

JUNE 1<sup>ST</sup>

TWICE  
A MONTH

# 10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



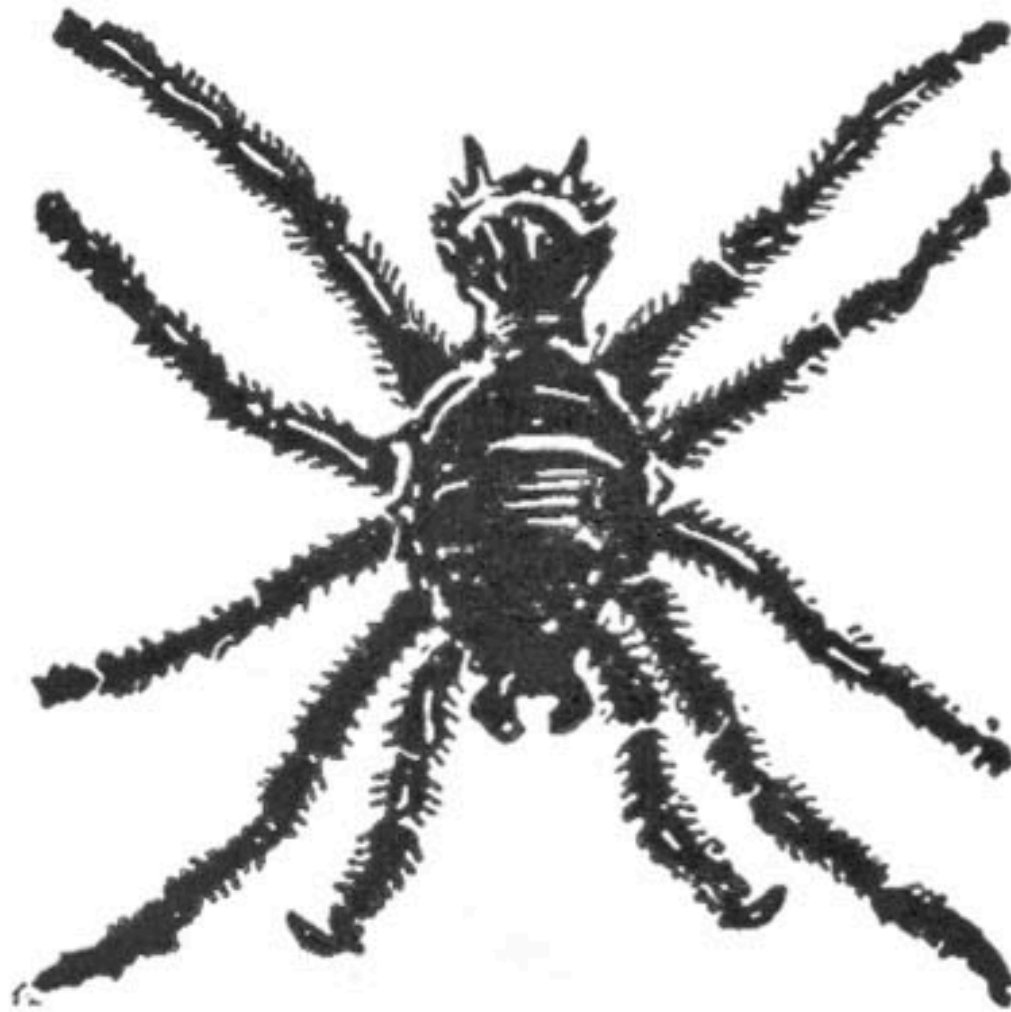
**A COUPLE OF  
QUICK ONES**  
*A CARDIGAN STORY*  
*by*  
**FREDERICK NEBEL**  
**JOHN LAWRENCE**  
**R.H. WATKINS**



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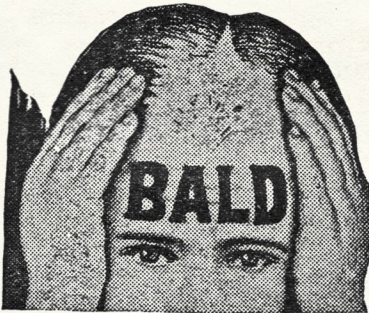
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# 10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



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EVERY STORY NEW

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**Vol. 18**                      **CONTENTS for JUNE 1st, 1935**                      **No. 2**

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**4—SMASHING NOVELETTE-LENGTH ACTION MYSTERIES—4**

*Keep your eyes glued on Cardigan of the Cosmos Agency as he pulls  
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*That change a suicide song to a murder melody in one short kill chorus.*

*Raise the lid of a*

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*There seem to be four sides to this puzzle business so we're*

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*Till you DIME DETECTIVE fans stop throwing cross words at us and make up your minds which side you want to be on.*

**Cover—"He Was Caught Half Turning".....** Walter Baumhofer  
*From Dangerous Dollars.*

*Story Illustrations by John Flemming Gould*

**Issued the First and Fifteenth of every month**

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**Watch for the June 15th Issue**

**On the Newsstands May 31st**

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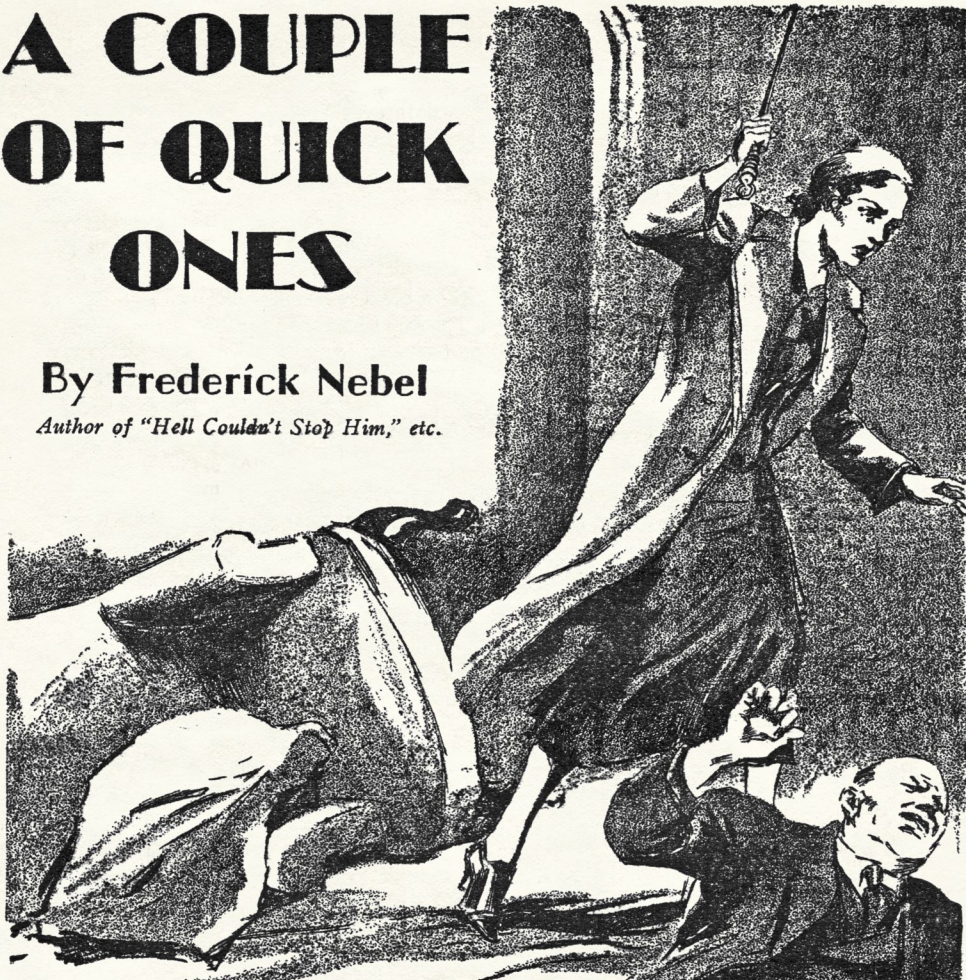
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# A COUPLE OF QUICK ONES

By Frederick Nebel

*Author of "Hell Couldn't Stop Him," etc.*



## CHAPTER ONE

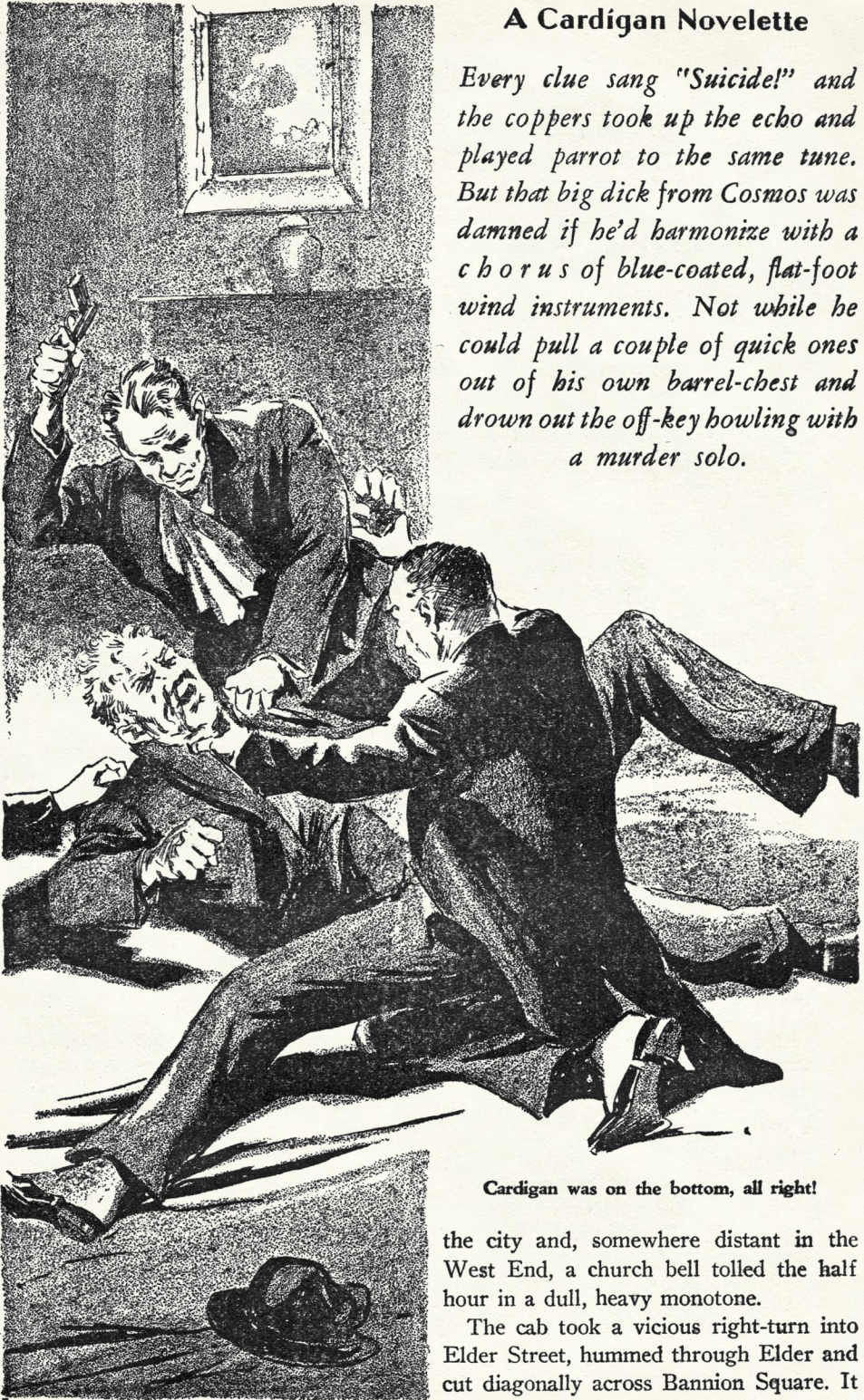
### Murder or Suicide

THE streets were empty at half past one. The cab sped down Center Street with nothing to stop it, not even a traffic light. After midnight they merely set the yellow caution signals. Portbridge's main drag was, by day, a hive of activity. At this hour there were only low night-lights in the shops and an occasional cop pegging his post and letting the speed limit slide. The sound of a freight train hauling heavily out of the east yards, came sharp and clear across



## A Cardigan Novelette

*Every clue sang "Suicide!" and the coppers took up the echo and played parrot to the same tune. But that big dick from Cosmos was damned if he'd harmonize with a chorus of blue-coated, flat-foot wind instruments. Not while he could pull a couple of quick ones out of his own barrel-chest and drown out the off-key howling with a murder solo.*



**Cardigan was on the bottom, all right!**

the city and, somewhere distant in the West End, a church bell tolled the half hour in a dull, heavy monotone.

The cab took a vicious right-turn into Elder Street, hummed through Elder and cut diagonally across Bannion Square. It

turned right where a sign said *No Right Turn* and pounded down the long grade of South Bannion Street past dull, respectable rooming houses.

At the base of the hill the driver whipped left into Sumner Street, jammed on his brakes and stopped an inch from the red-tinted headlights of a parked ambulance. "Boy, some brakes!" he crowed.

Cardigan picked his hat up off the floor, put it on and opened the door. There were other cars parked along the curb and on the sidewalk were a dozen-odd persons, men and women, some huddled in bathrobes. A couple of uniformed cops were hanging around in front of the three-storied frame rooming house and across the street some people were leaning on the windowsills of another house.

Cardigan handed the driver a bill and the latter said: "Hey—*pst*—d'ja notice me brakes?"

"I noticed them, buddy."

"Funny, them brakes. Sometimes they catch and then again sometimes they don't."

"What happens when they don't?"

"Well, y' see, chief, I ain't met nothin' yet when they don't, so I can't say. But hot damn, would that ambulance ha' been sore if they didn't work that time!" He chuckled, slapped his knee. "It would ha' been a joke on them, all right."

Cardigan tipped him a dime, said sadly, "If you wake up some day with the transmission in your hair, don't say I didn't warn you," and stretched his legs toward the door of the brown frame house.

One of the cops blocked him. "Press?"

"No. Keenan called me. Cardigan."

"O.K. Top floor." The cop dropped his voice: "Take it slow, pal. Keenan's got ants in his pants tonight."

"Feeling his ants, eh?"

The cop rolled his eyes. "Hell, yes!" he muttered.

CARDIGAN climbed slowly, heavily, his big face saturnine beneath his lop-eared hat. In his deep dark eyes was a look that was half troubled, half angry. He paid no attention to the people grouped in the second-floor corridor; they were also wrapped in robes, one in a blanket. He went past them and climbed to the next corridor and saw at the end of it a door partly open. The door was splintered but still clung to its hinges. He pushed it wide.

The room was square, fairly large, cheaply but neatly furnished—a combination bedroom and living room. It was pretty crowded: cops, a couple of newspapermen, the ambulance doctor, the coroner, Lieutenant Keenan and Sergeant Brotski, both plainclothed and from headquarters. They were all standing around or lounging in the chairs. On a narrow studio bed, which stood against one wall, lay the dead man. Cardigan, his fists hanging heavily in the pockets of his shabby ulster, stared at the bed with a kind of rueful bitterness.

Keenan said in a voice low and lazy with sarcasm: "Put your dough on the wrong horse, didn't you?" He was an incredibly tall and thin man of about fifty, elegantly dressed in dark clothes. His hair was the color of a silver-fox pelt, soft and silky and well groomed. His face was long, narrow, dead-white, with steely shrewd eyes, a mouth like a straight-drawn red line. His hands were covered with rings and a diamond glittered in his deep blue tie. He chuckled drily. "Take a good long look, Cardigan, and if your face grows red, we'll understand. The guy you went to bat for, the state's star witness, pulled a quick one on you." His slow dry voice was mocking. "It pains hell out of me to tell you that Walter Symonds committed suicide."

Cardigan said: "You pain more than



hell out of me. Suppose you skip the cheap comedy."

"You wouldn't get sore, would you?"

"If you think you rate a laugh, you're screwy. Did I come over here to listen to a lot of warm air or to get the facts? If you think you're funny, Keenan, I don't see anybody rolling in the aisles."

Keenan said in a low incisive voice: "I don't think I'm funny, Cardigan. With the joke on you, I don't have to be." He held out a coil of rope. "That is what he hung himself with!"

Cardigan took the rope, looked at it and said: "Greased, eh?"

"Sure. To make it slide, so it wouldn't jam."

"Where'd he hang himself?"

Keenan nodded to the window. "Stick your head out and on the left you'll see an iron hook. I guess they used to hang a washline on it."

**C**ARDIGAN went to the open window, leaned out and saw on the left, imbedded in the outside of the building, a sturdy iron hook. Below, the back yard was a dark well of shadow and beyond a low board fence and a low shed, empty fields stretched away. Cardigan leaned on the windowsill.

Keenan was saying: "Patrolman Damiani found him. Damiani was heading across those fields back there, taking a short-cut. The only light in the building was this one and Damiani thought he saw something hanging there. He came over to make sure."

"What time was that?"

"A quarter to one."

"How long was Symonds hanging here?"

"We figure since about sometime between eleven and twelve."

Cardigan backed into the room, turned and looked at the door. "What about the door?"

"We had to bust it in. It was locked and bolted on the inside." Keenan smiled mockingly. "I suppose your idea is to make out that somebody came in and hung him out the window."

"You couldn't do my thinking if you tried."

"I can guess as good as you, though. Too bad there's no fire-escape outside the window, so you could say some guy came and left that way." His voice was low, playful, malicious. He handed Cardigan a crumpled sheet of paper. "We picked this out of the wastebasket. He started to write a swan song and gave it up."

Cardigan scowled down at the unfinished letter.

Dear Laura: It seems useless for me to go on like this any longer. I'm only kidding myself. I know how you feel about it, and God bless you for it, but I feel that sooner or later someone will find out and I'd rather tell them now than wait and—

It ended there. Cardigan's lips tightened and he felt the hair on the back of his neck prickle. He felt that all eyes were upon him—Keenan's cool, mocking eyes and the eyes of the others, the cops, the newspapermen. Without raising his own eyes he passed the unfinished letter back to Keenan and muttered: "Who's Laura?"

"I'd like to know."

"Didn't he leave an address book?"

"He did, but there's no Laura in it."

Cardigan turned to the window again. "Did you look around down in the yard?"

"Yeah. We looked in the shed, too, just in case there was a ladder there. There wasn't." He leered. "Listen, I didn't put ideas in your head when I kidded you about you making up some other guy hung him out, did I?"

Cardigan said in a dull, preoccupied voice, "I wouldn't give your ideas standing room," and moved across to the bed.

He stared down at the dead man but hardly saw him. He was wrapped in thought, almost oblivious now to anyone in the room.

Keenan said: "That's the trouble with you, Cardigan. You think everybody's ideas stink but your own. You were the first to stand up and say I was cracked when I wanted to bear down on Symonds—"

"You landed on Symonds," Cardigan said without turning, "because he happened to be the easiest guy to land on. He was the guy that carried the money and he was alone when it was stolen, and he didn't see the guy that conked him and grabbed the bag and nobody else saw it, and because Symonds got the jitters you figured right away he framed the whole thing. The angle was so open-and-shut that I wouldn't spit on it."

Keenan's eyes got very frosty. "No. What you had to do, you had to make a fancy ease out of it. The writing was on the wall, but that wasn't good enough for you; you had to turn your puss the other way and make out that I was a lousy blockhead."

CARDIGAN turned and raked him with a head-to-foot look. "I got a big enough case against Mulvaney to rate an indictment, to bring him to trial. I placed him within a block of the crime—at the time of the crime. The bootblack saw him and identified him. The taxicab driver saw him. Mulvaney was carrying a Gladstone bag—it was big enough to hold the bag of money that Symonds had. Mulvaney was holding a handkerchief to his nose. It was bloody. When they picked Symonds up—those two truckmen—they swore there was blood on his knuckles. My contention was that, when Symonds was blackjacked, his hand flew back and accidentally socked Mulvaney in the nose. We know that, a week before the crime, Mulvaney had to move

from the Flagg Hotel because he owed two months' rent. We know he owed a liquor bill and food bill and bills for clothes. We know that, a week after the crime, he bought a new car. We know that he has a record a mile long for similar crimes. And with all that stuff in your files, it took me to find it. And before he was jugged an hour, who turned up as counsel? Tully Pomeroy, the criminals' friend—at a price."

Keenan's smile was chill, satiric. "All pretty. All very pretty, Cardigan. Except that the day before the star witness is to go on the stand and testify he"—Keenan waved a hand languidly toward the corpse, then toward the window—"goes and hangs himself. He starts a letter to a gal and hasn't the guts to finish it and chucks it in the basket." He flexed his lips, bent his frosty silver brows. "The writing's on the wall again, Cardigan, but you're too damn stubborn to read it and take it on the chin."

Cardigan looked at the wall. "There's one thing I don't see on the wall, bright eyes. And you don't, either."

"Tell me, teacher."

"The money. The seventy grand that was stolen."

Keenan made an impatient gesture. "You had Mulvaney brought to trial without showing the money!"

"Use your head, if that's what you wear on your shoulders. When a guy commits suicide, he does it because he wants to clear things up. If a guy committed suicide because he yanked seventy thousand dollars, he'd tell where he bunked the money."

Keenan looked amazed. "You mean to stand there and tell me that Symonds *didn't* commit suicide."

"I mean to stand here and tell you that I don't know whether he did or not—and neither do you."

Keenan spread his hands wearily to

ward the reporters. "The door bolted from the inside, the unfinished letter, no fire-escape, no ladder or marks of a ladder in the yard, the guy hanging by the neck outside his window—and he didn't commit suicide."

"Take it easy," Cardigan warned. "I said I didn't know."

"I know!" Keenan snapped. "And if the press wants a statement, there it is. I believe Symonds committed suicide. And as for you," the lieutenant rasped in a voice hard with scorn, "the only thing you're trying to do is get out from under the boner you pulled when you collared Mulvaney." Color actually came into his thin face and his pale eyes shimmered. "You talked the state's attorney's office into such a sweat over Mulvaney that anything I said about Symonds was given a swift kick in the pants. I was just a horse's neck. Symonds took that money!" he ripped out. He leveled a long arm at the corpse and chopped off: "There's your answer."

"Yours," Cardigan said, going to the door. "Not mine."

Keenan leveled an arm after him. "It'll be yours too, baby, before you're much older. I'm no flash-in-the-pan. I began learning how to be a cop twenty-five years ago and—"

"When do you expect to be one?" Cardigan said, pulling open the splintered door.

Keenan said, in a stony voice: "I can take that kind of crack, too, and laugh."

"Well, I don't see you taking it and if that's a laugh on your kisser, I've been kidded all my life."

Sergeant Brotski, scowling beneath his black porcupine hair, said, "A push in the face might do that guy good," and came halfway to the door, impressed with the idea, adding: "If I had you alone in a room, guy, I'd take you apart."

"If you had me alone in a room, Brot-

ski, you wouldn't have the guts to try."

Keenan clipped: "Cut that nonsense, Hank. Come back here. There's other ways to make that wisecrack say uncle."

"Be thinking them up," Cardigan said contemptuously, and went out.

He went down the stairs slowly, a great deal more slowly than he had climbed them. His forehead was wrinkled with doubt, his eyes dark with anger and frustration. When he reached the lower hall he paused and ground his palm thoughtfully on the newel post, chewed on a corner of his mouth. Then he turned and strode to the rear of the hallway, unbolted the back door and stepped out into the darkness of the yard. The night air was damp, cold, but the sun had shone brightly during the day and the ground was soft, cushiony. He made his way through short, ragged grass to the shed, entered and turned on his small pocket flashlight. He went around inside the shed, following the flashlight's beam; snapped it off finally and stood for a long minute in the darkness, sunk in unhappy thought.

With a low sigh he again returned to the yard, looked up and saw the lighted window of Symonds' room. Going to the ground beneath it, he bent and sprayed his flashlight around, saw no ladder marks in the soft earth. Still bent over, he moved awkwardly, used his free left hand to rummage in the tattered grass; tossed stone after stone out of the way. Presently he tossed away an object that was not a stone, and realizing his oversight, hastened to recover it. It was a small, straight-stemmed briar pipe with an oddly shaped bowl.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Seventy-Grand Hunch

THE Bearcat was an all-night bar and snack place between the theater district and the tony West End. The Bear-

cat itself was pretty tony, but in a nice way. It was small, snug, paneled in oak, with brown leather chairs in the room where the tables were and high chairs with little curved backs at the bar. Cardigan stopped for a Swiss-on-rye and a bottle of beer and went into the bar to get it.

Sam Sheffield, the Cosmos Agency's local attorney, was sitting on one of the stools and sucking dreamily at an absinthe frappé.

"I figured you'd be here, counsellor," Cardigan said, climbing onto a chair without further ceremony.

"How'd you figure that out?" Sheffield asked without seeming to be much interested.

"Well, you've been here every night for the past two weeks. Maybe that had something to do with it."

"Smart fella. 'Orace," he said to the barman without looking at him, "give my friend a drink."

"Right-o, sir," the pop-eyed barman chirped. "W'ot will hit be, Mr. Cardigan?"

"Beer and Swiss-on-rye and I'll put the mustard on."

"Right-o, sir."

SHEFFIELD continued to brood over his drink. He was a man who might have been forty or sixty and was fifty-three. His hair was a peppery gray fuzz atop a domed head and beneath it his face looked battered and warped as though it had weathered a thousand storms. His skin was crisscrossed with wrinkles, it looked tough as leather. He was not a big man.

Cardigan said: "What are you looking down-at-the-mouth about?"

"I'm troubled."

"That's what you think."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean if you think you're troubled

now, you'll probably pass out over what I tell you."

"Oh, I don't know. I'm troubled enough. It's about some nut came to see me today. And about Napoleon."

"I know; you're drunk."

"No, Jack. I'm just troubled. This nut came to me and wanted me to collect all the statues I possibly could of Napoleon. All of them. All of the statues. Offered to pay me a ten-percent commission on the price I'd pay for each one."

"Maybe he's crazy about Napoleon."

Sheffield shook his head. "No, he hates the guy."

"Listen, are we talking about the same thing?"

"I'm talking about Napoleon and this fellow not liking Napoleon and wanting me to get all the statues I can, with a cut of ten percent on each buy."

Cardigan called the barman and said: "Horace, how many has he had?"

"Drinks? 'Im. Mr. Sheffield? 'E's only 'ad four."

"Did you hear the Napoleon story?"

Horace dropped his eyes, wagged his head dolefully. "Hit is sad, eyen't hit, sir," he said, and went down to the other end of the bar to get the Swiss-on-rye from a waiter.

"It's the truth, Jack," Sheffield insisted.

"O.K., O.K.," Cardigan said, humoring him. "Skip it and tie your ears onto this. Symonds committed suicide."

Sheffield had been on the point of continuing his story. He stopped, turned his head slowly and regarded Cardigan with dull, uncomprehending eyes. Cardigan's sandwich and beer came down the bar and he spread the mustard liberally.

"It's a lie," said Sheffield.

"Only he didn't commit suicide."

"Ah, I knew it. Knew it was a lie."

"But he's dead."

Sheffield put his drink down. "Some-

body's drunk around here and if it's me, I've been holding it from myself a long time."

Cardigan said: "It looks like suicide and Keenan says it's suicide but if it's a suicide I'm an Eskimo with bells on. If you can keep your face out of that drink long enough, I'll tell you about it."

"It doesn't make sense, but go ahead anyhow. I like the way you murder our native tongue."

CARDIGAN related everything up until the time he left young Symonds' room. Sheffield raised his drink and for no apparent reason it fell from his hand, crashed on the bar, and he said: "My bum hand, Jack. Goes limp on me sometimes. Make me another, 'Orace," he called out, and then to Cardigan, "The way you tell it, I'll lay my money on Keenan. Where do I come in for all the trouble you anticipate?"

"Just before I came over here I met Tully Pomeroy. He was going in the rooming house. Somebody'd phoned him. He's going to pull a quick one. He's going to turn around and sue the agency for a hundred grand—false arrest of Jake Mulvaney. Sop that in your frappé."

Sheffield leaned on the bar. "Does that half-wit think he can get away with a gag like that?"

"Listen, Sam. He's no half-wit and if he plays his shots right he'll get away with it. He's got everything on his side. The Mulvaney angle'll be thrown out of court. No matter how much the jury thinks, up to now, that Mulvaney's guilty; if it's hammered down their throats that the state's star witness committed suicide on the eve of the day he's to testify on the stand, they'll bring in a verdict of not guilty. Then what? Then Pomeroy comes back at us with this false-arrest gag. And of all the cockeyed jokes, he'll have the police department on his side. He'll have

Keenan and all the other crackpots that believed in the beginning that Symonds was guilty. Not because these cops are crooked—I don't believe they are—but because they'll have to testify. It's a beautiful set-up—for Pomeroy. If you don't think it is, you're twice as a drunk as I think you are."

Sheffield's wrinkled lids dropped lower over his eyes. He mused aloud: "Tully Pomeroy, the crookedest shyster in the state, with the cops testifying for his client." He sighed. "I never thought I'd live to see *that*."

"You won't, if I can help it."

"How can you stop it, kid?"

Cardigan made a fist. "I've got to, Sam. I've got to follow my hunch and I've got to prove that Symonds didn't snatch that bankroll and I've got to prove it before the case of the state against Mulvaney goes to the jury. If I don't—hell, man, the agency can't afford it!"

"Don't yell so. It's all right for you to get sore and all steamed up, pal, but as far as I can see, from what you've told me, it looks like suicide. Keenan's a nasty man, but he's on the level—"

"Keenan may be on the level but he's a fathead at heart and all he can think of now is getting even with me. And anyhow, I didn't finish." He pulled out of his pocket the straight-stemmed briar pipe with the oddly shaped bowl and laid it on the bar. "I picked that up down in the yard under Symonds' window. It's his pipe. I know it because I used to see him smoking it."

"How long was it down in the yard?"

"Not long. There was tobacco in it and I took the tobacco out and the heel was still wet. I blew through the stem and I blew out moisture. The tobacco that was in the bowl was that stringy kind that packs in tight and that's why it didn't fall out. And it was almost full."

"He could have thrown the pipe away."

"The way I've seen that guy smoke and cuddle that pipe, he wouldn't have thrown it away."

"How'd it get in the yard then?"

"It was knocked there, out of his hand or out of his mouth, during a struggle."

SHEFFIELD smiled bleakly. "You told me yourself the door was bolted on the inside and that no ladder was used. Don't let that hunch run away with you. A hunch never holds in a court of law, Jack."

Cardigan was exasperated. "Damn it to hell, there are other things! Listen—that line that strangled him was greased. I've seen any number of suicides, guys that hung themselves, but I never yet saw a guy that greased his own line. Now picture his bedroom, minus the flatfeet, the press and the other guys. Before he turned in, he took out a clean shirt and hung it over a chair, put the collar buttons in the neckband and cufflinks in the sleeves. The shirt was clean—never worn; you could tell. There's the little table beside the bed. On it's a glass of water and his alarm clock, set to go off at six thirty A.M. He was in bed and got out or was dragged out. After I came in out of the yard—and after I met Pomeroy—I found the woman that runs the rooming house and she said that at ten, only an hour or two before he was supposed to have died, Symonds came down and knocked on her door. She was in bed and she called out and asked what he wanted and he said could she have breakfast for him at seven instead of seven thirty."

Sheffield shrugged. "You're building up nicely, Jack, but you're overlooking that letter he started to write to this girl named Laura."

Instantly Cardigan looked dismal. "Yeah, I know. That's the one catch."

"It ought to be Pomeroy's trump card." Sheffield raised his glass and smiled

dreamily at it. "Tough, tough. It'll be the first case Pomeroy ever beat me in."

"You sound licked before you start."

"I am. You've handed him a golden egg, Jack, on a golden platter. . . . Now about this fellow and the statues of Napoleon—"

Cardigan growled: "You and Napoleon! I'm going home."

He slammed out of the Bearcat, walked three blocks and swung into a telegraph office, where he wired his New York office the whole details. Instead of taking a cab, he walked to his hotel, his hands thrust deep in his overcoat pockets and his thoughts wallowing in gloom. Sheffield was right. A hunch was worthless in a court of a law. He knew it himself but hated to admit it.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### White Guy

THE morning was bright, windy, with cottony clouds galloping in the sky. The wind hummed on the broad avenues, boomed and clapped in the narrow streets and sent odd bits of newspaper skating and skyrocketing. Men's hats blew off and women had trouble with their skirts. The faces of traffic cops were beet-red and newsboys drummed cold feet on the corners.

At fifteen past nine Cardigan came round Tremont into Baxter Street, the wind ballooning his ulster and whistling past his ears. He passed beneath the booming canvas marquee of the Axminster Arms, hit the heavy swing-door with his shoulder and banged his big feet across the quiet, luxurious lobby; passed the mosaic desk and entered one of three elevators. It lifted him smoothly to the seventh floor and he walked down the corridor and pressed a small white button alongside the door numbered 717. It was

opened by a mulatto with slicked-down ebony hair, who bowed Cardigan in before the big cop had time to say a word. He took Cardigan's hat and overcoat and gracefully ushered him down a narrow foyer and into a large and elegant living room, filled with period furniture.

"Mr. Pomeroy will be in directly," said the mulatto, dropping his soft, expressionless eyes, then retiring.

Cardigan didn't sit down, he was too impatient, too restless. He paced up and down taking sharp drags at a cigarette and in a minute or two Pomeroy came through a door at the far end of the vast room. He was a big-bodied man dressed in striped trousers and a black swallow-tailed coat, wing collar and black-and-white-striped tie. His hair was thick, black, bushy; his eyebrows tremendous. His face was florid, heavy-jowled, and his mouth seemed set on one side of it.

"Hello, Cardigan," he said in a booming, hearty voice, flung a big hand toward an easy chair. "Sit down, sit down. Sorry as hell to get you over so early but I wanted to see you before I went to court."

Cardigan sat down, unsmiling, and Pomeroy walked on to the end of the room, turned and came back and went past Cardigan and then stopped twenty feet away, where he swiveled heavily and suddenly jammed a cigar between his teeth. His voice came loud, heavy, as though he were addressing an audience in a great hall.

"I had a talk with Mulvaney," he boomed. "You may not know it, Cardigan, but Mulvaney's a nice lad, a great lad, a lad with a big heart. Do you know what Mulvaney said? When I told him I was going to sue your agency in his behalf for a hundred grand, why, he didn't think much of it. He said, 'Mr. Pomeroy, all I want is to be cleared of this charge. I don't want to pick on those

people.' Now there's a white guy for you, Cardigan—white as they make 'em."

He lit his cigar and took another pounding turn round the room and again stopped far off, suddenly, and held up a fat, rigid forefinger. "But maybe I'm not a nice guy, Cardigan. Mulvaney was broke when I took his case, didn't have a cent. I took it because I hate to see an innocent man persecuted. It's taken a lot of my time, a lot of my money, and, I tell you, I'm not as easy-going as Mulvaney. Besides, I can't afford to lose money. I took the case, I say, to save an innocent man," he roared, "but now that I've got a chance to make some money, I think Mulvaney ought to sue you fellows. Owe it to himself—to me! I know I've got a case. I can not only sue you fellows for a hundred grand—I can get it. I can summon a battery of witnesses that you fellows could never hope to laugh away—Lieutenant Keenan, Sergeant Brotski, Inspector Ness, half a dozen patrolmen. By God, I can even summon the man who at present, in this trial, is my distinguished opponent. I refer, Cardigan, to State's Attorney Moffat!"

HE paused, his big head hauled way black, his round eyes wide with wonder at the possibilities that lay before him. Then, suddenly, he picked up a chair, carried it across the room and placed it very close to Cardigan. He sat down, lowered his thick eyelids, smiled out of the side of his mouth and laid his hand on Cardigan's knee.

"Maybe I am, after all, a bit of a white guy," he said in a voice suddenly rich with oil. He leaned forward. "Now I haven't peeped to the papers yet about what I intended to do. I haven't given them an inkling that I intend to sue you fellows. Cardigan," he said in a soft, salubrious voice, "I'm going to give you a break. A break, my boy. You don't

want this in the papers. You don't want to get a lousy reputation. You don't want to run smack up against a judgment of a hundred grand, do you?"

Unsmiling, Cardigan said, "No," in a dull, wary voice.

Pomeroy smacked him on the knee. "Of course you don't! So I'm giving you a break. Cardigan"—he lifted his forefinger—"we can settle this thing like gentlemen. All I want is some small change to pay for expenses incurred in this most unfortunate trial of Mulvaney. All I want, Cardigan, is forty thousand dollars—and everything will be dropped." He sat back and nibbled thoughtfully on his cigar.

Cardigan said: "I only work for the agency. I can't promise you anything."

"Call your boss, if you want to."

"I don't want to, but I'll have to." He stood up and went across the room to a telephone.

"Don't use that one, Cardigan," Pomeroy said, rising and beckoning. "That's a house phone. I've got a private outside wire in my study."

He led Cardigan into the foyer, down the foyer and into a smaller but no less luxurious room. Pointing to a dial phone, he said: "You'll get a better connection.

Cardigan called New York and in three minutes had George Hammerhorn on the wire. He said: "I'm here in Pomeroy's apartment, George. You got my wire? . . . Well, Pomeroy says that for forty grand he'll quash his intentions. . . . How do I feel about it? I'm calling to see how you feel about it. . . . What would I say? Why, I'd tell Pomeroy to go plumb to hell. . . . O.K., George," he said, staring at the number of the phone—Western 3300.

He hung up and turned to Pomeroy and said: "Well, counsellor, I guess you can go plumb to hell."

For a moment Pomeroy acted like a

man trying to regain his balance. He regained it. His thick face was very hard and savage and there was no mercy in his bulging eyes. "You guys will eat dirt for that!" he spat.

"You offered us a proposition and we turned it down. What the hell are you beefing about?"

"You'll beef, guy, when you fork over a hundred thousand! By God, I'll crucify you!"

"For a guy that expects to get a hundred grand," Cardigan said derisively, "you sure don't look happy."

"I made you a white proposition—"

"I'm not color-blind," Cardigan ripped in, his eyes snapping. "I know a shake-down when I see it and don't think those fancy pants and that go-to-hell collar you wear turns red to white in my eyes. I suddenly don't like you, Mr. Pomeroy. To hell with you and good day." He turned on his heel and strode out of the study, down the foyer. He snatched his hat and coat from the mulatto and put them on as he went down in the elevator.

WHEN he strode into Sam Sheffield's office twenty minutes later, Sheffield and his secretary, Miss Olds, were standing in front of the window pointing down into the street. First Sheffield cried, "Beaver!" and then Miss Olds cried, "Beaver!" and this went on for several minutes. Cardigan flung down into a big chair and the noise caused Sheffield to turn around.

"Oh," he said. "Didn't know you'd come in." And to Miss Olds, "What's the score?"

She consulted a card. "Sixteen for you and twenty for me. You owe me forty cents."

Sheffield sighed and gave her four dimes and she went out into her own office. The attorney scratched the fuzz on the top of his head and said in a confi-



dential voice: "Sharp-eyed, that girl. I've yet to win. Good game, though. She was four up on me that time. You ever play Beaver?"

Cardigan made a face.

"Oh, it's a good game, Jack. We use the northeast corner of Center and Sixth. The first one that sees a man with a beard yells 'Beaver!' and you count up—"

"Would it interest you to know, Mr. Sheffield, that Pomeroy offered to call it quits for forty grand?"

Sheffield's entire face seemed to close up and for a long minute he stared at the wall, curiously, suspiciously, as if he expected to find something there. Then he brought his eyes down upon the desk, ran them over a collection of papers, nibbled at his lip. He shook his head.

"That doesn't fit in," he half whispered.

"Fit in with what?"

"Well"—Sheffield leaned back, his eyes still puzzled—"I was over to Symonds' room this morning—just out of curiosity. There was a cop stationed there and we sat around and chatted about one thing and another and after a while I picked up a book, a novel, and began thumbing it, you know how you will. Well, I thumbed it to a place where there was a letter, and after a while, when the cop wasn't looking, I shoved the letter in my pocket." He drew a letter from the desk drawer and scaled it across the desk. "I took the liberty of opening it."

Cardigan stared down at the address on the envelope—*Miss Laura Harrod, 92 Spruce Street, Stratford*. He withdrew the letter and spread it before him. It was dated yesterday and read—

Dear Laura: It seems useless for me to go on like this any longer. I'm only kidding myself. I know how you feel about it, and God bless you for it, but I feel that sooner or later someone will find out and I'd rather tell them now than wait and have them find out later. I hope I

won't weaken between now and tomorrow morning. I can't stand the suspense any longer. I feel it's the only way out and I hope it won't hurt too much.

Walter

Cardigan muttered: "It's almost the same as the one Keenan found—"

"Except this one's finished."

CARDIGAN threw it on the desk, blew out a breath, wagged his shaggy head. "If that isn't a suicide note . . ." He stood up, towering darkly, and ground the fist of his left hand into the palm of his right. "I suppose," he muttered in a low, savage voice, "I deserve whatever I get. I go around shooting my mouth off and bragging how bright I am. I swear on oath that I believe Symonds is innocent and then the punk pulls a trick like this and leaves me holding the bag—"

He stopped short. His eyes widened and then narrowed again and he spun and pointed at Sheffield. "The bag. The money. The seventy thousand that was stolen—" He stopped short again and planted his hands on the desk, leaned on his braced arms. "If Symonds snatched the dough, he had an accomplice. The woman—"

"You chucking over the idea that Mulvaney took it?"

Cardigan took his hands off the desk, inhaled deeply and strode to the window, his face flushed. He ground out: "I don't know what to believe. My hunch feels shaky. I had it all figured out that Symonds didn't—couldn't—have committed suicide. Now you drag in that letter, with its famous last line—'I feel it's the only way out and I hope it won't hurt too much.' Cripes, I must be losing my grip."

Sheffield stood up. "Take it easy, kid."

Cardigan whirled. "Take it easy! If Pomeroy sues us for the false arrest of Mulvaney—and he will—who'll have to

pay?" He deflated his chest, stared sinisterly at the letter, said in a low, somber voice: "Give me that letter. What's the best way to get to Strafford?"

Sheffield put his hand down on the letter, said in a quiet lazy voice: "If she was mixed up in it with Symonds, your getting the money back now will only double the case against you when Pomeroy brings action in Mulvaney's behalf."

Cardigan came over to the desk, his face very dark. "Take your hand off it, Sam. The bank hired us to track down seventy thousand dollars that was supposed to have been snatched from their man Symonds. Right now, that's all I'm interested in."

"Why stick your head in the lion's mouth?"

"It's in already. I might as well jump in the rest of the way. Take your hand off."

"This gets funnier and funnier. Pomeroy will wind up by having you in court testifying against yourself. No one will know who's on whose side or why. Ah, well . . ." He stepped back, shrugged and looked at his fingernails.

Cardigan took letter and envelope and thrust them into his pocket. "How's the best way to get out there?"

"Take an S trolley on Center. I could kick myself in the slats for showing you that letter." He mooned over to the window. "You look intelligent, and at times you act intelligent, but I guess you've just been giving imitations all along. . . . Ah—Beaver!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Couple of Quick Ones

STRAFFORD was a suburb of Port-bridge, five miles from the center of the city by high-speed trolley. Three fourths of the run was through fields,

woods or the back yards of factories. Cardigan got off at Main Street, Strafford, and asked the way to Spruce. He walked away from the center of the village, bending his head into a rowdy, blustering wind. Spruce Street was on the edge of the village; its houses were scattered through fields and second-growth timber.

Number 92 was a rakish, shingled bungalow surrounded by weeds, willows and a few poplar trees. There was no other house nearby. Cardigan approached the veranda by way of a plank walk, climbed the steps and rang the doorbell. The wind whistled about the veranda and among the young trees; it flapped the skirt of Cardigan's coat and the brim of his hat.

There was no answer and he rang the bell again and after a minute's wait he rang it a third time but still there was no answer. Then he noticed a piece of paper sticking from the black tin mailbox beside the door. He pulled it out and saw written on it—*Don't leave any mail today. I'll be away. I'll call for it late this afternoon.* He frowned, replaced the note in the box and idled up to the front windows, tried them. They were locked. He went around to the back of the house and finally forced a basement window and climbed in.

A stairway led him to a small, neat kitchen. A few dishes had been washed and stood on the drainboard beside the sink. He opened a swing-door and stepped into the living room, in the center of which was an easel with a canvas showing a partly finished landscape. Paints and an artist's palette lay on a small table.

He went to a desk and rifled the drawers; found paid electric and gas bills and bills for laundry and food. Among these papers he found a snapshot of a girl and a short note from Symonds.

Dear Laura: I'm afraid they'll find out and if they do, God knows what will happen. I think even now they're shadowing me and I don't want to make any phone calls to you. Write me what you think I ought to do. I'd better use a false name. Send it to James Bronson, care of Postmaster, Station B, Portbridge. I'll call for it.

It was dated two weeks before and as Cardigan finished reading it his face soured, his big shoulders sagged. The irony of the whole business lay in that the more he found out, the more Pomeroy's case against the agency gained.

He replaced everything in the desk but the note and the snapshot of the girl, which he pocketed. He left the house by way of the cellar window and strode grimly back to the center of the village, caught a trolley to Portbridge and sat with his hat tipped low over his eyes and his arms folded on his chest.

**H**E got off and went around to his hotel and was stretching his long legs across the lobby when the clerk at the desk called him and said: "A young lady was in looking for you, Mr. Cardigan."

"Yeah? When?"

"About an hour ago. I told her you were in and out all the time and suggested that she wait."

Cardigan half turned, saying: "She here now?"

"Well, I don't see her."

The bell captain strolled over and said: "That lady that was looking for you, Mr. Cardigan?"

"Yeah."

"Some man went out with her."

"When?"

"Oh, about ten minutes after she came in. He was in here before she came. I saw them going out together."

"What'd he look like?"

"Well, maybe as tall as you, maybe just

a little shorter. But thinner. Derby and blue Chesterfield and gray spats. About thirty, I guess. Good-looking fellow. Oh, yeah, he had a white silk scarf on too. Snappy."

Cardigan said: "The woman—what's she look like?"

"She was pretty young and good-looking and she had on a powder-blue overcoat, kind of full, with a big belt and big lapels. And a blue beret, only it was darker blue. She wasn't very tall. She seemed very excited."

"Look like this?" Cardigan said, producing the snapshot he had taken from the bungalow.

"Yup. Yes, sir—that's the face."

Cardigan turned on his heel and went out to the sidewalk and asked the doorman: "Did you see a girl in a light blue overcoat come out about an hour ago with a fellow?"

"Lemme think. . . . Yes, I guess I did."

"D they take a cab?"

"No. They walked"—he pointed down the street—"that way."

Cardigan turned away with a look of deep frustration and went up to his room to get his wallet, which he had forgotten earlier that morning. Plenty was happening, he ruminated bitterly, but there was not one thing that jibed with another. Nothing made sense. No matter in which direction he turned, there was a stone wall. He went round and round the room burning up cigarettes and minute by minute working himself up to a high pitch of nerves.

After a while he got fed up with this and banged on his hat and went down to the lobby. He said to the clerk: "If that woman comes in again, tell her to wait. Tell her to wait till I get back—no matter if she has to wait all day."

He wheeled away from the desk and almost crashed into Lieutenant Keenan.

Keenan took a long thin cigar from his

mouth and said: "What woman, Cardigan?"

"What do you do, hide in the furniture?"

Keenan's thin white face was expressionless, his cold blue eyes steady. He wore a stiff, pearl-gray fedora smartly over one ear; his thick silvery hair swept dashingly over the other. "You know, don't you, that we were wondering about a woman? A woman named Laura. Symonds' woman." His voice was low, a dull monotone, and his lips hardly moved.

"I was talking about another woman," Cardigan snapped, and swung out of the lobby.

Keenan caught up with him outside and said: "Which way you going?"

"Whatever way you're going, Keenan, I'll go the opposite."

"Who's the woman?" Keenan asked, never raising his voice but making it hard and relentless, anyhow.

"A friend, a friend. My God, can't I have a woman call on me without you trying to make something out of it?"

"The way you sailed out of that elevator and spoke to that guy at the desk, I think I have reason to make something out of it. Come on, wherever you're going, I'll go along with you and we'll talk it over."

"I've got nothing to talk over, bright eyes. And I'm not walking with you." Cardigan swung off down the street but he knew that Keenan followed, he could hear Keenan's quick steps right behind him.

"My legs are as long as yours, Cardigan," Keenan called.

CARDIGAN said nothing, nor did he look back. He cut through Albion Street to Center and when he reached Center, heavy motor traffic was stopped against a red light. Cardigan lingered on the curb and Keenan came up and stopped

beside him, saying: "We may as well cross while the light's with us."

Cardigan stared hard at him. "I don't like you, Keenan. Maybe it's because of that hat you wear."

"What's the matter with the hat?"

"It's cheap—like you."

"Yeah? I'm not cheap, you lug—and the hat's a Buscan."

"I'd have to see that to believe it."

Keenan took his hat off and said: "Take a look at it."

Cardigan took hold of the hat, looked at the sweatband and said, "Well, I guess you're right," and then turned and scaled it down the sidewalk.

Keenan's lips ripped apart: "Why, you dirty—" But he stopped and made a dash after his hat.

Just as the lights changed, Cardigan plunged across wide Center Street and the heavy motor traffic closed in behind him. Keenan, who had recovered his hat, was stranded on the other side. Cardigan strode hard and fast up Center, through the Mitchell Arcade, out into Pope Street, up Pope to Fleming and eventually back to Center by a roundabout route.

It was noon when he walked into Sheffield's office. As he entered, a small, bearded, sorrowful man was leaving. When Cardigan and Sheffield were alone, the attorney wagged his fuzzy head regretfully.

"I hated to turn him down," he sighed.

"Who?"

"The old gentleman who just went out. He's the one doesn't like Napoleon. Let me tell you about it—"

Cardigan growled impatiently: "Cut the comedy, Sam!" He lit a cigarette and flung the match into a tray. "I was out to Strafford but she wasn't in. I crashed the house and found another note and I took away a snapshot of a good-looking gal." He tossed the note and the snapshot on the desk. "I came back to the

hotel and they told me a gal was looking for me and the gal that was looking for me is the one in the snapshot."

Sheffield read the note, made a wry face. "You sure can collect evidence against yourself, fella. Why the hell didn't you tell Hammerhorn to pay the forty grand and call it quits? You're sinking deeper and deeper."

"After the gal waited a while in the lobby, she left with a guy. She's Laura Harrod or God didn't make little green apples."

"And if she is, what? If she's Laura Harrod, and if Laura Harrod was confidant—or an accomplice—of Symonds, why the hell should she be waiting to see you? It's like saying two and two are five—or six—or eight; all the answers are wrong." He leaned back, pulled at his lip, mused aloud: "Maybe she meant to proposition you—and had the guy along to cover her in case you got tough." He tapped the note which Cardigan had given him and said: "This, Jack, is more incriminating than the one I found in Symonds' room. Symonds was scared, nervous and—" He stopped short, leaned forward. "You know, Jack, I might be right. Maybe the girl did want to proposition you. Maybe she's nervous and has the dough and wants to either cut with you or give it all back to you. People do screw things when they're scared."

Cardigan said abruptly: "If she doesn't try to get me again this afternoon, I'm going back to Strafford—to the bungalow. She's bound to show up there."

"I'll go with you. We'll take my car."

"You stay the hell home."

"No kidding, Jack. Besides, I own a lot out there I've never seen. Won it in a crap game one night. We can play Beaver on the way out."

**T**HE woman did not appear again and, at dusk, Sheffield and Cardigan started out in a long-hooded roadster with

a slanting windshield and beveled wings. It was a custom-built Bentley, not so fast on the pick-up but a wildcat on the straightaway.

They did the five miles to Strafford between smokes and as they were rolling through the village Cardigan said: "We don't want to park in front of the house, Sam."

"Why?"

"Habit. Go out this road and when you come to the end of it park and douse your lights—all of them."

Sheffield parked beneath a big maple and when they had got out he looked at the street signs and said: "That looks like the lot I won."

"Where?"

"That marshland."

Cardigan pointed. "We go this way."

They walked up Spruce Street past vacant fields, past one house and then another and then past a stretch of woodland. Beyond the woodland, the bungalow was a dark blur in the shadows. Not a single light shone.

They walked as far as the veranda but instead of climbing it Cardigan led the way around to the rear. He opened the cellar window and said: "Go ahead, drop down."

Sheffield said, "I don't like this a bit," but backed into the opening and dropped to the cement floor.

Cardigan followed, pulled the window shut and snapped on his flashlight. He led the way across the basement to the stairs and up to the kitchen. He stopped and Sheffield stopped close beside him. There was no sound but the wind in the trees and in the long grass outside. Presently Cardigan moved into the living room, then to the bedroom door. The bedroom was empty and the bed had not been slept in.

"I guess she didn't come home," Sheffield commented.

"We'll wait. Don't turn the lights on. Find a chair and sit down and I'll turn out the flashlight."

They sat in the darkness, Cardigan smoking his pipe and Sheffield smoking a cigar. The room was pitch-black, for there was no moonlight, no nearby street light. The wind whined in the eaves and sometimes the windowpanes shook and the room was chill. The red end of Sheffield's cigar brightened and dimmed as he inhaled, exhaled. Half an hour passed.

He said drowsily: "I told him what he ought to do, he ought to go to a collector, or someone who made a specialty of that sort of thing."

"Who?"

"The chap who doesn't like Napoleon. You see, Jack, he—"

"Sh!"

"Huhn?"

"A car."

"Where?"

Cardigan stood up. "Out front. Can you see me?"

"Just about."

"O. K. There's a closet in the back of the room. Come on."

Moving, he took hold of Sheffield's arm and steered him through the darkness. He opened the closet door and said, "Get in," and when Sheffield went in, Cardigan crowded in after him and closed the door. He spat into his pipe, putting it out. "Step on your cigar, Sam," he said, and Sheffield dropped his cigar, ground it beneath his heel.

THERE was dead silence, and then, in a few minutes, Cardigan heard a key grate in a lock, heard a door creak. The sound of footfalls came to his ears and the creak again and the sound of a door being closed. A moment later he could tell, by the crack above the door, that the living-room lights had been turned on.

He heard footsteps moving about the

room; they faded, went into another room; came out again and drew very close and then went away. For several moments there were no footsteps but there were other sounds—as if a chair were moved, a drawer opened. Then silence. Then the sound of the chair scraping again and after this the footfalls, wandering about the house, drawing near and then going away and then suddenly coming very near. Too near. Right outside the closet door.

Abruptly the door was pulled open and quite as abruptly Cardigan drew his gun and held it leveled, stomach high.

A short ruddy man in a tweed overcoat and a blue fedora stepped back, his eyes and mouth springing wide, his hands already half raised. Behind him, in the middle of the room, another man was lifting a cigarette from a brass humidor. He dropped it and his right hand darted toward his coat pocket.

"Don't," said Cardigan, stepping from the closet.

"Where'd you come from?" muttered the man in the tweed coat.

Cardigan said: "You took the words right out of my mouth."

The man in the middle of the room had drawn in a breath and was still holding it; his black eyes were sharp, hard, and his hands pressed against his overcoat pocket. He wore a blue overcoat, a derby, a white silk scarf.

Cardigan said: "You don't live here, do you?"

"Do you?"

"No. So we start from scratch. Except you're one up on me—you came in with a key."

"Maybe I live here."

"Maybe the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga," Cardigan said. "Reach into your right-hand coat pocket with your left hand and take out that gun and drop it on the couch."

The man's right hand started down.

"Your *left* hand!" Cardigan snapped.

The man dropped the automatic on the couch and Cardigan said to Sheffield: "Pick it up, Sam, and make sure the safety's not on."

Sheffield strolled over and picked up the gun and Cardigan turned on the tweed-coated ruddy man and disarmed him of a short-barreled revolver, then gave him a rough shove, saying: "Stand over there with your pal."

The ruddy man looked scared and harassed and began to breathe asthmatically; but the other, the tall debonair man, remained cool and tight-faced and sinister.

Cardigan walked heavily across the room and stopped in front of them, his eyes wide-open and hard like brown marbles and a truculent twist to his mouth. He looked straight at the tall debonair man, said: "Well, where's the woman?"

"What woman?"

"The woman gave you the key to her front door. Laura Harrod."

The tall man shrugged. "Never heard of her."

Cardigan slapped his face hard and said: "Quit clowning."

**T**HE tall man's eyes shone viciously and his smooth lips curved into a dangerous half-smile, then grew straight again and tightened against his teeth as his eyes narrowed to steady shining pinpoints.

Cardigan turned on the other. "Well, how about you?" he ripped out.

The ruddy man ducked and held his hand against his cheek. "Geez, I don't know what you're talking about," he cried.

Cardigan turned back to the other and said sententiously: "*You* know what I'm talking about. You were in the lobby of my hotel this afternoon and you left with Laura Harrod. Now don't deny it. You were seen leaving with her. Now where is she?"

The tall man regarded him levelly. "Did you see me?"

"No, but I know someone who did."

"He's a liar."

Cardigan's smile had no mirth in it. "How do you know it was a he?"

The tall man's eyes wavered for a split instant.

"Sam," Cardigan said over his shoulder, "frisk this guy."

Sheffield put his gun in his pocket and went patiently, carefully through the tall man's pockets. On the table he laid a thick roll of bills, some loose change, fountain pen and pencil, a ring containing several keys, a pigskin wallet, and a dozen cartridges.

"Now the other one, Sam."

The ruddy man's pockets produced much less. Each had an automobile operator's license and Sam Sheffield said, in a bored voice: "The little guy is Patrick Shannon and the other lad is called Stephen Rewell. Both at the same address—Four Hundred Four Clive Street."

"Hold your gun on them, Sam, till I look over that junk."

Cardigan found that the roll of bills, which had come from Rewell's pockets, amounted to twenty-one hundred dollars, in fives, tens, fifties and one-hundreds—mostly one-hundreds. He sniffed, smelled the money and for a minute looked fixedly up at Rewell. Rewell's wallet gave up a lot of old name-cards—among them a packet of ten engraved with Tully Pomeroy's name. There were a snapshot of Rewell, an automobile insurance card, a contract for a trunk in storage, a couple of blank bank-deposit slips, a hunting license.

Cardigan stuffed everything, both Shannon's and Rewell's, into his overcoat pockets and said: "O. K., Sam. We'll take these guys to where they live."

Rewell muttered darkly: "You can't arrest us. What's the charge?"

"Arrest you?" Cardigan laughed roughly. "You don't think you birds are going to get off that easy, do you? Pick up your feet. We're going to your house."

Rewell rasped: "I tell you—"

"You'll tell me plenty, Rewell. Close your trap and get going." He shoved him across the room, shoved Shannon after him and said: "Turn out the lights, Sam."

Sheffield turned out the lights and as he did so Cardigan snapped on his flashlight. He pushed and shoved the two men out onto the veranda, down the steps and across to their sedan.

"You drive, Rewell," he said. "You sit beside him, Shannon. I'll ride in back and if you two clown around on the way in I'll bop you. . . . Sam, you ride on the running board far as your car, then follow us in."

"You think you can handle them, Jack?"

"What are you trying to do, kid me?"

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Beaver!

**C**LIVE Street was on the borderline between midtown and the West End and Number 404 was a stucco apartment house of six floors.

Cardigan climbed out of the sedan and then opened the front door and said, "Get out." His hand was in his overcoat pocket. As Rewell and Shannon got out Sheffield drove up and parked directly behind the sedan. He joined Cardigan and then marched Rewell and Shannon into the lobby. There was a small desk behind which stood a bespectacled thin man of many years.

"Oh, Mr. Rewell," he called out, holding up a slip of paper. "Gentleman's been trying to get you on the phone. Called about half a dozen times. Didn't give his name but wants you to call this number as soon as you get in."

Rewell, his face expressionless, took the slip of paper from the clerk's hand and thrust it into his pocket without looking at it. Then he changed his mind and glanced at it. His lips tightened and he said. "If he calls again, tell him I'm not in."

"Oh. Oh, all right, sir."

Rewell strode toward the elevator and Cardigan and Sheffield crowded both men as they got in. Going up, Sheffield said in a pleasant voice: "Damned decent of you, Mr. Rewell, to invite us up. I for one appreciate it no end."

Rewell stared ahead, said nothing, and they all got out at the fifth floor. Rewell's apartment was spacious, comfortable, and as they filed in he took off his overcoat and hat, flung them on a divan.

He poured a drink, said: "Well, now that you're here, go on with the comedy." He downed the drink sullenly, smacked down the glass. "And I'm not inviting you to a drink." He sat down, stuck a cigarette in his mouth and lit up.

Shannon, still very uneasy, sat on the very edge of the most uncomfortable chair in the room.

Cardigan poured a drink anyhow, threw it down his throat and said: "Help yourself, Sam."

"Thanks," said Sheffield, and took one too.

"Keep these guys covered while I look the place over."

Cardigan disappeared into another room; looked in the bathroom, the pantry, all the closets, and reappearing, said: "Well, where is she, Rewell?"

Rewell said: "You going back to that again?"

"I never left it." Cardigan emptied his overcoat pockets onto a table, again smelled the roll of bills curiously. He stood for a full minute staring down at them, then picked up the storage contract and studied it. He sat down and looked



at the bills more closely, one at a time, and wrote down numbers. Then he went to the telephone and called the manager of the bank who had hired him to track down the seventy thousand.

"This is Cardigan," he said. "I wish you'd do a favor for me. . . . Well, that's swell of you. I wish you'd call police headquarters and ask for Captain Straub, of the bank squad. I can't because they'd be on my neck in a minute. Ask him to look in his files and check up on some currency. I'm mainly interested in a few one-hundred-dollar bills. Got a pencil and paper? I'll give you the serial numbers. They run in sequence." He told off the numbers and then said: "This might not be recent. In fact, I don't think it is. . . . Yeah. Call me back at Clive Two Twelve," he finished, and hung up.

SHEFFIELD scratched the fuzz on his head perplexedly. Shannon looked bewildered and Rewell's face was dark and stony, his hard narrowed eyes fixed steadily on Cardigan. Cardigan waved the storage contract, said: "What'd you put in storage two months ago, Rewell?"

"It's none of your business—but it happens to be a lot of books and some pictures."

Cardigan frowned and thrust the storage contract back into his pocket.

Rewell said in a snarly voice: "I don't suppose I'm allowed to make a phone call, am I?"

"It all depends. If you want to phone the woman and tell her to come around, swell."

Rewell said tartly: "I want to phone Circle One Thousand."

Sheffield looked sharply at him, then at Cardigan.

Cardigan smiled bleakly. "Police headquarters, eh?"

Rewell stood up with a black, angry scowl. "Yes, damn you, police headquart-

ers! I'm tired of this horseplay! If I'm going to be pushed around, I want to know why! Get the cops over here! Go ahead! Do you think I'm afraid of the cops?"

Cardigan laughed shortly. "You think I'm dumb, Rewell? You know damn well that the cops are sore at me. I know what you're trying to do. You want to get out of my hands, slide out of this because it's getting too warm."

"I demand the right to call the police!" Rewell snapped, and strode toward the phone.

Cardigan blocked him and sent him flying back onto the divan; said in a low, slow voice: "No you don't." He turned and took three fast steps, snatched up Rewell's overcoat and drew from its pocket the slip which the desk clerk had given Rewell. It read—*Call Western 3300. Urgent.*

Cardigan's brain began to simmer. His eyes opened wide and for a moment he stared at Rewell in frank amazement. Then his eyes dropped, clouded. He looked worried, he bit his lip, and his hand closed hard and tight over the slip of paper. Indecision battled in his eyes, round his restless, flexing lips. Then suddenly his lips hardened and his eyes flashed.

"Sam," he snapped, "you sit here on this chair. Shannon, you go and sit beside your pal. Sam, sit here and keep your gun trained on them and don't take it off till I get back."

"Suppose the call comes in?"

"Don't pay any attention to it. I'll ring him again."

"But, Jack—hey, wait—"

Cardigan had scooped Rewell's belongings back into his pocket and was on his way to the door. "And don't open the door for anybody. I'll take the key." He banged out with Sheffield's protestations ringing in his ears, took the elevator down and sailed out into the street. Two blocks

away he caught a taxi, said. "Tremont and Baxter," and hopped in.

It was a ride of about ten minutes and when Cardigan got out in front of a drugstore, he gave the driver a dollar and said: "Now wait here. Keep your flag up. You're taken, see?"

"I get you."

Cardigan punched open the swing door into the drugstore and strode to a telephone booth in the rear. Closing himself in the booth, he spent a minute chewing on his lip, drumming with his fingers, his eyes excited. Then he deposited a nickel and called Western 3300.

He leaned far away from the mouth-piece and when he heard a heavy male voice at the other end, he began to shout in a high-pitched, Negro voice.

"Ah was passin' down Clive Street an' by an apartment house theah, it wuz Number Four Hundred Four, Ah found a ten-dollah bill wrapped in a piece o' paper. Paper says, 'Call Westuh Three Three Hundred and tell man to take her somewhere else. Keep the ten-spot.' Tha's whut it says, boss man. . . . Yassuh, right down in front o' dat apartment house, Numbuh Four Hundred Four. Yassuh, boss."

**H**E hung up, banged out of the booth, went out a side door of the drugstore and walked up Baxter opposite the Axminster Arms. Several cars were parked against the curb and he stopped behind them, obscured from the front of the Axminster. Five minutes later he saw the lobby door swing open and Tully Pomeroy come barging out in great haste. A cab was parked near the entrance and he went heavily toward it.

Cardigan stretched his long legs to the corner of Baxter and Tremont, climbed into his waiting taxi and said: "See that one pulling away up the block? Follow it.

Let him get a start first and don't follow too close."

The taxi, which Pomeroy had taken, headed out Baxter. There was quite a bit of traffic and there was nothing conspicuous about the way Cardigan's cab trailed along. Seven blocks out, the cab ahead made a right turn into Willis and rolled along past cheap restaurants, radio stores. It turned left into Dill Street and a truck turned in after it and Cardigan's driver rolled along behind the truck. This went on for a distance of eight blocks, and now Dill Street was dark and gloomy with battered old rooming houses.

Cardigan's driver said: "I think he pulled up."

"O. K. Go past the truck and then go past the stopped cab. Here's your pay. When you get a block beyond, slow down just a little, but don't stop, and I'll hop off."

When he had jumped from the running board, Cardigan stood for a moment in the darkness. The truck boomed past. Pomeroy's cab was still parked, the door nearest the curb wide open. Cardigan made his way back up the street cautiously, keeping to the shadows of the old buildings. He stopped thirty yards short of the cab and stood behind a pole.

It was fifteen minutes before he heard a door bang and then he saw Pomeroy's bulky shape come down a wooden stoop accompanied by a woman, whose arm he held. He thrust her into the cab and heaved in after her and as the cab pulled slowly away from the curb Cardigan jumped out, pulled his gun and leaped to the running board.

"Keep going, driver!" he snapped, and yanked open the rear door, thrust in his gun. He climbed in and slammed shut the door and sat down on one of the spare seats. He said: "Where were you going, Pomeroy?"

Pomeroy was heaving around on the

seat like a man in breathless agony. He spluttered: "What—what's the meaning of it? Get out of here! I'll call a policeman!"

"Go ahead. Yell your lungs off."

"This is—this is—"

"Save it," Cardigan chuckled; and to the driver: "Go to Four Hundred Four Clive Street and step on it."

Pomeroy stammered: "But—but—now look—now listen—"

"What's the matter, your false teeth getting away from you?" Cardigan growled. "Shut up!"

The girl said nothing. She was muffled in a light blue sports coat, its big collar up around her ears, half concealing her face. She lounged in the corner. Only when they passed near a street light could Cardigan see her eyes: they were wide, fixed with terror or fear or awe. The cab banged madly on its way and Pomeroy spluttered and gestured and slapped his knees and pulled his big fat hands across his face.

Cardigan jeered: "Well, why don't you call a cop?"

"I—I'll—Pomeroy pointed in the darkness and his heavy voice shook. "I'll have your hide for this!"

"How was my Negro accent?" Cardigan chuckled.

"How was your—" Pomeroy fell back in his seat with a vast groan and lay there making no sound now, only breathing heavily, thickly.

**W**HEN the cab stopped in front of 404 Clive, Cardigan got out first, stood on the curb and clipped: "Come on, both of you, get out. Get out, I said!"

The girl almost stumbled to the sidewalk and Cardigan gripped her arm, held it. He said to Pomeroy: "Pay the taxi fare."

Pomeroy thrust a bill into the driver's hand and then Cardigan grabbed him by the arm and said, "This way, counsellor,"

and marched Pomeroy and the girl into the lobby and across it and into the elevator. He did not let go of their arms. Pomeroy's face was flushed, beady with sweat, and his breath, coming hard and fast, kept puffing out his lips. His eyes rolled and his whole fat body shook. The girl was stiff, tense, her eyes round and blank, her face white as a sheet.

Cardigan walked them down the fifth-floor corridor, took out the key and was inserting it in the lock when the door whipped open and Rewell and Shannon crashed into him. They were as shocked as he was but he was quicker on the uptake and his left fist shot upward, crashed against Shannon's jaw and drove him back into the living room. Rewell twisted with panther-like speed, his face dark and contorted, deadly. He clubbed an automatic pistol at Cardigan's head, missed his head but ripped the skin of his cheekbone. The pain made Cardigan suck his breath in between gritted teeth and his right fist smashed into Rewell's belly and drove him backward, off balance, into the living room, where he finally fell flat on his back.

Pomeroy started down the hall but Cardigan caught him by the coat-tail, swung him around and sent him tumbling into the living room, where he fell upon Rewell, who was trying to get up. The girl was flattened against the corridor wall, her hands pressed to her cheeks and her eyes stark with terror. Cardigan grabbed hold of her and thrust her through the doorway, slammed shut the door; shoved her roughly out of the way and took a flying leap at Rewell, who had again started to rise.

He flattened Rewell on the floor, snarled: "Cut it, Rewell, or I'll use a gun!"

Shannon staggered up behind him and took a kick at his head. Cardigan grunted, "Ugh!" and turned, ducked the next kick, caught Shannon's foot and yanked him

down. Then Pomeroy, all reason gone from his eyes, hurled his massive body upon Cardigan and crashed the big op against Rewell, who was still with his back on the floor. Rewell yelled and Pomeroy clubbed with his fists against Cardigan's head and Shannon, though groggy, was able to crawl over and join in.

"You asked for it, Cardigan!" Pomeroy cried wildly.

Arms and legs and bodies thrashed violently over the floor. Cardigan was on the bottom, with Rewell and Shannon and Pomeroy clubbing and kicking him. His face was red and swollen and one eye would be black and blue before long. Rewell's lip was cut. Pomeroy's nose was bloody and Shannon had a torn ear, but they were heavy, hard, rough—and mainly, they were desperate.

Then suddenly Cardigan saw Rewell fall to one side and lie groaning on the floor, and while he was being amazed at this Pomeroy grunted and fell on the other side, rolled over and lay on his back. Shannon became terrified and started to heave off, but he grunted too, made a bitter face and plunged to the floor.

Cardigan saw the girl standing, holding an iron poker. Her face was dead white, her lips shook, her breath beat through her nostrils.

She choked: "I didn't know you were Cardigan—until I heard them say your name."

He got to his feet, his tie and shirt torn and his face bruised and smeared with blood. He stared hard at the girl. Then he grinned.

"I can't make it out," he said, "but thanks."

**H**E bent down, took away Rewell's gun, looked around the living room and then strode across it and banged open the bedroom door. Sheffield was lying on the bed, bound and gagged. Cardi-

gan took out a pocketknife and cut away the gag and the bonds.

"Whew," said Sheffield, "do you look lousy!"

Cardigan scowled. "I told you to keep those guys—"

"Jack, I tried to tell you. You know how my hand suddenly goes limp on me. Some nerve bad, I guess. You remember? Well, it went bad and the gun just fell out of my hand and they jumped me an—"

The phone rang and Cardigan turned and strode back into the living room, snatched up the instrument. "Yes? . . . Yes, this is Cardigan." He pressed the receiver closer against his ear. "They are, are they? Well, I'm glad to hear it. All those numbers I gave you, huh? . . . Swell. I'll see you tomorrow."

He slapped the receiver back into the hook and turned as Rewell was struggling to his feet. He said to Rewell: "You're going to have a hard time explaining where you got part of the Wintermeade payroll stick-up, four years ago."

Rewell groaned and fell down again.

Cardigan raised his eyes to the girl. "So you're Laura Harrod. I've been looking for you."

Still shaking, she came over beside him. "I've been looking for you. I went to your hotel and they said—"

"I know what they said. Then you went out with Rewell—that guy there."

She grimaced. "I know. I was a fool. But he said he was looking for you too, he was a friend of yours, and he thought he knew where he could find you. I—I went with him. We walked a couple of blocks and then took a cab and then he took me to that awful house—where you jumped on the running board. He wanted to know why I wanted to see you. I wouldn't tell him. He slapped me a lot and then tied me up and after a while that fat man came and wanted to know too, but I wouldn't tell him. They tied

me up again and left me there and took my purse. I think one of them went out to my bungalow. My address was in the purse."

Cardigan was wiping the blood off his face. "Why did you want to see me?"

"About Walter Harrod. I—I read in the papers about his—his death—" Tears welled in her eyes. "I read about how they said he had committed suicide, how he was guilty of stealing that money, and about the unfinished note. I—I wanted to see you, to ask your advice. I knew you'd stood up for him before. I—I didn't know what to do. I wanted to tell you—ask you—"

He handed her the letter which Sheffield had found in the book and said: "He was going to send that. It's finished there. It's pretty incriminating."

Sobbing quietly, she read it. Then she shook her head slowly. "It's not what you think. Walter was in a little trouble about nine years ago, when he was sixteen. He stole a car. It was some kind of an initiation to some boy's club. They told him he'd have to steal a car and then, of course, return it a day later. But he was caught and the boys were scared, they lied, and he was given a month in jail. That's what he was afraid of—that before this trial was over someone would find out about that sentence. He wanted to tell the state's attorney about it. It prayed on his mind. He didn't—he couldn't have committed suicide. He never, never took that money—"

Cardigan grunted, "I catch on, Laura," and glowered at the men on the floor.

SHEFFIELD was sitting in his office at noon next day idly fingering a small bronze statuette of Napoleon when Cardigan loomed in the doorway, tossed his hat into one chair and sat down in another. He slapped his knees, said: "Well, we got the money. The whole seventy grand."

"Where was it?"

Cardigan leaned back, his face patched with adhesive tape and one eye a beautiful shade of purple. "Where I guessed last night, when you took me home. In the storage warehouse—in Rewell's trunk. The money he had on him, the money I took from him, smelled strongly of mothballs. It worried me. Why should money smell of mothballs? Well, because maybe it was stowed away in some clothes. I took a Brody on that storage contract and got a court order this morning to have the trunk opened. Keenan went with me, his puss long as a mule's. We opened the trunk and there was the money, covered with old clothes. The other money, the stuff Rewell had, was taken out of storage. It was part of the sum traded to Mulvaney for the seventy grand. They gave him fifty grand in old money for it. Mulvaney gave Pomeroy twenty grand of the fifty as a retainer and Pomeroy gave Rewell twenty-five hundred of the same money. Rewell and Pomeroy ran a regular business of buying stolen money and storing it away and paying for it with money that had been stolen years before. Mulvaney told Pomeroy that if he didn't get him out of this rap he'd spill about the business. So Pomeroy and Rewell put their heads together and figured out a way to make Symonds look like a suicide.

"We got that from Shannon. It was Shannon who broke down. It was Shannon and Pomeroy who climbed to the roof above Symonds' window and at an appointed time it was Pomeroy who phoned Symonds from a booth and said, 'I think somebody's in your back yard trying to get up.' Well, Symonds went over and stuck his head out. He was smoking a pipe. Shannon and Rewell were on the roof. Rewell, who used to be a roper in a circus when he was a kid, dropped the loop over Symonds' head. The line was greased and Rewell gave one yank and Symonds never peeped. They hauled him

out of the window and up a bit and then they cut off part of the line, made a loop on their end and hooked it onto another hook which was fastened to another line. Then they lowered Symonds and caught the loop at the end of his line onto the iron hook outside the window. Their hook dropped loose and they hauled up their line and beat it across the rooftops, to a fire-escape on an abandoned building a block away. I knew when I found that pipe down in the yard that something was wrong. Now it fits. It dropped out of Symonds' mouth when they yanked him."

SHEFFIELD leaned forward, toying with the statuette. "Jack, this time yesterday I'd have bet anything I own that you were sunk."

"I thought I was myself."

Sheffield stood up, said: "Come on. I'll blow you to lunch." On the way out he told Miss Olds: "If that nut comes around, Miss Olds, call a cop and have him taken out."

"Yes, sir."

Cardigan walked down the corridor and Sheffield, joining him, complained: "The old gent is screwloose."

"Who?"

"The one who doesn't like Napoleon. Why he picked on me, I don't know. But he wanted me to collect all the statues, statuettes and so forth, of Napoleon. You see, his wife ran away with a guy last month. She fell in love with the guy because he was the dead spit of Napoleon."

"It still don't make sense."

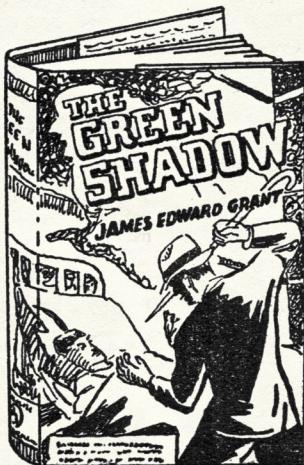
"Well, what the old gent wants, he wants to get all the statues of Napoleon he can possibly get and then bust them, one by one. He's a pest. And besides, he's been costing me a lot of dough."

"How?"

"Well, every time he comes in, Miss Olds naturally sees him first, being in the reception room, and she hotfoots it to my door, opens it, points at the guy's beard and yells 'Beaver!'"

They took a cab to the Bearcat and as they got out Sheffield made a face and said: "Jack, you'll have to pay. My hand's gone limp again."

"Think nothing of it," Cardigan said, and shoved his hand into Sheffield's pocket, extracted a roll of bills and peeled one off. "I'll keep the rest till after lunch in case your hand goes bum again."



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# Dead Man's Chest

by  
Preston Grady

Author of "Murder Inn," etc.

*Ross Paget hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about that morning the Baron and his side-kick, Sonny, walked in and began gun-whipping him because he didn't know the answers to their cockeyed questions. He soon found out though. Hot ice on a dead man's chest was the key to the riddle—even if it had taken two hundred years to melt.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Sonny and the Baron

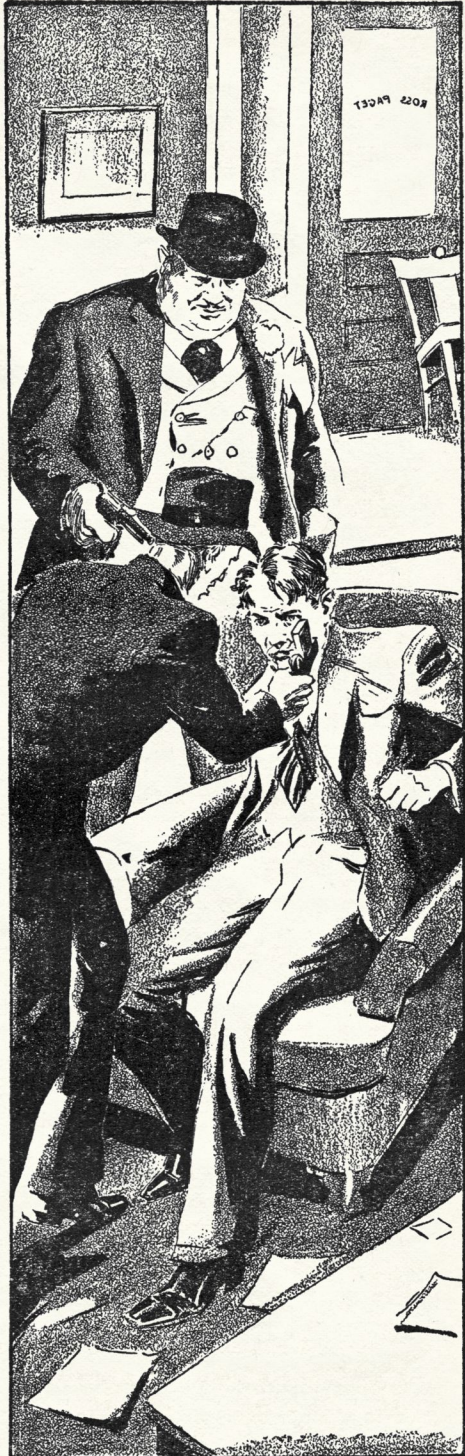
**R**OSS PAGET opened the door that bore only his name in chaste gold lettering, and went on through glancing at his wrist watch. It was five past nine. He was very tall, very long-legged, with wide angular shoulders and a lean pleasant face.

The girl at the typewriter looked up at him and smiled. "D. W. Morton called. About twenty minutes ago. Lord, if I had as much money as he's got I wouldn't speak to my best friend before noon, much less phone a private detective."

"Maybe he's in trouble."

Ross Paget headed for the inner office. She called after him: "I want to go to the bank, but Tom hasn't come in yet."

"He's across the street at the Green Grill getting breakfast," Paget said over his shoulder. "I saw him going in as I drove up. You go on to the bank. I can



The Baron raised three of his chins in a gesture to Sonny.

get him over there if I need him. He's mooning around that cashier."

Nina Carr's chuckle floated in to him as he thumbed a directory and found Morton's residence number. He heard her go out as he picked up the telephone.

There was some trouble getting the connection and nearly two minutes elapsed before a formal voice announced: "Mr. Morton's residence."

"Mr. Morton. Ross Paget calling." Paget heard the sound of the instrument being put down at the other end, then silence, broken finally on his own end of the line by the squeak of his hall door being opened and closed and two pairs of feet, one heavy and one light, crossing the anteroom. Paget frowned and turned.

**T**WO men stood in the doorway. One, a slim, pasty-faced youth of about twenty with overlarge waxen ears and too-small pupils in ice-blue eyes; the other an enormous individual who seemed to push his protruding load of fat along in front of him with an effort.

They came in and glanced at Paget and looked the room over with frank appraisal.

Paget put the phone down and said: "Well?" He pronged the receiver.

"Ahem!" said the fat man. "Please excuse our walking in on you like this, sir, but there was no one in the outer office and it was highly imperative that we see you at once on a matter of grave importance . . . Grave importance, that is, to us, sir; and I daresay you aren't averse to earning a little cash now and then—er?" He chuckled with the traditional good humor of fat men.

"Quit making so damn many speeches and tell him what we want," the youth suggested irritably. His right hand was in his coat pocket.

The fat man said reprovingly: "Tut,

tut! Will you please let me handle this, Sonny?"

Sonny spat, missing the waste basket beside the desk by several inches.

Dark anger welled in Ross Paget's eyes but he repeated calmly: "Well?"

"It's this way, sir." The fat man's glance slid to Sonny and back again. "We are looking for a chest. A very old iron chest which once belonged to Mr. D. W. Morton, the financier. We believe that you know where this chest is, and we are prepared to make you an attractive offer merely for information."

"Yes?" Paget said.

"Yes indeed, sir! Of course you are aware that this chest contains absolutely nothing. It is valuable only because it is an antique with, I believe, some historical significance. I am desirous of obtaining it simply as a collector of antiques."

A wry smile tugged at Paget's lips. "How much are you willing to pay for this information?"

"Shall we say—a thousand dollars?"

"Only a thousand?" Paget was scornful.

"Well, five thousand, then. But that is the absolute top, Mr. Paget! The absolute top!"

Sonny broke in: "For God's sake, Baron! Are you screwy? This punk would be glad to get—"

"Quiet, please!" the Baron rumbled.

Sonny's hand remained in his coat pocket. The bulge became a little more prominent.

Ross Paget's long arms hung loosely at his sides. He did not move from in front of the desk. But his nostrils flared and quivered and his eyes were humid.

"Mr. Paget and I can handle this matter very satisfactorily, I think," the Baron went on quickly. "There is the question of ethics involved. Ethics, popular opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, is the mainstay of the private-



detective trade. Right, Mr. Paget? No one can be successful—”

He seemed to realize his own lack of directness. “But enough of that! It *is* a business, and the purpose of business is to make money. So I am glad to offer a sum which will enable Mr. Paget to disregard any slight scruples he might have. What do you say, sir?”

“Five thousand dollars is a lot of money just for information about an old iron chest.”

“Exactly!” The Baron beamed. “I knew I would have no trouble dealing with a man of your experience.” He drew out a fat wallet. “A thousand dollars now, and four thousand more when we have found your information to be correct. Could anything be fairer?”

**R**OSS PAGET'S forehead became lined. He rubbed the back of his neck. “But how can I be sure I'll get the four thousand—even if you do find my information to be correct?”

“That is a point which I had not overlooked, sir. To be perfectly candid, the manner in which we may obtain the chest may cause some concern on the part of the police. If we do not fulfil our part of the bargain, you can doubtless contrive some recourse by law which would not expose your own part in the affair. If we do pay up, then you will wisely take your profit and forget the whole matter.”

For a moment there was silence, then, “Tell me,” Paget said. “You are sure this chest is valuable only as an antique?”

“Heh-heh!” The Baron's jowls shook. “It does seem a very large amount, doesn't it? But I am a collector, sir—and you know the lengths to which collectors will go. I must have that chest!”

“You talk too damn much, Baron,” said Sonny tonelessly. His beady eyes fastened upon Paget; the pupils were hardly larger than pin-heads. He snapped: “You

talk some now, shamus! Where's the chest?”

“Sorry to disappoint you.” Only Paget's voice was amiable; his body was tense. “I don't know where the chest is.”

“You what!” the Baron exploded.

“I don't know where the chest is,” Paget repeated. His words were swift, hard, hammer-like. “I never heard of such a chest. It all sounds like a fairy tale to me.” He stared at Sonny. “And even if I did know anything about the chest, I wouldn't deal with you. You look like a couple of rats to me. Neither one of you would hesitate to stick a knife into your grandmother's heart and turn it around—if you thought you could make any money out of it.”

He shifted slightly on his feet and looked at the Baron. “So you can take your cheap little gunman out of here, hog-belly, before he tries to use that cap-pistol he's got in his pocket. I don't want any part of you—understand? Get to hell out!”

Red crept up through the rolls of flesh on the Baron's neck.

Sonny swore lewdly and walked forward, the gun muzzle poking out the cloth of his coat pocket.

“Careful, Sonny!” the Baron shrieked. “We can't kill him! He's got to—”

The telephone rang. Its jangle was short, sharp, incisive. The Baron stared at it.

“Excuse me a moment, please, gentlemen?” Paget said with elaborate mockery, and took up the instrument. “Ross Paget speaking.”

The voice that came over the wire was thin and high-pitched, though not with excitement; rather with the brittleness of age. “Mr. Paget,” it said, “I would like to engage your services. My name is Lionel Podhouser. I am the proprietor of an antique shop on the West Side.

Four Thirty-two Macon Street. Could you come out to see me right away?"

"Fine, lieutenant!" Paget said. "Where are you? Downstairs? . . . All right, come on up!" And he slid the receiver into place and put the phone down.

**B**UT the Baron grabbed the instrument before it touched the desk and whipped the receiver off the hook, applied it to his ear. Relief flooded his face as he listened without speaking for an instant and then hung up and set the phone aside. "An old trick, Mr. Paget!" he smiled, and wagged a finger.

The youth had flipped back Paget's coat and reached for the heavy .45 automatic in the spring-holster under Paget's left arm. Paget's right hand flashed up, gripping and throwing outward the pocket containing hand and gun. The gun barked viciously through the cloth, somewhat muffled, and seared the palm of Paget's hand. Acrid fumes of powder and scorched cloth were in Paget's nostrils.

The spring in his holster let go but the .45 hung for an instant as the end of the barrel caught in the boot. In that instant the Baron spoke. "As you were, gentlemen! I have you covered!"

Sonny got the automatic loose with his left hand, but he did not fire again. He simply jammed the weapon against Paget.

With the snout of the big gun against his chest and Sonny's hate-filled blue eyes stabbing up at him, Paget released the pocket. Snarling, Sonny stepped back to where he could see a small nickel-plated revolver in the Baron's pudgy fist without taking his eyes off Paget.

"That was close!" the Baron breathed. "Careful, Sonny!"

With his free hand, he drew a handkerchief from his breast pocket and wiped sweat off his brow. "I suppose you realize, Mr. Paget, that my assistant is what you would call 'primed to the gills,' and

would like nothing better than to murder you?"

"That seems obvious," Paget commented dryly. "It's one of the reasons why I want nothing to do with either one of you."

"Sonny, will you please go and lock the outer door?" the Baron suggested, stuffing the enormous silk handkerchief back into his pocket. "Perhaps it might be well to prop a chair against it, too. We would not like to be disturbed during the rest of our conference, particularly not by any of Mr. Paget's associates who might return."

The youth went out.

Paget pulled speculatively on his nose and looked at the revolver in the Baron's fat fist. The hammer was pulled back to full cock. The Baron's finger, like a bent sausage, was caressing the trigger, and the muzzle did not waver by so much as an inch.

Sonny came back in and said: "All set." He had transferred Paget's gun to his right hand; the slight bulk of his own gun was still in his pocket.

"This is gonna be a pleasure!" He went up beside Paget and slammed the weapon against Paget's leathery cheek, knocked the detective sprawling into an overstuffed chair.

For the space of a full minute Paget lay there on his side, trying to shake his senses back to normal with little side-ward jerks of his head. His cheek was livid where the gun had struck. A blue haze swam before his eyes. His eyes became bloodshot.

The Baron said: "You see, Mr. Paget, we came here to find out where that chest is, and we don't intend to leave until you've told us."

"To hell with you!" Paget husked. He straightened into a sitting position.

Sonny came up on one side of him—the Baron had him covered from the other—and raked the sight of the auto-

matic across his lips once, struck him cruelly across the mouth with the barrel, and then raked the sight over his lips again. Blood spurted.

"The chest, Mr. Paget?" the Baron urged gently.

"For the last time," Paget said, "I don't know anything about D. W. Morton or any old iron chest that once belonged to him. And if I did, you wouldn't have enough money to buy the information from me, or enough guts to gun-whip it out of me."

"*Tsk, tsk!*" said the Baron. He lifted three of his chins in a gesture to Sonny, at the same time letting down the revolver's hammer, gently.

Sonny started to strike again. Paget's pile-driving, knotty fist came up in a streak, every tendon in his long body putting force behind it, and smashed the youth's jaw—lifted him several inches off the floor.

But at the same moment the Baron's revolver, reversed by an easy flip of incredible speed, came crashing down against the detective's forehead, the butt breaking open the skin and sinking Paget back into the chair where he lay stunned.

Staggering backward, Sonny did not lose balance altogether until he caromed against the corner of the desk; then he half spun and sat down very suddenly by the waste basket, his mouth loosely open and his eyes completely out of focus.

**P**AGET was the first to regain consciousness. He swore thickly, unintelligibly, and blinked slowly at the little black hole before him which was the lethal end of the revolver that the Baron held at full cock again.

"A deplorable procedure, Mr. Paget, is it not? *Tsk, tsk!* And I had thought you were a man of intelligence, a man who would listen to reason without compelling us to resort to such violent measures!"

Paget said: "To—to hell with you!"

His forehead was bloody. A little stream of red trickled down into one eye. Drunkenly he pushed up a hand and wiped it, smearing the crimson across that side of his face, then looked down curiously at the blood on his hand.

"A very good time, right now, sir, to let me have the information—while my assistant is under the weather."

The Baron gestured with his free hand to where Sonny was slumped over with his head between his knees. "I need not warn you how Sonny will feel toward you when he recovers! I may not be able to curb his enthusiasm for the task at hand!"

Paget wiped more blood out of his eye and said nothing.

"Sonny," the Baron went on smoothly, "will probably prefer something crude like a burning cigarette-end applied to your bare feet. Perhaps I shall let him do that. Then, sir, if your tongue does not loosen, we shall use a more refined method of my own devising!"

Lumps of muscle whitened Paget's jaw corners; he said nothing.

Presently Sonny stirred, looked absently at them for a moment, then got groggily to his feet. With a glance at the .45 in his hand, he lunged forward and knocked Paget clear out of the chair. Paget unfolded on the floor, remotely aware of what was going on but unable to move a muscle. Sonny kicked him in the stomach and spat in his face.

As if from a far distance, the detective heard the Baron's weary voice. "Oh, well! There's not any use to work on him any more. There's a *man*, my boy, if I ever saw one!" But Sonny kept kicking him in the stomach.

Curiously, there was little pain. He could feel the blows, feel the toe of the shoe every time it struck, but only as a

sensation without pain, as of a surgeon's knife cutting anaesthetized flesh.

After what seemed like many hours he heard them go out, talking; heard the hall door slam. Pain began to seep into his stomach, into his ribs, then. He licked his lips; there was the salty taste of blood in his mouth. Desperately, agonized, he raised himself on his hands and crawled toward the desk.

Every inch was like a mile, every little movement torture, but finally he extended an arm upward and with a sweeping motion knocked the telephone down, got it close to his head, gasped a number.

A girl's cheery voice answered.

"H'lo, Mary!" Paget said. "Tom eating there? . . . Get him, quick! . . . Tom, there's two guys, one big and fat, the other a kid—coming out of building now. If you—look across street—see 'em? Tail 'em! Don't lose 'em! . . . Don't—"

The instrument fell out of his hand. He stiffened, then relaxed into a prone position with the side of his face on the carpet. A mouth of darkness opened and swallowed him.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Beyond the Law

AN hour later Ross Paget was driving through the West Side on his way to the Morton estate. There were strips of adhesive tape on his forehead and his lower lip and a half-pint of brandy under his belt.

He had half forgotten the thin brittle voice over the telephone until he realized that he was in the four-hundred block on Macon Street and, watching, he spotted Number 432. It was a very old gray stone house, probably a converted residence, squeezed in between a warehouse and a third-rate hotel. A bronze sign by the entrance said—*Lionel Podhouser, Antiques*.

Antiques, eh? There must be some connection. Ross Paget parked his nondescript sedan, switched off the motor and withdrew the key, sat there thinking a moment. Oh, well! It wouldn't take long. He climbed stiffly, laboriously, from the car.

Biting off half-audible profanity as he thought of Sonny and the Baron, he negotiated the distance to the opening in the railing which bordered the areaway. The house sat below sidewalk level. He went down the three stone steps, crossed the narrow space and banged the knocker.

The door opened wide and a small neat man, slightly bald, with a weak mustache and immaculate clothes, said: "Come in, sir. What can I do for you?"

Paget walked in and the small neat man closed the door and followed him to the center of the room. It was a large room, as wide as the house and half as long. It was cluttered with showcases and old furniture.

Displayed in bewildering profusion were all kinds of articles considered by collectors to be *objets d'art*, some of them probably genuine antiques; wood carvings, metal pieces, glassware, pottery. Something screeched, "Make yourself at home!" and Paget looked up and saw a parrot glaring balefully at him from a cage.

He turned on his heel. The small neat man raised his eyebrows expectantly.

"Mr. Podhouser?"

"No. I am the clerk. Would you like to see Mr. Podhouser?"

Paget nodded.

"And your business, sir?"

"Never mind that. Get him. The name is Ross Paget."

"Just a moment."

The small neat man went through a doorway at the rear. Paget stood sniffing the musty odor of the place with faint distaste.

Lionel Podhouser was old like his merchandise. He wore a black skull-cap over his deeply wrinkled head. His nose was beak-like, almost predatory. He came forward leaning from the waist, rubbing his hands together in the classic bargainer's gesture, and somehow Paget knew that he never straightened; he was always stooped like that.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Paget, although I did not know whether to expect you. You made no answer over the phone, and I was just debating whether to call some other member of your profession when you—"

"We must have been cut off," Paget said. "The line—"

"Of course." Podhouser's hand-rubbing became more energetic. "Come this way, please."

**H**E led Paget into a back room and indicated a chair which the detective squinted at and finally sat down in with some misgiving. There was a long wait. Paget won.

"I was robbed last night," Podhouser said at last, seating himself.

"Yes?" Paget's tone was merely polite.

Podhouser's chin moved up and down. "About two o'clock this morning there arrived a shipment of antiques from another city by motor express. A rush shipment, you understand."

"Two o'clock this morning?"

"I had instructed the motor express company to deliver immediately upon arrival, no matter what time of day or night. Well, the phone rings, they say it is here, and I tell them to send it around. I pay extra for the service. The shipment is brought here, unpacked. I sign for it and the truckmen leave."

Podhouser spread his hands jerkily in a lifting gesture. "Well and good. I go back to bed. My clerk goes back to bed

too. He lives here, you understand. But at four o'clock there is a noise downstairs. I get my pistol and a flashlight and start down the steps. It is dark below, but I hear the noises."

Paget asked: "Where is your telephone?"

"It is downstairs," Podhouser said. "So you see I cannot use it to call the police. I come down the stairs with the flashlight in one hand and the pistol in the other. I reach the bottom of the stairs. It is very dark beyond the range of my flashlight. There is silence. I shake a little, perhaps. Who would not?"

Paget didn't say anything.

"Well," the old man went on, "I reach the bottom of the stairs. Something round and hard is shoved against my back and a gruff voice says, 'Stick 'em up!' So I put up my hands. The voice says, 'Drop the gun!' So I drop the gun." He paused and ran the tip of his tongue over his lips.

"Where were your valuables?" Paget asked. "Your most—"

"They are in the vault of the branch bank up on the corner, fortunately. My clerk and I take them there each evening and bring them back each morning. That is, the jewelry and other things which can be carried."

"Jewelry?"

"Yes. I deal a little in jewelry, too. Mostly antique mountings, you understand. Perhaps a few stones. Not many."

"I see. Go on."

"Then somebody else turns on a light in this room in which we are now sitting, and it sheds just enough light out there for me to see that there are two other men besides the one who is holding the gun in my back. The one who has turned on the light joins them. They are toughs."

"Can you describe any of them?"

"Not very well. It is dim, you see.

One of them is short and dark, a little stout. An Italian, perhaps. Another has a thin red scar, a line that runs from the corner of his left eye down onto his neck. The others I cannot remember. Naturally I am very much excited at the time."

"What were they after?"

**PODHOUSER** sat on the edge of his chair, leaning forward. "This is the peculiar part, Mr. Paget. They are after an old chest, one of the items which arrives in the shipment earlier in the night. It is a large chest, about three feet long, somewhat less deep and wide. I have acquired it from this dealer in another city. It is some hard tropical wood, with hand-forged iron straps criss-crossing one another and large round rivet-heads studded thickly. Probably made during the seventeenth century."

"And the robbers had found it?"

"Yes. It is there on the floor where it has been unpacked. These robbers are trying to move it. It is very heavy, although there is nothing in it. The man behind me makes me keep my hands up while the others drag the chest toward the back of the house. Why they should want nothing but this chest, I cannot imagine, but that is the fact."

"They disturbed nothing else?"

"Nothing. The man behind me prods me toward the back of the house after the ones who are dragging the chest, and when we get back there I see that they have broken the lock on the back door. That is the way they effected entrance."

"There is an alley at the back?"

Podhouser nodded. "They have a truck waiting. They finally lift the chest into the truck and spread a tarpaulin over it. All the time this man behind me has the gun in my back, and of course I can do nothing. They caution me not to call for help."

"Where was your clerk all this time?"

"Upstairs asleep. He never awakens. He is a very heavy sleeper. There is some conversation among the robbers as to what they should do with me then. One says tie me up. Another says slug me; it would take too long to tie me up and they want to get away as quickly as possible. The man behind me ends the argument by slamming me over the head with the gun."

"You never got a look at the one behind you?"

"No. When I regain consciousness I go all over the shop looking to see what has been taken, and nothing has been taken but the chest."

"You have no suspicion as to the identity of any of the men?"

"None."

Paget rose. "What do you want me to do about it?"

"I want you to find out who got the chest, who has it, and to recover it for me if possible."

"That's the duty of the police, Mr. Podhouser. They can handle it better than I can—they have more organization. What do they say about it?"

"I haven't notified them."

Paget's jaw slackened a little. "You didn't call the police?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"There are a number of reasons. One of them is that this robbery is beyond the usual sphere of the police. The chest has no value except as an antique. In other words it is valuable only to collectors and experts who can appreciate it as an example of workmanship. The police mean publicity, and publicity might hamper effective investigation."

"You understand that I am no more familiar with the antique business than the police are?"

"Of course. But you can keep the whole matter under your hat, as the say-

ing goes, and probably make better progress than they could."

"How much is this chest worth?"

"That depends entirely upon who has it and who is buying it. I might dispose of it to one of my customers, say, for a thousand dollars. At a big auction, with proper interest aroused, it might bring five thousand."

"How much would you pay for its return?"

"I am prepared to offer you five hundred dollars as a retainer. If you recover the chest without publicity, I would pay you five hundred more. Is that suitable?"

Paget walked out among the show cases. Podhouser followed him, bent sharply forward from the waist.

"I don't know, Mr. Podhouser. The fee is all right. But I am very busy on other cases." Paget glanced at his watch. "Tell you what I'll do: I've got to check up on something else, and I'll call you back within an hour or so and let you know whether I can handle the case. O.K.?"

"Well and good. I'll expect you to call."

"Good day, Mr. Podhouser."

"Good day, Mr. Paget."

Paget opened the front door and stepped out into the areaway. His expression was a mixture of quizzical irritation, amusement, irony and baffled curiosity. He reached behind him to close the door and just before the latch clicked he heard the parrot screech: "Make yourself at home!"

**S**COWLING, he took the steps in one stride and walked swiftly to his parked car. At the curb he stopped abruptly, stood there a minute with his eyes narrowed and his thumbs caught in vest pockets, then swung about and entered a drugstore. Paget saw a phone booth in

the back. He entered it and dialed a number.

Nina Carr said: "You slipped away! You know you shouldn't have left here. The doctor said—"

"Never mind that. Has Tom phoned?"

"Yes. He phoned about fifteen minutes ago. But the Morton case or anything else—you know you oughtn't to go—"

Paget's voice was grimly eager. "What did Tom say?"

"He followed them to an apartment hotel on South Eighteenth Street. The Beverly. He says he's in a quick-lunch on the other side of the street from the apartment house where he can watch the entrance, and he's already had five cups of coffee besides the two he had at breakfast and he wants to know if it would be all right to drink some beer now. I told him not to dare. What did those two horrible men want from you, anyhow? What was it all about? You never did tell me—"

"Thanks a lot. Call you later."

He banged up the receiver, flung the folding door open and walked out of the drugstore with both hands jammed in pants pockets. For the first time that day there was a whole-hearted grin on his face. It stretched the split lip under the plaster and it hurt, but he felt like grinning and he grinned just the same.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Shades of Blackbeard*

**T**HE Morton place was a huge castle-like structure on a bluff overlooking the river and the entire countryside. Its rugged appearance of age and stability gave the impression that it must have been there for centuries, but in reality it had been constructed in 1930.

No one really knew much about D. W. Morton or where he had acquired his wealth. He had come here in January of

that year from New York. Wall Street, the public generally said, and those two vague words covered Morton's background. Of his birthplace or his early life the public knew nothing. He had built the huge house and had been living there since with his wife, who was reported to be a frail, ineffectual little woman of middle age who took no part in social activities nor even bothered to assist her husband in his occasional house-parties.

A gaunt butler in livery admitted Ross Paget and ushered him into the library. The lanky detective stood there waiting, his tanned young face betraying awe at the magnificence of the furnishings, the statuary and armor pieces, the book-lined walls, the whole atmosphere of apparently unlimited wealth.

The butler went through a doorway and Paget, by leaning slightly, could see him cross a wide room and knock on a door.

Voices were raised in excitement behind that door: a man's—gruff, crisp, almost violent; a woman's—pouting and spiteful; and another woman's—older, mild and apologetic.

At the butler's repeated knocking the voices ceased for a moment and then the man called irritably: "All right! Come in!"

The butler opened the door and coughed behind his hand.

"Mr. Paget, sir. You were expecting him, I believe?"

"Yes—show him in! No, wait! Helen, for the last time I want you to understand that I'll not tolerate your snooping. Because you're my wife is no reason for you to walk in on me like that. Edith Stanton is here, and she's going to stay here a while whether you like it or not. Now get out!"

"And next time, knock when you come in here!" the pouting voice said.

"Very well, Dan," came the humble voice. "I'll go now."

The butler stood aside as Mrs. Morton appeared. She was a thin, white-haired woman whose kindly features showed no trace of humiliation. She came slowly toward the library. Behind her, a voluptuous blonde flounced from the study, stabbed the butler with a contemptuous glance and swept out of view.

Paget stood discreetly aside and gazed at a painting. He heard Mrs. Morton enter the library.

"Mr. Paget?"

He turned. She stood there quiet and frail, with her hands folded. He nodded.

"I'm Mrs. Morton," she said. "My husband is in bad health—his heart, you know—and is very excitable this morning on account of what happened last night. You'll be considerate with him, please? Keep him from becoming alarmed over anything, if you can?"

"Of course."

"Thank you, Mr. Paget. He'll see you now." She nodded to the butler, who was waiting, and the butler led Paget back to the study and admitted him, closing the door behind him.

It was a big room with thick rugs and impressive furniture. Great barred windows overlooked the river. Between the windows and Paget, D. W. Morton rose from behind a flat desk as big as a billiard table and indicated a chair to his right.

"Sit down, Mr. Paget. Glad to see you. Have a cigar?"

"No, thanks." Paget sat down.

"I called you this morning," Morton began, "because you were recommended to me by the police commissioner as being a man of the highest integrity, whose word was as good as his bond."

Paget smiled faintly. "That was very good of the commissioner."



MORTON lit a cigar, and the dark roll of tobacco protruding from his gray mouth emphasized the grayness of his skin, his eyes, his clothes. Everything about him was gray.

"Have you any idea how I acquired my fortune, Mr. Paget?"

The detective shrugged. "Wall Street, I believe, is the popular explanation."

"It is true that during 'Twenty-nine I figured prominently in several sensational stock deals," Morton said. "But my money came from elsewhere. Until Nineteen Twenty-eight, I had been a soldier of fortune, never of very much importance. I wandered over the globe. Now and then my wife was with me, but most of the time she remained in New York. She had a small income from her family's estate and I did not have to worry about her support.

"In November, 'Twenty-eight, I was associated with one Michael Benjamin in a South American revolutionary plot which failed. Michael Benjamin was an adventurer like myself. He is a very fat man, and during the years before the war had followed the occupation of a card shark aboard transatlantic liners. His airs of elegance gave him the nickname of the Baron.

"One night in Rio, the two of us ran across a derelict sailor who had a scrap of goatskin, inscribed with a skull and all the other trimmings, which appeared to be a map of the location of a treasure. We bought this map from the sailor for the price of a quart of whiskey. Michael Benjamin fancied himself a scholar, particularly on things of this nature. He reached the conclusion after several days' study of the map and independent historical research that it was actually a map drawn by the pirate Captain Edward Teach, otherwise known as Blackbeard.

"Naturally I was skeptical at first. I had a few hundred dollars at the time,

and Michael Benjamin, being broke, found it necessary to convince me. He did so, by showing me various historical documents unearthed from libraries in Rio. It seemed that Blackbeard really had buried much treasure about the year Seventeen Sixteen in the vicinity of Plum Point, a narrow neck of land in Beaufort County, North Carolina, where Bath Creek flows into the Pamlico River.

"This map bore a reference to Plum Point. Well, to shorten the story, Mr. Paget, we took passage to the States. The day before Christmas, we located the spot designated by the map. It was a few paces from an old tree near the end of the Point, a low and sandy place, cut off from the mainland by a marsh so that it is practically an island.

"We had reached this locality by boat, and we had plenty of implements for digging on board. There were three of us—Michael Benjamin had brought his younger brother, a mere lad, into the affair. We dug straight down. We had to cut some of the roots of the tree.

"Our spades presently uncovered the dome of what appeared to be some kind of vault. The bricks were old, larger than bricks now commonly used in building, and hand-made, with rounded edges. We broke away the top of this vault and found a large chest. It was a wooden chest bound with hand-forged iron straps and hinges. We had to chip away bricks and mortar, for the chest had been perfectly sealed in this vault.

"The chest was forty inches long, thirty-two inches wide and about the same depth; we measured it later. After much effort, by using a makeshift tackle and tripod of poles, we succeeded in raising it.

"That chest, Mr. Paget, contained thousands upon thousands of doubloons and pieces of eight, gems and golden goblets. We dragged it down to the boat and got

it aboard. In our haste to get it away, we made the mistake of not covering over the hole we had dug. We left it just as it was.

MORTON sighed and then went on. "Several days later the newspapers—they are available, Mr. Paget, if you care to go somewhere and consult the files—printed accounts of the discovery by two trappers of what we had left of the vault. Of course the bricks and mortar on the sides and bottom of the vault had retained perfect impressions of the chest. It was easy for the public to reconstruct what had happened.

"But by that time we were safe in Charleston, South Carolina, with our treasure. The problem of its disposal worried us no little. It was impossible to tell what its value to us would be if we made a clean breast of the affair. But the government might take it away from us, the owner of the land where we had found it might file claims—there would doubtless be litigation and other trouble.

"We decided that the only sensible course was for us to melt down the gold and silver and take the gems from their settings. We did that. And with the bar gold and silver and unmounted jewels divided equally among us, we went to New York and set about finding the most advantageous way to convert our loot into cash. The others wanted to destroy the chest itself, but I decided to keep it for sentimental reasons. I boxed it and stored it.

"If you were to go to a library and consult the New York morning newspapers of January Second, Nineteen Twenty-nine, Mr. Paget, you would find an account of the murder of a young man who was registered in a mid-town hotel under an assumed name. He was found in his room by the chambermaid, stabbed to death. The case is one of the unsolved

mysteries of the New York Police Department.

"The facts are these, Mr. Paget: that young man was Michael Benjamin's brother. He had been carrying his share of the treasure in an ordinary handbag. The Baron and I occupied rooms adjoining his, and about one o'clock on the morning of January Second we heard a disturbance in his room. We rushed in and found him dying. The handbag containing his part of the treasure was gone.

"Before he died, he managed to gasp out to us a description of the murderer. But the description was of little use to us. The intruder had been masked, the lad said. There had been a struggle. During the struggle, the bandit's coat and shirt were torn, exposing the tattooed figure of a cat on his left shoulder. That was the only clue. The boy died.

"In our circumstances we did not wish to face a police investigation, so we left the hotel and never returned. We disposed of our shares of the treasure. Benjamin went his way, vowing vengeance upon the killer of his brother and saying that he would never rest until he had found him, and I went mine. For a while I amused myself with the stock market, then came here to live. You know the rest, until now we come to what happened last night.

"The chest I had kept as a very personal souvenir, telling anyone who happened to ask about it that it was merely an antique I had picked up in Charleston. Last night I was sitting in the library with Edith Stanton, a house guest, when the butler came in and announced that Michael Benjamin was at the front door.

"Somewhat flustered, I suppose, because I had not seen or heard from the Baron since January, 'Twenty-nine, I got rid of Miss Stanton and ordered the butler to admit the Baron. He came in and we

talked in circles for a while, until finally I discovered what it was that he wanted."

**M**MORTON smiled grimly. "He is a very clever man in some ways, Mr. Paget, but my previous association with him had taught me some of his talents. He approached the matter very tactfully at first, saying that he merely wanted the chest for the same reason I had kept it, and offered me two thousand dollars for it. I refused.

"We argued. I told him I would not sell it at any price. He proposed to be my guest for a few days. I told him that he was not welcome, because I did not trust him in any way. He offered me ten thousand dollars for the chest. I refused that and he left in a huff.

"My curiosity was aroused, and the more I thought about it the more I became convinced that there was something about the chest, perhaps its historical significance, that made it worth a lot of money. So, unable to sleep, I drove eighty miles to the state university to see an acquaintance of mine, a member of the faculty, who is an authority on American history and whose hobby is the study of pirates and piracy.

"I was sure that the Baron had chanced upon some historical reference to the chest which made it immensely valuable. And it turned out that I was not wrong. The professor had never seen my chest. I described it to him in minute detail, told him that I had bought it in an antique shop in Charleston, and since had run across a newspaper account of the finding of a similar chest in Beaufort County, North Carolina, in 'Twenty-eight. Perhaps mine was that very chest. Was there any way to know?

"That brought the information I really wanted. The only notable reference to such a chest in the history of the Americas, said the professor, was of one taken

by the French pirate, Duclerc, in an attack upon the city of Rio de Janeiro in Seventeen Ten, six years before Blackbeard was supposed to have buried his treasure in North Carolina.

"The Portuguese governor, Francisco de Castro, had prepared this chest to be sent home as a tribute to his ruler, filling it with the treasures of the gold-mining country of Brazil. The joints were prepared in a manner which could easily be identified today. Because of this authenticated history the chest itself would be worth more than thirty thousand dollars.

"The professor was very much excited about it. He refused to place an exact estimate on the historical value of the chest, but swore it would bring at least thirty thousand dollars. I told him I doubted if it were the same chest, thanked him and left. But on the way home I became sure that in some manner the Baron, with his flair for scholarship, had learned of its value. He could pay me ten thousand and still make a profit of twenty, if not more.

"When I arrived home about one thirty o'clock I found that there had been a hold-up there. An armed group of bandits had held the staff of servants at bay and taken the chest away in a truck. Some foolish servant had called the police, but I kept him and the rest of them from talking too much after the police arrived. I persuaded the police that nothing of consequence had been taken and eventually got rid of them.

"I do not want any publicity, and consequently, I do not want the police to pursue any inquiry for reasons which you can readily imagine. The Baron knew that. And it will be next to impossible for him to dispose of the chest without the newspapers carrying the story.

"As you are well aware, I am supposed to be a rich man, Mr. Paget. But as a matter of fact I am practically broke.

My investments have been disastrous during the past three years. Everything, even this home, is mortgaged to the hilt. My total tangible assets are here in this drawer—seven thousand dollars in cash.”

He produced a sheaf of currency. “Here’s five thousand of it—cash. I will pay you five thousand more if you recover the chest for me. I’ll still make the same profit the Baron is after. Do you accept the commission?”

Ross Paget said, “I do,” and took the money. “You’ll hear from me within a few hours,” he added, and went out.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Honor Among Thieves

**N**INA CARR was sitting with her elbows on the desk, her chin in her hands, staring at the telephone as if she dared it to ring, when Ross Paget barged in, his necktie askew and one side of his coat collar untidily erect.

“Why didn’t you—” she burst out.

Paget cut her off with: “Wire Hanrahan in New York and tell him to call me as soon as possible with all the dope he can get on D. W. Morton, who was in Wall Street there in ’Twenty-nine. Also Morton’s wife. Call Max Shelton up at the Rialto office and get any information you can about Edith Stanton, former actress. Has Tom called lately? Are they still at the Beverly?”

“Five minutes ago. They’re still there.”

“All right, snap into it!”

She said, “O. K.,” reached behind her to yank a box-lever which would summon a telegraph messenger, swung around to her typewriter and whirled a blank into the carriage and started pounding out the message.

In the inner office, Paget grabbed up the telephone book, found Lionel Podhouser’s number and called him.

“Mr. Podhouser?”

“Yes.”

“Ross Paget speaking. I am sorry to say that I will be too busy on other matters to undertake that investigation for you.”

“But Mr. Paget! Wait! You’ll have to take the case!”

“Why?”

“Early this morning, before I had seen you, the customer I had promised to save that chest for came in and wanted to see it, and I had to tell him about it being stolen. But I told him that I had retained you at once—got you out of bed—and that you had already found where the chest was, and would recover it for me probably today. Now if you do not take the case I am—”

“Sorry, Mr. Podhouser. Another time?”

Paget hung up, his mouth twisting. So that was why the Baron thought he knew where the chest was! The detective unhooked the receiver again; Nina Carr was talking to Max Shelton, and he listened in.

“That baby?” Shelton said. “Say, Nina, she’s the most unscrupulous gold-digger that ever hit this neck of the woods. She’s as crooked as a snake and the only reason she gets by is that she wiggles her hips that way.”

“Thanks, Max,” Nina said. “You can take me out some night.”

The line went dead. Paget hung up, called out, “I got it!” and reopened a connection and asked for long-distance to get him the president’s office of the state university while he held the line. A woman’s voice answered.

“What’s the name of your American history professor—the one who’s an authority on piracy?” Paget asked without preamble.

“You mean Doctor Williams?” the secretary said.

"Right! I want to talk to him. It's very important."

"I'm sorry, Doctor Williams is lecturing at the moment. Will you leave your number?"

Paget gave her his number and told her to tell the faculty member that it was highly urgent and for him to call collect. He slammed the instrument down on the desk and yelled: "Get hold of Jimmy Burke for me—at the *Clarion* office or the Hippodrome Bar."

He heard Nina pick up the phone and give the *Clarion* number, and he paced the floor, biting his thumb, until she announced that Jimmy Burke was on the line.

"Jimmy," he said, "go scramble in the files along about Christmas, Nineteen Twenty-eight, and see if you can find anything about somebody discovering where a buried treasure had been dug up near Bath Creek, North Carolina."

"Sure, Ross," the reporter said. "I'll call you back."

**H**ANGING up, Paget stormed out of the office with no more than a curt "Back in a few minutes!" to Nina Carr. He ran to the elevator, punched the button with a broad thumb and stood shifting from one foot to the other, impatiently, until the door clacked open. When he hit the street he walked swiftly three blocks eastward. Suddenly he slackened his pace as he approached a pool parlor on a dingy side street, and stuck his thumbs in his vest pockets and sauntered into the place.

It contained a cigar counter behind which a stout man in a collarless shirt was drowsing over a newspaper, taking occasional sips of coffee from a cup which rested at his elbow. Midway of the length of the place there was shadow, and beyond it the pool tables around

which half a dozen men were playing, and others just looking on.

"Hello, Ross!" The collarless man looked up from his newspaper. "How's it?"

Paget shrugged. "So-so." He named a brand of cigarettes and tossed a quarter on the counter.

The collarless man gave him cigarettes and change. Paget opened the package and lit a cigarette and flipped the match in a high arc, turned and strolled out.

A block away he sidled into the gloomy doorway of a run-down rooming house and waited. Presently a thin, sallow little man with a toothpick angled from one corner of his mouth walked past, spotted him, came back and with cautious glances up and down the street, stepped in beside him.

"What you want?"

"A bunch of the local talent was hired for a big-time heist last night," Paget said, "only all they were supposed to get was an old chest. One of the hired hands was short and dark, maybe an Italian, and the other had a thin, red scar from the corner of his left eye down to his neck."

"That would be Louie Screvin and Gent Slattery, probably."

"Well, get all you can about it and let me know." Paget tendered a bill.

The little man took it. "All right. What'll I do? Call you?"

"How long will you take?"

"Oh, just a few minutes maybe."

"O. K. Meet me back here in half an hour."

Paget dodged out of the doorway, doubled around the block and covered the distance back to his office as fast as he could without attracting attention. Nina Carr held the phone out to him when he went in.

"It's Jimmy Burke."

He snatched the phone. "Find anything, Jimmy?"

"Right-o!" the reporter said. "Just a squib, because maybe it looked kinda phony to the telegraph editor, but it seems two trappers came upon this place where there was an old vault under the ground that somebody had broke into, and the cement held impressions of—"

"Good enough. Thanks." Paget put the phone down and went to the inner office, got the brandy bottle from the bottom drawer of his desk and took a swig.

Four minutes later the phone rang stridently again and Paget answered.

"Hey, Ross! Maybe I've done the wrong thing, but that little guy, the kid, the one that looks like a killer, came out of the Beverly and walked up the street and I tailed him. He's in Chippie's saloon on South Fourteenth now and I'm in a joint across the street where I can watch. What'll I do?"

"Stick with him, Tom! Don't let him spot you, but stick with him whatever you do! And call back here when you can. I'm going to the Beverly."

**E**XAMINING his gun swiftly, Paget reholstered it, swung out past Nina Carr's worried frown and had his left foot in the hall and his right hand pulling the door shut after him when he saw Edith Stanton approaching. Their eyes met simultaneously.

There was no doubting her sensuous attractiveness. She wasn't young, but her face and her figure were so well cared for that she was as sleek as a tiger. The black sheen of her dress was designed to show every line of her figure, with no attempt whatever at concealment. And when she spoke, a certain throaty harshness underlay a sugar coating of honey smoothness.

"Hello, Detective."

Paget didn't move.

"Aren't you going to ask me in?" Her eyes brimmed twinkling, mischievous invitation. She slid up close to him and placed her hand on his arm. Paget looked over the lines of her figure with cold, inscrutable appraisal. He shrugged the shoulder of the arm on which her hand lay and stood aside wordlessly.

She went in past him, saw Nina, sniffed, and continued to the inner office. Paget followed her, went behind the desk and sat down and nodded toward a chair. She sat down and crossed her silken legs, carelessly careful that her skirt was up to her knee.

"Well?" Paget's tone was strictly businesslike.

"After you left the Morton home this morning," she began, "I happened to hear Mrs. Morton comment that she liked you very much. She liked your face, in spite of the plaster strips. She said it was an honest face." Edith Stanton laughed. "Have you been in a fight, or did you just fall against something?"

"What did you want to see me about?" Paget countered.

"There's no hurry, is there? Give me a cigarette."

He gave her one and held a match for her.

"As a matter of fact," she said, exhaling smoke, "I've got a job for you. Since Mrs. Morton seemed to like you, it won't be hard. It's this: Dan wants a divorce. Wants to divorce her. But there are no grounds, and your job is to make grounds."

She got up and sat on the desk and leaned toward him confidentially. "It ought not to be hard for you to get her to some hotel on an excuse and arrange to catch her in a room with a man. You probably know how those things are done. Of course it would be just a formality, to let Dan get his divorce. How about it, big boy?"

Paget sat drumming the desk with his fingers. She rose languidly and came around near him, giving him the full effect of her perfume and the nearness of her body.

"You know, I think you and I ought to get together some time, too. I'm a little like Mrs. Morton. I like your face."

He pushed his chair back, and the chiseled bronze of his features showed no emotion whatever as he said: "Is that all?"

"Sure," she frowned. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I don't want your kind of business."

"But"—she spread her hands in a swift gesture—"you're a private detective, aren't you?"

"Not that kind. Now—" He inclined his head toward the door.

For a moment she glared, her eyes flashing savagely like those of a beast. Then quite abruptly she stabbed her cigarette into the tray and stalked out.

**F**OR a long time Paget sat there motionless, lost in reverie. The phone rang again, but its sound did not penetrate his consciousness enough to arouse him to action. Nina Carr came in.

"It's Hanrahan in New York."

With a quick lift of his head to her, Paget took up the phone.

"All right, Hanrahan. You're very prompt. What did you get?"

"Nothing much," Hanrahan said. "I couldn't find a thing on him before 'Twenty-nine. It seems he showed up here that year from South America or some place—with millions. He played around with the stock market a while, lost some money. Then he went to your town. His wife is one of these nuts that loves her husband no matter what he does."

"He played around with women pretty much there?"

"Plenty. Got in some bad jams, too, but his wife always pulled him out of them. She'd been living here by herself half the time before 'Twenty-nine, and I suspect she used to send him money in South America or wherever he was. She had a little money herself before that time, and she probably gave him most of it. Anything particular you wanted about him?"

"No, that's fine, Hanrahan. So long."

The line went dead and he slowly replaced the receiver, got his hat and went down to the street. The stool pigeon was waiting for him in the dim doorway four blocks eastward.

"It's pretty tough, Mr. Paget. Some heavy dough was laid on the line and the boys are all tight-mouthed as hell. I haven't run across anybody that would talk yet, but—"

Paget said: "This is pretty important to me, too. There'll be a century note in it for you if you can get me what I want—everything you can about who was in it, who hired 'em, and why."

"Well, I'll do the best I can."

"When you get anything, call my office. If I'm not there, spill it to my secretary. She's a right guy, and she'll handle it for me. O.K.?"

"O.K., Mr. Paget."

The detective dodged out, walked half a block and signaled a taxi. He climbed in and said: "The Beverly, on South Eighteenth."

It was a big place, fairly well-to-do though not among the best in the city. Paget had his driver go slowly past it several times before he finally decided there was nothing to be seen in the way of headquarters dicks or other stake-outs. He got out of the cab, paid the driver, and went into the lobby.

There were Persian rugs underfoot,

mirrors between heavy purple drapes, and soft-shaded lamps next to inviting arm-chairs. A clerk and a cashier were back of the desk.

Paget went straight across to where a lad in a trim green uniform lounged in the open door of an elevator, said, "Ten," and was taken upward.

ON THE tenth floor he found 1032 and knocked loudly. There was no response. He knocked some more. Mumbled swearing could be heard through the panel, the sound of something wooden falling to the floor, and a sleepy voice called: "Who is it?"

"Telegram, sir." Paget disguised his voice.

More mumbled profanity, and at last the door swung open to expose a dark, slight man about the same age as Paget—thirty—whose hair was pillow-tousled, whose eyes were squinting from his screwed-up face, and who was hitching up his pajama pants with his free hand.

"Oh, hello, Ross! Come in! Why the gag about the telegram?"

Paget went into the room where the bed was rumpled and a chair overturned with a coat and vest on its top-heavy back. He picked up the chair and straightened the coat and sat down.

"I just don't like to go yelling my name around hotel halls."

"Oh!" The clerk got back in bed and pulled the covers up to his chin and cocked an eye at the detective. "I kind of thought it might be somep'n about my mother. You gave me a scare. She's been ailing lately, and I keep thinking I'll go home and see her, but I never get around to it and—"

"Were you very wide-awake last night?" Paget broke in.

The clerk yawned cavernously. "Whadda yuh wanta know?" His yawn ended with a click of his teeth.

"There's two guys stayin' here, one of them very big and fat and jolly—looks like he's been a lot of things and done a lot of places—and the other a kid of about twenty that looks like he might've eaten a mess of gunpowder by mistake. Know 'em?"

"Let's see." The clerk rubbed a bristly chin and turned his open eye upon the ceiling thoughtfully. "Yeah, I think so. That would be Mr. Michael Benjamin and his secretary. Secretary—hah! I bet that kid can't even read."

"Well, what I want to know is about their goings and comings last night. When did they go out and when did they come in? Or were they separate? I thought you might remember—"

"I don't know, Ross. Let's see. Yeah, I do remember seeing the kid come in by himself about five this morning."

"That all?"

"Uh-huh. I wouldn't remember about earlier, anyhow, on account of there's so much more going on. But the kid come in about five. I remember that all right."

"Sure he was alone?"

"There wasn't nobody with him."

Paget got up. "Have you seen the new bill at the Rialto?"

"No," the clerk said. "Why?"

"I've got a couple of tickets I don't need. I'll send 'em over to you."

"Thanks, Ross."

At the door the detective asked casually: "Say, what rooms are they in?"

"The fat slob is in Four Ten, I think, and the kid is Four Twelve."

Paget said: "Thanks. Mind if I use the phone?"

"Go ahead."

NINA'S voice was cheerful as ever when she answered the phone. Paget said: "Tom called again?" There was a note of excitement in his voice.

"Yes, he has. The kid, he said, went



to a house about a block from Chippie's saloon on South Fourteenth Street. Tom was able to sneak up to a window and look in. The kid had two other men in the room arguing with a fourth man, a gray-haired, gray-faced fellow. They gave him the works but didn't seem to get anything from him. He's out cold now. Two of the men were just leaving when Tom phoned, but the kid was still there."

Paget's lips tightened under the adhesive. "Anything else?"

"Somebody who wouldn't give his name called and said tell you that Louie Screvin and Gent Slattery—those are the exact names—pulled a job last night, but he can't find out what they did."

Paget said: "O.K. I know what they did. And you tell Tom to stick to that room. The kid may leave there soon, he probably will, but Tom's to keep his face in that window."

"I'll tell him. But I wish I knew what it was about. Why don't you—"

Paget said: "No time now. There's work to do." He forked the phone, said, "Thanks," to the clerk and went out.

Deep lines came into his face as he went to the elevator, boarded it and descended to the fourth floor. The set of his mouth was wan and haggard. At the door of 410 he halted, tested the easy slide of his gun in his holster, and carefully put fingers on the knob.

Silently he twisted it. The door was locked. There was no sound from within. He knocked.

Paint footsteps could be heard. They came to the door and stopped. Seconds passed. Paget tried to keep from becoming tense. He saw the knob turn, rasping audibly. A key clicked. The door opened. Paget's arms hung loosely at his sides.

The Baron stood there, his pink jowls spreading into a smile. With his right hand back of the door on the knob, he

stepped aside and said: "Delighted, Mr. Paget! Won't you come in?"

Paget went in. The Baron shoved the door shut. He raised his pudgy right hand from the doorknob; he was holding a gun. The small revolver was pointed straight at Paget's chest.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Tattooed Cat

THE Baron was very genial. Except for the fact that there was a gun in his hand, he might have been greeting an old friend who had turned up unexpectedly.

"Well, well, sir! I am glad to see you! And you seem to have survived our little conference of this morning without serious damages." He fingered an ear reflectively, studying Paget's face. "Perhaps you have changed your mind and decided to accept my offer?"

"Does the five thousand dollars still stand?"

"Indeed it does, sir. Merely for information as to where I can find the chest. Most generous, if I do say so!"

"For the information, you'll pay me a thousand now, and the rest of it—four thousand more—as soon as you have been satisfied that my information was correct?"

"Quite so. Those were my terms this morning, and so far as I am concerned nothing has happened to change them."

"You'll expect no assistance from me in acquiring the chest?"

"None whatever."

"All right. You're on."

The Baron drew out a wallet with his left hand and tossed it on the table. He kept the gun in his right hand trained on Paget's chest.

"Take ten hundred-dollar bills from that wallet and then give it back to me," he said.

Paget did so, noticing that several other notes of the same denomination in addition to half a dozen thousand-dollar bills remained in the wallet, and handed it back to the Baron.

"Good," he said then. "The chest is at Fourteen Forty-two South Fourteenth Street."

"Good!" The Baron's eyes gleamed. "Then I—"

At the sound of a knock on the door, he broke off. He stiffened. He did not move, did not take his eyes off Paget.

Paget grinned widely. "They didn't lose any time getting here," he said.

The knocking was repeated.

With a slight quiver of his thick lips that betrayed his uneasiness, the Baron crossed to Paget and stuck the muzzle of the gun against the detective's stomach. He reached under Paget's coat and took the .45 automatic from the holster. Then he ran a hand cautiously over the rest of Paget's body, keeping the muzzle of the small revolver in position.

"The forty-five is the only one I carry," Paget told him.

Nodding, the Baron dropped the big gun in his coat pocket and went to the door.

"Who is it?" he called.

There was no answer.

He repeated the question.

Silence.

He stepped back and gestured with his gun. The skin was stretched tight over the rolls of fat in his face but his voice was still genial: "Will you kindly open the door, Mr. Paget?"

Good naturedly Paget went to the door and opened it. Two men with guns crowded him back. One of them was short and dark, rather stout, whose features showed a Latin strain; the other, thin and flashily dressed, had a thin, red scar line that ran from the outer corner of his left eye down onto his neck. The

scarred man closed the door. Paget moved warily out of the line of fire.

**E**LECTRIC tension gripped the scene, but no gun exploded. The two intruders stood gazing at the Baron, who did not lower his revolver. A minute passed in complete deadlock.

"Drop the rod, Fatty!" said Louie Screvin.

The Baron was unhurried, unruffled. "And if I don't?"

"There's two of us. Your buddy don't look like he's heeled. He couldn't draw fast enough to beat us anyhow. When the shootin' starts, you'll get a slug from one of us if you don't from the other."

"Your logic, my good man, is above reproach." The Baron dropped his gun; it thudded on the rug.

"Frisk 'em!" Screvin ordered.

Gent Slattery went to Paget first, keeping out of the line of fire from his confederate's weapon, and satisfied himself that the detective was unarmed. Paget held his hands straight out from his sides until the scar-faced man completed the search, then let them drop.

"Up, Fatty!"

The Baron, whose right fist was frozen before his paunch in the position from which he had dropped the revolver, put his hands up slowly.

Scooping the revolver from the floor, Slattery ran expert fingers over the Baron's clothes and found the .45, took it and pocketed it.

"All right, we can talk now," Screvin said. "What we came here to find out, Fatty, is how come you wanted that chest so much. We got another fence—not that Podhouser punk—to look it over and he said it wasn't worth three grand. And there ain't nothin' in it. We looked good. So what's the catch, Fatty?"

The Baron's eyes slitted. "Am I to understand that you have the chest?"

"Yeah, we got it."

"At Fourteen Forty-two South Fourteenth Street?"

Screvin scowled. "How'd you know that?"

Paget said cheerfully: "How about that four thousand you owe me now, Baron?"

"You crossed me," the Baron charged. "You knew that even if I went there, they'd grab me and—"

"Sure," Paget admitted. "But my information was correct, wasn't it? And that's what you bargained for, wasn't it?"

"Hey, cut this out," Screvin clipped. "I'm askin' the questions around here. What's the pay-off about that chest?"

"Are you the torpedoes my assistant engaged to acquire the chest from Mr. Morton?" the Baron asked.

"Aw, hell!" Slattery exclaimed. "Tell him about it, Louis, so he'll know where he stands."

"The hell with him!" Screvin said. "He's the one to do the talkin' around here."

Paget suggested: "Maybe I can enlighten the Baron about the details. How about it?"

There was no objection, and Paget turned to Michael Benjamin. "You see, Baron, when Sonny hired these men to help him get the chest from Morton's place while you were somewhere here in town establishing an iron-clad alibi, he got it and took it to Lionel Podhouser, as you suggested. But you made a mistake in choosing Podhouser.

"He's really not a good fence—just an amateur. Come to think of it, though, maybe that's why you chose him. You were the only one who knew the real value of the chest, and you figured it would be safe there until you got around to it. Well, Sonny followed your orders, up to that point, explicitly.

"But he got to thinking about it and decided that if the chest was worth all that trouble to you, it ought to be worth as much to him. So he hires these fellows all over again and goes back to Podhouser's and gets the chest; being careful, of course, that Podhouser didn't get a glimpse of him the second time.

"He took the chest away and hid it, and came back here to you about five o'clock and reported that everything was just as you wanted it. With your alibi fixed so well that nobody could possibly doubt it, you went down to Podhouser's for the chest and found that it had been hijacked. Sonny was probably with you, pretending innocence and great surprise.

"So when Podhouser told you that he had retained me and that I had located the chest, you came up to my office and tried to beat the information out of me. That was no go.

"Now Sonny has the chest and he doesn't know what to do with it. In his situation, he's got these guys helping him. They don't know any more about what makes the chest so valuable than he does."

THE Baron's admiration was frank. "I see, Mr. Paget—I see. You are more conversant with the problem than I had imagined. You are very clever, I must admit, since I have no idea of the source of your knowledge."

He turned to Louie Screvin and Gent Slattery. "But Mr. Paget errs in one respect; in hinting that the chest has some mysterious value. It hasn't. I am a collector, gentlemen, and I want the chest merely because it is an interesting antique. You know how collectors—"

"Nuts!" said Screvin. "Work on him a little bit, Gent. I can keep this dick covered."

"With pleasure, Louis," said Slattery, elaborately mocking the Baron's tone.

Gloating and savage, the scar-faced man

advanced. The Baron was imperturbably affable of expression until Slattery struck him across the mouth with the gun butt; then the Baron's corpulent face contorted hideously and he lunged forward—until he met the cold, hard, reverse end of the gun jabbing against his paunch.

"Don't shoot!" he shrieked. "I—"

Slattery used the gun barrel and hit him on one cheek and then on the other, leaving livid streaks. The Baron stumbled backward, clawing his face, his pig-like eyes becoming pools of terrible fear.

"Open up, Fatty!" Screvin said. "What's the low-down about that chest?"

"I'll pay you for it!" the Baron whined desperately. "I'll pay you five thousand—ten thousand! I'll pay you fifteen thousand dollars for the chest! That's more than it's worth to anybody but me."

Paget was holding his hands away from his sides. He said: "I could help with this."

Scriven said, "Yeah?" His fingers still curled tight around the trigger.

"I'll need help, but not from that thing in your hand. You call the kid over on Fourteenth Street and tell him to come here and bring Morton."

The Baron said: "Morton?" The word was muffled by bloody lips.

Screvin said: "That punk don't know. We worked on him."

"Maybe, but not the right way. Get him over."

"If you know so damn much, why don't you tell?" Slattery was coming toward Paget. His right arm was crooked at the elbow, raising the gun butt shoulder high.

Paget stood flatfooted. His face was expressionless, his eyes looking squarely into those of Slattery. He said: "I won't tell because I don't know. You can try to beat it out of me if you want. The Baron tried and see what he got."

Slattery hesitated. Blood vessels showed

along the back of his hands as he swayed the gun. He said: "All right. What's the game?"

"You can't beat it out of Morton. You've tried. But I know what will make him talk."

"What's your cut?"

"Ten percent."

Scriven said: "Hell, Louis, call the kid."

It was fifteen minutes before knuckles rapped on the door. Paget stepped forward, swung it open.

**D.** W. MORTON stood there, one eye bruised and swollen darkly. Behind him was the kid, right hand in his coat pocket, the outline of a pistol muzzle shaped by the cloth.

They came through the door and Sonny swung it shut. Morton was limping a little as he was prodded forward. He came up beside Paget.

"All right," the kid said. "What the hell is this?"

"The dick said he could make Morton talk." Slattery came a half step closer to Paget. The scar was like a streak of fire down his face. His lips did not move when he said: "O.K., louse, make him talk. If you don't—God help you."

Paget said: "I know what you mean." He swung toward Morton. "Will you tell them what you know about the chest, or will I tell them what I know about—murder?"

Morton's face was grayer than ever. His words were fast and breathless. "I don't know what you're talking about. I hired you to work for me. What is this—a double-cross?"

Paget said: "This is not work any longer. Either I live or I don't, and I mean to live. That chest's not worth my life. It's not worth yours unless—" he made a gesture with his hands.

Morton's lips twitched suddenly, the

eyes flamed with avarice. He swung toward the kid. "You can have the chest, all of you. I told Paget why I wanted it. It's got historical value, worth thirty thousand or more. But you can have it. I'm done! If it's worth any more than that"—he swung and stabbed a finger toward Paget—"there's the man that knows why! He's handled the whole thing for me!"

Screvin said, "You rat!" and dropped the gun in his pocket, drew out a long clasp knife with a pointed blade.

He stuck the point through the cloth of Paget's vest just above the belt. The point penetrated shirt and undershirt also; Paget felt it prick his skin. He backed up against the wall, with Screvin following and keeping the point pressing against him.

Screvin said: "I guess you'll talk now, gumshoe. We're deep enough in this thing so a little murder won't make much difference."

"Morton's lying," Paget said calmly.

Screvin increased the pressure on the blade. The point dug deeper into Paget's flesh. He ground his teeth together to keep from crying out. Knots of muscle made white spots along his jaw.

"What's the secret?" Sonny shrilled at him. "If Louis don't croak you, I will! I been wantin' to do it ever since you shot off your mouth this mornin', anyhow. This time and place suit me fine."

"All right," said Paget, expelling breath. "I'll tell." He looked at Morton. "We could have got out of this. When I had them call you over I thought I could make a break. There wasn't any chance. But I've got my assistant watching the chest. If you'd come clean, sent them back to the chest, we'd have won. But you wanted the whole thing. You'd let them knock me off—to save you the rest of the fee."

Morton said: "To hell with you—I'm

through. Get out of this your own way."

Paget said slowly: "Take the the knife out of me, Louis. I'll tell."

Screvin glanced back to see that his pals had their guns ready, then withdrew the knife.

"All right, Paget," he said. "Do your stuff."

PAGET strode over to Morton and caught the gray-haired man's shirt collar and ripped the garment from his shoulders. The tattooed figure of a cat was exposed.

The Baron's bloody chin went slack.

"You!" he gasped. Color drained from his flabby face, left the rolls of flesh like dough. "*You killed my brother!*"

Paget said: "You asked for it, Morton, and I had to do something."

Without warning, the Baron flung himself upon the gun in Slattery's hand, and such was the unexpectedness of the assault that he met little resistance. He wrenched the weapon free and fired at Morton. The bullet smashed Morton squarely between the eyes.

Sonny's gun exploded almost simultaneously. The Baron reeled, gasped, and lifted one hand grotesquely as a splotch of crimson showed on his chest, then lost balance and pitched forward on his face.

Diving at Sonny's knees, Ross Paget contacted and lifted Sonny's body in a mighty heave and flung it toward Screvin. Another shot roared out and Sonny's body twitched in the air and crashed against the dark man. The detective was vaguely aware that a wisp of smoke curled from Screvin's gun; he had fired in confusion at what little he could see of Paget and hit Sonny instead.

Screvin plunged for the doorway; Slattery followed like a streak.

Feet pounded outside in the hall. Someone shouted. A woman screamed.

Scrambling erect, Paget saw that Son-

ny was dead, or would be in a few seconds; he had been hit in the neck and the bullet had severed his jugular vein.

Paget slammed the door and locked it, looked over the room and, grimacing, went to the phone and told the girl at the switchboard to call the police.

He remembered that Morton had limped coming into the room. Thinking curiously of Morton's wife and her futile efforts to keep his decent side uppermost, he went to the body and unlaced a shoe, slipped it from the foot. He felt in the shoe. His probing fingers encountered something solid in the toe. A ruby.

It was as red as the blood on Morton's forehead and blindingly brilliant. And large as the second joint of a man's little finger. This was the first time any man except Morton had gazed upon it since Francisco de Castro secreted it in some hidden compartment of the chest more than two centuries before.

A distant wail of sirens arose from the street. Ross Paget dropped the stone in his pocket and put the shoe back on Morton's foot and laced it. He said aloud: "No man with the Baron's money and brains was going through this for a twenty-thousand-dollar profit—not when he couldn't sell the chest without making its history public. Morton might hear of its sale. There had to be something else. De Castro was another chiseler—sending a treasure chest to his king, but hiding

a fortune in it for himself. Morton had the true story from the professor. After they left him in the room with the chest, he was willing to give up the game. No wonder."

He went to the body of the Baron then, and took four thousand-dollar bills from the fat man's wallet.

When the police hammered on the door Paget's brain had already manufactured a story which would leave out the ruby.

**A**N HOUR later he walked away from the hotel. The deputy medical examiner had bandaged his wound. Half a dozen blocks distant he went into a drug-store and asked for a small box.

The clerk found one, gave it to him.

"May I bother you for some tissue paper, too?"

The clerk gave him some. Paget tossed a quarter on the counter and went out. At a branch post office, he stuffed the box with tissue, put the ruby in it, wrapped it, sealed it, and addressed it to Mrs. D. W. Norton. At the window he registered it, had it weighed and stamped, and then dropped it into the mailbox.

His face was haggard and pallid as he left the post office and signaled a taxi. He was very tired and hungry. He supposed he ought to get lunch before sleep, but apparently he was more tired than hungry for he was dead to the world before the taxi was well away from the curb.



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Lonergan swung the bottle in a sweeping arc.

*Rex Lonergan was determined to get on the detective force—even if the chief had said, "Nothing doing"—and he was damned if he'd be kept off by a bunch of jealous chiselers who were afraid he'd show them up. All he wanted was a job—and if there wasn't one he'd create it—by sending a couple of public enemies to join—*

# The Corpse Parade

by  
John K. Butler

*Author of "Murder Alley," etc.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Bloodstained Slipper

**R**EX LONERGAN walked hard-heeled across the hotel lobby. At the desk he called for his room key, a casual business gone through count-

less times when a man has been at a hotel for weeks. But this time it was different.

The clerk avoided Lonergan's eyes. He flipped the key from a numbered pigeon-hole, pushed it along the green blotter, his eyes glancing significantly over Lonergan's shoulder.

"All right, *Mr. Lonergan*," he said.

With the inflection of his voice he put an unnatural emphasis on the name—like a stage actor trying to make his speech clearly audible in the gallery.

Lonergan's tight mouth twisted into a lopsided smile. He heard the hollow click of heels on the marble floor behind him. But he didn't turn—kept his eyes fixed on the clerk.

"Putting the finger on me, eh, Judas?"

The desk clerk made no answer. He blushed slightly, turned away.

Cigar smoke drifted in a blue, odoriferous wisp about Lonergan's face and a hand touched his arm just above the elbow. In the same instant, a voice spoke tonelessly at his shoulder.

"O.K., buddy, let's go upstairs. You got company."

Lonergan looked around with no surprise and no curiosity, looked into the face of the man with the cigar. It was a broad face, blue-jowled from frequent shaving. His eyes were small, weary and remote, too preoccupied to study Lonergan closely.

Without humor, Lonergan said: "Bet I know what you do for a living."

"Yeah. And I'm doing it now. Let's go up."

In the elevator, Lonergan said: "Nice of the D. A. to give me a police escort."

The detective made no answer. He was like a stranger ascending in the elevator with Lonergan. His weary eyes watched the floors go by until the car stopped at the seventh floor and the operator clanked back the steel grill. Then he merely glanced at Lonergan.

"O.K., buddy."

**R**OOM 708 was at the end of the corridor. The door was shut but Lonergan didn't need his key. The detective palmed the knob, straight-armed the door open and stood aside in a tired way.

Lonergan walked in. "Well, this is a

surprise," he grinned. "I'm glad you fellows could drop in."

The three men eyed him sourly, drinks in their hands. Behind Lonergan, the detective closed the door and leaned his back to it, fished a cigarette from his pocket, discarded his cigar in the direction of the china cuspidor.

Hannaman, the district attorney, sat straddled in a ladder-backed chair turned the wrong way. His forearms rested on the top rung of the back, and he held his drink balanced on an elbow with a thin white hand. His face was too lean, his quick-moving eyes set too close together on each side of a narrow, hooked nose. The whole impression of his face was one of business.

"Well, Lonergan, we hear you've been going places and doing things."

Lonergan made no answer. Frank Dale, the D. A.'s chief investigator, half sat, half leaned on the high windowsill. He raised a drink of Lonergan's Scotch to his crooked mouth, wincing at the taste.

Over on the bed, the chief of police, Mike Ryan, sprawled fatly. His coat was unbuttoned and his thick paunch bulged and strained over his belt. His eyes were fixed on Lonergan as he spoke.

"We just came from a talk with Lawrence Chase."

Lonergan, smiling, boosted himself with muscular agility to the dresser-top where he sat at ease, looking around the room at the solemn faces of his official visitors.

Still smiling, he said: "I suppose Lawrence Chase gave you the surprise of your lives."

Frank Dale's eyes flashed hate. He pushed himself away from the windowsill and stood near the district attorney.

"Why bother to talk with this wise guy?" he snarled impatiently. "Let's slap him in the can."

Lonergan didn't even glance at Frank



Dale. His eyes were steady on the district attorney.

"Tell your stooge to relax," he said evenly. "The guy annoys me."

Frank Dale took a step forward, his knuckles showing white as he gripped the glass of liquor. The district attorney waved him away.

"Sit down, Frank."

**F**RANK DALE didn't sit, but he went over to the window and stood looking out, his back to the room. Lonergan grinned, saying: "I suppose Frank's sore because he can't drive the pay-off car tonight."

The D. A. sipped his drink. Over the edge of the glass, green eyes held on Lonergan.

"We're all annoyed, Lonergan. We had some neat plans arranged for that contact."

"I don't see how your plans are affected," Lonergan said. "The only difference is that I drive the ransom car instead of Frank Dale."

The investigator turned quickly from the window. His finger pointed at Lonergan. His voice whined: "Listen to that! I tell you, the guy's slug-nutty."

"Sit down, Frank," Hannaman said again.

Chief of Police Ryan shook his gray head, loosened his belt against the strain of his thick paunch.

"It beats me why a guy like you wants to stick his nose into this case. You're not even a private dick—you're not anything."

"That's just it," Lonergan smiled blandly, "I'm not anything. I want to remedy the situation. Hell, you ought to know what I want. I told you just yesterday."

"He wants to be a detective," Frank Dale muttered with oily sarcasm. "He

wants to have a nice shiny badge so he can show it to his mama."

Lonergan ignored the cut, said to Ryan: "I went to you fair and square. I told you my qualifications and experience and asked you to get me on the homicide squad."

"And what I told you still holds," Ryan responded. "There's no opening. The city's having a hard enough time to meet the budget now. We're not putting men on; we're laying 'em off."

"What I say is—there's always room in any police department for the right man."

Frank Dale looked at Lonergan and gave a hard laugh. "Right man! Just listen to the guy, will you?"

"What this city needs," Lonergan told Ryan, "is fewer Frank Dales and more Rex Lonergans."

Nobody laughed, but the detective who leaned against the door lowered his eyes to study his smoking cigarette and his mouth curled in a broad smile over which he had no control.

Frank Dale stepped around Hannaman's chair, his face colored angrily.

"Listen," his voice pleaded to the district attorney, "you and Ryan look the other way for one minute—one minute is all I want with this guy!"

"Relax, Frank," Hannaman said. Turning to Lonergan, he went on in an attempt at friendliness: "Why didn't you come to me, Lonergan? I might have found something for you in my office."

**L**ONERGAN, still sitting on the dresser-top, lit a cigarette. "Yesterday, your secretary told me you were in court," he grinned wearily. "I knew that was a stall because whenever you go to court the papers scream it in headlines a mile high. You see to that."

Frank Dale swore viciously, but Hannaman only smiled thinly. "I think I like you, Lonergan," he said. "I like to

see some fire in a bird. Suppose you give me a couple of days to work on it. I think I can find just the spot for you."

Lonergeran shook his head slowly, exhaling smoke from his lungs in a blue gust. "No, thanks, Hannaman. I've got an idea you're just trying to oil me. If you did anything at all it would be just to bury me out in some sub-station where the only action I'd get would be neighborhood reports of loud radios and petting parties."

"So just what do you intend to do?" Chief Ryan asked sourly.

"I intend to *make* the job you birds won't give me. By next week I'll be wearing a police badge—and it won't be in any sub-station, either."

Frank Dale shrugged, his hands extended palms upward. "The guy defeats me," he groaned. "I give up."

Ryan smirked, looking at Lonergan as though he were inspecting some circus curiosity.

"And just how do you intend to make this job?" he inquired sourly.

Lonergeran laughed. "It's simple. I'm just borrowing the method you birds use to keep your jobs. Only I'm using it to get one. Publicity. Newspapers. People talking. All the old baloney."

They didn't say anything, their curious eyes fixed on him. Lonergan went on slowly and patiently, like an adult explaining something to very small children.

"It begins with this Arlene Chase thing. Tonight I drive the pay-off car. I've fixed that up with Lawrence Chase and you birds don't dare buck me—Chase is too big a man in this state. I made Chase see what a fool move it would be to have Frank Dale in that pay-off car. The ransom note said nothing doing if cops mix in. I'm not a cop—not now, anyway. I know the underworld. There's a good chance I might identify somebody. Hell, if Frank Dale ever got close enough to a real criminal,

he'd probably be so awed he'd ask for an autograph—"

Frank Dale lunged forward but Hannaman was quicker, catching his wrist in a solid grasp. The jerk nearly yanked the district attorney from the chair he straddled.

To Hannaman, Dale whined: "He's asking for it, chief."

Hannaman pushed his investigator away with a bored gesture. "Naturally," he said to Lonergan, "if Lawrence F. Chase insists that you drive the ransom car, we'll have to let you do it. After all, it's his daughter that's kidnaped. And he's a very influential man. But Ryan and I had worked out a moving net of radio cars to use tonight. The operation would be mainly directed by Frank Dale with a short-wave radio transmitter in the pay-off car."

"Swell," Lonergan said. "No need to scrap your plans at all. Put your transmitter in the car. I'll handle it."

FRANK DALE colored and muttered profanities. Nobody paid any attention to him. For a long moment the district attorney studied Lonergan. Then he turned to Chief Ryan and inclined his head slightly.

Ryan, with a grunt and a hitch at his paunch, rose from the bed. Nodding toward the district attorney, he said: "Hannaman and I worked out a plan that'll make the whole city a chess-board of radio cars, tonight. We'll keep the pay-off car blocked in at all times. As soon as contact is made, the pay-off car radios the news. Sixty-five cruise cars close in. We trap these snatchers and boil them in oil till they kick through. We'll get that girl back unharmed."

Lonergeran's face showed nothing as he eyed the chief of police. He drew on his cigarette. It was too short. The smoke

was too hot. He flicked the butt neatly into the cuspidor.

Without raising his voice, he said: "If you get that girl back unharmed, I'll buy you all rubber cigars."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I don't think this is a snatch case at all. I think Arlene Chase is dead—murdered."

Three pairs of eyes fixed on his face. Even the detective, standing guard at the door, snapped out of his weariness, eyes on Lonergan.

"Let me go over a few facts," Lonergan said. "You birds must have picked up the same information I got from Arlene's personal maid. Saturday afternoon Arlene came home from somewhere in a taxi. She was all excited. There was a man, a stranger, waiting to see her. From the description, he was a tough-looking guy. The maid says she never saw him before. Better check on that description. We'll be seeing that guy again."

Nobody said anything. They waited for Lonergan to continue.

"Well, the maid says Arlene talked to this guy alone in her father's study. Then he left. He'd hardly closed the front door when Arlene came running out of the study. She was white as a sheet, excited—putting her father's gun into her purse. She tore out the side door, jumped in her sister's car in the driveway and drove off. The last the maid saw of her, she was burning up the street in the direction the stranger went in the taxi."

"So what?" Ryan asked. "It was probably a gag to get her out of the house."

"Gag, hell," Lonergan said. "She came into the house excited. Went out after a stranger, taking a gun with her. And that's not all. The ransom note Chase got, was just from the supposed kidnapers. In snatch cases, it's customary for the kidnapers to send along a note of appeal from the person snatched. Law-

rence Chase didn't get any note from Arlene. Why? Because she's dead!"

When Hannaman spoke, his voice didn't carry much conviction. "They mailed Chase one of Arlene's slippers to prove they had her."

Lonergan's mouth twisted into a grim smile. He said: "And that's where I stole a march on everybody. I didn't even tell Lawrence Chase what I found. He has worries enough."

Lonergan paused, letting them hang in suspense before he drove home his final punch.

"I had that shoe in my possession for an hour. Had it analyzed by a chemist. Traces of stain showed on that shoe. And the stain was blood."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Straight-Eight Phantom

SLOWLY he drove, and alone. The dome light in the upholstered ceiling of the coupé threw a dim golden glow over the interior of the car, a Ford of recent model.

The money, packed neatly in a black bag, rested on the cushioned seat beside him as he drove. From time to time he glanced down at it.

Sixty thousand dollars!

Dollars which had been well earned by the agile business brain of Lawrence F. Chase. And now, parties unknown were attempting to get away with these dollars, at one crack, by a promise to deliver the missing Arlene Chase.

It was the lure of money, big money, easy money, that drove men to such ends. And as long as society couldn't check greed and violence by peaceful means, it remained for the law machine, for men like Rex Lonergan, to put them down with a heavy hand.

The door of the car came chest-high

on Lonergan. This high door had enabled the men, installing the radio microphone, to place it where he could speak into it easily without attracting attention. All he had to do was to incline his head slightly, speak softly.

"Police Emergency Broadcast Number Ten . . . Driving up the main drag between Forty-first and Forty-second Streets. Will turn right on Forty-second to Melrose Avenue. That is all."

Lonergan flipped off the switch, turned on the short-wave receiver. A moment later he heard the mechanical, droning voice of the police announcer at headquarters repeating his call. It was followed by a series of orders to individual radio cars cruising in the gigantic net around Lonergan.

"Cars A, B and C," the voice announced, "close in toward Melrose and Forty-second Street. . . . Car One Hundred Three cruise along Forty-second Street to the main drag. . . ."

Lonergan flipped off the switch.

In sixty-five police cars those orders were issuing from radio speakers. Sixty-five police cars, following orders emanating from Lonergan, were quietly, cautiously, weaving an unseen net around him as he drove alone in the lighted Ford coupé.

Lonergan could picture them. Sixty-five pairs of uniformed men, listening for their orders, proceeding ahead, slowing, turning—grimly waiting for the final call that would send them speeding, guns ready, to close in on their prey.

Lonergan continued to drive through the night at twenty miles an hour, following the route designated by the criminals in their last note of instructions. He kept weaving uptown, twisting back and forth between the main drag and its parallel street, Melrose—moving uptown, block by block, in an endless letter S.

SEVERAL blocks later he became aware of the car following him. The headlights, reflected in his rear-vision mirror, struck him in the eyes. The car made no effort to pass him but paced along behind him at twenty miles an hour.

Lonergan flipped his transmitter into life, inclined his head to the small microphone, fixed in place near the top of the wide door.

He spoke softly. "Police Emergency Broadcast Number Ten . . . Being tailed by a car as I turn right into Forty-eighth Street to Melrose . . . if I don't make a call in thirty seconds—thirty seconds—close in on this district. That is all."

He flicked off the switch.

Thirty seconds!

A lot could happen in that brief span of time. The men making contact might disable Lonergan's transmitter. They might disable Lonergan himself—even kill him. He was taking that chance.

The headlights of the tailing car still reflected in Lonergan's rear-vision mirror as he turned left into Melrose. Then they swerved away. He heard the roar of a powerful motor swiftly accelerated.

The car burst into position beside him, slowed with a squealing of brakes. This was it!

A green Packard sedan, it was. Wire wheels. Three men in it, one in the back leaning head and shoulders through the window of the rear door, a heavy automatic in his hand.

The Packard crowded in. Lonergan cramped over his wheel, took his foot from the throttle and nodded as the man in the back of the Packard waved him to the curb.

The Ford jolted as the right front wheel bumped over the sidewalk curbing, stopped with a sudden lurch and bang of torn fenders. Inadvertently, Lonergan, his eyes on the Packard, had smashed into a concrete lamp post. A harsh laugh came

from the Packard. Perhaps it was that laugh, the odd tone of the voice which spoke immediately afterward, that cinched Lonergan's identification of the man in the back of that big car.

"Let's have it, brother!"

Lonergan, his movements unhurried, picked up the black bag from the seat beside him and tossed it over to the waiting arms of Chinee Lou, the much-sought underworld figure who was half white and half Chinese.

The Packard didn't pull away immediately but stood there, out of gear, while the driver impatiently gunned the motor. Chinee Lou made a quick examination of the contents of the black bag and called an order.

The man up front beside the driver was looking off at the smashed fenders of Lonergan's Ford.

He said: "Never mind shooting, Lou. His front wheels are cockeyed."

Instantly, the powerful car roared away in low gear, smoke streaming from the exhaust-pipe.

In the same instant Lonergan acted. He threw his gear lever into reverse, pressed down the throttle and flipped the switch on his transmitter.

The car responded, backing, but the bent fenders made too much noise against the front wheels. Lonergan stamped down the clutch, disengaging the gears. The car stopped as he talked into his transmitter.

"Lonergan calling . . . A green Packard sedan with wire wheels . . . Three men in it . . . Just now turning left on Forty-ninth toward the main drag . . . One man is Chinee Lou . . . Chinee Lou . . . This means fight . . . Get them!"

**W**ITHOUT switching off the transmitter, he again threw the Ford into gear, backed off the curb. The front

wheels grated noisily against the smashed fenders.

Lonergan shifted gears. There was power in the motor, swiftly responding power. He tramped on the throttle and raced down Melrose in low gear, the damaged front wheels wavering and straining.

He repeated his call into the transmitter, shouting over the noise of motor and fenders.

Sharply, he cut the corner at Forty-ninth and Melrose and braked the car to a stop.

Into the transmitter, he called: "Lonergan . . . I'm holding intersection at Forty-ninth and Melrose to stop a double-back . . . I don't see them . . . That is all."

Easing the .45 automatic from his shoulder holster, he stepped from the car into the dimly lighted street.

A moment later, brakes squealed and tires screeched on the intersection behind him.

The police car braked to a stop behind Lonergan. He could hear its short-wave receiver going, repeating orders in that droning voice.

"Attention all cars . . . Close in . . . Three men in a green Packard sedan . . . Wire wheels . . . One may be Chinee Lou . . . Get them . . ."

A uniformed officer stepped from the car, a short, thick tear-gas gun in one hand, his revolver in the other.

"Expect 'em back?" he asked.

"Maybe," Lonergan said. "If they run head-on into the net, they may swing back this way thinking they only have to blaze their way through me."

Behind them, headlights danced along Forty-ninth Street. A spotlight swept the street from right to left as the car approached.

The second radio cruiser to arrive came to a stop in the middle of the intersection; both officers, guns in their hands, stepped

out. What traffic there was at this hour of the night, 12 P. M., was halted for careful examination. Flashlights, in the hands of police officers, swept the interiors of automobiles. Light swept the faces of drivers and passengers. Some of those faces were worried, fearing the detection of alcoholic breath.

But the police paid no attention to that. The task tonight was a lot grimmer than the mere exposure of slightly intoxicated autoists.

The radio speakers in the cruise cars kept calling.

"Attention all cars. Hold your position as directed. Examine all automobiles. Call your station as soon as you have anything . . . Three men in a green Packard sedan, wire wheels, last seen turning into Forty-ninth from Melrose . . ."

**T**WENTY minutes passed with no report phoned in by any officers. Lonergan sat on the running board of the coupé, smoking cigarettes in a chain. He didn't say anything to the officers who stood by, eyeing him from time to time.

A siren wailed mournfully in the still of the night. An instant later, a roadster with a red light on the side of the windshield roared up Forty-ninth and skidded to a stop near Lonergan's coupé.

Frank Dale was the driver. Hannaman and Chief Ryan were crowded into the seat beside him. They all got out.

Ryan looked from Lonergan to the officers. "Well?" he asked.

"Nothing doing here," Lonergan said.

Ryan swore. "Say, what the hell is this? I've made the rounds. I've covered the middle ground in this net. Same answer—nothing."

The district attorney eyed Lonergan narrowly. "We're now at the point where we're looking behind lamp posts and under manhole covers."

"Hell," Frank Dale snapped bitterly, "automobiles won't fly!"

A few motorists, impatient at being held up, began to sound horns. Others followed the example. Somewhere in the distance, the bell of a street car clanged monotonously.

Ryan glanced down the street toward the main drag. "All right," he said to the officers, "there's an alley down there by the theater. Look in that garage, too."

A half dozen officers went down the sidewalk, hard heels clicking on the pavement. Chief Ryan followed.

To Hannaman, Lonergan said: "I'm going down to that all-night drugstore and buy me a drink. This is screwy."

"I'm going with you," Frank Dale said.

He said it rather unpleasantly, with a nod to the district attorney.

They walked down the middle of the street, not saying anything. Further along was the alley beside the theater. Flashlights danced over it, playing on ashcans and blank concrete walls. It was a blind alley. Lonergan didn't have to cross over to know the police wouldn't find anything.

Ryan, with a couple of men, was entering the wide-open doorway of the Barker Garage and Auto Storage Building. They wouldn't find anything there, either. The Packard with three men in it had done a complete vanishing act. It was unreasonable, screwy; but it was the fact.

**L**ONERGAN bought a bottle of Scotch at the drug counter. Then, at the soda fountain, he ordered glasses and carbonated water.

The gray-haired clerk eyed him sleepily. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm not allowed to serve hard liquor on the premises."

Frank Dale grinned sourly, flashing his badge.

"If you don't pipe down, you won't even be allowed to serve ice cream on the premises."

Lonergeran didn't offer Dale the bottle, but the D.A.'s investigator reached for it anyway and built a highball. Lonergan didn't object.

They drank for a while.

From outside came the sounds of moving traffic, horns, street-car bells, the racing of motors.

Ryan and the district attorney pushed through the heavy glass doors of the drug-store, came to the counter and sat on stools.

Lonergeran poured them drinks as the chief said: "Well, we busted the net."

Lonergeran nodded absently: "Nothing in the Barker Garage, eh?"

"We went over it inch by inch. Three floors and the basement. Practically took the fingerprints on every car stored there or under repair. It beats me. A rabbit couldn't have got through that net. But a Packard, with three men in it, did."

Frank Dale cleared his throat, stared into his highball, sloshing it around in the glass.

"I don't think there was any Packard with three men in it," he announced slowly.

Hannaman's eyes shifted in quick thought. Ryan put down his glass and asked: "What do you mean?"

"I mean Lonergan *says* he saw a green Packard with three men in it. He *says* one of the guys was Chinese Lou, *says* he handed over the bag of ransom spinach. We've only got Lonergan's word for it. Nobody else saw anything."

Lonergeran looked into the mirror back of the soda fountain and met the quick eyes of the district attorney; saw, in the mirror, Ryan turn his head in a significant glance toward Frank Dale who was still staring into his highball.

"A typical Frank Dale idea," Lonergan commented.

"Not such a bad idea, either," Dale went on. "Sixty thousand is a lot of po-

tatoes. Right from the start I thought there was something screwy in the way you butted into this case. A guy that just wants a detective job don't go at it that way."

Lonergeran, smiling lopsidedly, said nothing. Both his hands were on the marble counter. He began to roll his highball glass back and forth between stiff palms.

Ryan said tonelessly: "You had a swell chance, Lonergan. All you had to do was ditch the bag of money somewhere along the route. Then, on Melrose, you ram the pay-off car into a light post so it'll look like somebody crowded you into the curb. Then you radio a phony description of three men and a Packard."

"You're all slowly going nuts," Lonergan said.

"We were nuts not to suspect you in the first place," Ryan responded quickly. "But we can make up for it now. We can lock you up in some sub-station and have a heart-to-heart talk with you. Maybe you'll want to tell us where you ditched the sixty grand."

"I get your angle," Lonergan said knowingly. "You're afraid of what the papers will say about the failure of your big net of radio cars. You want to arrest somebody, so it's easy to make me the goat."

HE KEPT his eyes on the mirror watching the three men. "I don't want to be a goat. You'll bury me where I can't reach a lawyer, slug me over the head with a rubber hose and you won't be one damn bit closer to solving the Arlene Chase thing."

"We'll see about that," Ryan grinned sourly.

"Use your bean," Lonergan told him. "Leave me a free hand. I want to bust this case as much as you do. If I do, you'll be giving me the job I want. You can save your face by telling the papers I was

officially working for you all the time; but working under cover."

"You talk big," Ryan said, "but you can't talk your way out of this pinch." He added in quick command: "Take him, Frank!"

Frank Dale's hand was already in his pocket but it didn't come out. Lonergan had formulated his plan of action without looking at anybody, except in the mirror.

The Scotch bottle came into his hand swiftly, swung in a sweeping arc to connect with Frank Dale's head. The investigator went backwards off the stool.

Lonergan swiveled the other way. His bent arm hooked around Ryan's neck. The fat chief of police had no defense, both hands being occupied at that instant in getting his gun out. Ryan went heavily to the floor with a thud that squeezed a grunt out of him.

Lonergan backed away. His .45 was in his hand, dangling. He didn't bother to aim it at anyone.

Hannaman hadn't moved except to turn his head. Both his hands rested on the marble counter. Narrow eyes on Lonergan, he was as calmly collected as when he faced a law court in criminal prosecution.

"You're making one hell of a mistake, Lonergan."

Ryan's gun lay on the floor. It had fallen away from him when he went down. Lonergan kicked it still farther away as the chief rolled over and came ponderously to his feet.

"I'd be making a hell of a mistake if I let this minion of the law slap me in a lock-up," Lonergan said to the district attorney. "I know his methods. While I'm on the outside I can straighten this mess out."

Red-faced, Chief Ryan snapped: "You won't be on the outside long."

BACK of the soda fountain stood the gray haired clerk, a worried expression on his face. Lonergan asked him if there was a men's room and he pointed to the back.

"Come on," Lonergan said to Ryan, jerking a thumb at Frank Dale's sprawled figure, "help your boy-friend to his feet. And snap into it."

Hannaman slid off the stool at the fountain, helped Ryan lift Dale from the floor. Dale's lips began to work silently and he shook his head as they lifted him.

"You too," Lonergan called to the drug clerk.

He herded them into the back section of the store, back into the bottle-lined prescription room, through the washroom door. He locked them in.

Quickly, then, gun returned to his shoulder holster, he crossed through the store and pushed through the heavy glass doors.

Someone spoke to him on the sidewalk. It was a plainclothesman.

"Have you seen the chief?" he asked.

Lonergan nodded down the street. "Just a minute ago. Went to the car, I think."

Lonergan turned down the main drag and walked rapidly to the corner where he boarded a trolley car.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Hot-Car Racket

THE apartment house door was locked.

On the left wall of the vestibule was a brass plate with narrow cards bearing the names of tenants, a button after each name.

Lonergan pressed one of the buttons, took the brass receiver from the hook and leaned close to the speaking-tube. He had to press the button several times before a voice rasped in the receiver.



"Release the door catch," Lonergan said. "I want to see you, Hu." The front door gave a series of clicks. Lonergan went in.

Hu Rawlins, a bathrobe thrown over his pajamas, was standing in the doorway of his apartment when Lonergan went down the hall. He didn't speak, just stood aside as Lonergan entered the apartment, shutting the door after him.

Hu Rawlins eyed him for a moment with an ironic smile. "You've got a hell of a nerve to come here, Rex."

Lonergan dropped to the davenport, lifted an inquiring eyebrow.

"My sense of honor is put to a test," Hu Rawlins announced. "I'm torn between duty and friendship."

"The old baloney," Lonergan responded. "Just forget you're a cop and relax, Hu." He added: "So the minions of the law made a sensational escape, eh?"

"I'll say they did. I was just talking to headquarters on the phone. The chief is just about chewing the walls off the Hall of Justice. It seems he likes to retire of his own free will. You locked him up at the point of a gun. He's plenty sore."

Lonergan laughed easily. "And I'm hot, eh?"

"Hot!" Rawlins exploded. "Hell, when you walked into this building the fire hazard went up fifty percent! By morning, every cop in town will be working on one order—pick up Rex Lonergan! Why, if Ryan had the authority, he'd call out the militia!"

"I've been in jams before," Lonergan said. "And I'll probably be in plenty more before I retire to a little cottage by the sea. It can't be helped. Ryan's big net of radio cars was a frost. It makes him look like a chump. He felt he ought to arrest somebody and Frank Dale thought up a swell reason why I ought to be the goat."

Rawlins sat down on the fat arm of an

overstuffed chair. "You didn't help things with that drugstore incident. Now they want you on charges ranging from resisting arrest to assault with a deadly weapon."

"The weapon wasn't deadly," Lonergan grinned. "It was only a bottle of Scotch."

Rawlins shook his head slowly, saying: "The kind of Scotch you drink is plenty deadly."

Lonergan lifted the lid of a cigarette box, helped himself to one of the inspector's smokes. "Well, Hu, I didn't bring a toothbrush but I'm here for the night."

Rawlins rolled his eyes heavenward. "You'll make my hair turn gray. Inspector Hubert Rawlins found shielding fugitive from justice!"

"You won't be found," Lonergan told him, "shielding me. I'll be out of here in the morning. I have places to go and things to do. Believe it or not, there *was* a Packard that met me tonight. It *did* have three men in it, and one *was* Chinese Lou. In a way, I don't blame Ryan. How that car slipped the net is one of the neatest mysteries I've ever met."

Hu Rawlins took a cigarette. After a while he said: "They haven't found the car Arlene was driving when she disappeared. It was her sister's car."

LONERGAN smoked in silence, looking at the ceiling. When he spoke he seemed to be addressing the ceiling rather than Hu Rawlins. "If we knew why Arlene Chase was all excited when she came into the house that day, we'd know more about what happened to her."

"It may have been just about her roadster. She was plenty excited when I saw her."

Lonergan's eyes came down, fixed on Hu Rawlins from under lowered lids. "What're you talking about? When did you see her?"

"Didn't anybody tell you about that?"

Rawlins asked. "She came over to headquarters to report a stolen car. Raised a big stink over it."

"When was this?" Lonerger asked quickly.

"The first time, was the day before she disappeared. She came in twice that day; came in again in the morning. She did a lot of phoning too. A hot-tempered dame, I guess. She offered five thousand bucks for the return of the car. It's a crazy reward. Hell, she could buy the same car, new, for three grand."

Lonerger leaned forward on the davenport, leveled a finger at Hu Rawlins. "You cops drive me nuts. I suppose you don't attach any importance to that stolen car."

"I don't see how it ties up," Rawlins told him. "Of course, we're trying to trace the car."

"Anything might tie up," Lonerger snapped. "When you're shooting in the dark you have to try every mark. What kind of a car was it?"

"A Pelham roadster. Sort of sky-blue Nineteen Thirty-three model. Worth about a third of the reward she offered."

Lonerger got off the davenport, paced the floor impatiently. "A roadster disappears. The pretty owner raises a big fuss, and then she disappears. Three men in a Packard collect a big ransom and then they disappear, car and all. There's a hell of a lot of disappearing in this case."

Lonerger stopped pacing, stood directly in front of Hu Rawlins, glaring at him with cold eyes. "Maybe I ought to start at the beginning. I'd like to find that stolen roadster."

Hu Rawlins laughed sardonically. "You'd *like*, eh? The police would *like* to find about fifty stolen cars every month and only about ten turn up. They turn up in all parts of the state with their faces lifted—new plates, altered motor numbers, different paint-jobs and even forged

certificates of ownership. And they're all stolen from this town."

LONERGER went back to the davenport, sat down, saying: "Now we may be getting places. Tell me all you know about this hot-car ring."

"What we know about it," Rawlins said, "you could write on the head of a pin. We've turned this town inside out. We had men watching all the parking lots. Big Bill Wilson owns most of the lots in the city and we worked on that angle. But since repeal, Wilson says he's running all honest rackets, like nightclubs, gas stations and auto parks, and it looks as though he is. We couldn't find anything. What's more, we kept a check on it and never got a report of a car stolen from one of Wilson's parking lots. But Wilson has a lot of tough babies working for him, guys with records. One of Wilson's parking lots is on Forty-fifth and Melrose. The cop, we had watching this place, says he saw a lot of these guys around there. But they didn't seem to be doing anything out of line. And no cars were ever stolen from the lot."

Lonerger put out his cigarette in the ashtray, pressing it out with a big impatient hand. "Go on," he said.

"That's about all—except, we think maybe Chinese Lou's mixed up in it."

Lonerger straightened up on the davenport, snapped: "Except? For God's sake, man, that's important! Chinese Lou was in that Packard tonight. Don't you see the possible tie-up? Girl's car disappears. Girl disappears—maybe murdered. Chinese Lou collects ransom for her return. Chinese Lou also mixed up in the hot-car ring. Hell, there's your connection between Arlene's disappearance and the hot-car ring."

Rawlins said: "So you think Chinese Lou was in that car that met you tonight?"

"Think? I know! Well, go on with the

tale. How do you figure Chinee Lou in the hot-car racket?"

"Not as the big cheese, that's sure. Chinee Lou has no brains. He's just a dirty rodman who can take orders. He's wanted for so much now that a few more killings won't matter, even if he's caught."

Lonergan nodded. "All right. What makes you think he's in it?"

"A radio cruiser spotted him driving down the main drag one night. They chased him, plugged a tire. Chinee Lou abandoned the car and ran down an alley. He shot one of the cops and got away. The cop died. The car Chinee Lou was driving was hot, stolen from in front of the owner's house just ten minutes before."

"How'd he steal it?" Lonergan asked. "Tamper with the ignition wires?"

Hu Rawlins shook his head. "That's the funny part of it. He had a key that fit—a nice shiny key. The lock on this car was special. The owner had the only two keys that came with the lock. But Chinee Lou had a duplicate. Don't ask me how he got it. I don't know."

Lonergan whistled softly. "Hu," he said, "this is the most interesting interview I've ever had in my life."

LONERGAN spent most of the next day at Hu Rawlins' telephone. From Rawlins he had secured an official list of the names of people who had reported stolen cars in the last two months. He phoned to all of these people, told them he was calling from the police department and asked a lot of questions. Putting the answers together at the end of the day, Lonergan was interested in one fact.

Every person who had lost a car—and they were scattered all over the city—reported to Lonergan that the car had been parked the day before the theft in the parking lot at Forty-fifth and Melrose Streets.

The cars had been actually stolen from all over the city; from in front of the owners' houses, from driveways, from in front of groceries—from every conceivable place where an autoist might temporarily park a car. Yet there seemed to be one connecting link—the auto park at Forty-fifth and Melrose.

It was early evening when Lonergan took his watchful stand in the shadows across the street from this parking lot. For an hour he watched the activities. Cars drove in and out. People left them with the attendant, paying twenty cents; claimed them with ticket-stubs that had numbers matching the tickets left on the steering-posts of the cars. It was all very ordinary.

The lot was brightly lighted up front; autos gleaming as they drove in and out. On one side was a bootblack stand. It was covered with canvas curtains, closed up for the night.

On the other side was a similar little stand, but this one was lighted. A sign overhead bore the one word—KEYS.

A man lounged behind the counter, reading a newspaper. Behind him, the shabby wall was covered with keys, finished and unfinished, hanging on hooks.

Lonergan watched everything from the shadows. He saw a woman drive into the lot in a green sedan. She left the car with the red-haired attendant, paid him, took her numbered stub.

The attendant drove the sedan to the back of the lot, parked it with a squealing of brakes. The woman had gone on down the street.

A moment later, the attendant walked to the front of the lot. But he didn't stand there, as usual, waiting for the next customer. He went directly to the key-maker's stand.

The man behind the counter put down his paper. They exchanged a few words. The attendant dropped something on the

counter, something the key-maker immediately picked up.

Lonergan, across the street, couldn't see it. But he knew what it was. A key. And it would be from the ignition lock of the green sedan.

The key-maker was working, his hands moving busily on a shelf just under the level of the counter.

**L**ONERGAN watched for a while. Then he crossed the street and entered the parking lot under the glare of reflected electricity.

Immediately, the red-haired attendant joined him, coming over from the key stand with a rapid stride and asked: "Got your stub?"

Lonergan shook his head. "I didn't leave a car here. I'm going to wait for my sister. She just left a green sedan."

Quick, nervous worry showed on the face of the attendant. He overcame it at once, and when he spoke it was with sullen authority.

"We don't allow people to wait in the cars unless they got the stub to show it's theirs."

"I'll wait near it, then," Lonergan snapped.

"You'll have to wait for her down here," was the sullen answer. Lonergan paid no heed to it. He looked back at the dark end of the lot and saw the hood of the green sedan. He started off toward it.

"I'll have to get the manager," the attendant said quickly.

He shouted a name. Lonergan, over his shoulder as he walked to the back of the lot, saw a man swing out of a curtained touring car which was parked back of the key-maker's stand. He was a big, ape-like man with wide shoulders and long, swinging arms.

Lonergan reached the green sedan ahead of both of them. A swift glance to

the dashboard told him what he wanted to know. There was no key in the ignition lock.

The attendant came up, jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "This is the manager," he said. "You'll have to talk to him."

Lonergan looked squarely into the eyes of this big man who was called the manager. "Where's the ignition key to this car?" he demanded.

The silence was heavy, ominous. The red-haired attendant shifted his feet nervously, put a hand in his overalls pocket.

Lonergan turned so that he stood easily balanced on both feet, weight slightly forward, his back to the green sedan. His eyes were still fixed on the man who passed as the lot manager.

"Manager, hell!" Lonergan challenged. "Bet you're the guy who tags this car all day tomorrow and finally swipes it with the duplicate key that's being made up front, right now—"

Lonergan caught a movement out of the corner of his eye, exploded into swifter action. His right fist made a terrific swing.

From the standpoint of the clever boxer, the maneuver was all wrong. Lonergan led with his right, a haymaker. But the powerful swing went accurately to its mark—the face of the parking attendant. The crushing impact shot pain the length of Lonergan's arm. But it was nothing compared to the pain the attendant would have when he was able to pick himself up off the gravel.

A blow jolted Lonergan's shoulder. He spun swiftly, his entire body swinging its weight behind a left hook, drove it hard and deep into a soft stomach.

The big man staggered, bent double, with his long arms pressed to his midsection. Lonergan polished him off with a chopping hook to the side of the jaw.

The big man joined his groaning part-

ner in the gravel. But the big man didn't groan.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

Sing Kee

THE hands on the modernistic clock over the checkroom of the Lido Club pointed to 10:05 as Rex Lonergan strode in. He put his battered felt crusher on the counter before the check girl, placed a ten-dollar bill beside it.

"My hat," he said. "The other is to make you forget whose hat it is till I ask for it again. It's money. People use it to buy things with."

The girl pocketed the ten dollars, smiling. "That's what they tell me people use it for."

As Lonergan turned, he saw a face; saw part of it, that is. Most was covered with wide white bandage. But the red hair completed the identification.

It was the parking attendant Lonergan had left, a half hour ago, in the gravel of the lot at Forty-fifth and Melrose.

The man was walking in from the bar. He stopped instantly at sight of Lonergan and ducked back into the bar. Lonergan smiled grimly.

He crossed the club foyer to a door marked—*Mr. Wilson, Private.*

He walked in.

Big Bill Wilson looked up from his desk. He was broad with a suggestion of flabbiness; but his dark eyes were keen. His great stature was apparent, even though he was seated.

There was money on Wilson's desk, great piles of it. He was scooping it into bags.

"Hello, Rex," he greeted cordially. "Sit down. I'm just taking a little change out to the gaming tables. I'll be right back."

Lonergan sat on a red leather sofa and smoked a cigarette till Wilson returned.

He frowned when he saw Wilson was not alone. Eddie Wirtz, his right-hand man, followed Wilson into the office and shut the door.

"O.K.," Wilson said. "You can talk in front of Eddie. He's the second in command of the Wilson enterprises now."

Big Bill rested his huge body on the edge of the desk, chewed his expensive cigar. Lonergan spoke slowly.

"It's the Wilson enterprises I came to see you about. I'm worried about them. I think they're getting too enterprising."

"What do you mean, Lonergan?"

Lonergan was cool. "I mean I know a lot about how the hot-car racket works. But I want to know more about it. I want to know how a Packard, with three men in it, can vanish. And I want to know what happened to Arlene Chase."

Wilson gave a nasty laugh, a rumbling laugh that rose up from the depths of his heavy abdomen. "I suppose you're trying to play policeman—got an idea you can tie me up to the snatch of the Chase girl!"

EDDIE WIRTZ didn't say anything. He still stood by the door. His eyes never left Lonergan's face. Most people's eyes have some sort of expression, are like windows through which you can see something of the person back of them. The eyes of Eddie Wirtz revealed nothing. They were like windows with the blinds pulled down.

To Wilson, Lonergan said: "To begin with, I don't think Arlene Chase was snatched. I think that was an afterthought, a big idea to pull in extra cash. I think she's dead. But I want to know where she is, and why she disappeared in the first place."

Wilson chewed his cigar. Took it from his thick lips, looked at it as he held it in a hand ornamented with expensive rings.

"Damn you, Lonergan," he said, "I must like you a hell of a lot to take what

I do from you. You come in here with a lot of crazy accusations and insinuations—I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

"Now you're maybe trying to bluff," Lonergan said. "When you see that won't work, you may try to toss me in forty fathoms of water with an anchor around my neck. But let me give you a tip. That won't save you. Some people know I came here. If I don't show up, they'll come around here asking such questions as: 'Have you seen anything of Rex Lonergan, Mr. Wilson?' And you'll have some answering to do."

"Cut that stuff!" Wilson snapped. "Talk turkey!"

Lonergan bowed, smiling, unperturbed by the impatience and indignation of the powerful man. "All right, Bill. I'll get down to cases. Do you admit owning the auto park at Forty-fifth and Melrose Streets?"

Wilson's temper broke loose. He threw his cigar across the room like a pitcher sizzling a hot baseball over home-plate. The cigar popped against the wall, showering sparks.

"Of course I own that auto park! I own three fourths of the auto parks in this city! I own the Barker Garage! People pay money to leave their cars when they go shopping and to shows. I provide the place and take the money. What the hell is wrong with *that racket*?"

"I'll tell you what's wrong with it," Lonergan said. "There's a key-maker's stand on the auto park at Forty-fifth and Melrose. While people park their cars there, the attendant takes the key from the ignition and has a duplicate made at the stand. The cars are tagged around by guys with the duplicates. When they get a chance they hop into the cars—and goodbye, cars."

"Shall I toss him out, chief?" Eddie Wirtz wanted to know.

Wilson shook his head slowly, shrewd eyes on Lonergan. "No, Eddie. I think we'll have to call a doctor. The guy's gone nuts."

"The Chase girl," Lonergan said, "offered five grand for the return of a stolen car that wasn't worth half that dough. Then she disappeared. And it seems I have to bust up a hot-car ring to find why."

SOMEONE was knocking at the door. Wilson's eyes shifted. "Yeah?" he called absently, and a waiter from the cabaret stuck his head into the office.

"Cops outside, Mr. Wilson," he whispered. "They say they had a tip Rex Lonergan was in the place. They're turning it inside out."

"I'll be right out," Wilson said.

Lonergan rose from the sofa, sourly eyed the two men who were watching him. His mouth twisted into a tight smile.

"So that's it, huh, Bill? You sic the cops on me. You figure when Ryan and the city-hall boys got me buried in some sub-station, you can hush up the whole thing."

For a moment Wilson made no response. He eased his big frame from the edge of the desk, stepped in front of Eddie Wirtz to the office door and turned the key in the lock.

Facing Lonergan, he said: "It beats me. Your name is headlined in all the papers as a dangerous fugitive from justice. Every cop in town is looking for you. But you come around here and play policeman."

"It's a case of everybody's wrong but Lonergan," Eddie Wirtz put in sarcastically.

"And to show you how little you worry me," Wilson said to Lonergan, "I'm going to get you out of here without a police escort." He turned to Eddie Wirtz, added: "Smuggle him out of here, Eddie."

Eddie Wirtz frowned but admitted: "You're the doctor, Bill."

Wirtz opened a closet door, pushed aside coats hanging from a rod, and a panel in the wall opened, under his hand, into a dark void. A jerk of his head told Lonergan to follow.

"So long, Rex," Wilson said tonelessly. "It all looks screwy to me."

Lonergan looked back at him from the closet door. "It would look screwier if you knew the reason for it all. I'm going to all this trouble just to make Ryan give me a police badge I can carry around in my pocket."

A fist banged on wood. A voice outside the office announced: "Police, Mr. Wilson!"

Lonergan pulled the closet door shut, stood in darkness. A flashlight in the hand of Eddie Wirtz burst into bright being.

"You go ahead," Lonergan said to him.

**A** FLIGHT of narrow steps led downward. Eddie Wirtz went ahead with the white beam from the flash, not saying anything. Their shoes made little sound on the deep pile of the carpet.

The descending corridor ended with a door. Eddie Wirtz snapped off his flash and a small square of light was revealed in the darkness as he looked through a peep-hole in the door to whatever lighted room lay beyond.

Wirtz unlocked the door, pushed it wide for Lonergan to pass through. "So long, Lonergan," he said flatly.

It was a washroom. Lonergan went through it, came out in a hotel lobby. A moment later he was climbing into a taxi outside the hotel.

"Chinatown," he said to the driver.

They drove past the front of the Lido Club and Lonergan saw two police cars parked at the curb. A uniformed officer

stood in the doorway. In another moment, Lonergan thought, the chief of police himself would arrive. He'd stamp around in the Lido Club, his paunch jolting with his steps, his eyes snapping authority.

The taxi driver was winding down the window that shut him off from the rear compartment. Over his shoulder, as he drove, he said: "I think there's a car following us."

Lonergan looked back. There was a car, a big limousine, pacing along behind them.

"Shake it," Lonergan called to the driver, "and there's a hundred berries in it for you."

The taxi responded to the sudden acceleration. Easing the automatic from under his coat, Lonergan knelt on the floor of the cab. The side window was down. He knelt close to it.

A lurch of the cab, as the driver cramped his wheels for a corner, almost threw Lonergan over backwards. Quickly he locked an arm over the edge of the door.

Tires screeched as the cab skidded on the turn. Into that screech of straining rubber stabbed the staccato sound of gunfire.

Lonergan fired back, not at the quick jets of flame, but full into the windshield of the pursuing car. The heavy automatic bucked in his hand.

The limousine didn't make the corner. It lurched one way and the other for an instant, then careened to the sidewalk, bounded over the curbing and crashed, with a great shattering of plateglass, into the show window of a darkened store.

Lonergan's eyes met the white, startled face of the cab driver turning back to him.

"Geez, chief—"

"You earned your hundred," Lonergan told him, and added grimly: "Now keep going. I still want to go to Chinatown."

SING KEE was one of the most prosperous merchants of Oriental art in the Chinese quarter. He was also the head of the tong known as the Five Families Association.

The chambers of Sing Kee were located over his brightly lighted shop and were reached by a flight of brass-edged stairs and a long, musty-smelling corridor.

To one of the rooms upstairs, Lonergan was taken by a Chinese servant who shuffled silently on slippers. It was a room of splendid Oriental decoration, a place of rich silk hangings, soft lights and deep-piled rugs.

Sing Kee rose from a teakwood chair when Lonergan came in. He bowed, shaking both his hands before his stomach after the custom of Chinese greeting.

Lonergan did the same, said: "I'm in a jam, Sing Kee. I think you can help me out."

"You honor my sad house with your presence," the moon-faced Chinese told him. "You honor this sad man when you come to him for help."

They sat in elaborately carved chairs, facing each other. A teakwood table between their knees bore tea and cakes.

"There's a man," Lonergan began, "who used to belong to your tong. He's half Chinese. This man now has a very bad name with the police. He is called Chinee Lou."

Sing Kee remained impassive, beady black eyes on Lonergan's face, patiently waiting for the rest.

"This man," Lonergan continued, "is hard to find. I think maybe he hides somewhere in the Chinese quarter where police can't reach him. I thought you'd help me find this man."

Sing Kee spoke with unhurried words. "This man who calls himself Chinee Lou cannot be, as you say, in the Chinese quarter. He is a very bad man. Long ago he lost face with the Five Families. He is

in, as you would say, disgrace. He hides from the Five Families."

"I see," Lonergan nodded. "You mean if you knew where Chinee Lou was you'd deal with him yourselves?"

Sing Kee bowed—a slight inclination of his head. "It would give the Five Families great pleasure to find this man who calls himself Chinee Lou. It would give the Five Families great pleasure to talk to this man in a language he would understand."

Lonergan rose to leave, then remembered Sing Kee mentioned troubles of his own and sat down again, politely asking what the troubles were. From a table at his elbow Sing Kee picked up the late afternoon paper and passed it to Lonergan.

"This paper, in your own language," Sing Kee explained, "tells of an unfortunate death. I have been asked many questions by your police and only the work of an honorable lawyer has saved me from other embarrassments."

Lonergan glanced over the paper, saw himself featured in the heavy-lettered headlines with the words—LONERGAN STILL MISSING.

There was a secondary heading, and this read—FAMOUS ARCHITECT MURDERED. Lonergan's eye ran quickly down the printed column, absorbing the facts surrounding the mysterious death of one Roy S. Brewster, architect.

Brewster had been found dead in his hotel room, early in the afternoon, by a chambermaid who went in to clean. The architect's throat had been slit from ear to ear. On his head was carved the symbol of the Five Families Association.

"I have talked with the members of the Five Families," Sing Kee said. "I can say that no member ever heard of this unfortunate man who died with the mark of our honorable tong."

Lonergan glanced on down the column of the newspaper. One thing, one name,



caught his eye, and he read the paragraph more closely.

The National Architects' Convention brought Brewster to his home town after ten years of residence in New York. He was to speak tomorrow before a class at the McKinley School of Architecture, after which he was to escort the class on an inspection tour of his three famous local monuments—the State Trust and Savings Bank Building, the Elton Theater, and the Barker Garage and Storage Building. . . .

While the rotund Chinese regarded him impassively, Lonergan shoved back the teakwood chair and began to pace the room like a caged panther. Then he halted, facing the leader of the Five Families.

"Sing Kee," he said, "this is a break. If my guess is right, lots of questions can be answered tonight—lots of birds can be killed with one stone."

He pointed his index finger at Sing Kee's face and sighted along it with narrowed eyes, like a man aiming a gun.

"Sing Kee, how would you like to clear your tong of suspicion in this dead architect business? How would you like to see a bunch of rats caught in a trap? How would you like to see the police apologize for accusing us of doing nasty things—see them give me a nice shiny police badge to wear under my coat? And, maybe, best of all, how would you like to locate Chinee Lou?"

None of Lonergan's rugged excitement was imparted to the dignified Chinese. He sat there motionless, expressionless, like a statue of Buddha. But he said: "All these things would lift the curtain of sadness from my house and restore happiness and joy."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Buried in Concrete*

**L**ONERGAN stood in the deep shadow between the blackly looming walls of the Barker Garage and the rear of the

Elton Theater. The time was going on midnight and little traffic passed along Forty-ninth Street.

For twenty minutes Lonergan had been standing there in the shadow, motionless, except for the few seconds it had taken him to slip a clip of fresh cartridges into the heel of his automatic.

A light shuffling sound came from the dark alley behind him. Lonergan heard it, knew what it was and didn't turn to look. His attention was held by the car which moved cautiously along Forty-ninth Street.

It was a closed car, a big seven-passenger job. It moved slowly, the driver holding his arm straight out to signify a left-hand turn into the entrance of the Barker Garage.

The light was bad for identification of faces, but two identities were clear to Lonergan—the round, baby-like face of that half-caste killer, Chinee Lou, and the looming bulk of Big Bill Wilson of the Lido Club.

The automobile passed out of Lonergan's vision without his identifying the other two figures in it.

He felt the presence of the person who had pressed close to his side in the alley and he spoke softly from the side of his mouth.

"This is all we could ask for, Sing Kee. Did you see the guys in that car?"

The voice of the Chinese was low, rhythmic, like the creation of a spiritualistic medium in the hush of a seance room. "One face," said Sing Kee, "these old eyes can see through the thickest stone wall—the face of the one who is called Chinee Lou."

They moved out of the shadow of the alley and into the dimly lighted drizzle of the sidewalk along Forty-ninth Street. Further along, electric light from the interior of the Barker Garage flooded through the open entrance and made a

square of golden glow that reached to the other side of the street.

"The men are placed as you directed," Sing Kee said. "At a given word, no person will leave this building."

"Give it," was Lonergan's laconic answer.

Sing Kee's shuffling steps slowed. Lonergan strode on, came to the lighted entrance of the garage and turned in.

The interior was wide, concrete-floored. Automobiles of all sorts—trucks, delivery cars and passenger vehicles were stored neatly along the walls, side by side, noses outward. At one side, near a battery of gasoline pumps, a concrete ramp led steeply upward to the second floor. A red-lettered warning over it read—DRIVE SLOWLY—SOUND HORN.

Straight on from the entrance was an elevator shaft with its opening guarded by an upward-sliding gate. From the size of the opening, Lonergan judged the service elevator was large enough to carry a pair of automobiles up or down.

A MAN in smart gray overalls, with the name of the garage embroidered on a chest pocket, stood by the elevator gate. He turned sharply as Lonergan's heels clicked hollowly on the concrete floor.

"Calling for a car?" he asked quickly.

Lonergan made no answer but kept walking toward the elevator shaft. Aside from the rhythmic clicking of his own heels as he walked, the only sound in the big garage was the growl and whine of powerful elevator mechanism.

Beyond the uniformed garage man, the smoothly running cables in the elevator shaft caught Lonergan's eye. The movement of those cables told him something, told him that the big car he'd seen turn into the garage less than a minute ago was on its way up or down in the elevator right now.

His eyes went back to the garage attendant. The man had taken a step toward him as though to block his progress to the elevator. "Got your ticket stub?" he asked sullenly.

"No," Lonergan responded.

"Well, I don't remember you—"

Lonergan was just a few feet away from the attendant when he snapped his answer. "You will—you'll remember me for the rest of your life!"

The man tried to duck, bringing up his hands, but he wasn't quick enough. Lonergan led with a straight, head-jolting left to the mouth, and he followed it with a well placed and powerful right to the jaw.

There had been only two blows in the fight, and Lonergan had delivered both of them. The man lay lifelessly on the concrete floor.

Lonergan didn't even glance at him after the impact of his blow, but went straight to the elevator shaft and leaned over the iron gate.

The cables had stopped running. Lonergan craned his head upward and saw, three stories up, the giant wheels and hoisting mechanism for the elevator. He looked down and saw a basement level. Four feet below that was the graveled bottom of the shaft with its steel-cushioned bumpers and safety devices.

There was no elevator in the shaft!

Sing Kee appeared at Lonergan's elbow, stood there without expression and without saying anything. Turning, Lonergan saw that half a dozen Chinese were evidently carrying out orders from their tong leader. The tall, heavy doors, at the entrance of the garage, were being slid closed on their greased runners. Two Chinese bent over the garage attendant who was beginning to groan a bit with returning consciousness. They were binding him hand and foot with strong cord, stuffing a wad of silk into his mouth.

Lonerган met the eyes of Sing Kee, asked: "Can an elevator vanish from its shaft?"

The round face of the Oriental remained impassive. Lonergan leaned over the gate again, peering down through the gloom to the bottom of the empty elevator shaft.

As he looked down, he heard the growl and whine of machinery. The cables were running again, cables running in an empty shaft.

**T**HEN, down there in the half-light, the graveled bottom split in two, the sections pushing upward like hinged covers. Pushing up through this false bottom of the shaft—this hinged trap with its dummy bumpers and its slots to allow the cables free passage—came the elevator, rising under slow, growling power.

There was no roof to it, just the steel braces of its superstructure. A single electric globe burned on one of the steel braces. The rising platform was empty save for the man operating the controls. Like the attendant Lonergan had knocked cold, the man coming up on the big elevator wore natty uniform overalls. He wasn't looking up.

Lonergan ducked his head in from the shaft, nodded to Sing Kee.

"Well," he whispered, "now I know how a Packard, with three men in it, can vanish from the tightest net of radio cars the police in this town ever threw out."

Lonergan pressed himself close to the wall at the side of the shaft opening. Sing Kee and his men did likewise at the other side.

The lifting machinery growled, whined—stopped with a heavy metallic clanking. The iron gate slid ceilingward on its tracks.

"Stay where you are!" Lonergan ordered, stepping away from the wall, the automatic bulking big and hard in his hand.

The man leaving the elevator halted abruptly, awkwardly—held his position rigidly like a motion picture suddenly stopped in the projector. His eyes shifted from the gun in Lonergan's hand to the solemn Chinese faces, shifted back to Lonergan's face. His lips twitched a little but no words came from them.

"O. K., Sing Kee," Lonergan grinned. "I think this guy gets the idea we mean business. Let one of the boys keep an eye on him."

Sing Kee merely nodded his head. It was a sufficient order. One of the Chinese took a step closer to the garage man. As he did so, a long, highly polished knife appeared from the looseness of his sleeve. He made no threatening gesture; merely stood there with the knife dangling easily in his thin fingers.

Lonergan glanced at the petrified face of the garage man, laughed. "In less than a minute," he said to Sing Kee, "we'll be paying a little visit downstairs."

He turned away, surveyed the automobiles and trucks parked along the walls of the garage. His quickly moving eyes came to rest on a huge, steel, gravel truck.

"That's the baby," he said.

The Chinese waited for him in a solemn group while he went to the truck, mounted the high cabin and warmed the big motor. He drove over to the elevator slowly, the motor growling in low gear.

"Will the platform hold it?" he demanded of the garage man.

His answer was a slow, frightened nod.

"O. K.," Lonergan said. "You get aboard first. You're taking us down."

**T**HE garage man walked onto the elevator, walked stiffly, as though he didn't have much control over his legs. His Chinese guard, with the knife hanging from thin fingers, followed him and stood by his side.

The gears of the big gravel truck

growled; the platform trembled as Lonergan drove on, braked to a stop.

"All right, Sing Kee," he called, "you can sit up here with me. Tell the boys to hop in the back."

Sing Kee spoke a few orders in Cantonese. The Chinese, except for the boy guarding the garage man, swarmed up the steel walls of the truck and dropped lightly into the dumping section.

"All right, punk," Lonergan barked at the garage man. "Take us down."

The platform trembled, clanked, as the operator shoved over his control lever. Slowly, the platform sank in the shaft. This time there was no sound of hoist machinery; Lonergan kept the truck's motor running and it drowned out the sound.

Sing Kee asked no questions but sat stoically on the worn leather seat of the cab. Lonergan looked into the bland, round face.

"This is an old Greek custom," he explained. "I read about it in history once. The Greeks used the gag to capture a whole town. Only, instead of a gravel truck, they used a wooden horse."

**T**HE elevator stopped. Lonergan, leaning out of the cab and looking back of the truck, saw an iron gate—similar to the one upstairs—slide clear of the opening. Beyond the gate was a short concrete ramp running slightly downward and coming to an end at two wide doors, like those on the upstairs entrance of the garage. The closed doors were heavily padded with sound-proof material.

Instantly, Lonergan knew why those doors were there, knew why they were sound-proofed. He hadn't figured on using the big gravel truck for a battering-ram but it would serve that purpose very well.

He shoved the gear lever into reverse, let out the clutch, gunned the powerful

motor. Leaning from the cab, he backed the truck down the incline, steering with one hand, his .45 automatic ready in the other.

Those big padded doors loomed up, closer and closer. With motor roaring a song of power, the truck gained momentum on the slope of the ramp. It smashed into the doors with crashing impact.

The obstacle was frail before the rushing tonnage of the huge truck. The doors gave, splintering inward, ripping from their hinges and toppling over like flimsy slabs of cardboard.

Lonergan kept his throttle down, kept reversing the truck. Back of him was a concrete workshop lighted with uncovered electric bulbs. Cars were lined along the walls, some in a dismantled state, like cars under repair. Work benches ran along the far wall.

Beside Lonergan, as he backed the big truck, were offices partitioned off from the garage section with light tongue-and-groove paneling and glass windows.

In one of these offices, three men looked up; looked up with startled, white faces. For a fraction of a second they stood petrified, inanimate—like modeled figures in a wax museum.

Chinee Lou acted. A pair of guns appeared in his hands, spit streaks of flame, banged. Behind those crashing guns, the baby face had grown hard. Narrowed eyes flashed brutality, hate—the face of a killer.

Lonergan knocked his lever out of gear, braked. Close to his face, the windshield was blown out with a shattering of glass. He threw himself from the cab of the truck and landed, half falling, on his knees. The automatic was still gripped in his hand. He used it.

**O**VER his head, the Chinese of the Five Families, protected by the steel sidewalls of Lonergan's fort on wheels,

answered the fire of Chinee Lou, answered fire that came from the other side of the garage.

Big Bill Wilson hurled himself from the office. His hands were high over his head, and Lonergan saw that the wrists were bound together with rope. Wilson ran a few long strides along the pine partitions of the office, flattened himself against the wall out of the line of fire, his bound hands held over his head.

Nobody shot at him.

Guns crashed in the confinement of the garage, echoed from concrete walls. Bullets splintered, ripped the flimsy pine partitions of the offices, broke out glass.

The guns of Chinee Lou were silent. He toppled over against the wall, knocked over a water-cooler and went down with it.

Eddie Wirtz had vanished from the office; but a second later he came from a doorway further along the partition. Evidently he had crawled there, keeping himself hidden under the glass windows in the partitions.

He came out in a crouch, running, made for the elevator, shooting as he ran. Lonergan, kneeling by the truck, was the mark of those bullets. He saw the quick appearance of a long scar in the concrete by his knees, heard the screech of the lead pellet as it ricocheted off.

Lonergan's gun was empty. But it didn't matter as far as Eddie Wirtz was concerned. Someone from the back of the truck got him.

Eddie went down, twisting, like a sprinter with a wrenched ankle. His body skidded in a pool of oil, stopped; was still.

With the falling of Eddie Wirtz, firing ceased. The garage was suddenly silent, and Lonergan got to his feet.

Sing Kee stepped down from the cab of the truck. Over the steel sidewalls of

the dumping compartment, Chinese faces looked down, solemn, serene.

Sing Kee was slipping shiny cartridges into the open cylinder of his revolver. "This weapon," he said with slow, clear speech, "is sometimes a blessing to mankind."

THEY gathered in the bullet-ripped office behind the pine partition. Big Bill Wilson sat on the edge of the desk. The rope was off his hands. He rubbed his sore wrists.

He said to Lonergan: "When you came around to the Lido Club with that wild tale about hot cars and the way duplicate keys were made in one of the auto parks, I got curious. You accused me of giving the cops that tip that brought them to the club looking for you. I didn't. Wirtz must have done it."

Lonergan nodded. "Wirtz heard about me from an attendant I beat up on the parking lot. I caught a glimpse of the guy at the bar with his face bandaged. I thought he was around tipping you. When Wirtz saw you letting me get away from the cops, he had some guys try to bump me when I was riding off in a taxi."

"After you left," Wilson said, "I got to thinking. I guess Wirtz was worried I was already wise. They brought me down here, tried to make me sign a bill-of-sale for this garage. Then I guess they'd knock me off. Wirtz thought he could get away with anything. I think the guy was a little nuts."

"They sure played you for a sucker," Lonergan told him. "All this hot-car racket going on right under your nose—on your own property."

Chinee Lou sat on the floor, his legs sprawled before him, his back propped against the wall. Just above his belt his shirt was red, sticky. His eyes moved around the office with a haunted look.

Lonergan stood before him, said:

"There's a car out there in the garage, a blue Pelham roadster. It's the one that was stolen from Arlene Chase the day before she disappeared. I just took a look in it. There's a glove-compartment in the dashboard, but the door to it is missing. It's been broken off the hinges."

His hard eyes demanded an answer from Chinee Lou: "What did you guys find in that compartment?"

The thin mouth of Chinee Lou was clamped tight. He didn't open it.

"You better talk," Lonergan said. "If you don't I'll turn you over to Sing Kee and the boys. The Five Families don't love you very much. I think they'd like to persuade you to talk."

The eyes of Chinee Lou shifted quickly to the bland face of Sing Kee, shifted back to Lonergan again.

"I'll talk," he said.

Lonergan smiled sardonically. "I thought you would. Now go ahead. What happened to Arlene Chase? And why?"

Chinee Lou touched a hand to his belt; it came away sticky. "Eddie Wirtz got the idea of the hot-car racket. Wilson didn't know nothing about it. Eddie had this system for getting duplicate keys to ignition locks when people left their buggies in the auto park. The boys'd turn the duplicate key over to us. They'd get the address of the owner from the white slip in the car. They'd give us that too. The next day we'd spot the car. When we got the right chance we'd drive it away with the duplicate key."

CHINEE LOU paused, looked again at the red stickiness on his hand. "Go on," Lonergan prompted. "What about Arlene Chase?"

"I'm getting to it. Eddie had the idea of fixing up this basement for a shop to doctor the cars, change the motor numbers and fix up fake ownership certificates. This basement was never used for

anything but a storeroom—on account of the bad air. That phony bottom to the elevator shaft was Eddie's idea, too. We rigged up those doors there so you couldn't hear anything upstairs. We worked over these cars and nobody ever bothered us. We sold 'em to used-car dealers all over the state."

Bill Wilson swore. "The dirty, double-crossing—"

"We swiped the Chase dame's Pelham in the regular way," Chinee Lou went on. "When we got it down here, we found that little door in the dashboard was locked. We figured we'd have to bust it off and put a new one on. We busted it and found a bunch of letters inside, all tied up with ribbon."

Lonergan nodded slowly. Now he could guess why Arlene Chase had offered five thousand dollars for the return of her car—a car which wasn't worth a third of that amount. She wanted those letters that were in the dashboard compartment.

Chinee Lou went on: "Eddie Wirtz was here when we read 'em. They were love letters the dame had written to some guy. We figured she'd just got 'em back. They were hot stuff and Eddie said they'd be worth a big hunk of cash to a society dame like her."

"So Eddie used them for blackmail?" Lonergan put in.

Chinee Lou nodded. "Eddie went out to see her about it and when he got back here the dame was right on his tail; walked into the garage upstairs. She put up a big beef to Eddie. He got nasty. She pulled a gun and blazed away at him. A hot-headed dame, I guess. Eddie plugged her."

Lonergan finished it. "So Arlene Chase was dead, and Eddie Wirtz's blackmail scheme died with her. He made her father think she was snatched, sent him

a ransom note along with her shoe. And I saw the bloodstain on it."

Chinee Lou's eyes widened. "Did it have blood on it?"

"It did!" Lonergan snapped. "That's what started me looking for murderers instead of kidnapers. But I might not have followed the trail to this garage if you hadn't bumped off that architect."

Chinee Lou's eyes stayed on Lonergan's face, stayed wide, astonished.

Lonergan went on: "You guys read in the paper that the man who designed this building, ten years ago, was in town. He was going to bring some students here on a tour of inspection. You knew he'd wonder why the place only had one basement now, when he built it with two. So Wirtz decided to protect his profitable hot-car racket with murder. You slit the architect's throat. And because you've got a grudge against Sing Kee and the Five Families, you tried to frame it on them by putting their symbol on the corpse. It was a great idea, except that I came along, added two and two—and got the customary four."

NEVER had the city beheld a parade like this one Rex Lonergan now led up the main drag toward the Civic Center. It was unfortunate that it couldn't be done in daylight—so that more people might witness it.

It was a grim sight.

Lonergan drove a blue roadster, the one that had been stolen from Arlene Chase just the day before her disappearance. Beside him rode Big Bill Wilson, nightclub owner and racketeer.

The more gruesome, the more puzzling part of the parade followed behind; over a dozen cars in all and each driven by a solemn-faced Chinese. Some of the pas-

sengers were dead and Chinee Lou sat bleeding in the car driven by Sing Kee. Crowded in beside him were two attendants from the Barker Garage. They were bound tightly with rope. Their faces were glum.

In other cars were other captives and some of them wore crimson souvenirs of the resistance they'd offered Lonergan in his attack on the garage.

One car carried a printing press which had been used to forge certificates of ownership; another carried a steel safe which contained money collected from traffic in stolen cars and sixty thousand dollars taken from Lawrence F. Chase for the promised return of his daughter.

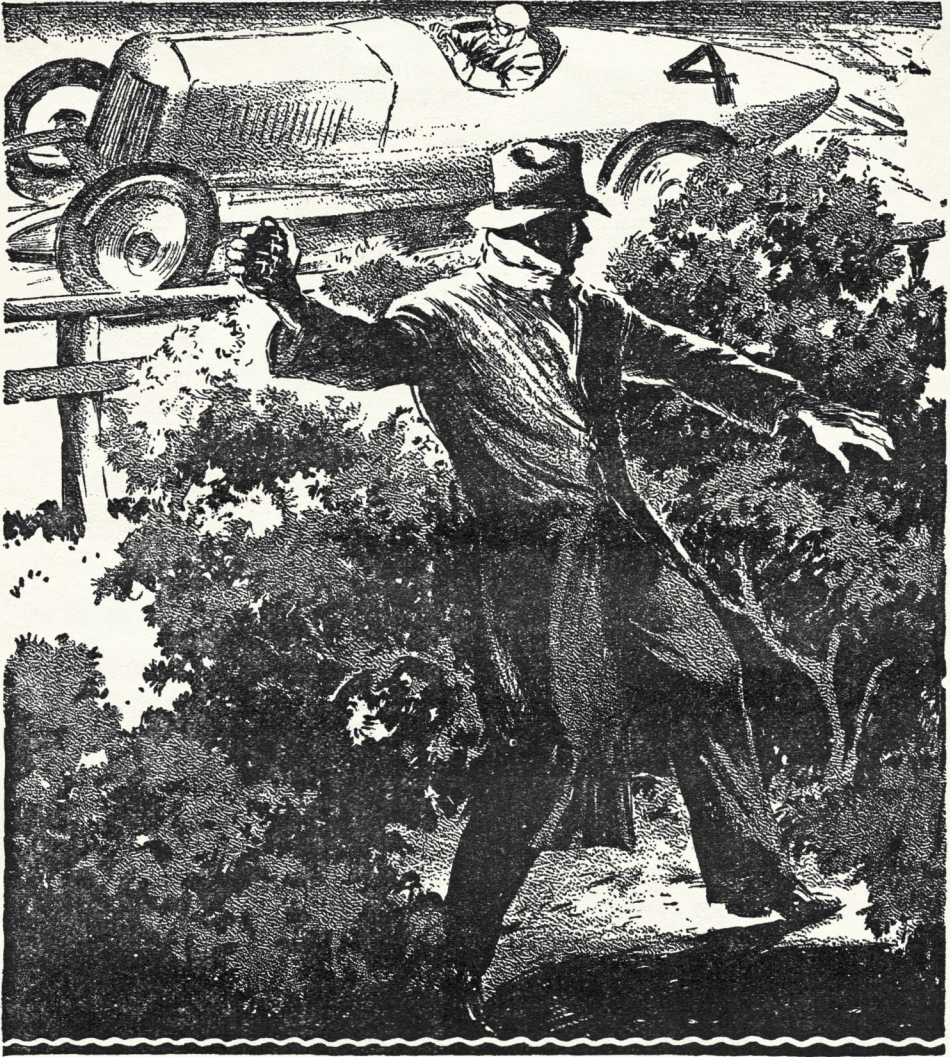
Chase wouldn't ever get his daughter back. Her body was buried in concrete in the lower basement of the Barker Garage.

And so the parade moved uptown, Lonergan sounding the horn on the lead-car as he came to intersections. A parade of over a dozen cars, every one hot, every one sought by the police throughout the state.

"You ought to be in a circus," Wilson said. "Maybe you'll wish you were when Ryan and the district attorney hear of this. They'll eat you alive."

"Eat me alive, hell!" Lonergan grinned. "They'll be eating out of my hand. Ryan'll probably give out statements that I was working for the police all the time, working under cover. You watch those boys at the city hall climb on the bandwagon. Watch the papers. You'll see a picture of the chief of police, smiling all over the place, with an arm around me. The caption will read—'Chief Ryan very satisfied with work of Lonergan.' From now on, I'm the white-haired boy around the Civic Center. Want to bet?"

He clutched the grenade



## HELL'S HALF

**T**HREE men, as silent as if they were dead, rode the front seat of the blue truck. Behind, in the body of the truck, rested a trim racing car.

The machine which traveled in such state was a single-seater, one-hundred-inch-wheelbase job with a four-cylinder, double-overhead camshaft motor which would put out one hundred and eighty

*Around that terror-track it roared  
er, single-seater hot iron—and in  
murder. What was the strange hoo-  
every time it lost a race? Why did  
always die, even as they*



in his tense right hand.



# MILE

By  
**Richard Howells Watkins**

*—a hundred-and-eighty-horse pow-  
its swirling dust-wake thundered  
'doo that turned it into a kill car  
those who beat it to the finish line  
won their laurels?*

horsepower at six thousand revolutions per minute. A hot iron, in the lingo of the dirt track.

Mile after mile was clipped off on the road to the Pemberton half-miler. But not once did a man speak. Hap Stone, mechanic of the outfit, a chunky, fat-faced man, guided the fast-moving truck with sure, powerful arms. At intervals,

his low-lidded gaze uncontrollably flicked from the road to the two men beside him.

Once his small dark eyes were met by the surreptitious glance of Ted Quimby, owner of both truck and car. Quimby, a lugubrious six-footer, sat hunched over, restlessly moving his knobby hands.

Ben Tolliver, driver, and top man on the Arkroyd circuit that year, faced rigidly forward, lips compressed, jaws set; lines like knife-cuts ran from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. Not a big man, even as racing pilots went, and lean meat throughout.

**E**VENTUALLY, the truck turned off the concrete and a wire gate swung open for it. It rumbled on behind an empty grandstand and around its end to another gate giving onto the track itself.

This gate did not open at once. All three men automatically studied the brown, dirt bull-ring as one would appraise a formidable enemy.

The Pemberton half-miler had been rebuilt by John Arkroyd, who leased five half-milers and also ran fair-ground meets. Now, the track was well banked on the corners and wider than it had been.

Three cars were wheeling. One, on the backstretch, jolted hard as it shot into the turn. Ben Tolliver's eyes instantly assayed the severity of the bounce and he spoke to Hap Stone.

"Take up on the shocks."

The mechanic nodded. The three cars trying out the track came around into the grandstand stretch, bunched. Skip Robinson, in his rocker-arm job, was leading the others but Pepper O'Meara's bright green double-overhead alligator was pressing him hard. These two were boys from the Coast but all three on the truck knew them by their cars and numbers.

Both Ben Tolliver and Hap Stone listened acutely to the blare of the two motors as they swept by. They sounded hot,

and the two pilots handling them were reported to be always ready to step.

The gateman looked around the track, opened the barrier and hurriedly waved them on. The blue truck crossed to the pits and stopped.

Though few customers had arrived, there was already plenty going on in the pits. Drivers, mechanics and helpers were getting set for the proceedings of the afternoon.

The busy, cheerful medley of yells, clinking tools, roaring motors and arguments died as if somebody had turned it off.

Everybody looked at the three men on the blue truck. The eyes were hostile. A few of the racing men nodded guardedly.

Hap Stone and Ted Quimby responded with quick jerks of the head but Ben Tolliver, top driver, did not. He got down, moved away from his rig, planted his feet apart on the dirt, and slowly rolled himself a cigarette.

Before he had lit it, John Arkroyd came bustling up to him. The tall boss of the circuit clapped the driver heartily on the shoulder and then proudly flung a long arm toward the track.

"What d'you think of it, Ben, my boy?" he roared, plainly attempting to make up for the sudden lull that had come to the pits with Ben Tolliver. "I've sunk a lot of jack on steam rollers, calcium carbide and waps to make this track hold the fastest jobs in the business. Will it do?"

Ben Tolliver's bleak blue eyes swept around the saucer. There was a glint in the back of them.

"Tell you later," he said, and his flint-like face did not change.

Arkroyd hesitated, chewing his lips. "Uh—a few cops—detectives—have come to—uh—see the races," he said awkwardly.

Ben nodded.

Arkroyd immediately hustled on, to greet the owner of Tolliver's blue D.O.

Ben Tolliver stood still. He lit and smoked his cigarette. Not too openly, but very keenly, he studied everybody in sight. He seemed to be waiting for something. But nothing happened.

Things had slid along like that for quite a while now.

ONE April day, not long after the opening of the Eastern racing season, George Ulrich had beaten out Ben Tolliver in the last lap of a twenty-five miler. Both cars blasted down the home stretch in a Garrison finish. Ulrich belted past the checkered flag only about a wheel ahead of Ben Tolliver. But that wheel's advantage had meant first money, three hundred dollars for George.

The two cars slid into the turn just beyond the finish line with plenty of speed. Ben Tolliver, lifting his throttle foot, turned his blue car in behind the victorious Ulrich to follow him around to the pits. But just then, as the winner was relaxing his taut muscles, his yellow job blew the left-front shoe. The car broad-sided along the bank.

Tolliver, right on Ulrich's tail, braked swiftly. With diminishing momentum, his machine smacked Ulrich's. They tangled.

It wasn't much of a tie, as those things go on a race track. But when the dust cleared away from the two locked cars, Ulrich was out of his bucket seat, on the dirt; Tolliver was bending over him, lifting him up.

Tolliver carried him to the infield fence before the roaring cars behind got near enough to the wreckage to threaten a pile-up. The pilots clawed up the bank and kept clear of the mix-up.

But Ulrich's crash-helmet was off, and his skull was cracked. He was dead.

Nobody thought much about it. No dirt-track speed merchant is better than a hundred-to-one shot to raise a long gray beard.

"Sometimes the toughest-looking crashes, with cars flipping end to end, wind up with nobody in the butcher wagon." Hap Stone commented coolly. "So why wouldn't an easy little crack sometimes kill a guy?"

Nobody thought much about it.

George Ulrich had copped but he hadn't lived for the pay-off. So John Arkroyd paid off his widow instead and that was that.

The next man to beat Ben Tolliver in a feature event was Bill Tresco. He took the main from Ben at the Bradbury County Fairgrounds after a tough battle which ended in the 25th lap when Ben fouled a sparkplug and couldn't get his motor perking again. It was Bill's race by a lap.

While walking across the highway to the roadhouse—where Arkroyd was paying off the boys that evening—Bill Tresco was struck by a hit-and-run car. At least that's what they figured when they found him, half an hour later.

The doctor said death had been instantaneous. The boys agreed that it was a tough break considering the chances he'd taken and the driving he'd gotten away with that afternoon. And they agreed, too, meaning no harm, that it didn't seem to pay to cop against Ben Tolliver. They kidded Ben about it.

**B**UT the matter of Sam Hull was different. Sam took the main at Woodmont in spite of all Ben Tolliver could do. Sam was hot that day. He hit the corners as if they were stretches and never ran out of track. He gave Ben a real beating. The other boys back in the dust enjoyed it, for Ben had been going places all season. They liked him to have some real competition.

As usual, after the customers went, the boys talked it all over and got their rigs set to go home without hurrying much. In the dusk, Pete Warner—Sam Hull's

mech—took a final look at the tow bar and jumped into the sedan where Sam was sitting.

"Let's travel, fellow," he said.

But Sam Hull didn't answer him, having the front of his skull caved in with a Stilson wrench.

Now George Ulrich's death could be set down as an accident and Bill Tresco's to a hit-and-run driver. But Sam Hull, with a wrench through his head, didn't fit into either of those categories. Sam Hull was murdered. Knowing that, everybody suddenly thought of the other two boys who had taken Ben Tolliver recently.

After that there was talk—lots of talk—plenty of talk. Only Ben himself didn't say anything. He didn't talk much anyhow. Even when the detectives questioned him he said he didn't know anything and made it stick.

The talk spread beyond the racing bunch. The newspapers played it up as a series of strange coincidences, with innuendos, and illustrated with cracked-up cars.

Ben canceled a mid-western trip he'd been figuring on, although there were several juicy purses waiting out there for a pilot with a heavy right foot.

Ted Quimby, owner of Ben's brisk D.O., and Hap Stone, who kept it hot, each had nice cuts out of Ben's many pay-offs. They talked a lot, while people would listen, but didn't say anything. All three of them got to looking each other over—on the sly.

Ben Tolliver got good after that. He drove like wildfire. Nobody could take him, though plenty tried. He ran up a big lead in points on the Arkroyd circuit and copped a lot of jack, as jack goes on the dirt.

Word went all the way to the Coast about what happened in the East to drivers who took races away from Ben Tolliver. A few outside boys came from here

and there to see what there was in it, race drivers being naturally fond of entertainment and not very timid.

The answer they got was there was nothing in it at all. Ben Tolliver knew his way around the Arkroyd half-milers and the visiting pilots neither won nor were killed. And that made the thing even more talked about—but not talked about with Ben Tolliver.

**B**EN finished his cigarette and his scrutiny of the men in the pits. Nobody came up to him and nobody met his eyes as they swiveled slowly around the pits. Everybody was working again, or pretending to.

Ben walked back to his blue D.O., which had been rolled off the truck. Hap was down on the dirt in front of it, taking up the shock absorbers. Arkroyd was still talking to Ted Quimby but he paused to grin at Ben Tolliver.

"Going to christen my new track by copping on it, Ben?" he asked.

"You know I've got to cop," Ben retorted curtly.

John Arkroyd looked over his shoulder. "I know, but there're a couple of boys who don't," he said, jerking a long arm toward the track. "Here they come rolling in, right now."

In silence, Ben Tolliver waited as Pepper O'Meara and Skip Robinson, cutting speed, came wheeling into the pits. They jumped out, spoke to their mechs and then approached John Arkroyd.

"A nice bit o' dirt. Mr. Promoter," the thin, agile Pepper O'Meara assured him. "Now if only all the dirt is on the track—" He paused and peered inquisitively at Ben Tolliver.

"Meaning what?" Ben demanded. His face was flint; his eyes frosty.

"Just that," Pepper O'Meara replied softly.

Skip Robinson stood at O'Meara's

shoulder, looking over it at Ben Tolliver. He was a barrel-chested man with thick black eyebrows which gave him a lowering expression. But now his eyes were glaring.

"Here's some straight talk, Tolliver," he said. "Pepper and I have mixed it plenty, here and there. But off the dirt we ain't fighting; we're standing together. And it'll be just too pitiful for you if anything funny happens to either of us."

Ben Tolliver shrugged his shoulders. "You've got to trim me before you're in any danger," he stated crisply, "so you're both safe."

Skip Robinson growled in his throat.

Hap Stone got up off his knees. "Calling him a killer?" he demanded of Robinson, pointing his wrench toward Ben Tolliver.

"I'm calling him nothing; I'm telling him something," the barrel-chested Robinson snapped, "and that is that. If Pepper gets his, Tolliver don't live long enough to take down his pay-off. *I mean it!*"

"Ditto for Skip," O'Meara put in. "We ain't saying it's you, Tolliver, but it's a cinch that some guy is a killer. And, whether you know it or not, he's working for you. The way to stop him is to stop you. Do I register?"

Tolliver didn't say a word.

O'Meara's broad Hibernian countenance crinkled up in growing wonder. "If it ain't you, man, why don't you quit racing?" he demanded. "That would stop the red murder that's going on."

Ben Tolliver's lips parted in a bark of bitter mirth. "I'm a driver—and I'm staying that way," he said. Abruptly he swung away from them to glance at his blue D.O.

"Wind her up, Hap," he commanded.

With the eyes of everyone in the pits and in the slowly filling grandstand on him, Ben Tolliver hooked on his goggles, adjusted his cork-and-leather crash-helmet

and slid into the narrow bucket seat. For just an instant his hands seemed to clutch the taped wheel uncertainly. Then his grip hardened till his knuckles grew white.

Hap Stone and Ted Quimby stood beside the little blue bus, waiting for an order or remark. But Ben did not speak. He shoved the motor into low, revved it up, eased in the clutch and glided gently away.

"Sort of jittery," said Ted Quimby, looking sideways at the mechanic.

"Yuh," retorted Hap.

FOR a couple of laps Ben took it slowly, warming up the oil that reached bearings and cylinder walls under the compulsion of a high-pressure pump. Behind his goggles, his squinting, straining eyes studied the dirt. He marked well just how fast the bank sloped up where the stretches became curves and just how the bank flattened out where the corners straightened out.

Races were won and men killed at those spots.

His oil was warm. It wasn't a hot day but Ben slipped his goggles and mopped out the hollows of his eyes. Sweat had gathered on eyelids and eyebrows. The lines from his nose to the corners of his mouth deepened on his face. His neck muscles tautened up.

"I got to take this one," he muttered.

He stepped on his throttle. The blue D.O., with a deepening roar, shot ahead. Ben blasted down the backstretch, peaking his speed almost into the bend. Then, with a quick reach of his handbrake, he steadied his car and belted into it. Under the compulsion of his wheel and throttle, the bus almost broadsided. But, before the rear end could flip ahead, he kicked the car out of the skid with more speed. The car surged on around the curve, throwing dirt and making miles.

For three laps he kept coming. The track was new, a bit soft; with spots and even

stretches, that a hurtling car did not take kindly to. Ben Tolliver marked them and tried them out at close to the limit.

At last he lifted his foot. But he did not go into the pits. Instead he rode on slowly, as if still working out the track. As he came down the front straightaway his eyes, their direction screened by dusty goggles and rigidly held head, scrutinized once more the men in the pits and around the other jobs. Not for a moment did his eyes turn toward the crowds steadily dribbling into the two new grandstands on the front stretch. Some of them were yelling words at him or booing vehemently; but his motor cut off all other sound.

In the backstretch he swabbed out his eyesockets again and then returned to the pits. The crowd redoubled its razzing.

Ted Quimby was waiting for him with a stopwatch. "Twenty-nine and four-fifths," he reported almost cheerfully. "Not bad on a new surface."

Ben Tolliver nodded. "O.K.," he said to Hap, who was standing by. "Put the cover over it."

He climbed into the cab of the truck, which had been parked just behind the pit enclosure, and sat there, watching what went on.

By one o'clock the crowds really started coming. John Arkroyd redoubled his wanderings and conferences with guards, judges, timers, ticket-takers, race officials, drivers and owners. He kept on the jump all the time, so busy that he hardly had time to wave his arm proudly around his new racing plant as he greeted newcomers.

The pits were pandemonium. Drivers who had brought sweet-sounding motors to the track now were riding distracted mechs hard for last-minute tinkering that had raised hell with the mixture or timing. Only a few cars were set, and the best of these were Skip Robinson's and Pepper O'Meara's.

WHEN the starter called the time-trials, Ben Tolliver came out at once. The stands were jammed and practically united in their condemnation of the blue D.O.'s pilot. A couple of fights started. Ben took it all as if he were deaf.

With gritting teeth he punched his car around in twenty-nine and a fifth. Then he went back to his seat on the track while the other pilots shot at the mark. Pepper O'Meara equaled it. No one cracked it.

The time came for the first event. On the card were three five-mile heats, with the first three cars in each qualifying to start in the main event; a consolation five-miler in which the winner also got a chance to start; and the feature, a twenty-five-mile race.

To the crowds watching, all that was going on over at the pits where men sweated, toiled, tinkered, argued and kidded each other in preparation for risking their necks, it seemed that many thousands of dollars must be involved.

Only the participants knew that the total purse was seven hundred and fifty dollars, of which two hundred and fifty went to the driver who took the feature. The promoters know that when a man has the itch to wrestle with a taped wheel in a cloud of dust it doesn't take much prize-money to make him roll one.

That first heat was a big surprise.

Ben Tolliver on the pole, with Pepper O'Meara alongside him, uncorked to the limit on the first corner. It looked like the fence for the blue bus but Ben got away with it.

He left Pepper in the dust to fight it out with Skip Robinson and belted on around the bend, alone in the lead. Flint-faced, he handled his car as if his forearms were as rigid as connecting rods. On the backstretch he let them pull up on him a bit, but watched them. He took the corner into the grandstand stretch pouring in the gas.

All the way around the curve, he kept climbing on his car. But, as he drifted off the corner with skittering rear wheels, the bus got away from him. He spun. Grazing the infield fence, he came out of the whirl with no speed left.

Pepper, Skip and Tuck Kingsley, swinging wide, all got by him. As Ben Tolliver, now in fourth place, accelerated down the grandstand stretch, fighting off a couple of other challengers, he realized that the stands had gone wild.

"Want to see another murder," he told himself, through contorted lips. The two cars, trying to pass him, faded as he kept building up speed right into the corner. This time, despite the way he barreled into the curve, he bent his mount around with no mishap.

The three cars ahead had a long lead on Ben. Tuck Kingsley, in third place, was fighting like a madman to pass Skip Robinson.

Only three cars would qualify for the main race—and Ben Tolliver was riding now in fourth place. He crouched a little lower over his wheel and came off the corner into the backstretch with his hurtling car fighting to crash the fence. He manhandled it into subjection. He went screaming down the backstretch. In another two laps he drove in the dust of the three cars bunched close ahead. All four crowded the fences hard.

Tuck Kingsley, driving half blind in the swirling brown clouds, swung out as they hit a corner to get Robinson before Ben Tolliver could take him. He tramped on his throttle too hard.

Next instant his car barreled into the bend. The bus bounced hard, off on all four wheels. It pounded up the bank. No grip on the dirt.

Kingsley hit the crash rail. The timber couldn't save him. With a rending crash, the big eight-by-eight let go. The car dropped over the edge of the track.

**B**EN TOLLIVER went riding into third place. He mopped the dirt off his goggles on the next stretch and hung on the tail of Skip Robinson. Almost imperceptibly the mankilling pace slackened. The pressure was gone; Ben Tolliver no longer jumped on his mount. He took a tame third place.

"Qualified!" he muttered.

The jeers of the crowd redoubled while he coasted around.

"Start killing!" Somebody in the stands, with a mighty voice, bellowed that as Ben cut his motor in the pits. That set them off again.

Ted Quimby and Hap Stone received him without comment.

"Motor O. K.," Ben Tolliver said harshly, as he climbed out. "Let it alone."

John Arkroyd found time to come over.

"Who d'you think you are—Barney Oldfield?" he demanded of Ben Tolliver, gesturing derisively toward the corner where Ben had slid and spun.

"Qualified, didn't I?" Ben retorted crisply. Arkroyd darted away again.

Ben retreated to his perch on the track to watch the pits. His lips curved into a tortured smile as he saw that two strangers—big men with bulges on their hips—were plainly standing guard over Pepper O'Meara and Skip Robinson.

Then, in the privacy of the truck's cab, he looked down at his strong, hooked fingers. Almost imperceptibly they were quivering. He straightened them out and laid them on his knees. The quivering stopped. But he couldn't stop the sweat that kept oozing up on his forehead and trickling down into his eyes. He kept swabbing at it but always there was need of more swabbing.

"I've got to cop the feature," he rasped.

The word went around the pits that Tuck Kingsley had only cracked a couple of ribs when he crashed the fence. The ambulance brought him back to the pits

and he hung around, telling people he felt swell.

Nobody sprang any surprises in the following heats or in the consolation. The fast cars had rolled in the first heat. The rest of the field was made up of clunkers—second-rate cars that couldn't hit the gait of the leaders by a good two seconds a lap.

"Main event!" yelled the starter. "Let's have 'em, boys!"

In silence, Ben Tolliver walked beside his car as it was rolled into second rank, inside, for the start of the twenty-five miler.

Both Pepper O'Meara and Skip Robinson, in the first row, turned to watch him. Robinson climbed out of the bucket and walked back to Tolliver.

"Remember, get both of us—or neither, champ!" the driver from the Coast warned grimly. "If you're lucky you'll finish where you start—third."

"Do you read palms, too?" Ben Tolliver said through his teeth. He climbed into his seat and waited with his eyes on the filling-cap of his radiator.

They rolled around—ten cars. They circled and came back into the grandstand stretch. O'Meara, on the pole, kept his speed down; then lifted the pace steadily as they approached the start.

On the track, the white sweated starter balanced warily on his toes, green flag concealed behind his back, appraising the line-up as they swept him.

Ben Tolliver, glancing around, knew it would be a start. The cars were in good formation. He jammed down his foot even as Pepper O'Meara, ahead, opened up wide. With a simultaneous roar, the ten racing machines surged forward. Through brown dust kicked up by whirring wheels and the blue smoke of burned oil, the brilliantly colored cars lunged into action. They hurtled past the

spot where the starter, leaping forward, was flashing the green flag.

LIKE fiends pouring out of hell they screamed down the stretch, hub to hub, radiator to tail, fighting to jam into anything that looked like a hole ahead. All ten were blasting on to seize a spot big enough for only one car—ahead and close to the infield fence at the start of the first curve. There is no wily lying back in the dirt. Speed wins.

Pepper O'Meara in his green bus, inches ahead of Ben Tolliver, was ripping on in a desperate effort to leave everything else behind in the dust. He lanced toward the coveted spot, by the infield fence, with never a touch of his brake handle. Ben Tolliver rode his tail and Skip Robinson clung to his right flank.

Close quarters!

O'Meara wheeled down the straight-away as if he had never heard of a curve.

A second of time swept by in a blur of sound and motion.

O'Meara hit the bend. His car started bouncing sideways up the bank, with Robinson, outside him, swerving desperately to avoid a crash. Ben Tolliver, with his brake slashing down the speed that threatened to send him barreling up the slope after O'Meara, fought to run his radiator in between the infield fence and the green machine. It was the chance he had awaited.

But O'Meara, with a mighty effort of his thin, agile little body, wrenched his car back toward the infield fence and blocked the hole. Only by lifting his throttle foot in a hurry did Ben escape crashing into him.

Back in the groove after his slide, Pepper O'Meara continued to uncork. With iron grasp he held his weaving car near the fence, killing his skids with the throttle. He had Tolliver back in his dust and Skip Robinson up the bank, trying to



crawl by while driving a wider circle. O'Meara couldn't be taken on that bend.

They drifted out onto the backstretch, all three, a hundred feet ahead of the field, with rear ends whipping dangerously.

Ben Tolliver rode out onto the level with his throttle foot heavy, letting his car skitter outside O'Meara's. And, as he controlled his sliding machine, he poured in everything he had. The blue job hurtled down the straightaway.

As his car whisked through that short stretch, Ben Tolliver's taut face grew bleaker. Everything he had—but it had not been enough!

O'Meara, inside him, held his own. And Robinson, though he trailed the green car, clung close to it, leaving Tolliver to wheel to the outside.

Without the gun to pass them Ben Tolliver, in the outer berth, must slow up, hit them, or slide through the fence at the start of the next turn, looming up ahead.

Tolliver, gritting his teeth, hung onto his speed. O'Meara couldn't smack another curve as he had the first—one miracle per lap is plenty.

O'Meara knew it, too. At the last instant he braked, just as Robinson, alongside him, grabbed at his own lever and threw out the anchors. Swiftly Robinson flicked his car in behind O'Meara's as they barreled into the corner, both close to the infield fence.

Tolliver took a long chance, with a quick eye measuring the top of the bank. He held his pace a moment, shooting up alongside the other two. Next instant his greater momentum hurled his flying car broadside up the bank.

**B**EN TOLLIVER kicked his bus hard with his throttle foot. He straightened out. It looked as if he were set on driving through the crash rail instead of just skidding through it. There was an

inviting hole, made by Tuck Kingsley, waiting for him up at the top of the slope.

He was scant inches from the edge of the track when the angle of the bank gave him traction and a chance to bend his flying car around. He had shot past the cars inside him. But to attempt, at his gait, to dive down the bank toward the infield fence would have meant a certain spin. He gunned on, matching greater momentum against the shorter distance the green car and the red rocker-arm were traveling.

O'Meara, maddened at the sight of the man up the bank, kicked his car petulantly and not too wisely. It slid away from the fence, gouging up a thick brown screen of flying dirt. Ben Tolliver, flicking his eyes around, instantly darted down the bank. At hand's-length apart, the two cars crossed. The blue was ahead.

Ben Tolliver jammed his mount close to the infield fence before Skip Robinson got there. They blared on around into the grandstand stretch, Ben Tolliver first, Skip Robinson second and O'Meara, coming out of his broadside, a bad third.

They couldn't take Ben on the front stretch though his lead was slender. He tried hitting this corner wide, as he had the other. He found himself fighting desperately to wrench his hubs away from the crash rail at the top of the bank. This bank wouldn't hold such speed. He kissed the rail but clawed away undamaged and hastily edged his car down the bank. Robinson, too, had tried taking the bend wide and was fighting to save himself on the bank. Ben still held the lead. O'Meara came through inside Robinson's red rocker-arm into second place.

Ben Tolliver found the two boys from the Coast were tough. There was no settling back to wait for a break in the succeeding laps. O'Meara rode his tail as tightly as he could kick the green car along, fighting to jump him into every

corner. And Robinson hung close behind O'Meara, taking the dust. He played it close to the infield fence when it looked as if the leaders were barreling into a bend too fast and he drove wide when it seemed that they hadn't hit it so hard.

Ben Tolliver's face was growing gray and very strained under the brown dirt. His jaws were grinding against each other and his hands were cramped on the wheel. Out front is where the winner should be, but setting the pace for those two lead-feet took plenty. They never quit trying.

"Yellow!" he gritted. He did his desperate best to open a gap behind him on the next bend. He got around fast. But there was no hole back of him when he jerked his head around on the backstretch.

His ears were listening apprehensively for a rift in the tremendous symphony of sound from his motor. Running wide-open like this, lap after lap, might send a rod through the case or the block; his motor needed a breather.

A couple of cars showed ahead on the backstretch, long after he had lost track of the laps. That meant he was picking up the field—lapping the clunkers. He saw a chance to get his motor that breather it needed so sorely. He ripped down the stretch onto the curve and took both cars, driving blind through their dust, riding on the steep bank that would hold high speed.

O'Meara, back in the dust of three cars, didn't get by the clunkers till the curve flattened out into the grandstand stretch. Ben, fighting an impulse to air out, lifted his foot a bit, looking back. His hard-driven motor got a chance to ease; not much, but at least a little. Then O'Meara was on him again and he had to open up.

"Just itching to die—that guy!" Ben Tolliver said it through stiff, dust-crusting lips as he hurtled into the bend and, with aching arms, manhandled his mount out of a wild shoot toward the rail.

HE HELD his own against O'Meara. But another darting glance behind told him that Skip Robinson, in third place, was getting restive. The pilot of the red rocker-arm was pressing O'Meara, hanging on his tail. Robinson was trying hard to dive past the green job on the inner side.

O'Meara was holding him off. Laps whirled by, but still the starter in front of the grandstand gave no sign of reaching for the blue flag that meant the last lap was coming up. Fifty are lots of laps.

Out of his dust-blurred goggles, as he drifted onto the backstretch, Ben saw Skip Robinson up on the bank, fighting to beat O'Meara onto the straight. It was rougher going on the outside of the track, but Skip was pushing his jarring car to the limit.

Suddenly the front end of the red rocker-arm dipped. A spurt of dirt shot up into the air as broken axle ploughed the track.

O'Meara tore past inside the disabled car, dodging a loose wheel. Next instant Robinson's red job whirled around and shot backward up the bank. It hit the crash rail with a crack that nearly flung Robinson out of the seat.

That was all Ben Tolliver saw in swift glances astern, for his car was already shooting at the next curve. He took it fast. O'Meara, free of interference, would be mixing it again.

The starter had the yellow caution flag in his hand as Ben belted down the home stretch but he did not flick it.

Robinson's wreck was not badly blocking the track; the starter let them go to it.

Ben barreled into the dust-shrouded bend, weary eyes peering intently through the brown-filmed lenses. Thick, swirling dust meant more cars ahead on that corner. He must somehow take them at top pace, for O'Meara would be on his tail if he lifted his foot.

Ben Tolliver chewed his lip.

One tail-ender, sputtering along close to the infield fence with a blown head-gasket, Ben took almost at once. But there were two more to be taken. Strong-arming the wheel, he skittered on around the corner.

Suddenly the dust opened enough to show him two cars, side by side, dinging on in a private battle. He rode the bank high, with enough gun under his hood to get by them.

The inner car slid. The other pilot swerved frantically up the bank. That drove Tolliver higher. The guard rail reached for his whirring hubs. He kept going, hot tires flogging the loose dirt. His foot thrust down the throttle-paddle to the limit.

Ahead was the wreck of Robinson's red rocker-arm, jammed up against the crash rail with which he was flirting. Crowding alongside Ben, was the bouncing clunker. He must fade, pass, or smack into Robinson's crack-up.

His foot again thrust down the throttle-paddle to the limit.

That heavy throttle foot won. He surged past the tail-ender, cut over ahead and clawed past the red wreck.

Right then, ten feet beyond, his left rear shoe picked up something sharp from Robinson's wreck and let go in a sudden burst. With all the might that was left in him he struggled with the rioting car, forcing it toward the outside rail.

Vaguely, as he fought his wheel, he heard the two tail-enders and Pepper O'Meara blaring past him. Then, pivoting on his rear shoe, his car sideswiped the crash rail and bounced back onto the track.

Axle and wheel stood the gaff. That was that.

Ben Tolliver kept the car moving, limping as fast as he could around toward the pits.

HIS FACE, under the paste of oil and dirt, had abruptly gone grayer than when he had been jamming into the curves at everything his job would stand. And his eyes, no longer bleak but fearful, kept staring across the infield toward Pepper O'Meara, roaring on to fatal victory with nobody else within striking distance of him.

Ben Tolliver got to the pits. Hap Stone was waiting with a wheel. The grandstands were wild with excitement—sure that Ben could not win—shouting about O'Meara's fate—a different kind of thrill!

"What lap?" croaked Ben Tolliver, as he backed against the blow-tire and, with straining back, lifted the rear end of the car off the dirt.

"O'Meara has three to go!" Ted Quimby snapped back, blocking up the wheel.

"God, if O'Meara gets killed!" Hap moaned, wrenching off the wheel. "They'll mob hell out of all—"

"He won't be killed!" Ben rasped harshly.

The wheel went on. But Ben Tolliver wasted a precious second to stand beside the car, looking around the pits and across in front of the grandstands. The hard, alert eyes of several men in plain clothes met his, but these he ignored. He jumped into the car and screamed away.

O'Meara had a lap and a half on him.

Ben drove, but not with the wholehearted intensity of before. His lips were twisting—twisting in words—half sentences—thoughts whisked away in whispers by the windstream through which he tore.

"Once O'Meara finishes—gets back to the pits—he can't be killed. Everybody will be watching—those cops will never let him out of their sight. He can't be gotten—unless—"

He roared on, driving with such automatic precision that O'Meara ceased to gain. The agile little man from the Coast

was too wise to risk a crack-up with the checkered flag only two laps ahead.

Two laps went fast. Soon, as Ben shot down the home stretch he saw the starter edging out to give O'Meara, behind him, the blue flag. Last lap for O'Meara! Ben, as he drove, let his eyes flick here and there along the edge of the track.

The backstretch itself was empty of people, and so was the turn out of it into the grandstand stretch. The ground there was too low for people to see around the track.

"You can't hit a guy traveling at O'Meara's gait with a rifle or pistol," Ben told himself. "But if you could even jolt him—slamming into this curve—"

**H**IS eyes turned toward the infield and suddenly focused upon something near the fence. Just where that white barrier began its long curve from the empty backstretch to the crowded grandstand straightaway, a man's head had risen from some low bushes. The fellow was enveloped in a long bulky raincoat. The brim of his felt hat was turned well down in front. He dropped out of sight almost instantly.

That was all Ben Tolliver could make out as he flashed by. Then he turned his head, after bending the blue car around the start of the turn. He saw that Pepper O'Meara was past that lurking man and shooting up behind him toward the finish. Nothing had happened.

"After he wins!" Ben Tolliver told himself. "Am I crazy or—"

He held place two hundred yards ahead. Pepper O'Meara swept along the roaring grandstands and took the snap of the checkered flag from the starter.

Finished! O'Meara roared on around the extra lap that would bring him coasting up to the pits for his moment of triumph and applause.

Ben Tolliver did not slacken pace. Pep-

per was trying to catch him—but Ben held the gap. As he hit the backstretch, Ben's eyes were on that clump of bushes in the infield near the end of the straightaway. He saw nothing.

Then the man in the bushes showed himself again. He was crouching, eyes turned down the stretch toward O'Meara's green car.

He made no great attempt to conceal himself from Tolliver, who would pass him first. The eyes of a pilot hitting that curve at high speed must be fixed on the dirt.

But Ben Tolliver, head rigidly forward, saw him. And as he shot close he saw the thing, like a black pineapple, that the man clutched in his tensed right hand as he waited for Pepper O'Meara.

Hand grenade!

"Now!" Ben Tolliver gritted. He twisted his wheel and jammed down his throttle foot.

Like a huge projectile, his blue mount hurtled toward the white infield fence. The barrier burst into flying matchwood before that terrific impact.

The car bounced onto the rough infield, reared perilously on two wheels, dropped back and roared on the few feet toward that rigid figure.

In a frenzy the man hurled his grenade at this thing thundering at him.

The grenade hit the front cross-spring of Ben Tolliver's car. But the momentum of that fourteen hundred pounds of flying steel sent it bouncing back at the one who had thrown it.

The man whirled, darted sideways.

Ben Tolliver ducked, as if for a crack-up. A blast that dwarfed the roar of his motor jarred his eardrums. The wheels, with tires ripped, dug steel rims into the grass. The car crashed over on its side and ploughed on.

Dizzily, Ben Tolliver let go of his wheel and crawled out. His crash-helmet had a

gash across its top and his head ached. But his mind still worked.

**H**E APPROACHED the man whose sideways leap had saved him from the car. It had not saved him from the bomb. He lay, face downward, arms outstretched, and the back of the raincoat was shredded; with blood welling through several gashes.

Sliding tires snarled on the track. Ben Tolliver jerked his head around at that compelling sound. Pepper O'Meara had jammed on his cinchers and now, in a broadside, was fighting his car to a stop. Before it quit rolling beside the infield fence, he was out of it and running toward Ben. Panting, he halted by the still figure.

Slowly, with one hand, he turned over the man in the raincoat. The driver from the Coast stared at the unmarred face.

"John Arkroyd—huh? The promoter that runs this circuit?"

Ben Tolliver nodded.

"Why would a guy like—" Pepper O'Meara began, his face twisted in doubt. Then the wrinkles of perplexity straightened out, as he looked across at the crowded grandstands.

"Oh, I get it," O'Meara said slowly. "He was picking up thousands of bucks for every hundred you made, whenever you raced, with the crowds jamming in to see if somebody got murdered."

"And he wanted to cinch capacity business with just one more sensation," Ben said curtly.

The Coast pilot glanced around at the start of the curve.

"All he had to do was to slam that egg down in front of me on the turn and I was through the crash rail and he was away over the fence into the woods. Huh?"

O'Meara nodded jerkily, added: "Yeah, Arkroyd was the only fellow that could go

circulating all over the place. Nobody could keep track of him. He was safe—killing all those drivers."

"You get it, brother, a little late, but you get it," Ben Tolliver said. "It was a fortune instead of bankruptcy for John Arkroyd when he got this idea. And he's only had to murder one man."

"One?"

Ben nodded. "Ulrich got his in an accident—a tangle with me on the track. Some drunken driver got Bill Tresco—how could anybody time it to be passing with a car just when he started across the road?"

Ben jerked his head again. "But those two getting killed, accidentally, gave Arkroyd an idea—right when he had to get a big bunch of customers paying into his races or else fold up. I figure he didn't have the jack to pay off Sam Hull. So he killed Sam in the pits—and that started the fans talking about me and coming to the races by the thousands. I had no proof—nothing but a hunch—but I doped it and waited."

"How'd you dope it?" Pepper asked in incredulous wonder.

"I was on the inside track," Tolliver told him grimly. "I knew I hadn't done it. That was more than anyone else seemed to know—or believe. Yes, I was on the inside. I had to pretend I suspected my own owner and mech, and everybody else in the game, so Arkroyd wouldn't shy off. But I knew. And I had to keep winning or see murder done—until I saw a chance to get him."

He nodded again, and the taut, strained lines faded off his face. His bleak blue eyes, with a spark in the back of them, drilled Pepper O'Meara, winner of the feature that day.

"Now I can quit worrying about sure wins and go back to wheeling for the pleasure of it," he said significantly. "Maybe it won't be so hard."

# DANGEROUS DOLLARS

*It was a cold million, all right. No one knew it had been stolen—yet there it was, anybody's cash, ripe to be lifted from its hiding-place. The only trouble was, too many people got wind of the horde all at once. Detective Blue had some of the angles—the others ought to square out, he thought—if only the stampeding chisellers would stop killing each other long enough to let him get going on his own account.*

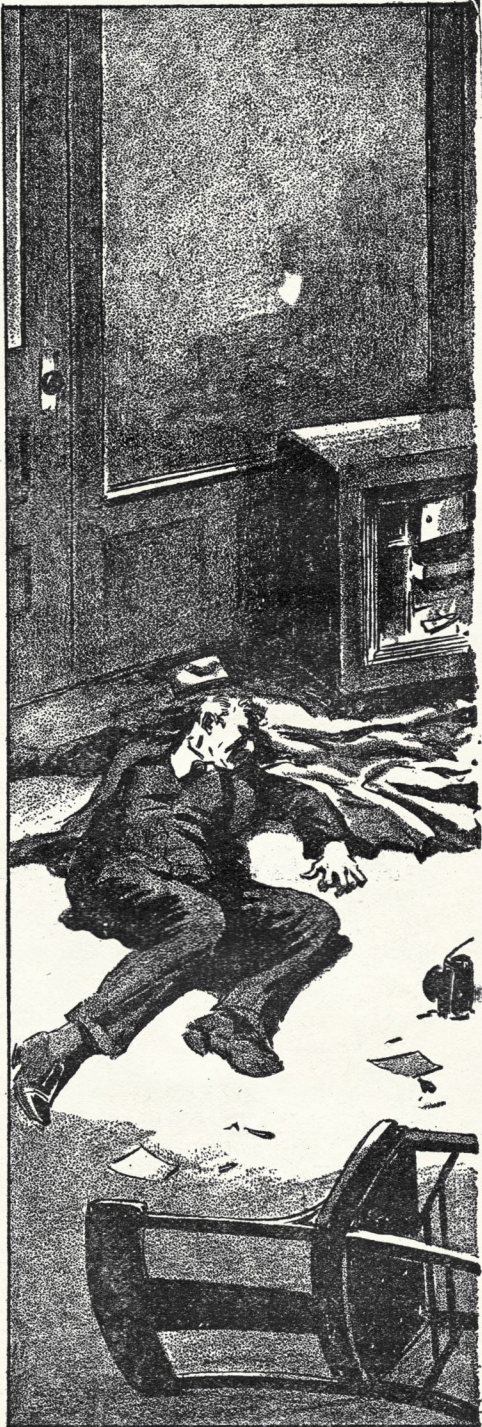
## CHAPTER ONE

### Million-Dollar Client

**I** KNEW I had a job, the minute I saw him. I had first encountered him on a blackmail job, two years back. It was a foul-smelling frame-up on a rich clergyman, but I'd managed to break up the blackmail only to come up holding this guy, Frank Cortelyou.

It would have ruined my client to prosecute; and, because Cortelyou sported a private license too, I was burned up. I gave him a beating in a garage and promised the same every time I ran into him—which threat made a monkey of me. I didn't run into him. I didn't even hear of him. For all I knew, he might have evaporated.

After a while, that piqued me. I put out some underground inquiries. It took nearly two years to garner that he was something pretty special in rats—a dangerous, spineless crook. The blackmail I'd tagged was really beneath him. He touched only top-money jobs as a rule. He worked



A CASS BLUE STORY

by John Lawrence

*Author of "The Barking Body," etc.*



with the cream of the underworld, though as stooge or as principal was a question. He had the cops fooled completely. They'd pegged him as a cheap Broadway biter. He had an original way of not disturbing the fable. He kept perpetually, scrupulously, out of sight. He was an expert at it—the original invisible man. In all the items that drifted in, there was nothing on his personal habits. He had an office he never went near, and, ostensibly, he slept in the sewers. He had a political fix—not a big one, but ample. It kept his private sleuth's license from spoiling and blocked back-room shellackings by the cops.

This, of course, made him a matter of business. I set to work in real earnest to uncover him. He must have found out I was looking for him. I never even came close.

Naturally, I was kicking myself. Crooks like that are a private cop's gold mine. Breaking up one of their jobs can mean a fortune. It was a hard pill to swallow—that I'd fumbled him, but I was finally reduced to thinking just that. The last few months, even my best lines had been silent. He remained an irritating shadow, invisible. I was left just where I started, only madder.

Coming face to face with him, on the deserted Village street, was a sensation.

I WAS coming out of Rappas' restaurant, after a midnight snack. It stands on the corner of Eleventh Avenue and Fourteenth. A drugstore bites the actual corner out, but Rappas' hooks around it in an L-shape, has doors on both streets. I was coming from the side, onto Fourteenth, just ambling. I was about at the corner when I saw him.

He was rigid on the sidewalk, twenty yards from me, watching the front window of Rappas'. I couldn't mistake him. Warm light from the restaurant shone

under his snap-brim, full on his olive, small-featured face. Nor was he watching it idly. His long-lashed, dark, liquid eyes were thin, alive, as he peered in; his tight vermilion mouth firm. His chamois-gloved hands were taut to his thighs, half in the pockets of the black Chesterfield that fitted tight to his slender, thin-waisted figure. He was bent slightly forward, intense.

Frank Cortelyou was working.

To have found him at all was a triumph, but to have caught him on a job—well, a warm glow swept over me.

I'd pulled back, out of sight, instinctively. I sent a quick look around. A newsstand, closed for the night, gleamed wet from the mist-like spring rain, was next the gutter at my right. Three long, careful strides put me behind it. I could keep one eye on Cortelyou around its edge.

As I moved, so did he. He backed slowly across the street, keeping in line with the café window, turned as he reached the opposite curb, and picked himself the dark entrance of an ancient, dingy bank on the corner.

There was a second when we stood there in silence, save for the spluttering of the blue-white street lamps overhead. The rain had ceased minutes before, leaving gleaming wet over everything.

Behind me, I heard Rappas' side door swing open, but my attitude would not betray my watching. I paid no attention. I heard shambling feet come towards me. That they stopped—yards behind me—hardly registered. But the anxious, blurted voice did.

It said, suddenly, in tones that would carry beautifully across to where Cortelyou now craned sideways: "Mr. Blue? Mr. Cass Blue?"

I felt like slugging him. I swung my head, bit at him: "Get to hell out of here! Beat it!"

He was shabby, even ragged. He held



a lumped felt hat between gnarled hands; under silver hair, his face was seamed, knotted. He looked about sixty. I had plenty of profanity ready to lash him with as he stood there, yet something—some fine thing in his frightened old face—stopped me. There was a livid purple welt across his face. He was trembling.

I said, "Go on—beat it!" in a milder tone than I'd planned.

**H**E seemed to cringe, but he held his ground. His voice was a gulping, rushing croak. "Please—for God's sake—let me talk to you at least, Mr. Blue! I'm in trouble—something's happened. I haven't any money now, but—if you'll help me—I may have a fortune! Jerry MacLean told me—said you were regular—"

I stopped my hand, halfway out of my pocket with a bill. Jerry MacLean was a big-time burglar, in Sing Sing at the moment. I threw a closer glance at the old derelict. "Tomorrow," I told him hastily. "Come and see me tomorr—" I checked myself.

The wild possibility came into my mind that this old ragbag might be the one that Cortelyou was following!

I threw at him in an undertone: "Where do you live?"

He blurted a number on Horatio Street. "Just a couple of blocks from here. I called your night number and a girl said you might be here. I came looking for you. I thought—if you'd just come to my room—a few minutes, Mr. B—"

"All right," I stopped him quickly. "I'll come, if you do as I say. Don't ask questions. I'm going to walk out from behind this box, and head back across town. You follow me a few steps, and make out like I've refused to listen to you, understand? In case anybody's listening, they'll think I've turned you down.

I'll walk away. You turn back and walk to your own place. I'll be along in a few minutes. Put on a good act—or I won't show up. Got that?"

He gulped, bewildered. "Ye—yes."

I swung out from behind the box, slapping air with my hand, headed back in the opposite direction. I said in an irritated tone: "No, damn it! Beat it! I'm busy!"

It took him a second to get into it, but he didn't do badly. He took a step or two after me, saying: "Please—please—for God's sake—"

I snarled, "Nuts," over my shoulder, strode briskly away from him, without looking back.

Eighty yards down the street, I edged into one of the building fronts, stopped, and turned back.

By stretching my neck, I could see the dark entrance of the bank building where Cortelyou had been lurking. It was now empty. The old man, of course, was out of sight.

I walked back to the corner.

The old man was plodding dejectedly, a block and a half away. Across the street, and twenty yards behind him, Cortelyou was a deeper shadow in one darkened store front after another.

I watched till the old man reached the corner of Horatio, two blocks down. He turned and trudged off down the side street, vanished behind the corner. Cortelyou was a minute later in vanishing.

I crossed over to the side of the street he had used and covered the two deserted blocks swiftly, trying to figure out a plan, get myself oriented. Out of nowhere, it appeared that I was suddenly in a real sweet spot. It would be especially sweet if Cortelyou could be convinced that I was not involved in the job—whatever it was. That he was dynamite—a killer, if necessary—made it not so comfortable, if he did know I was connected.

I REACHED Horatio, stopped at the corner, peered around. The shambling figure of the old man was visible, a hundred yards ahead. Cortelyou was nowhere to be seen.

I ran my eyes down the dark, somber little street. There were enough black doorways to hide a hundred men. I stood where I was until I saw the old man turn in to what appeared, at this distance, to be an apartment house. Then I cut back to Gansevoort Street, walked three blocks down Gansevoort, cut back again to come up Horatio from the other direction.

The street was dark enough so that I fancied I could make my way to the old man's number without being recognized. I had the collar of my belted camel's-hair coat up, my light snap-brim turned down. I hunched over a little as I passed under one street light.

I came to the number he had given me. It was a cheap apartment house, sagging. There were two entrances to it, and also two dark arches that evidently led to a court behind the front building, hence, probably to a rear bank of apartments. I turned up the steps of the nearest entrance to the front building—the number he had given me.

A figure bloomed out of the darkness of the doorwell, peering at my face. It was the old derelict. He blurted: "Mr. Blue! Thank God! I was afraid you weren't—"

"Get in!" I rapped at him.

He hastily unlocked the front door, as I threw a swift glance over my shoulder at the silent street.

I followed him into a dimly lit hall, thinly carpeted, reeking of old food. He led the way upstairs, saying over his shoulder: "I forgot to tell you my name. You wouldn't have known which bell to push. See? That's why I—"

"Save it, till we get upstairs," I told him.

We went up one flight, two flights. It was while we were on the third flight that I saw a reddish-stained piece of paper detach itself from the sole of his worn shoe, and adhere to the thin stair-carpeting almost under my nose.

I picked it up without disturbing my stride. It was thickly crusted with red substance, and the momentary glance I took showed it as an oblong strip of thin, white paper. I did think I saw one or two figures on it, but the light was too dim to be sure. I slipped it into a vest pocket as we went into the old man's shabby one-room apartment.

He turned on a battered, goose-necked stand-lamp, aimed over a scratched, imitation oak table. In the rug under it was a hole I could put my shoulders through. He closed the door, locked it, swung on me, as he threw his hat on the table. His eyes were hunted, feverish.

I realized, with a shock, that the old man was an ex-convict.

HE LEANED against the door, spoke earnestly. "Mr. Blue—I'm going to tell you the God's truth—no matter how crazy it sounds. I swear it! There's—there's a million dollars—maybe more—in cash—involved in this." He swallowed once. "I don't know where it is—yet. But if you—that is, there's something going on—that concerns that money—or part of it. I must get it—some way."

"I see," I said. "Hot money."

He shook his head vigorously. "No! No! It isn't hot money! That's the whole thing. It may have been stolen money, once, but it isn't hot now!"

I looked carefully at his eyes. "What the hell are you talking about?"

He ran palms over his silvered, matted hair. His eyes were wild, fixed on the table-top. "I—I don't know how to tell you—so you'll not think me mad. The money was stolen—years ago. A million

dollars—maybe more. *But nobody knew it was stolen!* Understand? Nobody is looking for it! It's—it must be somewhere around. But—it isn't hot!"

I blew breath through my nose. "A million dollars stolen that nobody knew about? Do you think I'm going to swallow that?"

"Wait—listen. I knew—a man, very well. He stole this money. I knew he stole it—or at least I could have given him away. I didn't. He escaped to South America."

I said nothing, eyed him sourly.

"That was seven years ago. He knew he was indebted to me for keeping silent. I didn't ever hear from him, while he was alive. He died—three months ago—I saw the clipping in a South American paper."

I looked at him aghast. "Nuts! You're not going to tell me his spirit's appeared to you and told you where—"

"No! No! Give me a chance! It's nothing like that! But—today I got a note—I don't know who from. Here!" He suddenly sat down on the sagging couch-bed, flung one spindly ankle over his knee and began to unscrew a false heel from one of his shoes. "This came at three o'clock today. I thought—you'll know what I thought—that he—my friend—was sending me something."

He extracted a crumpled note from the recess in his heel, handed it to me. I read it while he replaced the heel.

The note was in fountain pen, a woman's handwriting, obviously disguised—

Dear Mr. Driscoll:

The writer is in town from South America. A certain mutual friend felt that you had been unfairly dealt with, and asked me to get in touch with you. If you will come to Number 3365 New Lots Avenue, Brooklyn, at ten thirty tonight, I have an envelope which I am instructed to hand you. Mutual recognition can serve no good purpose, so would ask you to meet me in

the clump of trees in vacant lot across the street from that address. On the reverse of this note are full instructions and a rough map showing exactly how to reach the place I have in mind.

A friend's friend.

The old man broke in: "You—you can see what I thought? That he had sent—that he wanted to give me a stake, or something. Honest to God, Mr. Blue—I'm down to my last few dollars. I'm desperate. If something doesn't break for me soon—it's the Dutch for me—I mean it!"

"How long have you been out of the can, and what's your racket?" I asked him suddenly.

He went slowly white, licked his lips. He dropped his eyes. "Six—six months. I'm—on parole. But it was a wrong rap—a bit for burglary, Leavenworth—I swear it was wrong. Look at me, Mr. Blue! Do I look like a crook? Since I got out I've been trying to write a little music. I—can't get by. The few dollars I've saved—they're almost gone too—"

"All right," I said gruffly, "get on with what you were telling me."

HE swallowed again. "Well, when I got that note, I waited till the time, and then went out to the place it said. It was dark, and raining. A woman called my name. When I went toward her, somebody knocked me out. I couldn't see either of them.

"I came to, lying in the mud." He put one hand to the purple welt on his forehead. "I don't know why anyone should knock me out—unless they thought I already had the money, or something. And—the funny part is this."

He reached for a rolled-up bundle on the couch, flung it open on the table. It was a trench coat, thickly crusted with red mud. He plunged a hand into one of the slash pockets, produced a revolver.

"When I came to, this was in my pocket."

I took it from him. It was some revolver. About .32 caliber, blued steel, finely balanced, a Colt. And the butt plates were of gold, no less.

I broke it mechanically, saw that the chambers were all full. I put the muzzle to my nose—and suddenly I woke up.

I jerked my eyes to the old man's haggard china-blue ones. "You never saw this gun before?"

"Yes! Yes!" he said hastily. "It's mine. It's been in my trunk for years. I'd forgotten I had it."

"When did you fire it last?"

"Why—why, at least five years ago. I don't ex—"

"This gun's been fired in the last few hours."

His jaw sagged slowly open, fear flooding his eyes. "Oh, my God, no?"

"Oh, my God, yes," I snapped. "Now, listen—" I took my hat off, ran a hand through my hair. I was on the point of telling him where he could go with his impossible story, when—I thought of Cortelyou, standing somewhere downstairs, waiting. I closed my mouth, jerked my hat back on, bored into his eyes. I was absolutely up in the air.

I noticed something on his vest. The two halves of a broken silver chain were dangling—one end from each pocket. His eyes followed mine. He made a soft exclamation, tucked the chains in.

"What's that?" I snapped at him.

"I—I guess I lost my watchfob. It's nothing—just a little silver locket," he explained hastily.

I scowled at him, massaged the back of my neck. "Damn it," I told him. "No sane guy could swallow your story. You know that."

He said, desperately: "It's true—every word I've told you."

"What you're trying to tell me is that

you knew a crook that stole a million dollars. You let him get away with it when you could have crossed him up. In return, you thought he was sending you a piece of his take."

The old man nodded.

"You got a note from some unknown person. You went out to the wilds of Brooklyn. You were socked on the head and left in the mud till you came to. And you had a gun planted on you—your own gun, evidently stolen from your room, and—fired, more than once, if I'm any judge."

"That's right. That's right."

I wrinkled my forehead, slid my thumb into vest pockets. "The point we seem to have missed is—how did this crook steal this million dollars without anybody knowing he'd taken it?"

HE caught his breath. Unexpectedly, stubbornness came into his face. He said through set teeth: "I won't tell that. I won't tell his name. If I do—the money will become hot—and then I can't ever touch any of it. Please don't ask me that. I won't answer—even if you drop me here and now—or if you try to beat it out of me. If that money—if I can't get some of that money—it's my last hope. I'm done for, anyhow. For mercy's sake, Mr. Blue, it can mean absolutely nothing to you where the money came from. It's there—it's around somewhere—it must be. It's loose money—free money. Whoever gets it first, keeps it. My telling what you ask wouldn't give you any information about finding it. If it would help you, I'd tell you in a minute, but it—"

"Help me? My God, you're the one that needs help!"

"It couldn't help me."

I cursed him inwardly. If I'd been in a normal spot, I would have dropped him right there. But—there was Cortelyou.

Driscoll burst out: "Please—can't you

understand, Mr. Blue? If I put that money out of my reach—by naming it—I'm finished—done for. What good is your help—or anyone else's help then? Please—do it without asking that one question. Whatever we get—we'll split fifty-fifty—”

I said, grimly: “I don't want to split what you're going to get, you numbskull. What time did you leave here tonight to go to Brooklyn?”

“A-about nine.”

“And you got back?”

“Why—just now. I came home to leave my coat, and phoned your night number from the phone on the landing, and went right over to—”

“Did you see anybody you knew between the time you left here and the time you got to Rappas'?”

“No. What did you mean I'm going to get—”

“Are you completely dumb? You've been nicely sidetracked between the hours of nine and one thirty. You haven't the shadow of an alibi for that time. You're an ex-convict. Your gun's been fired. You want me to tell you where it's been fired? Into somebody's body—during the time that you're without an alibi! Now do you get it?”

His hands went to his head. “Oh, my God! You mean—”

“Murder! That's what they use guns for! Murder! During the time you were out of the picture, somebody was killed with your gun—if you're not lying—and they've made you the fall guy of the ages.”

“Who? Who was killed?”

“My God, how do I know?”

“But—what—what'll I do? How'll I find out—”

“I'll try and find out for you—if you come clean. Tell me the truth!”

His lips tightened. The desperation in his eyes seemed independent of them. “I

have told you the truth,” he said hoarsely. “There's nothing more to tell.”

I blew out breath in exasperation. “All right,” I said bitterly. “I'll do what I can for you. If you wind up in the chair—don't blame me. Blame your own bull-headedness for not giving me what I need.”

My thumb, in my vest pocket, encountered the slip of paper that had come from the old man's shoe-sole. I dug it out, held it under the light.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Almost Murder

NOW, I could make out quite a few faint figures. I laid it against the light-globe and was able to see what I had. It was a taxi receipt—the kind that pops up from the taxi-meter when the driver rings up the fare—the kind that either driver or passenger, ninety-nine per cent of the time, drops into the gutter at once.

Somebody had ridden in a Tanager cab, Number So-and-so, four-dollars-and-ten-cents' worth, and had paid off at exactly twenty-five minutes to ten of this same night.

The red smears on the slip were identical with the mud on the old man's trench coat. It was an even bet that he had picked this slip up on his shoe, either in, or near, the field in which he had been waylaid. It was a certainty that *he* had not ridden in a cab.

I said: “Where's the phone?”

In the hall, I got the night manager of the Tanager Cab Company on the wire. He told me: “That cab is on duty at our stand at the Carls-Rite Hotel—right across from Grand Central. You want me to send him over?”

“No. I'll go there. Thanks.”

As I strode back into the apartment, Driscoll was hastily putting the gold-

handed gun in a paper bag. I snapped: "What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm going to take and throw it in the river," he said bitterly. "If they can't find the gun, they can't say a certain bullet—"

I held out my right hand. My left found the butt of my own gun in my pocket. "I'll take care of it—and that note. If this nightmare, you've handed me, is even partly on the up-and-up, I'll look after you. If it's as phony as it smells, I'm going to be protected."

"But—my God—if the cops get that gun? And—that note is the only thing I have to back up my story! Please—don't make me—"

"I'm not going to give them to the cops," I said. "Snap it up!" I reached over and grabbed the paper bag from his hand, took the note from the table and put it in, too. "Don't get the idea I'm satisfied with this million-dollar pipe-dream of yours. If I find I need it—you'll come through, understand? Right, now, I've got something urgent to do. In the meantime, where can you go to hide?"

"Hide?"

"If you haven't any place else to go, go to the Farnum Hotel. Register as Don Pearl. Got it? Don Pearl. Stay there till you hear from me. Clear out of here as soon as you can put a toothbrush in your pocket. Don't carry any bag. If these lugs are framing you, being where they can't find you will hamper things."

"You—you're going—"

"To try and find who you killed, to begin with—or who you're supposed to have killed," I said. "Never mind that! You get out of here in the next few minutes. Don't miss!"

**M**Y watch showed quarter to one as I hurried down the evil-smelling stairs; got out, let the door close behind me, and looked carefully up and down the street.

No one was in sight, but there was a sedan parked fifty yards up the street that I didn't think had been there before.

The paper bag containing Driscoll's slim protection was in my left coat pocket. In my right, I sweated my gun butt as I went down the steps, turned back toward Eighth. I would have to pass that sedan on my way.

I had determined to leave my booty with Ament, the night manager of the Carls-Rite whom I knew, as soon as I got there. I had no wish to let Driscoll into the hole that the loss of the note would create; and there was no telling what was ahead here.

I had gone twenty yards when it happened. I was almost exactly abreast of the second of the yawning arches of the tunnels that led behind the apartment house I had just quitted. Without the slightest warning, a girl jumped out of the sedan on which my eyes were glued. She wore a trench coat, and even as she hit the pavement, she was tugging wildly at the pocket. A street lamp was near enough to give me a startling flash of blued steel as she whipped out a revolver.

One step carried me into the black arch beside me.

The man waiting there in the shadows swung his blackjack as I was going to one knee—that was why it didn't knock me completely out. He certainly swung hard enough to rip my head off. I saw all the constellations as I crumpled forward, flopped on my face, my drawn gun skidding over against the wall. Sickness and pain had me in a numb dream.

The unseen man flung me over on my back, as the girl's heels rattled up, and his hands were darting through my pockets by the time her swift whisper asked: "Who is it?"

"God knows! He went in with—"

Geez!" The man was not Cortelyou. He had a slight German accent.

He'd pulled the bag from my pocket. I fought sickness, black giddiness, missed a swift interchange of whispers between them. I forced one swimming eye open. Light came vaguely from a spot on the ground, two yards from me—reflected light. I pegged it as my gun, just as I caught the cheering words from the invisible man, ". . . no chances, baby. He goes like the rest of them."

"Not a gun! For God's sake, there's a precinct station a block from—" I thought he was farther away from me than he was.

I flung out a hand toward my gun, tried to roll, and my foot treadmilled, left me flattened. His curse jolted out; his knees landed in the center of my back, and the building collapsed on top of me.

**A** LIGHT shone in my face and I smelled whiskey. Through the pounding in my head I heard a man shouting, "Hey—you! Wake up!" Then a rumble of irritated profanity. I moved my head and the cold, greasy cement under me started swaying gently. I opened one eye, just as a man standing over me yelled: "Joe!"

Calked boots rang, coming across the stone floor. I saw all this in spurts as it bobbed up and down in front of me. I licked my lips, could not focus.

"Oh, you're alive now!" The voice snarled. "Joe—gimme a hand with this stew."

I was lifted by head and feet, carried thirty yards into light, swung up and dumped on a wooden surface. That started lights and figures pinwheeling in my brain. I rolled over. My feet fell off the edge of the counter and that jerked me to a sitting position. I braced myself on my arms behind me, my head wobbling till the room quieted down. I could see

through a haze. I was just inside the entrance of a huge garage. In various parts of the garage were what looked like a million huge, white trucks. One of the two overalled figures in front of me spat and said, "Hold him out o' my way till I get in," and tramped off. I followed him with vague eyes. He went into a short black passage, beyond which I thought I could see the street.

The remaining overalled man gave me a lecture. "You damn fool!" he called me. "If one o' the trucks had of been going out before that one come in, you would of been killed! Why the hell you have to pick out the one entrance to the joint that's dark to lie down in, I dunno!"

That percolated through my brain. "Garage?" I mumbled. "What's matter?"

He spat disgustedly. "Nuthin'—oh, nuthin'. Only you lay down for your shut-eye right in the middle of the ramp we drive them trucks over. Coming out of light we never would of seen you there. It's a wonder Frank seen you, even comin' in from outside. By God—it would have been a good finish for you at that—squashed to death by about a hundred and fifty tons of garbage!"

I wobbled my head at him. I felt tears welling up behind my eyes. I licked my lips and tasted whiskey. Vaguely, I seemed to remember somebody black-jacking me. They must have sprinkled some whiskey on my face, then carried me and left me in this spot the gentleman was talking about—where trucks might—

I made a sudden exclamation and fell off the counter onto the floor. The gentleman yelped, cursed and hauled me up again by my armpits. "Set still!" he roared at me.

"Kill me!" I mouthed. "Tried to kill me—with garbage! Rats! I—"

A roar like thunder jerked my head

around, almost sent me reeling again. A mountain of white shot up the ramp, through the dark passage from the street and thundered by me.

I struggled in the grip of the overalled man. "Lemme go," I complained. "Got to go. Where am I?"

"You're in the municipal garage for garbage trucks, on Horatio Street. Where do you live?"

I shook free irritably. "Never mind where I live. Got to go," I repeated.

"O.K. It's your own funeral," he said. "Go on. Beat it."

I STEERED for the dark passage. The floor went up and down a little. There was a monstrous black fuzzy cloud where my mind should have been. It let out only spurts of light. I got a hand against the stone wall of the ramp, guided myself out onto Horatio. I felt miserably treated and couldn't remember why or where. Bad enough to be blackjacked—worse to have them sprinkle whiskey on me so it would seem I'd been drinking. Terrible to put me where trucks'd run over me—right over me—in the dark.

I found a friendly lamp post at hand, leaned against it, reflecting bitterly. Garbage trucks! And sprinkling whiskey on my mouth so it would seem I'd been drinking—

Something fierce and urgent seemed to stab at my stomach. Then it was gone, and I was standing there, trembling, sweating. What was it that had come through the haze for a second? Cortel-you?

Cortel-you!

The fuzz ripped from my memory like magic. I sent fingers flying through my clothes.

I still had badge, credential-holder, gun, clips, twisters, cigarettes and matches, and a couple of handkerchiefs, money. Everything I'd taken from Driscoll was

gone. The taxi-meter slip was gone. I swung panicky eyes up and down the utterly deserted street for a minute. Cortel-you—the Germanic man, the girl—there was no sense trying to look for them here. Yet—I had nowhere to go—

Then I realized that the loss of the slip might not block me, regarding the taxi and the unknown who had ridden in it to keep that date with Driscoll in the Brooklyn suburbs. I held my breath for a minute—and found that I remembered the number of the cab.

I pushed myself away from the lamp post, started hastily toward Eighth. The street waved up at me, came up, and I stopped it with my knees—hard.

Sweat did break out on me then. I got to my feet, realizing what had been done to me. The girl and the man had taken no chances on a mere sprinkling of whiskey on my face. Wise in the ways of killing, they must have known that an autopsy would be performed on my dead body. They had poured whiskey into me—plenty of it.

I was three-quarters drunk!

I clenched my teeth, got to a cab on Eighth Avenue somehow, had every window opened. I gave the cabby the name of the Carls-Rite, told him: "Got to be sober by the time I get there. Let me get all the air there is."

I was fighting back to normal vision at least, by the time we were halfway to the hotel. I wasn't sober. There was still a deadening haze warming my brain, but the disastrous spot I'd put Driscoll in was back with me, in painful clearness. I was tight-jawed on the edge of the seat when we finally drew up behind the Carls-Rite.

I got off a few yards from the entrance. The doorman was talking on his little phone. As I went toward him, I had money in my hand. I was a little unsteady. I failed to see the man stepping from the car at the curb, till he banged



squarely into me. I mumbled, "Sorry" and threw him an unsteady glance—and something jerked inside me.

I was looking at the violently red-headed, chunky figure of Ames, of the homicide squad. He had a square box under his arm. He scowled at me, then lost interest.

"Oh, it's you, you clumsy ape. Watch where you're going," he offered, and walked on into the hotel.

The homicide squad! At this hotel—at two thirty A. M.!

I SWUNG toward the starter, bills in my hand. He took the bills and my question to the phone with him, came back after a minute to report: "Yeah. Thomas's the gee you want. He's out on a run now. You want me to hold him when he comes in?"

"Yeah. Listen—what's Ames—that dick, doing here at this hour?"

Stoniness came into his eyes. I cursed him, proffered more bills but he wouldn't change his—"How should I know what dicks are doing?"

I said, "Hold Thomas till I come back. I'll pay," and funneled into the lobby, swung over toward the office of the night manager, framing my bluff hastily.

Ament came hurrying out, just as I reached the door. I stopped him. His lean, bronzed face was worried, drawn; his usually metallically perfect, black, wavy hair ruffled. "Listen," I said. "How would you like that job upstairs cleaned—fast?"

He sniffed. "That's a lovely breath you've got there. I'll be seeing you around."

"No. Wait a minute," I blocked him. "The cops haven't a prayer of mopping it up fast. I can't keep you entirely out of the newspapers but I can make it a one-day spread, I think. They're going to nab the wrong guy, sure. Then when the

truth comes up, more grief for you. Maybe even they'll include you in a false-arrest suit. Who's handling it?"

"'Hurry' Armour."

"Yeah. Exactly. I'll bet you asked for him. Here's something you don't know. Armour's hurry-up-what-if-you-do-make-the-odd-mistake methods pan out just about fifty percent of the time—and no more. He's got a rep he doesn't deserve. This is one where I can step circles around him."

He ran a finger inside his collar. "Honest to God, I can't use you on it. If I hired you guys every time you came here asking for work—"

"It'll cost you just one thin buck. I've got another angle."

"Armour'll think I'm insulting him."

"Tell him the owner sent me over—none of your doing. Your boss's got a big political drag. Armour won't dare say much."

"Where'd you guys hear about this, anyway?"

I peered at him. "Guys? Has somebody else been around on this?"

"I threw a dick named Frank Cortel-you out of here, half an hour ago. I never heard of him."

Something turned over in my stomach. "That settles it," I told him meaningfully. "I *know* you need me now."

Ament hesitated, even after he'd started, under my urging hand, toward the elevator. "You're not running a bluff on me? You've got something?"

"Would I work for nothing if I hadn't?"

We stopped at the thirteenth floor. The room was two doors from the elevator. I waited outside while Ament went in to explain to Armour.

I could hardly stand still. I knew I had to get something from what lay beyond that door. The alcoholic haze began to creep back over me. I shook my

head, hard. I wished I'd had the sense to get some mints.

Ament opened the door and beckoned me into the crowded living room of the suite. He gave me a worried look as he slid past me, shrugged and hurried down the hall.

There were four people present when I came in. Besides the husky, blond Lieutenant Armour and his left bower, Detective Macready—a short man whose features looked as though they'd been squeezed together by a blow on the top of his head—besides the homicide men, there was a man and a woman in the room.

**T**HE woman was about sixty—raddled, sagging, with frizzed hair and a baritone voice. The man was tall, hawk-faced, watery-eyed, a cowlick of white hair over his forehead.

Armour was questioning them. He gave me a more friendly nod than I'd expected and said to the old woman: "You say you saw Mr. Eberhardt mail a letter?"

She made a fluttery movement with both hands toward the closed door. "If—if that's Mr. Eberhardt—in there—yes. I—I was waiting for the elevator. I saw him open his door. He stood with his back to the hallway—he was talking all the time to someone in his room, while he dropped the letter in the mail slot. I was close enough to see the special-delivery stamp on it. See, he could reach the chute without moving from—"

"Yeah, you told us that. What time was this?"

"Eleven thirty, exactly. I'd just taken my medicine, and—"

"All right, thank you. Please stay in your room till you hear from us."

Macready opened the door, gave the woman what was supposed to be a reassuring smile, but which, on his dried-

apple of a face, looked like disgust. She went out. To the gray, gaunt-looking man he said: "You heard absolutely nothing?"

The man's voice was sonorous, in spite of obvious fright. "N-no, officer. The—the walls are soundproofed. They told me so, at any rate."

"Even in soundproofed rooms you should be able to hear next door."

"What—what am I supposed—what would it have been that I heard?"

"Mr. Eberhardt was shot, with a thirty-two caliber pistol, sometime between midnight and twelve thirty."

The gray man shook his head anxiously. "I—I didn't hear anything," and Armour let him go with the same admonition.

To Macready, he said, as he turned to me: "Well, our brain trust has arrived, Mac." And to me: "All right, master mind—what?"

"Let's have a look."

We started for the bedroom. I stopped and stood in the doorway, absorbing the scene.

**A** LOT of drinking had been going on in that room. The place was mussy, untidy. It was a large room. Bed, chairs, and a refectory table under the window left a cleared space in the middle of the room. A green airplane trunk with white linen cornices stood at the far right-hand corner, facing the bed. To my left, just inside the hall door, stood a second, identical trunk; open, empty, price tags still hanging from it.

On the bed was a sheet of newspaper with a tin can, a couple of crumpled labels, and—a blue glass eye.

In the center of the cleared space, a short, foreign-looking man of forty-five, dark sideburns low on his swarthy face, lay dead on his back, in shirt sleeves; his shirt-bosom stained rust-colored. On

the floor beside him were three objects. There was a crumpled bundle of camel's-hair—it took me a second to identify it as a sleeping bag. There was a blackened, crumpled bath towel a few inches from it.

At my side, Armour said suddenly: "Say—are you stewed?"

I snapped out of it, gave him a contemptuous grunt. "I was told by a certain party I'd have police cooperation, not wisecracks," I said. "The party happens to be of some importance in this man's town. If you want me to have some phoning done—"

"You want the story on this, or don't you?"

"I'm waiting for it."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Corpse Story

ARMOUR jabbed a finger at the body. "Shot, according to the M. E. between midnight and twelve thirty. A thirty-two caliber gun. He's registered here as Frank Eberhardt. He came in from San Francisco on the noon train, registered at twelve twenty. Nothing known of him in San Francisco yet. They're trying to look him up. He left a couple thousand dollars in the safe.

"At one o'clock—just an hour or so ago, now—a guy from a trunk store came here to deliver that trunk"—he indicated the one by the door—"to Room Fourteen Twenty-six, which is the room directly above here. Seems the store had received some money by messenger—not a regular messenger service so we can't trace it—on Tuesday. It was the right price for the trunk, and the messenger told them that a condition of the sale was that it should be available for delivery at an hour's notice, day or night. They agreed. The messenger then bought a sleeping bag. Incidentally—that one yon-

der. He walked out. He was just a kid. Maybe we'll find him, maybe not. Anyway, the trunk company got a phone call as expected, around eleven o'clock last night—Wednesday—this is morning now—to deliver the trunk to—as I say—the room right above here, sharp at one A. M. When the delivery man got there, he couldn't get anybody to answer his knock, so he called the porter.

"The porter opened the room upstairs. There was nothing in it. The best we can find out is that a heavily veiled dame, in widow's weeds—a Mrs. Bruck—registered for that room yesterday—Tuesday—at noon, paid two days in advance—no baggage—and went up to it. She doesn't seem to have been seen since; and the get-up she had on, then, didn't give anybody a glimpse of her hair or face. Which means we've got no description.

"Anyway, her room was empty when the porter got there. The porter remembered that this guy Eberhardt had a trunk just like that one—down here. He figured maybe there'd been a mistake in instructions, or something, so he brought the delivery guy down here and they crashed the room. Finding—this."

I said: "Strictly speaking, this is now Thursday morning. I gather that all the ordering was done, not yesterday, but the day before."

"Right. That's the part I'm coming to. Because this gee"—he pointed to the dead man—"didn't register here till noon yesterday—Wednesday. Get it? He came in on the Flyer from San Francisco, arriving here at twelve thirty—noon."

"Then the killing was premeditated, at least a day before he arrived in town?"

"Right."

"Who was he drinking with?" I said, looking at the astonishing array of bottles, glasses, and cracked-ice bowls on the refectory table.

"The guy that killed him, of course."

I looked at him sharply. "You know who?"

"I do that." He looked at his watch with smug satisfaction. "Or at least I will in a few minutes. The bozo wiped his fingerprints carefully off everything in the room, but"—he cocked a finger at the corner of the rug—"he dropped a watch-fob. The corner of the rug must have caught and hidden it. There was a nice juicy thumb print on it—which they are now working on, downtown."

"They've got it in classification?"

"If they haven't, I'll eat it. Why else would the guy wipe his prints off everything else if he wasn't an ex-con or somebody who had his prints on file."

"What kind of a watch charm was it?"

"Nothing much—just a little silver locket. Nothing in it."

"And the guy was shot with a thirty-two?"

"Yeah. I figure this locket owner was drinking here with Eberhardt—maybe all evening. From what they put away, it looks like some session. Around midnight, they got into a fight—or something—and the locket guy ups and lets him have it."

"What about all this premeditation?"

"What's wrong with it? The jane above and this guy are in cahoots, waiting for Eberhardt to arrive. They figure to bump him, stuff him in the sleeping bag, then in the trunk—the bag's waterproof, see, to keep blood from leaking out—then ship him somewhere in a trunk that looks like his own."

"Why one like his own?"

He shrugged. "That'll come out."

"What's that stuff?" I nodded at the tin can and the labels.

**W**E went over to the bed. "The olive-oil can was in the wastebasket," he enumerated them. "The labels were on the trunk and the sleeping bag, and the

artificial eye was in the stiff's pocket. God knows what that's for."

"He hasn't any bum glim?"

"No."

"The towel for a home-made muffler, huh?"

"That's what I figure."

I went over to the writing-desk, pulled out drawers. I found nothing but writing-paper, envelopes and a book of three-cent stamps. There were two special-delivery stamps in its leaves.

"You do anything on that special delivery the old dame saw him mail?"

"Do? What can I do. It'll be hours before it's delivered. I'll get my man first."

"Any motive?"

"Well, no."

The door from the living room opened and the red-headed Monahan slid in, looking thoughtful. "Listen, chief. I just thought of something. That tall, gawky guy next door."

"Orpen?"

"Yeah, Orpen. He looks like a kind of a preacher. And—you maybe didn't realize it, but he came from San Francisco, too, about the same time as the corp'."

"There probably aren't over a hundred people in this joint that came off that train. So what?"

"Well, say he was a preacher—or maybe one o' them evangelists, maybe. Obviously, he isn't advertising it—he isn't wearing his collar backwards or nothing. Say he just come here to make a little hey-hey, got into an argument with Eberhardt and finally popped him off."

"What's the argument he's supposed to have got into?"

Ames shrugged. "Maybe a dame. Didn't you say there was a dame mixed—"

Armour said, wearily: "We found a lot of things since you went downtown, Billy. This is a premeditated job—plenty. It was all set up a day before your friend,

Orpen, got here—by a guy and a jane. Orpen was sitting on a train, a long ways from here, at the time he should have been meeting guys on street corners and such—if he was the gent.”

“O. K., then. But what about that old dame across the hall? The hotel snoop tells me she trains with gigolos, and—”

In the next room, the phone rang. Monahan broke off in mid-sentence, hurried in to answer it.

Armour asked me: “Anything else?”

I walked over and opened the window. I looked up, then down. Something caught my eye. There were one or two sparkling things on the platform under my nose, and—there were plenty more on the landing outside the window on the next floor down. The ones on my level were broken bits of glass. I presumed those below were the same. If so, something might have been thrown out either this window or the one above, smashed, and—

I pulled my head in, closed the window. Armour’s forehead was washboarded. “What did you—”

His name was called from the next room. I followed him into it—the living room.

HE WAS saying, “Yes, yes,” and steadying pencil and paper under his hand as he listened. He started to write, saying, “Yeah,” every so often. His voice got more and more excited. Finally, he burst out: “Great! You done great. Call me the minute you hear.”

He hung up, gave me a wide-toothed grin, his eyes going to his notes. “That,” he announced, “will be that. They’ve identified the thumbprint from the watch fob.”

“Yeah?”

“Driscoll is the gent’s name. Harold Montgomery Driscoll, if you please. Out on parole from a ten-year jolt in the pen. One of the upper claw-ses—a feenancer, no less.”

“What?”

He read from his notes—“Cashier of the Banding Home Loan and Personal Finance Corporation. Roger Banding, the president, used up about eight million dollars of his depositors’ dough, gambling on the stock market and the gee-gees, thus torpedoing the bank. It collapsed six years ago. Driscoll—this guy—got convicted for letting old Banding siphon out the jack. They couldn’t prove he got any. Be that as it may, we got his address, and the raiding squad”—he cocked an eye at his watch—“will be on his doorstep by now.”

A million dollars—that nobody knew was stolen! Light began to break for me. In eight million, supposedly lost gambling, couldn’t a man stow away part of it—in cash? Couldn’t—

And Driscoll had told me he was a burglar!

I pulled down my hat-brim. “That seems to be that, all right. I’ll shove off, I guess.”

He grinned affably. “Sorry. Guess we didn’t need a brain trust on this one. Why don’t you stick around? We’ll have news any second.”

I shook my head. “Appointment.”

Outside, I started quickly for the stairs. Two doors down the hall, a room opened. The dressing-gowned figure of the clerical-looking Orpen stepped out. He swallowed, beckoned me stealthily, putting a finger to his lips.

“You—Mr.—Ament said you were—were a private detective,” he said when he finally got me inside the room.

“That’s right.”

He ground palms together, fearful eyes looking sideways at mine. “If—you’re working for the hotel owner, aren’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“Then—then you couldn’t help—me, too? Work for me, too?”

“That doesn’t follow. You mean on this

shooting?" I jerked my head at the closed door. He nodded hastily. My forehead wrinkled. "What do you have to do with it?"

**H**E RAN a scarecrow hand through his long gray hair, licked his lips and dropped his eyes. "I—I know something—something the police should know, but I can't tell them. Something that has bearing, I'm sure."

"What?"

His eyes darted sideways at mine, away again, and he swallowed. "What will you do if I tell you?"

"Turn a handspring! For God's sake, mister, if you want to tell me anything, tell it! Time means plenty to me right now—"

"Will you have to tell the police?"

"No! No! Not unless I want to. What have you done?"

"Done? Nothing. But something—happened. It has bearing on this ghastly thing, I'm sure. I—Heavenly Father, I'll go crazy! I—I'll have to throw myself on your mercy. Please—please help me. The—the truth is—I'm not a salesman, as I told them." He swallowed heavily, let his red eyes sink. "I—I'm of the cloth. I am not—registered here under my own name—I daren't be. I am in town—for relaxation. You—you understand?"

I nodded quickly.

"You—you can guess what would happen, should—should my parish hear of this," he said hoarsely. "There—there was a girl in my room tonight, that—that I'm sure is mixed up in this thing."

"Go on."

He swallowed again. "At about nine—nine o'clock, a girl knocked on my door." He forced it out, his face crimson. "I—she asked me if I knew the gentleman in the next suite. I—she said she understood some friend of his had rooms near him. She was a little early for her ap-

pointment, and thought she might find him—Mr. Eberhardt—in here. She had a parcel with her, which she said was a surprise present she was bringing him. She—I—it came about that she decided to wait here for a short time. She said she knew he would be in by nine thirty. I—I happened to have a little stimulant—I take it for my heart—"

"Go on, go on! You fed her drinks."

"She was here about an hour. Once she went in to the bathroom to put powder on her face. I—happened to peek in her parcel—the wrapping was loose." He swallowed desperately, put a hand to his throat and got out word by word: "There was—a shotgun—a short-barreled shotgun in the package!"

He pulled a handkerchief around his turkey neck, looked at me with white-rimmed eyes and repeated: "A short-barreled shotgun!"

I said impatiently: "And . . . ?"

"That's all. A minute or two later she left. I—peeked out a minute later. The hall was empty. I didn't know what to do. She—she didn't seem like a—bad person. She was beautiful—"

"How? What did she look like?"

"Like—almost like a child. She was slender, about medium height, with white, white skin. Her hair was short, very dark. Her eyes were—at least they seemed—large, very large, and a lovely shade of violet—real violet."

"You'd know her again? You could identify her in court?"

**H**E CHURNED up, almost went on his knees. "My God—don't you understand? I *can't* go into court! It would ruin me—disgrace me forever! That's why—"

"You could identify her, though?"

"Yes, yes. But—"

"Listen!" I cut him short, hastily. "This is murder. God knows what's going

to happen. If I find that girl, I'll bring her here. It may be that your identifying her will scare her into a confession. In that case, you won't ever have to appear in court. But she mustn't know that. I'll do everything humanly possible to keep you in the clear—if you'll stay here in this room—till I tell you to go. Don't repeat what you've told me—to anybody. Under no circumstances go out—for anything. If—"

"My God, I'm due to go home tomorrow. This is Thursday. I have to preach Sun—"

"Try ducking on me and I'll have you arrested," I said. "You're in a jam. You may be able to go home to preach, but until I say so—you park here. As for leaving tomorrow—you better forget it. I've got to go now. I've spent more time than I can afford. Get this into your head—that girl didn't come in here accidentally. She's probably a criminal. God knows what she came for—maybe to plant something in your room. You search the place—and if you know what's good for you—search it with a fine-tooth comb. I'd like to do it for you, but I can't. You search it—and mail anything you find, to my office. If you don't do as I say, you're liable to find yourself involved a lot more seriously than you think. Now—stay here till I call!"

He was gasping, his mouth open, his eyes frantic, as I swung out the door.

The corridor was full of newspaper reporters. The red-headed Monahan saw me standing there. He was between me and the stairs. I didn't dare go past him and down them.

I went into the elevator—to find it full of other reporters, Armour, and the red-headed Monahan who had followed me in.

I tried to be casual as I asked Armour: "You get him—Driscoll?"

"Not yet," he said cheerfully. "We

found the gun, though—the raiding squad did. A thirty-two, lying right on his bed, and—get this—it had gold butt-plates on it!"

I thought that was the last straw. The man and woman who had blackjacked me and taken the gun from me, must have calmly returned to Driscoll's room after he'd left, and replanted the murder weapon. Another brain-dizzer hit me.

"That's the gun he shot Eberhardt with at twelve fifteen?"

"It is. The ballistics boys will say so in a few minutes. That it smells like it and looks like it, is enough for me."

The hell of it was, I knew the ballistics cops *would* say so. And—I was sure now—at twelve fifteen that gun had been in old Driscoll's pocket—several miles distant—in the wilderness of Brooklyn!

I DUCKED the passengers of the elevator at the ground floor, hid behind palms till they had gone, then rode back up to the floor beneath the murder room.

A pleasant young couple occupied the suite beneath Eberhardt's. They looked at my shield with awe, invited me to help myself.

I went over to their window, opened it, and looked out. It didn't take much of a sleuth to decide that a small bottle of some sort had smashed, showering most of its splinters on this fire-escape. I saw a bit of glass to which the bottle's label still adhered.

I gathered it in. The rain had smeared the writing on the label to some extent, but not irretrievably. It was a drugstore label—a pharmacy on University Place. The cryptic writing on the undersize label was undoubtedly a prescription. My blood began to throb.

I thanked the couple, hurried out, the label resting in my pocket, between two blotters I borrowed. I hit the lobby again, made for the rear.

The driver that I was waiting for, on

the Brooklyn matter, had not come in yet. I resigned him to the devil, took one of the cabs standing there, gave the address of the pharmacy on University Place, from which had come the label I still held between blotting paper.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Amateur Petermen

**T**HE drugstore was an all-night one. An old man who looked like a walrus in a white coat shuffled out from the recesses of the pharmacy counter, took a look at my badge and held the label within an inch of his eyes. He laid it down on the counter. "Sure. I make up a couple dozen one-ounce bottles of that a week, for Ike Trautwein."

"Who is he?"

"He makes artificial eyes. He gives away a bottle of this with every one he sells. It's used for washing the eye in—for leaving it in at night. His shop's just down the street—opposite the hotel there. About a block and a half." He mentioned a number.

I said, "Thanks, thanks," over my shoulder as I hurried for the door.

I walked down the silent, dark, cold street, till I reached the number he had given me—a tall, narrow, dingy office building, six or seven stories high. The ground floor was occupied with a store selling sacred objects of art. I saw no lights anywhere in the building.

I catfooted to the corner, four doors away, looked along it—and suddenly froze in my tracks.

A sedan stood thirty yards from me, parked at the curb. There was something very familiar about the sedan. It took me a tense second to figure it out—then it clicked. I was almost ready to swear that I was looking at the sedan out of which the girl in the trench coat had jumped,

during the attempt on my life on Horatio Street.

I carefully looked around. No one seemed to be in sight. I walked silently to the car, looked in.

A trench coat lay on the back seat. I stepped back and put my hand on the radiator. The radiator was hot.

I became aware that halfway between where I stood and the corner, a yawning alley gaped. I stepped quickly back, made out the sign swinging over its mouth—*Delivery Entrance For Number 1985*. It wasn't the entrance for the sacred-object building, but it was within two doors of it.

I took one final look around, stepped into the blackness. I came to a stone wall, climbed it, climbed another—and stood in the court I sought.

I catfooted slowly up to the back doors of the building. Beside the back door, was a heavy, metal-sheeted extra one, and as my fingers reached carefully forward, I found that it was open an inch.

It opened without a sound, to let me and my gun into a well of blackness. I pulled the door closed behind me when I was inside, stood listening. Finally I risk a moment's pressure on the button of my flash, and in the momentary light I realized where I was—on a fire-stairs. I groped to where I had seen the outline of a door, opened it cautiously.

I stepped out into the black lobby of the long, narrow building. A little light came from the street. I slipped toward it, past a freight elevator, and two passenger cars, finally located the directory. It took me a while to get courage enough to risk another flash of light; but I did, and got what I wanted.

There appeared to be but one tenant to a floor. I. Trautwein occupied the fifth.

Both passenger elevators were locked, evidently in the basement. I nearly stepped into the yawning void of the freight-car



shaft, before I realized that the door was open.

I PUT my head in the shaft. Not till then did I realize that it was in motion some distance above, so silently did the lift run.

My head touched a sliding rope as I pulled back. That explained, in part, the noiseless car. It was evidently the old-fashioned type, operated by ropes, pulleys and counterweights. Even so, whoever rode it was being exceptionally careful.

My jaw was hard as I swiftly went back to the fire-stairs, went up. There were no windows in the shaft. The floor was of stone, but my rubber-soled shoes kept me silent. I counted flights till I was on the fourth floor, halted while I considered the possibility that I might be expected.

It seemed beyond belief. I went up another floor and stood in pitch-blackness. Cautiously, an eighth of an inch at a time, I turned the knob of the fire-door, till I could pull it toward me.

Faint luminosity was within. Something heavy was being dragged across the floor somewhere. I heard a husky whisper—a voice heavy with a Teutonic accent. "Damn it! Do safe crackers always have to drag three tons of hardware?"

"Shut up and get going! Empty the bag!" A girl's voice.

I eased the fire-door open another inch. I was at the back of the establishment, close to the left-hand wall. Directly ahead of me, fifty feet, a ground-glass paneled door blocked what was evidently a hall beyond. Extending from the right of the ground-glass door, a partition—also mostly ground glass—ran clear across to the opposite wall. A door in this partition was folded open, and through it I could see an office, in the light of a bull's-eye lantern, which the girl was holding by its handle. And as I looked, she swung the

lantern in such way that, for an instant, the light fell square on her face.

She was small, dainty, childlike. She had black bobbed hair, curling up under a pert dark hat. Her black seal coat was drawn taut around her neat figure with one hand. I could not see the color of her eyes at the distance, but I was in no doubt that they were violet. Her skin was milk-white. I was looking at the shotgun-carrying girl that the ecclesiastic Orpen had mentioned.

The man, crouched over the bag at her feet, sat back on his haunches to show the bag empty. The girl stepped out of my line of sight, but I was not noticing her. My eyes were glowing on the haunched man in the lantern's beam. If I had had any doubts about the importance of the job, they went then, as I recognized him.

JAY GRENNAKER—iron-gray moustached, looking like a pillar of German-American respectability, sturdy, dignified. He was a thrice-named killer, a former bank robber, a high-class confidence man. He had never had a conviction against him. He hadn't been arrested in eight years. He was big—one of the best. I felt a queer cold sweat on my spine as I realized that it must have been Grennaker who had wielded the blackjack on me, earlier.

From out of sight, the girl's voice said: "My Lord, it's a foot thick."

"There's only one way to get into a box," Grennaker said, "and that's to blow it. All this junk gave me a pain from the start."

The girl exclaimed impatiently. "All right. But you can't blow it in here. The concussion'll knock all the windows out."

There was a second's grim silence. "I get it," Grennaker said. He, too, disappeared from my sight, straightening up and stepping over. "You want me to

move it outside. Well, to hell with— Wait a minute. It's got rollers."

"Hurry," was the girl's comment.

I heard him grunt. Something started creaking. The girl walked backwards, keeping the light on a medium-sized black safe that seemed to move on its rollers, after her, out into the storeroom where I stood. Grennaker got up from behind it, dusting his hands. The girl asked: "Will we risk turning on lights?" His grunt evidently meant no.

She set the lantern on the ground, so it illumined the face of the safe. She laid a pearl-handled automatic pistol on the floor, in the edge of the lantern's glare, sorted over several slips of paper in the beam, as she got to her knees. Grennaker made a trip to the office, came back with things in his arms that he put down with extreme care.

The girl began to read from a slip—"Soup—a bar of soup. Get—"

Grennaker sprang erect. His voice was really frightened. "*Soap—not soup!* Soup's the stuff you blow it with! If you're going to pull a Gracie Allen on me—"

"That's right. Soap. Honest, with this guy's writing it could be either. Wait—see if it all sounds right before you start."

She read off the complete procedure for blowing open a safe with the distilled dynamite. It sounded accurate, but there was a worried note in Grennaker's voice as he started to work.

His back and the girl's were both to me, as he went about caulking the safe door with a bar of yellow laundry soap. I looked swiftly round for a vantage point.

Standing three feet out from the wall, directly at my right were two huge, half-dismantled cases full of broken wood. They were about six feet high—crates in which showcases had arrived, I presumed. Between crates and wall, however, the

floor was covered to a depth of two feet with something in a lumpy, irregular pile. I bent my knees cautiously, without taking my eyes from the little circle of light that disclosed safe and safe-crackers, put out an exploring hand.

COTTON batting, torn and crumpled, had been thrown into a huge, approximately flat pile. I was too tense to chance trying to walk on it. Another time, I might have gambled on the tight-rope act on the woolly, lumpy stuff. Not now. This pair had tried once to murder me this night. I was in a good spot to take them now. One false move would wreck that—and finish me—and I knew it. And, believe it or not, I was worrying plenty about my responsibility to the old ex-con, Driscoll. Here was the answer—

My jaw hardened. I slid the safety off my gun. I was prepared to shoot one of them down, to insure my capture of the other. Whatever was the truth about this fantastic merry-go-round, one of the two in front of me must cough it up. My eyes were thin, speculative on the Germanic-looking Grennaker.

He'd used a needle-funnel to pour greenish, dark liquid from a cotton-swathed bottle, followed it with the end of a foot of fuse. He handed the girl the cotton-swathed bottle, said: "Put it inside. Let me see that paper. If we've done anything wrong, we'll both land in hell. I suppose you know that?"

She said everything was all right, went into the office as he read, came back with huge armfuls of blankets and rugs, flung them over the safe.

I knew this was my time to take them—that letting minutes slip by was suicidal. Yet I knew they wouldn't leave till the box was open. And—my blood was running high, I'll admit. I decided to let them blow the safe open for me. They weren't any more anxious to see what was

behind that door than I was. A few seconds—I decided to let them risk it.

That didn't mean I was going to put my life in the hands of these correspondence-school petermen.

I waited till Grennaker snapped his cigarette-lighter into flame, lifted the skirts of the safe and touched the fuse into spluttering life. I was quietly thankful that the door I was holding open was heavily metalled—a sturdy barrier.

I eased slowly, painfully, carefully backwards.

The round, cold muzzle of a pistol bored into my neck!

FOR one disorganized second, I was both physically and mentally paralyzed. The full implications of the disaster that single gun meant, turned my stomach upside down. Then, desperately, I set my brain off like a pinwheel. I thought faster than I'd ever expected to in my life. I had no friends that could possibly be behind that gun. And I'd thought the villains of this piece were all in front of me.

The hand that held the gun shook a little as we stood there—and then I knew. Then I knew my memory had played me false. The man behind me had a weak liver. Only one man in this circus could be called yellow.

Frank Cortelyou stood behind me, and I knew it as well as I knew my name. I felt fingers slip slowly, gently along the sleeve of my gun arm. That placed his gun in his left hand. Out of his class or not, the gun freezing my neck could spit lead and death as well from Cortelyou's hand as anyone else's. And one breath would swing Grennaker around, crucify me between them. I had to do the thinking of an hour—in a second.

The gun I held was a Colt automatic. That gave me a desperate hope. As Cortelyou's fingers slipped toward my hand,

I let go the trigger. I held the butt, hastily slid my little finger beneath the handle, and with the side of it pressed quickly on the burr.

The clip slipped out of its cog, rested on my little finger. Cortelyou's hand came down on top of the gun, and he gripped it, lifted it out of my grasp. I let it go. The clip remained in my hand.

I hadn't forgotten that there was one shell in the chamber. Neither had I forgotten that his other gun held at least six slugs. It was a desperate spot.

The fuse on the safe spluttered on. Grennaker and the girl had backed away, but were still turning backs on us. The by-play in our dark corner had been completed without a sound that carried over the spluttering.

Grennaker had evidently picked up his gun. I hadn't seen him, but it swung in his hand as he stood dimly outlined. The girl's pearl-handled one was still on the floor by the safe.

The gun in my neck increased pressure, insistently. The nitwit behind me wanted to get into the room. I felt his shoulder take the weight of the door off mine. I had no choice but to ease forward.

The safe suddenly *crunked!* Cortelyou jumped behind me, and I let out sweat in every pore. We froze there as the safe-door and its blanket covering fell outwards. A huge cloud of yellow smoke billowed out of the open maw. The girl and Grennaker held handkerchiefs to their noses till the smoke dissipated against the ceiling, then sprank forward.

The girl's hoarse cry was incredulous. "Empty!"

GRENNAKER got up from his haunches, bit off. "Why not? I told you, even if this *was* the pete from the Banding bank, it would have been opened and reopened a hundred times by now."

"Maybe it's in some other part of the furniture?"

"What part?"

"I—I can't remember. I just saw the letter from that dick, Cortelyou, for a few minutes, out in Frisco. There were about thirty pieces of stuff—all the furniture that was in Banding's private offices. They'd all been sold to some second-hand dealer, see, and then this dick, Cortelyou, had traced every piece of it from there. The only thing I can remember being here, for sure, is the safe. It *must* be here, though! My God, *he* thought it was here. He hardly checked in to the hotel before he came beating it over here. Buying that eye was just a stall to get in and look around. Hell, you did the same thing yourself, right after him!"

There was a moment's silence. In that moment, I heard a sound. Something like a purring—and yet it wasn't. I looked toward the blanket, wondered if the fuse were still burning—

My attention was taken elsewhere. The gun at my neck pushed again. I had to ease forward a few more inches. Then—I felt what I'd been waiting for, and I went tense as a spring. Cortelyou now had two guns against my neck.

He was shifting guns. He had to shift them, to get his left hand free. The left hand was to be used in easing the door closed behind him.

Grennaker said, viciously: "Well, what do we do now? Go into a trance?"

I got the clip poised atop my cocked right thumb.

The girl looked toward the door of the office, her childlike face savage. "We'll have to turn the place upside down. I'm going to turn on the lights. The hell with it!"

She stepped to the wall, ran her hand along it.

I flipped the clip into the air, toward the wall at my left; with my right elbow,

—now drawn back—I jabbed Cortelyou, nudging him to the left and dived head-first toward the cotton batting. Fire creased my left cheek, terrific thunder. I went deaf. I could hardly hear the gun still clicking furiously at me.

Grennaker's gasp came just as the lights flared on. I had landed on my stomach on the mound of cotton batting. I flung my head over my shoulder just in time to see Cortelyou's left-hand gun jerk up. There was a two-throated roar.

I heard Grennaker curse. Blood spurted from Cortelyou's throat. He was caught half turning, whirled round with his face to the door. Grennaker's gun thundered again, nailed the private detective's chest tight against the metal door. His head fell back with a queer sucking sound from his throat. He stood there a second, then collapsed, falling out and away from the door.

I WAS at the farthest corner of my little hiding-place by the time he hit the ground. I prayed wildly for one of his guns to fly in my direction, but I could have saved the effort.

One of them, to tantalize me, skidded almost across in front of the boxes behind which I crouched, near the right-hand wall of the room. It lay there—Cortelyou's gun—full of bullets, three yards from me. It might as well have been three miles.

For a terrifying second, I was afraid they had seen me, too. Desperately I wondered how. I had made my dive before the lights went on. Cortelyou's slug they must have simply taken as his attempt to kill them from the dark. By the time the lights went on, Cortelyou was standing there alone, shooting at them. How—

Grennaker's vicious voice bit off: "Who is it?"

The girl's heels rattled across the lino-

leum. I was huddled on my heels at the corner of the packing case farthest from them. I could see neither of them. I heard the rustle of the girl's silk dress, then: "It's Frank Cortelyou! The private nose that traced the furniture!"

Grennaker cursed. "That buttons it up! God knows who else knows about this, if he does. Those shots'll bring the law anyway. It's a frost all around—"

"It isn't! It isn't! Nobody else will come here. Jack's not going to—he's tied up. And those shots won't sound like anything on the street. We've killed all the alarms. My God, you're not turning yellow?"

That didn't impress the gray man. By now I'd discovered a line of sight between broken slats in the packing cases. I could see the upper parts of their bodies. He was sour, savage, disgusted. She clung to his arm, pleading, her huge violet eyes working on his. "Please—don't drop it now—it's here—I know it's here—we'll be rich for life, Jay—"

Then, suddenly a harsh, velvety voice bit from the elevator: "Hold it, you lugs! A very charming picture!"

I knew now what the purring sound I'd heard had been. The elevator—making a quiet trip.

The girl gasped: "Jack!"

I was hastily trying to duck up and down, sideways, any way to bring the new arrival into my line of view. This was a madhouse. For a second, I was in a panic—not because I was huddled here like a rat in a trap—but because I had utterly lost the sense of what was going on.

The added starter said, between tight teeth: "No, you're perfectly right. The shots cannot be heard in the street. I was halfway up while the fun was going on and I could hardly hear them. Get away from—drop the gun, Jay! Drop it, or—"

The gun crashed. Somebody gasped for breath. A gun clattered on the floor.

I didn't know who had hit who till feet stumbled backwards in a sudden rush. The newcomer's icy voice called someone a lousy framing heel as Grennaker staggered into my sight, falling backwards, both hands over one eye, his mouth open, working, no sound coming.

Another shot pumped into the side of his face, slammed him against the wall and he went down, all this without making the slightest outcry. As his body crashed to the floor, the girl cried shrilly: "No—no—Jack—wait!"

And in that minute, I saw him—saw who it was.

Orpen—the clerical-looking inhabitant of the room next to Eberhardt's at the Carls-Rite—the bird who had sent me hunting the girl.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Blow-Off

HE HAD a gun steady on the girl. His lips were like paper, his eyes thin, green. "Wait? Why? You lousy, two-timing little tart, do you think you can talk yourself out of the blast? Or are you going to hand me some more of the sweetheart guff?"

"Jack—you made me do it!"

His breath blew out. "Made you—Lord God! I made you and these other punks frame me for killing, eh?"

"No—no! We didn't—I swear we didn't ever intend to—"

His voice was ugly. "Put it in your ear. Even the cops know you had the bag and trunk gag arranged to ship my corpse out as much as a day before I got here."

She had no answer for that one. I could hear her quick breathing.

Orpen said slowly, grimly: "There's one teensy-weensy bit of dope I need. If you want to try talking yourself alive, go ahead."

"What—what do you want to know?" There was breathless hope in her voice.

"I'll let you know when you come to it, sister. I'm giving you no more chance to cross me up. Start at the beginning. I give you my word—the minute you lie—just once—I'll smear that nose of yours all over your face with a chunk of lead."

"You—you'll give me a break if I—do what you say? No matter what happens?"

He was suddenly intent. "Happens? What's that add up to?"

She blurted: "Jack—there's no money there. We—it's—the pete's empty—"

His shoulders relaxed. "Don't let that worry you. Start talking. It depends on how I feel whether I give you a break or not. This much is sure, however—if you *don't* talk—you go now!"

"I—"

"Start where you picked me up on the boat coming over from South America."

"I picked you up? Why, you—"

His voice was like a saw. "You've got sixty seconds to talk. If you want to waste it on that kind of stuff, all right."

"No, no—" she said hastily. "I—I'll tell you anything Jack. I—you told me enough on the boat—I knew you were coming back for a big score—a real one. I—I tried to get you to let me work with you. You know I did, Jack. You said you wouldn't let a dame in with you—that we were too dumb."

SHE swallowed. "You—you shouldn't have said that, Jack. It made me raging. I—I kept getting you drunk. I knew that was your weak spot. I was going to show you who was dumb. I found that letter Cortelyou'd written you—about the furniture from Banding's office. I got you to tell me more about Banding. You—told me he hadn't been able to grab all the cash he'd lifted from the bank—that he'd tucked some away.

Then, after I found that letter I knew it must be in one of the pieces of his office furniture. You—told me you'd met Banding in South America, and I thought he *told* you which piece it was in.

"I put—I got hold of Dink Eberhardt as soon as we hit Frisco. I beat you to New York by plane. I knew you had that grouch-bag around your neck—chained. I was sure the information how to get the money was in it. When you came on the train from Frisco, I had Eberhardt riding with you.

"I got hold of Grennaker here. We—bribed a clerk in the hotel to fix up the room arrangements, when you wired for reservations. We knew he'd be afraid to talk later. I—I didn't want to rub you out. Grennaker insisted. Said you'd never let up on us afterwards—"

Orpen said acidly: "Never mind the pep-talk. Go on!"

"I—we made arrangements. I knew you liked to drink. I thought if I could get you to go to Eberhardt's room and drink with him, we could get you drunk and get the grouch-bag. I showed him how to line his stomach with oil so he'd not get drunk, too.

"When you came out here, almost the minute you hit town, Grennaker trailed you—here, I mean—this eye-factory. I remembered enough of the list to know it was Banding's safe that these people had bought. I thought what was in your grouch-bag was the combination or something."

She hesitated, then went on: "We had a fall guy."

"You had what?"

"I—dug up an old derelict named Driscoll. He was cashier of Banding's bank. He was sent up the river for helping Banding or something. He was just out a little while. I found where he lived and prowled his place. I lifted his rod, and we fried some bullets into some cotton,

then wrapped the slugs in paper and put them in shotgun shells—you know the gag. I was going to send him a note to get him out away from any alibi he might have, while the—it—”

“While you bumped me off,” Orpen said grimly. “All right.”

The girl swallowed. “When—when you told—after you got back to the hotel and I went into your room—that you’d be going out at nine for awhile, I put it in the sap’s note to go to Brooklyn at ten thirty. When you did go out, Grennaker tried to tail you, but you gave him the slip. We didn’t care much—we knew you’d be back. As soon as you did come back, we hurried over to Brooklyn—we knew you’d be in Eberhardt’s room, like you promised, to meet me. We planted the gun back on the fall guy, but the damn sap had forgotten to bring the note I’d written him with him. We couldn’t leave that hanging around. I sent Grennaker down to Driscoll’s place to fan it again, while I came back to the hotel to see if—to see how—”

“To see if I was croaked yet,” Orpen grunted. “Go ahead.”

“Well, you know about the room I had above Eberhardt’s, and the trunk and the sleeping bag. He—he was going to carry you up in that bag—up the fire-escape, and ship you out from my room. When I got there, I expected him. When he didn’t arrive, I went down the fire-escape and looked in the window. I saw—saw something had gone wrong.”

ORPEN said: “You saw your boyfriend stretched out instead of me. I bet that was a shock. Listen, sister—if I hadn’t had such a tough time finding the guy that told me the secret of this safe—if my nerves hadn’t been all wrought up—your lily could never even touched me on that drinking—oil or no oil. As it was, he was as drunk—or drunker than I was.

I was just exhausted, that’s all. At that, when I did doze off, and Eberhardt got the stuff out of my grouch-bag, I woke up fast enough. If the rat hadn’t had that envelope all ready and shoved the stuff in the mailbox, I would have choked it out of him. I damn near did, anyway. He thought I was going to—and grabbed that damn shotgun. You can figure who was drunkest by who won out in the scramble for the gun—who got plugged. It wasn’t me, sister—not me. I—well, go on from where you were,” he checked himself.

“I—I went down and took the shotgun away. I hurried right out and went down to meet Grennaker. I threw the shotgun in the river on the way down.

“When I found Grennaker, he said he’d gone over Driscoll’s place and the note wasn’t there. He’d waited around and Driscoll had just gone in, with another guy. We waited and jumped the other guy when he came out. He was a private dick Driscoll had dug up somewhere. He had the note and the gun on him. We tore up the note and waited some more, then went back into Driscoll’s apartment, as soon as he went out, and planted the gun again.”

“Who was this private dick?”

“Cass Blue.”

Orpen’s eyes narrowed. “Driscoll picked him up, eh?”

“I guess so. He was with him, anyhow. Grennaker wanted to come right over here and blow the safe. He couldn’t see where whatever information you had on you meant anything, anyhow. I was afraid of meeting you or something. I went back to the hotel, waited around till I could pump a newspaper reporter. I heard about the letter Eberhardt had mailed, and that wasn’t hard to add up. I heard you were in your room. I figured you wouldn’t make a break out of there if you had a chance of staying in the

clear, and I figured you wouldn't be there at all, unless you did see a chance to bluff it through."

"Where is this Blue now?"

"God knows. We shook him off, long back."

"Are you damn sure you did? A little while ago, when I thought I was stuck in that damn hotel, I sent Blue out looking for you. It just occurred to me that I made a prime monkey of myself. *That's* where you got the idea I was tied up in the hotel—that rat was working for you! That's what I wanted to know—that and where he is now. And how much you've told him. Come clean with that, sister, or you'll die mean; I'm not going to leave him around loose!"

"Honest to God, Jack—you're wrong, dead wrong—"

"It's your tough luck, then, sweetheart. You'll suffer for it if I am. I'm going to dust you off, anyhow, but you can have it the easy way if you come through. Make up your mind. We've got all night ahead of us—No, by God, we haven't! I'll get this little job attended to first." He set down his bag. "After that—we'll go somewhere and talk. Get over there in that corner—and keep your hands in sight."

SHE backed, white-faced, toward the corner. I ducked back behind my boxes. I heard Orpen fling the blankets from the safe door. He eyed her carefully, hefted his gun. "Keep your trap shut—or you'll get it now. Watch this, and you'll learn something."

I eased round the corner of my box again, waggled my head from side to side, till I saw by the girl's eyes that she'd seen me.

Not that she started, or exclaimed, or any of those pranks. She was a vicious, deadly criminal, and beyond such things—she didn't even look toward me. I

jabbed a finger repeatedly at the dead Grennaker's gun. It was within two feet of her tiny oxford. I jabbed impatiently, till her eyes slid casually down, up again. I made pantomime.

Her nod was almost imperceptible.

Orpen was saying numbers to himself, coupled with right or left. Then, "Here she goes, sweetheart," and even he could not keep the breathlessness out of his voice.

I heard the wrench of the handle being turned, then a slight metallic clang, and—the thumping rustle of bundles of banknotes falling to the floor.

"Not bad." Orpen's voice was thick, husky. "Not bad. Get it? There's not *one* but *two* combinations to this pete. With the second combination, the face lifts right off the safe. That's why the walls seem so thick. There's a good five-inch space in there. See the pretty money? Surprising how much can be put in five inches. Thousands—and five-hundreds. It isn't a million—but it's damn near half of that! How do you like it, beautiful? Cross up the old maestro, would you? All right."

I heard him drag a bag across the floor, heard him load the bundles into it. "Tough, I call it, on old Banding. After all the trouble of loading the secret pete, they jumped him too quick—he couldn't get to it. Well, that suits John Q. Orpen down to the ground."

The clasp snapped. His shoes creaked as he straightened. His voice was ugly again, as he said: "This—my love—is a little something in memory of those nights on the boat, you double-crossing—"

The girl's foot lashed out. I was on my knees, my hands outstretched, ready. The gun spun across the floor and stopped—just an inch short of where I expected it to be. I couldn't stop. I grabbed for it, as Orpen gasped.

Thunder roared from Orpen's gun.



His slug hit the pistol just as my hand closed on it. I tried to whip it up—to find my hand had gone numb from the shock. He roared, "Drop it!" and for the first time there was hoarse fear in his voice. The money—having the money—had done that to him. I dropped it like a hot cake, crawled out, said placatingly: "O. K., Orpen, you win."

I tried to inject a little humor, desperately. I grinned weakly as I got to my feet with my hands up. "I'll tell your congregation you won't be back."

It laid an egg. His eyes were glowing coals as he held the gun centered on my middle. "By God!" he croaked hoarsely. "The dick!"

**H**E SUDDENLY swung hunted eyes from side to side; his lip curled in fear as he snarled at the girl: "Shook him off, did you! Damn you! You crossed me to the end! How many more of these mugs are planted around here?" He was swaying. His eyes darted to the door, with Cortelyou's body blocking it. He picked up his bag from the floor. He began to back towards the elevator.

"All right—I don't care if there's a dozen planted. I'll take one of them for every bullet in this rod. And you two to start with. It's done you no good, you double-crossing—"

He was within a foot of the elevator door, when I noticed something.

*The elevator was no longer there!*

He touched the edge of the door with his bag, steadied that arm against the door edge. His gun swung on the girl and his teeth bared.

I took a long chance. I suddenly pointed toward the front of the office, toward the little ground-glass door in the partition. I shouted at the top of my lungs: "Fred—plug him—quick!"

It worked. Orpen's gray head jerked around for a fraction of an instant. He

sprang back to get in the shelter of the elevator.

I dived. I dived on my stomach across the floor—like a football player. I couldn't have saved Orpen if I'd wanted to. He gave one horrible scream as his feet felt air. I clutched the bag of money to me, ripped it from his hand as his gun flew up in the air, came down on my head. His scream echoed all the way down the shaft.

I went sick at my stomach as he crashed. His backbone snapping was like a cannon report.

I jerked my head around at the girl. She had snatched up the pearl-handled gun, was bringing it in line with my head. I rolled as she fired, and the slug spattered on the back of the shaft. I rolled again as her second shot flared. I had Orpen's gun in my hand now, but I was afraid of killing her. I had to keep her alive to prove my story.

I nailed her through the gun shoulder as she tried for a third shot, then I was on my knees as she tried to shift the gun. "Drop it," I told her. "You're through shooting. You should never have taken it up."

I dived to Cortelyou's side, still covering the girl. I prayed he was enough of a dick to carry handcuffs. He was.

I left her handcuffed to a radiator while I ran down the fire-stairs. In all the confusion I had not overlooked the fact that somebody had run that elevator down while Orpen was here with the girl. Who it could be was absolutely beyond me.

**I** HIT the ground floor, jumped into the lobby, the gun ready. A little man was just running out the front door. I dived after him, was out on the sidewalk thirty yards behind him.

"Stop, or I'll—" was as much as I had to shout.

He uttered a broken cry of relief, put

up his hands and came trotting back, calling my name thankfully.

"Driscoll!" I said. "How the hell—where did you come from?"

"After you left me, I was just coming out when I saw a man and a woman carrying you down the street. I didn't see where they took you but I saw them coming back. They went into my place. I waited across the street. I was afraid they'd done something to you—that I was back on my own again—without help. I followed them up to the Carls-Rite and they parked out in front. I got close enough to hear them mention this place—this eye-factory.

"After a while, the woman went in, then she ran out and got in the car. I lost her. Then I thought of here, but I had to go and borrow a gun—"

"I know the rest," I said. "Everything's jake."

"But that man and woman—they may be coming here!"

"They won't be," I assured. "They're all washed up. Listen. Go out and find a

phone! Call this number—" I gave him my lawyer's number. "Tell him to get over here as fast as his pins will move him. Then, wait fifteen minutes and call the cops and tell them the same. And—don't forget to come back. Banding's money is upstairs."

I dampened his enthusiasm. "We've got it all right, but I doubt if we can keep it. What we'll do is—I'll put in a claim for it, by right of possession. I don't have to say where it came from. Then, if nobody else puts in a counterclaim, the court will have to give it to me, in which case you get half. That's a faint hope, however. The insurance dicks will sure as hell get their noses on it. In which case we'll get ten percent for recovered loot. We won't go penniless in either event. And—I've got enough story and one witness to clear us both of the charges over us."

I was right. The insurance company got the bulk of the dough. Still, I made more than on any case in my life—nearly twelve thousand dollars. Easy money.



PABST BLUE RIBBON

It's time for Pabst

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Premier-Pabst Sales Co., Chicago

# ON THE FENCE

**W**E'VE always been ready to go halfway—or even farther—with you critical DIME DETECTIVE readers, and admit there are two sides to every question and a possible happy medium lurking somewhere between.

However, this is the first time we've ever encountered as many as four separate and distinct points of view about something that had never occurred to us as being particularly meaty material for controversy in the first place.

It's the cross-word puzzle feature, *Cross Roads of Crime*, we're referring to, and the cross words you readers have been hurling at us about it, along with the pleasant.

Here's a sample of the latter brand, picked at random from the file. It came on the back of a post card mailed in Northampton, Mass.

I think *Cross Roads of Crime* is a mighty interesting feature and hope you make it regular. It's about time DIME DETECTIVE started something like that. The men whose pictures are run are interesting to read about in the little sketches that go with the answers.

Well, that didn't sound so bad. We confess that our own ideas ran along similar lines. But the following—that was something else again.

Why don't you stop wasting two whole pages every issue with cross word puzzles that might just as well be used for making the stories longer? Anybody who wants to do puzzles ought to do them in the news-

papers instead of hunting for them in a detective story magazine.

That landed on us from Boston. Not so far from Northampton as the crow flies but as far apart as the poles in point of view, from the opinion expressed on the post card. There didn't even seem to be much use in hunting for the happy medium there. And then this came along—from the middle-west, just for variety's sake. Muncie, Ind., to be exact.

The puzzles are all right—or rather the idea of running them is—but they're too easy. Give us something really hard to get our teeth in. Cryptograms, for instance.

And then this, from the west-coast. Walla Walla, Wash., believe it or not.

I'm a guy who can take a cross word puzzle or leave it alone. And I don't mind telling you that when they come as difficult as the ones you've been handing out twice a month I usually leave 'em and turn to something simple like the editor's page—

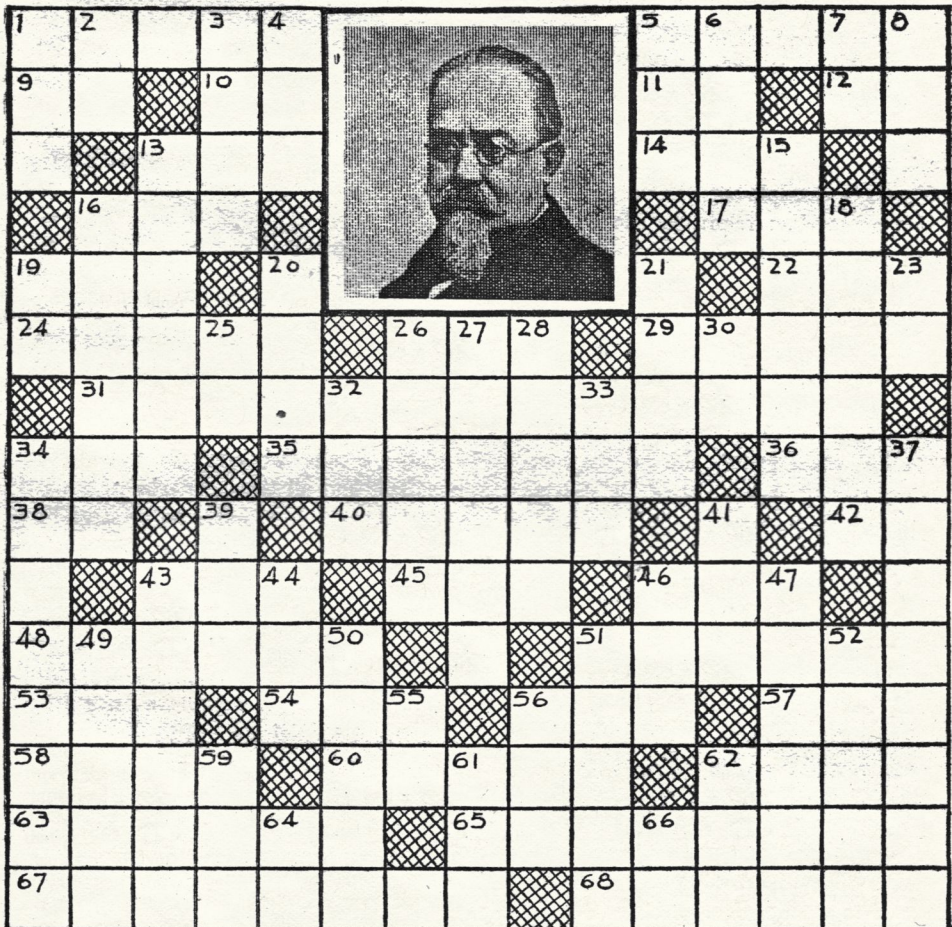
Can we take it! And do we have to? That last had all the earmarks of a nasty crack. So do you wonder we're straddling the fence until we get a few more reactions on this puzzle question? Apparently verdicts range all the way from good to lousy, with the luke-warm, take-'em-or-leave-'em boys following along behind. And if there's anything we hate it's a luke-warm criticism. Tell us definitely where we stand on this puzzle business—and don't take all year about it. We want to get down on one side of the fence or the other!



# CROSS ROADS OF CRIME

by

RICHARD HOADLEY TINGLEY



The pictured man, an Italian, was a famous criminologist, anthropologist, psychiatrist and educator.  
Who was he?

- ACROSS
- 1 The pictured man's native country
  - 5 The pictured man lectured in this Italian city
  - 9 Achieve
  - 10 Mythological Greek maiden who was transformed into a heifer
  - 11 Any one of the Norse gods who lived in Asgard
  - 12 Near
  - 13 With (prefix)
  - 14 The race to which the pictured man belonged
  - 16 Human beings
  - 17 Plunge
  - 19 Possesses
  - 22 Absorb
  - 24 Goddess of erotic poetry
  - 26 A king of Judah (2 Chron. 14-1)
  - 29 Musical drama
  - 31 A student of moral depravity
  - 34 Shelter
  - 35 Tumors (old usage)
  - 36 Contraction of the facial muscles
  - 38 Termination denoting alcohol
  - 40 University city in Italy
  - 42 Metric land measure (variant spelling)
  - 43 To freshen
  - 45 Eliminate
  - 46 A cavity
  - 48 Famous city in Flanders
  - 51 Any fraud or sham (gambler's slang)
  - 53 To replace a union workman with a non-union man
  - 54 Foot sled
  - 56 Gambling cube
  - 57 A servant of Solomon (Ezra 3-55 57)
  - 58 Roman emperor of the first century A. D.
  - 60 To follow after something (variant)
  - 62 Presently
  - 63 The fourth priest (Chronicles I 24-28)
  - 65 The pictured man studied to check this disease
  - 67 Seed of a species of iris used as a medicine
  - 68 On the back

- DOWN
- 1 An artificial language
  - 2 Sign of the infinite mode
  - 3 Jungle beast
  - 4 Distant (poetic)
  - 5 Head dress used by Mohammedan dervishes
  - 6 Employed
  - 7 Contraction of "ibid"
  - 8 An American humorist and poet
  - 13 First name of the pictured man
  - 15 The most intelligent
  - 16 A kind of hair wave
  - 18 Shakespearean advocate
  - 19 That man
  - 20 Capital city of the pictured man's country
  - 21 Nudges
  - 23 Father
  - 25 Last note
  - 26 Close by (poetic)
  - 27 Squalid; base
  - 28 Audibly
  - 30 3.1416, mathematically speaking
  - 32 A devil
  - 33 Sitting room in a harem
  - 34 Last name of the pictured man
  - 37 Title of the best-known book of the pictured man (The)
  - 39 Oriental fruit
  - 41 Salt
  - 43 One of the many activities of the pictured man
  - 44 Any species of property (common law term)
  - 46 The author of "The Wandering Jew"
  - 47 Resounds
  - 49 Assessor
  - 50 Economize unduly
  - 51 Man who laid the first and second transatlantic cables
  - 52 An interpreter of the ancient Hebrew Law
  - 55 Enclosed
  - 56 Payable
  - 59 Combining form used in geometry
  - 61 Town in Belgium
  - 62 River in Switzerland
  - 64 Ancient Babylonian city, now called "Hit"
  - 66 Behold!

**WILLIAM J. BURNS**, advocate of "common sense" in the solution of crime mysteries, was born in Baltimore, October 19, 1861. In 1889, Burns joined the Secret Service. He established headquarters in St. Louis and opened a drive against counterfeiters. He first achieved international prominence, in 1896, when he broke up a ring of Costa Rican counterfeiters; following this success with the apprehension of similar gangs in New York City and Philadelphia. In 1903, Burns resigned his government post to investigate land fraud cases in Oregon, Washington and California where he managed to implicate several federal, state and city officials. Together with his son, the late George E. Burns, he established the internationally famous Burns National Detective Agency in 1909. The following year, Burns linked the McNamara gang to the dynamiting of the *Los Angeles Times*. That was to be his greatest coup. In 1921, Mr. Burns was made Director of the Bureau of Investigation of the U. S. Department of Justice; a

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Last Issue's Puzzle

post which he resigned in 1924. He figured in the Teapot Dome oil scandal when he was sentenced to fifteen days in jail for jury-shadowing. However, the Supreme Court found him not guilty of an overt act. William J. Burns died April 14, 1932.

# READY for the RACKETS

By

S. Theodore Granik

Assistant District Attorney of New York County

As Told to John Gunn

**"WATCH OUT FOR THESE RACKETS!"  
SAYS THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**

*Racketeers and swindlers of all sorts are lying in wait for you, eager to rob or cheat you of your hard-earned cash. All you need, in order to thwart them, is a knowledge of their schemes, so that you may guard against them. Motivated solely by a desire to be of service to the public, S. Theodore Granik, Assistant District Attorney of New York County and nationally known director of the WOR Sunday Forum, is making public the following information taken from his files, only the names of the criminals and their victims being changed. Mr. Granik is contributing this series purely from humanitarian motives; he has refused to accept compensation for them.*

## 5.

### THE RADIO SCHOOL RACKET

**H**AVE you ever opened your morning newspaper and come across an advertisement which read something like the following?

**RADIO ENTERTAINERS WANTED.**

Experience unnecessary. Audition free.  
Apply at 1962 West — Street.

If so, you have seen the bait in one of the most recent and contemptible rackets in operation today. The swindlers who insert such advertisements are out to take a few dollars from earnest, hopeful youngsters, who can ill afford to spend the money, giving them in return nothing but broken hearts and faded dreams.

Such an ad, we will assume, has appeared in the *New York Morning Bugle*. Thousands of people read it. Among them is Bill Rizzo, whose daughter, Maria, sings in school, in the church choir, and at little, informal gatherings at home.

Maria, a girl of about fifteen or sixteen, is a pretty child, and her voice, though pleasing, is in no way exceptional. But you could never convince Bill or his wife, Angela, that Maria is not the equal of almost any opera star.

Having read the ad, Bill looks up from the paper and says: "Hey, Angela. Here's

a good chance for Maria. Some of those radio singers make big money. Why don't you take her over there tomorrow?"

Angela agrees that it is a good idea, so the next morning she and Maria put on their best clothes and go to the address given. There they are ushered into a fairly well furnished office, in one corner of which stands a microphone.

"Yes," says Mr. Blank, the man behind the big mahogany desk, "I inserted the ad. But before we go any further, I think I had better give your daughter a microphone test. It will, of course, cost you nothing. Please stand at the microphone, Miss Rizzo, and sing any song you prefer. I will go into the other room and listen."

Blank leaves the room and Maria sings. Maybe the microphone is connected—more than likely it is not. Whether he bothers to listen to her or not, his approach is the same, when he returns to the room in a minute or so.

"You have a very pleasing voice, Miss Rizzo," says Mr. Blank, "but you have never sung through a microphone before, have you?"

"No, she hasn't," Mrs. Rizzo answers, "but your ad said that no experience was necessary."

"That is true, madam. However, some people have a natural aptitude for radio singing, while others, though they may have even better voices, are not that fortunate. Your daughter is in the latter class. Now, don't be discouraged, Mrs. Rizzo. I can positively guarantee that, with a few lessons, your daughter will have a professional engagement on the radio. And you know how much money the featured singers make on the air, don't you?"

"Yes," says Mrs. Rizzo, "but will you put it in writing?" Mrs. Rizzo, as you see, is not the most trusting of women, and she demands some proof. But Mr. Blank is an artful swindler; he is perfectly willing to give it to her—and still cheat her. He agrees to give her a written promise.

"And how much will the lessons cost?" asks Mrs. Rizzo.

Blank looks at her carefully. Mrs. Rizzo is not badly dressed, and neither is her daughter. But they do not seem to be rich people. Mr. Blank considers well and then names his price. It is the most he thinks they will pay, but still low enough not to scare them away. He tells them that it is a special rate, and makes them promise not to tell anyone. He exacts this promise because each of his students pays a different price—the most he thinks he can get—and he does not want them to find out that they are paying more than others.

Then he signs a contract with Mrs. Rizzo. He guarantees that Maria will "be paid as an entertainer in a commercial program to be broadcast over a recognized radio broadcasting station after she has completed a course of ten lessons in microphone technique."

The price of the lessons is stipulated, as is his agent's commission, usually five, ten or fifteen percent.

With this positive assurance of a radio

career, the Rizzos depart happily. Maria goes to the school for her lessons regularly.

Eventually she finishes her course of training. She has been taught how to stand, and how to hold her head and how to pitch her voice. Maybe she has been taught correctly—maybe not. Mr. Blank may know nothing whatever of radio technique.

When, a few weeks after she has completed her training, no commercial program is forthcoming, Mrs. Rizzo goes to Mr. Blank's office and proceeds to raise the roof. Blank points out that the contract does not state *how long after* the course has been completed her opportunity will arrive. He explains that he, too, is eager, for he wants to earn his agent's commission.

However, Mrs. Rizzo persists. When enough students are complaining, Mr. Blank lives up to his guarantee. Maria and some eight or ten other students receive word that they are to appear in a sponsored program over a small local broadcasting station.

Mr. Blank goes to this station and buys fifteen minutes of time on the air, at a cost somewhere between ten and twenty-five dollars. He puts his group of students on the air and gives them two to five dollars each—money that they have paid him. And his part of the contract has been fulfilled. He has collected from \$500 to \$1000 from these ten students and has spent \$50 to \$75 in satisfying them.

Still he is not satisfied. After the program is over, he takes each one aside and says: "A manufacturer just called up. He heard you and is interested. He wants to see your photograph. Here's a card; go to this address and get some pictures taken—and I'll have a good chance of selling your services."

Maria goes there and is charged an excessive price for the pictures. Mr. Blank

tells her he will let her know as soon as he has some word for her. And that's the last she ever hears of the whole thing.

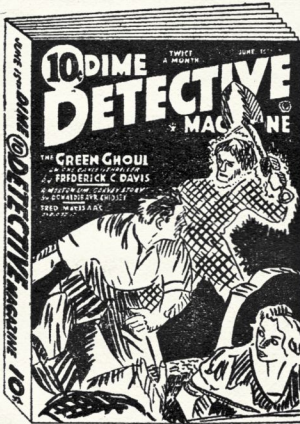
Of course there are some reliable radio schools—but they seldom give any guarantees. The more modest their claims,

the more legitimate the schools.

We have had several complaints about these fake radio schools and District Attorney Dodge has been successful in driving many of them out of business, as well as putting some of the operators in jail.

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE**—*The Free Suit Racket*, as told by S. Theodore Granik, Assistant District Attorney of New York County.

*And in the meantime—if you yourself have been the victim of some ingenious racket; if some plausible swindler has managed to part you from your hard-earned savings—write to the "Racket Editor" of this magazine, explaining in detail the methods of operation of the swindle by which you have been bilked. He will be more than pleased to publicize your experience in these pages—withholding your name, of course—as a warning to possible future victims; or see that the proper authorities are informed of them so that they may be on the lookout for the gyp-artists' tactics and procedure.*



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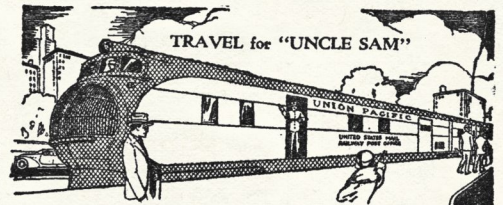
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**12**

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29x4.75-20	2.50	0.95
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.15
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.15
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.25
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.25
31x6.50-19	3.60	1.35
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.35
34x7.00-20	4.60	1.65
35x7.00-21	4.60	1.65

**CORD TIRES**

Size	Tire	Tube
30x3	\$2.25	\$0.65
30x3½	2.35	0.75
31x4	2.95	0.85
32x4	2.95	0.85
33x4	2.95	0.85
34x4	3.25	0.85
32x4½	3.35	1.15
33x4½	3.45	1.15
34x4½	3.45	1.15
30x5	3.65	1.35
33x5	3.75	1.45
35x5	3.95	1.55

**Heavy Duty TRUCK TIRES**

Size	Tire	Tube
30x5	\$4.25	\$1.95
32x6	7.95	2.75
36x6	9.95	3.95
34x7	10.95	3.95
38x7	10.95	3.95
36x8	12.45	4.25
40x8	15.95	4.95

**Heavy Duty Truck Balloons**

Size	Tire	Tube
7.50-20	\$ 6.95	\$3.75
8.25-20	8.95	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.45

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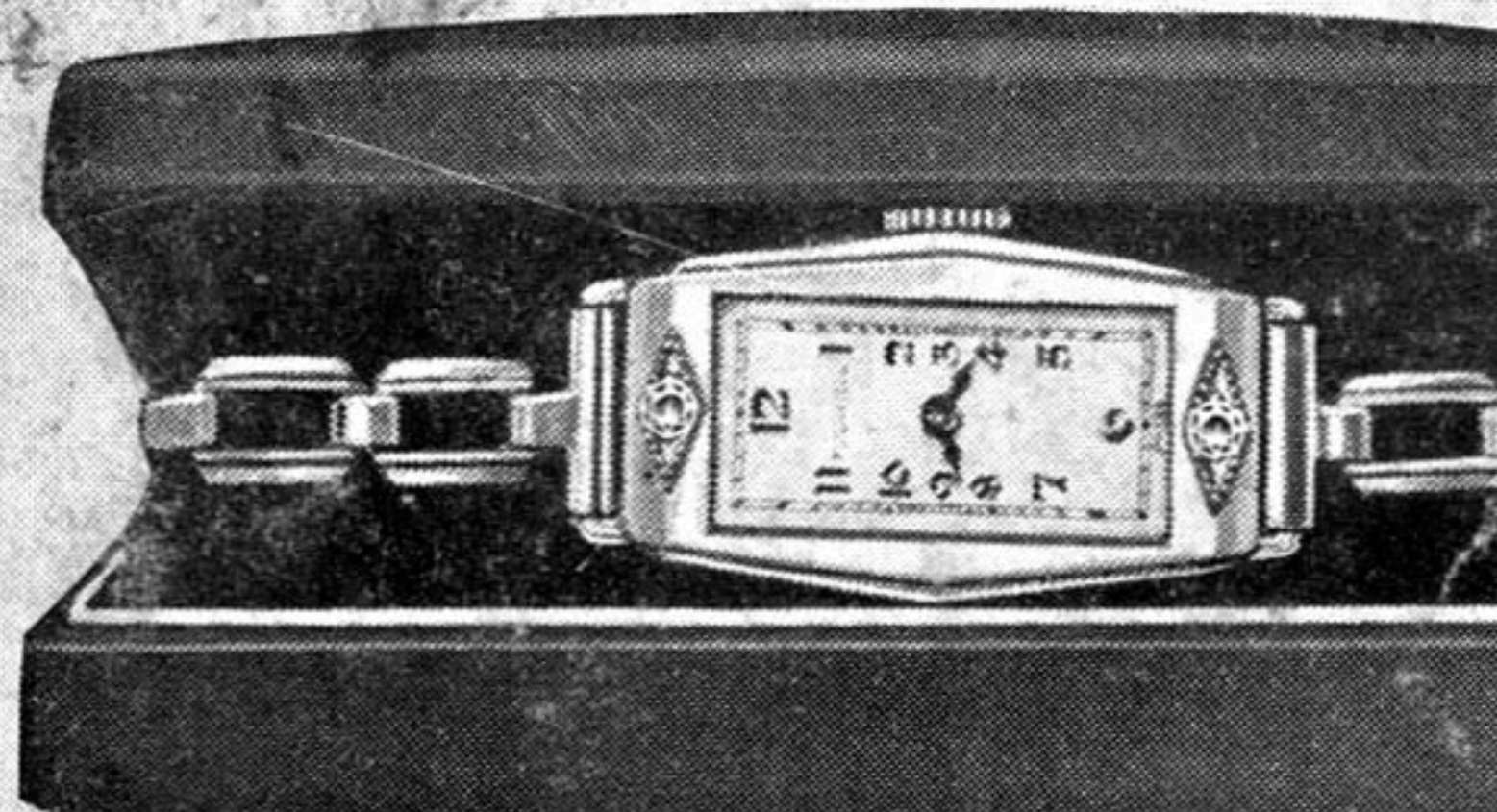
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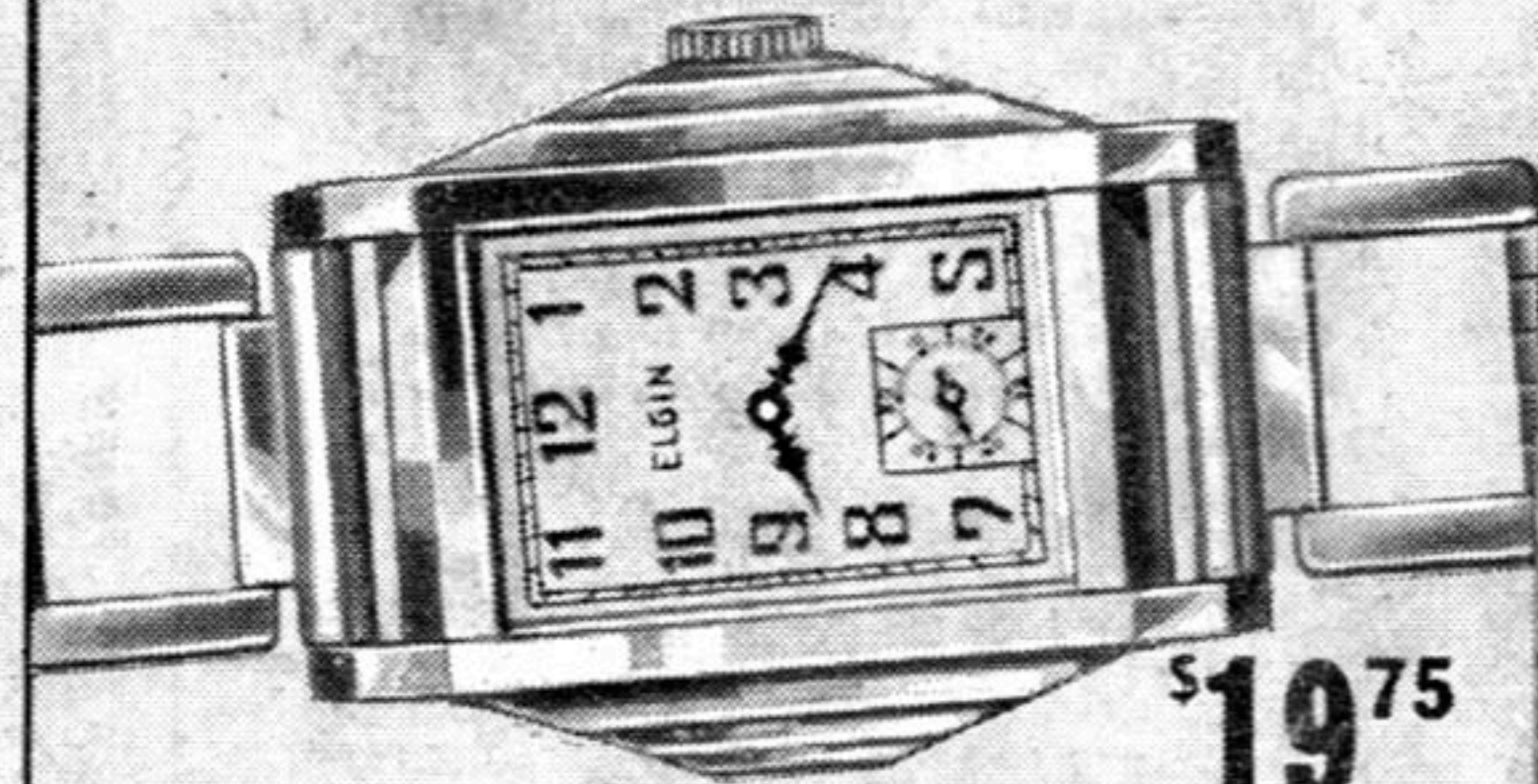
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