtfully. "I'm beginning to see through it. Who killed Foy?"

"Egan. They followed you to Henderson's home, guessed what you was goin' to do, so Egan figured it a good chance to frame you proper an' so have a sucker for the bank job. He gave Foy the works. Arnison saw him do it. Egan began to

get restless when he knew you was working against him, so he decided to let the boys polish you off. Well, so long." He closed the door.

The doctor took Phyllis by the arm and gently propelled her to the door. "No more questions for this young man," he announced firmly.

"Just one," shouted Duke. "Just one, Doc."

"And that is—"

"How soon can a guy travel to Europe with a leg like this?"

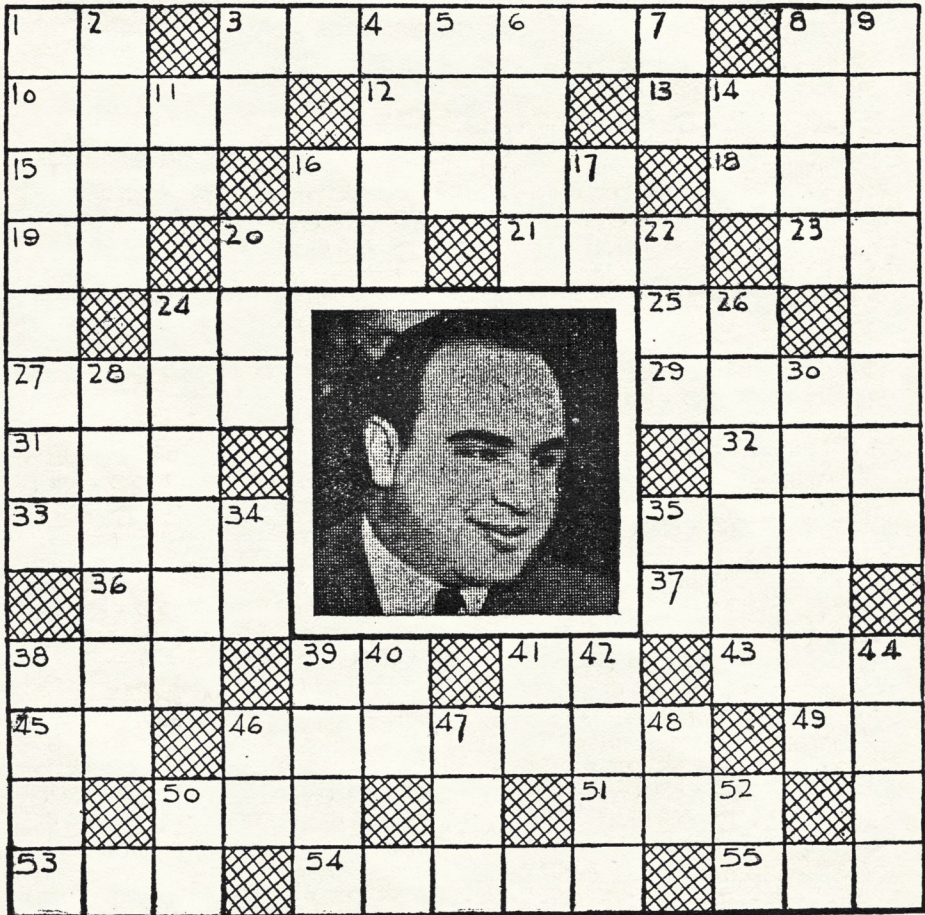
Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of March 3, 1933 of Dime Detective Magazine published twice a month at Chicago, Illinois for October 1, 1934. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Dime Detective Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York City, Editor, Harry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York City, Managing Editor, none, Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York City. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York City, Harry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York City, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York City. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of September, 1934. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County, N. Y. Co. Clk's No. 330, Reg. No. 6W435. (My commission expires march 30, 1936) [Seal] —Form 3526—Ed. 1933.



# CROSS ROADS OF CRIME

by

RICHARD HOADLEY TINGLEY



*Int. News Photo*

The pictured man is now serving time in Alcatraz Prison.



ACROSS

- 1 One of the pictured man's nicknames
- 3 Control; complete knowledge of
- 8 Conjunction
- 10 Mining vein
- 12 Antithesis of peace
- 13 He discovered Greenland
- 15 Opposite of amateur
- 16 A street-urchin
- 18 Mountain in Crete sacred to Zeus and Rhea
- 19 Personal pronoun
- 20 A ship's record
- 21 At the present time
- 23 The Norse god of war, otherwise called "Tyr"
- 24 About
- 25 Chemical symbol for "acetyl"
- 27 Require
- 29 Information; facts
- 31 Bend downward in the middle
- 32 A moccasin worn by frontiersmen
- 33 The lake on which Commodore Perry defeated the British in 1813
- 35 Fissure
- 36 An atom charged with electricity
- 37 Single
- 38 Hostelry
- 39 Seventh musical note
- 41 A bachelor's college degree
- 43 Completion
- 45 The giant king of Bashan as told in Joshua xii-4
- 46 Men
- 49 Sign of the infinitive mode
- 50 Pass (as in bridge)
- 51 Also
- 53 No particular one
- 54 Half dozens
- 55 A variety of whiskey

DOWN

- 1 The pictured man's first name
- 2 Tradition
- 3 Personal pronoun
- 4 Thieves' loot
- 5 A cap
- 6 Ireland
- 7 You (obsolete)
- 8 An assistant
- 9 One of the pictured man's nicknames
- 11 The first musical note
- 14 The smallest state
- 16 Pass on
- 17 Negative
- 20 Directed; preceded
- 22 Slang for large quantity
- 24 Vicinity
- 26 The pictured man's last name
- 28 The forming of ears of corn
- 30 Gift; ability
- 34 The sixth letter in the pictured man's first name and the fifth in his last
- 35 Exclamation to attract attention
- 38 Particle
- 39 Affiliations
- 40 Present tense of the verb, to be
- 41 Exist
- 42 Skills
- 44 Narcotic
- 46 Possessive pronoun
- 47 Levy
- 48 Therefore
- 50 Near
- 52 Otherwise

**J**OHN EDGAR HOOVER, lawyer and criminologist, was born in Washington, D. C. on January 1, 1895. He received his LL.B. at Washington University in 1916 and his LL.M. degree at the same university in the following year. He began his law practice in the nation's capitol in 1917 and continued until 1919 when he became special assistant to the Attorney General of the United States. In 1921, Hoover was appointed Assistant-Director of the United States Bureau of Investigation and in 1924, he was appointed Director. Since 1933, Mr. Hoover has been Director of the Division of Investigation, United States Department

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O		A	N		MAJOR JOHN EDGAR HOOVER					D		O		U		
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of Justice. Among other positions, he is a major in the Military Intelligence Division Service of the United States Army, Vice-chairman of the Advisory Board of the International World Police, life member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, honorary member of the International Association for Identification. After the adoption of the so-called "Lindbergh Kidnaping Law," Major

Hoover's activities, as head of the Division of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, began to embrace the investigation of all kidnaping cases in the United States. Besides being active in solution of the Lindbergh case, he was an important factor in the apprehension of the Roger Touhy gang in Milwaukee, and it was his operatives who brought about the notorious Dillinger's demise in Chicago a few months ago.



# Bones To Pick

IT IS a very healthy symptom, we believe, for any magazine to have a place somewhere in its pages where readers, writers and editors can get together and thrash out—to mix metaphors—the bones they have to pick with each other. It keeps the authors from getting too cocky when alert readers find things to quarrel with in the stories. It keeps the readers from getting too cocky when alert authors take issue with opinion or criticism from you fiction fans that may be too hastily made and not always founded on valid basis. And it keeps the editor from getting too cocky when he is made to realize, once in a while, that the authors and readers may both be on the right side of the fence and he, flat on his back, on the ground, on the wrong side.

Theoretically, a writer ought always to get his facts straight before he starts to pound his typewriter. And after a story is accepted the editor ought to verify those facts and correct anything that won't bear up under close scrutiny before letting a story go to press. Here's a case where author and editor both slipped and it took an alert reader to weigh the evidence and find it wanting. The following letter from Leavenworth, Kansas was welcome and we'd like to see more of the same sort.

Dear sir: After reading your page on gun angles and criticisms by different readers, I wish to make a criticism of my own. As a registered pharmacist of several years standing, I think I can speak my little piece

with a some small amount of authority.

In your story "The Flaming Shadow," by George Harmon Coxe, on pages 62 and 63 of the October 1st issue, he quotes Armstrong as drinking a solution of aconitine and recognizing it as an *alkali*. Now, an *alkali* is a caustic base such as caustic potash and ammonia water.

Aconitine is an *alkaloid* obtained from the dried roots of Aconitine Napellus, so you see there is quite a difference between the two.

Enjoying your stories more each issue and wishing you continued success, I remain,  
Yours sincerely—



Jack Allman

AND now there's just room to let a new member of our author's line-up introduce himself. He lives out in Connecticut right in the middle of the rural region about which he writes in *Homespun Homicide*. We give you Jack Allman—

Mining camps in Alaska with Indian kids as playmates . . . Dawson . . . when it was good . . . more camps . . . some trapping . . . some hunting . . . then back to the States for some rather sketchy schooling interspersed with such jobs as

roustabout on a cattle ranch in the Okanogan . . . bull cook in the big woods . . . pearl diver in one of Seattle's cheapest restaurants . . . blacksmith helper . . . boomcat on a steam shovel . . . hauling wool with a six-up team . . . skinning four with Sells Floto . . . some work with carnivals.

Prospecting . . . making a stake . . . sinking it back into the ground . . . then along came a war . . . France . . . the hospital . . . home . . . a crack at the New York stage . . . radio writing . . . and now, for four years, fiction.



**FROM A FAT MAN... to a HE-MAN ... in 10 MINUTES!**

**"I REDUCED MY WAIST 8 INCHES"**

WRITES  
GEORGE BAILEY

"I lost 50 pounds" says W. T. Anderson. "My waist is 8 inches smaller" writes W. L. McGinnis. "Felt like a new man" claims Fred Wolf. "Wouldn't sell my belt for \$100" writes C. W. Higbee.

**ACTUAL PHOTOGRAPHS SHOWING THE IMMEDIATE IMPROVEMENT IN APPEARANCE**



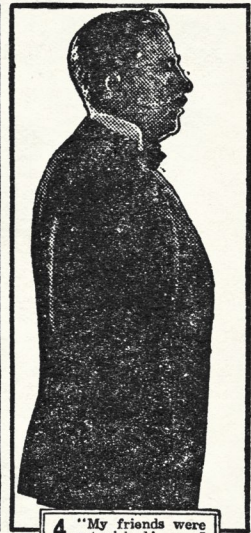
1. "I was just a fat man with a protruding stomach... ill at ease and clumsy—no pep to do anything!"



2. "I was ashamed to undress in the locker room—my friends poked fun at me and I had no answer!"



3. "Then I slipped on a Weil Belt... a transformation took place... what a difference—pounds seemed to have fallen away!"



4. "My friends were astonished!... I looked better—my clothes fitted me—and I felt like a million dollars!"

So many of our customers are delighted with the wonderful results obtained with the Weil Belt that we want you to—

**TRY THE WEIL BELT FOR 10 DAYS AT OUR EXPENSE!  
We GUARANTEE to REDUCE your WAIST  
THREE INCHES IN TEN DAYS... .**

... or it won't cost you one cent ... even the postage will be refunded!

**YES SIR:** I too, promised myself that I would exercise but it was too much like work—and it's darn hard to diet when you like to eat. The Weil Belt was just the answer—no diets, no drugs—I feel like a new man and I lost 8 inches of fat in less than 6 months!

**GREATLY IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE!**

The Weil Reducing Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 10 short days your waistline will actually be 3 inches smaller—three inches of fat gone—or it won't cost you one cent!

It supports the sagging muscles of the abdomen and quickly gives an erect, athletic carriage.

Don't be embarrassed any longer with that "corporation" for in a short time, only the admiring comments of your friends will remind you that you once had a bulging waistline.

**THE MESSAGE-LIKE ACTION THAT DOES IT!**

You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its constant gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or sit... its message-like action gently but persistently eliminating fat with every move you make.

Many enthusiastic wearers write that it not only reduces fat but it also supports the abdominal walls and keeps the

digestive organs in place—that they are no longer fatigued—and that it gently increases their endurance and vigor!

**DON'T WAIT—FAT IS DANGEROUS!**

Fat is not only unbecoming, but it also endangers your health. Insurance companies know the danger of fat accumulations. The best medical authorities warn against obesity, so don't wait any longer.

Send for our 10 day free trial offer. We repeat—either you take off 3 inches of fat in ten days, or it won't cost you one penny! Even the postage you pay to return the package will be refunded!

**SEND FOR 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER**

**THE WEIL COMPANY, INC.**

4812 HILL STREET, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

Gentlemen: Send me FREE, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and full details of your 10 day FREE trial offer.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

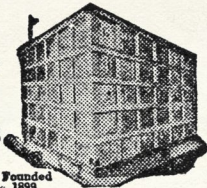
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All in the December 1st Issue of

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30x4.50-21	2.40	30x4	2.95
29x4.75-19	2.45	32x4	2.95
29x4.75-20	2.50	32x4 1/2	3.45
29x5.00-19	2.85	32x4 1/2	3.45
30x5.00-20	2.85	30x5	3.65
30x5.25-19	2.90	30x5 1/2	3.75
29x5.25-20	2.95	30x6	3.65
30x5.25-20	2.95	30x6 1/2	3.75
31x5.25-21	3.25	30x7	3.75
29x5.50-18	3.35	30x7 1/2	3.75
29x5.50-19	3.35	30x8	3.75
30x5.00-18	3.40	30x8 1/2	3.75
31x5.00-18	3.45	30x9	3.75
32x5.00-20	3.45	30x9 1/2	3.75
32x5.00-21	3.65	30x10	3.75
32x5.50-20	3.75	30x10 1/2	3.75
32x6.00-20	3.95	30x11	3.75
32x6.00-21	3.95	30x11 1/2	3.75
32x6.50-20	4.15	30x12	3.75
32x6.50-21	4.15	30x12 1/2	3.75
32x7.00-20	4.35	30x13	3.75
32x7.00-21	4.35	30x13 1/2	3.75
32x7.50-20	4.55	30x14	3.75
32x7.50-21	4.55	30x14 1/2	3.75
32x8.00-20	4.75	30x15	3.75
32x8.00-21	4.75	30x15 1/2	3.75
32x8.50-20	4.95	30x16	3.75
32x8.50-21	4.95	30x16 1/2	3.75
32x9.00-20	5.15	30x17	3.75
32x9.00-21	5.15	30x17 1/2	3.75
32x9.50-20	5.35	30x18	3.75
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32x10.50-20	5.75	30x20	3.75
32x10.50-21	5.75	30x20 1/2	3.75
32x11.00-20	5.95	30x21	3.75
32x11.00-21	5.95	30x21 1/2	3.75
32x11.50-20	6.15	30x22	3.75
32x11.50-21	6.15	30x22 1/2	3.75
32x12.00-20	6.35	30x23	3.75
32x12.00-21	6.35	30x23 1/2	3.75
32x12.50-20	6.55	30x24	3.75
32x12.50-21	6.55	30x24 1/2	3.75
32x13.00-20	6.75	30x25	3.75
32x13.00-21	6.75	30x25 1/2	3.75
32x13.50-20	6.95	30x26	3.75
32x13.50-21	6.95	30x26 1/2	3.75
32x14.00-20	7.15	30x27	3.75
32x14.00-21	7.15	30x27 1/2	3.75
32x14.50-20	7.35	30x28	3.75
32x14.50-21	7.35	30x28 1/2	3.75
32x15.00-20	7.55	30x29	3.75
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32x21.00-20	9.95	30x41	3.75
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32x22.50-21	10.55	30x44 1/2	3.75
32x23.00-20	10.75	30x45	3.75
32x23.00-21	10.75	30x45 1/2	3.75
32x23.50-20	10.95	30x46	3.75
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32x25.50-21	11.75	30x50 1/2	3.75
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32x35.50-21	15.75	30x70 1/2	3.75
32x36.00-20	15.95	30x71	3.75
32x36.00-21	15.95	30x71 1/2	3.75
32x36.50-20	16.15	30x72	3.75
32x36.50-21	16.15	30x72 1/2	3.75
32x37.00-20	16.35	30x73	3.75
32x37.00-21	16.35	30x73 1/2	3.75
32x37.50-20	16.55	30x74	3.75
32x37.50-21	16.55	30x74 1/2	3.75
32x38.00-20	16.75	30x75	3.75
32x38.00-21	16.75	30x75 1/2	3.75
32x38.50-20	16.95	30x76	3.75
32x38.50-21	16.95	30x76 1/2	3.75
32x39.00-20	17.15	30x77	3.75
32x39.00-21	17.15	30x77 1/2	3.75
32x39.50-20	17.35	30x78	3.75
32x39.50-21	17.35	30x78 1/2	3.75
32x40.00-20	17.55	30x79	3.75
32x40.00-21	17.55	30x79 1/2	3.75
32x40.50-20	17.75	30x80	3.75
32x40.50-21	17.75	30x80 1/2	3.75
32x41.00-20	17.95	30x81	3.75
32x41.00-21	17.95	30x81 1/2	3.75
32x41.50-20	18.15	30x82	3.75
32x41.50-21	18.15	30x82 1/2	3.75
32x42.00-20	18.35	30x83	3.75
32x42.00-21	18.35	30x83 1/2	3.75
32x42.50-20	18.55	30x84	3.75
32x42.50-21	18.55	30x84 1/2	3.75
32x43.00-20	18.75	30x85	3.75
32x43.00-21	18.75	30x85 1/2	3.75
32x43.50-20	18.95	30x86	3.75
32x43.50-21	18.95	30x86 1/2	3.75
32x44.00-20	19.15	30x87	3.75
32x44.00-21	19.15	30x87 1/2	3.75
32x44.50-20	19.35	30x88	3.75



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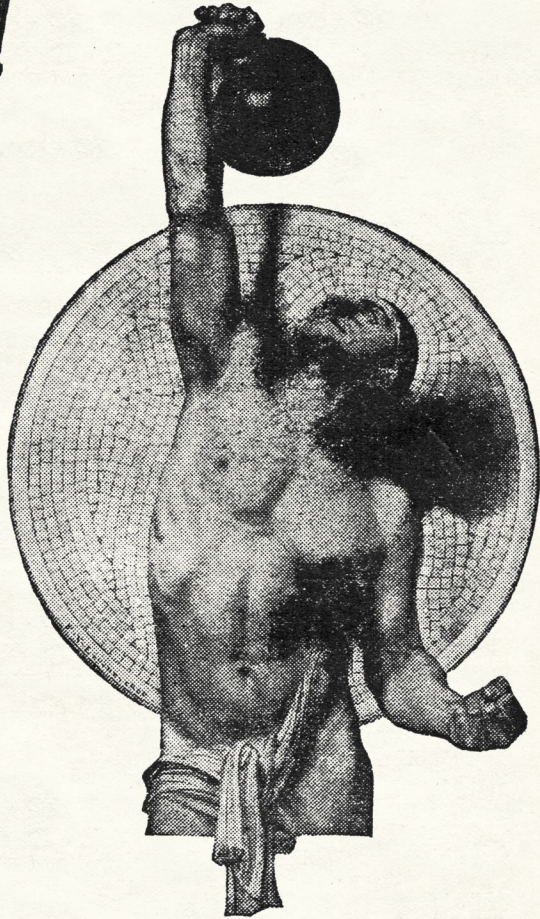
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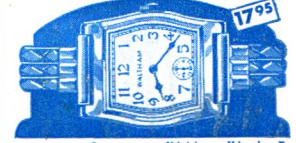
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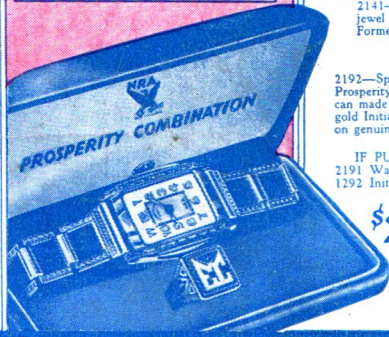
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