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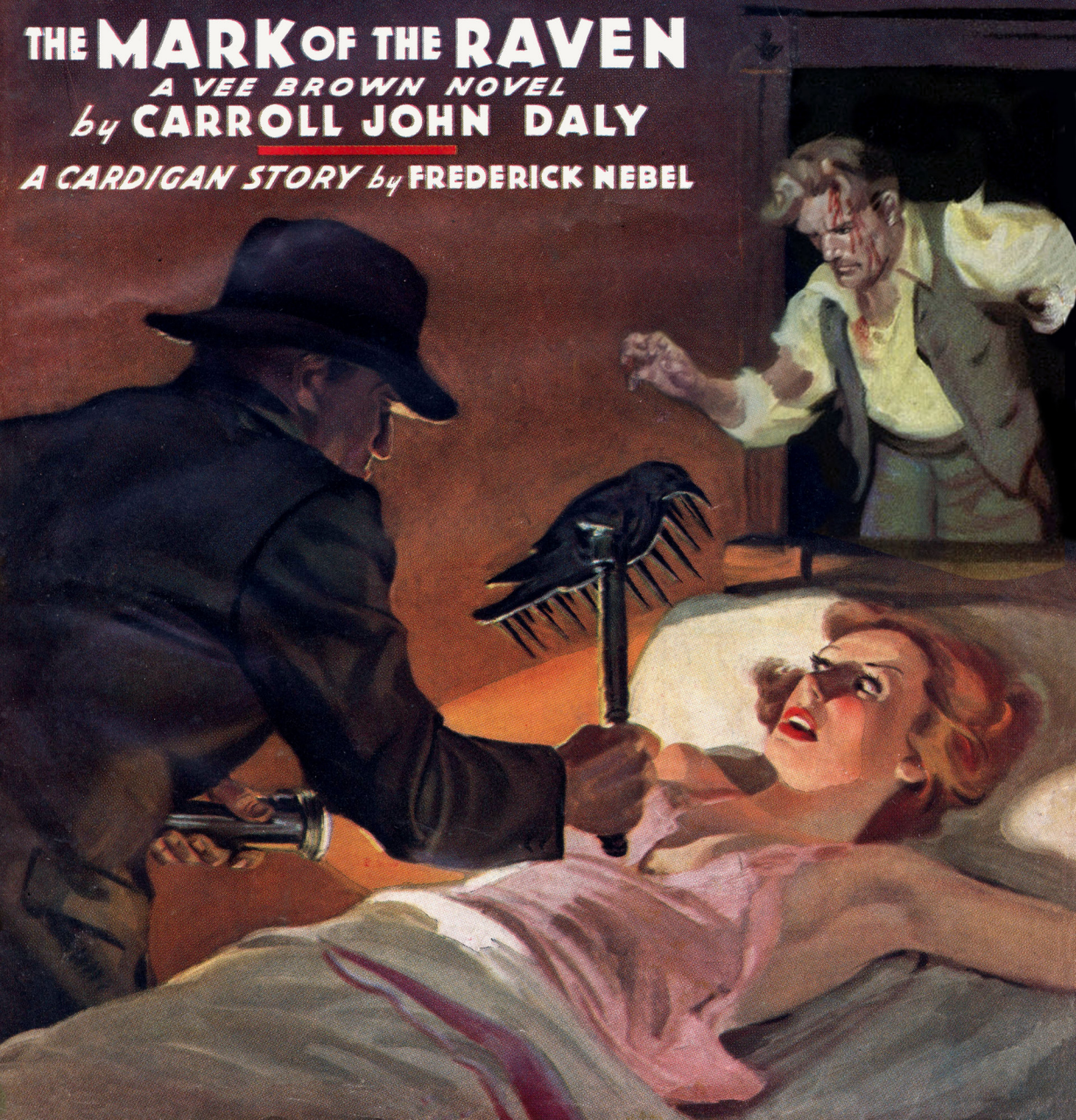


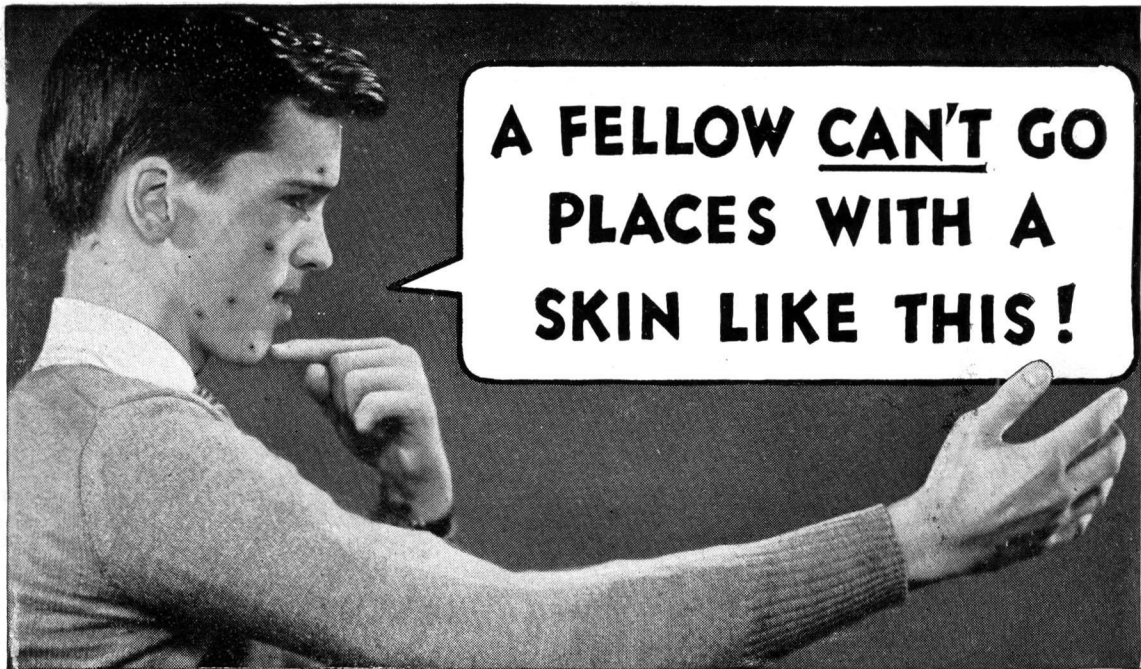
THE MARK OF THE RAVEN

A VEE BROWN NOVEL

by **CARROLL JOHN DALY**

A CARDIGAN STORY by **FREDERICK NEBEL**





A FELLOW CAN'T GO PLACES WITH A SKIN LIKE THIS!

But Pete is soon pimple-free and "out stepping"



Don't let adolescent pimples make a hermit out of YOU!

Between the ages of 13 and 25, important glands develop. This causes disturbances throughout the body. Waste poisons get into the blood and irritate the skin, making it break out in pimples.

But you can clear skin irritants out of your blood—with Fleischmann's Yeast. Then the pimples disappear! Eat 3 cakes of Fleischmann's Yeast a day, before meals, until skin clears.



clears the skin
by clearing skin irritants out of the blood

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I'll Prove in the first 7 days - that I can Make You a New Man!

DO YOU want big, smashing, sledge-hammer muscles all over your body? Husky, broad shoulders? A deep, powerful chest? All the pep and vigor of a "hard as nails" athlete? Give me just 7 days—one short week. That's all I need to give you the **PROOF** that I can make you a *new man*—give you a real he-man build and glowing health that resists sickness, ends pimples, skin blemishes, constipation and other troubles.

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Vol. 20

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Story Illustrations by John Flemming Gould

Watch for the February Issue

On the Newsstands January 3rd

Published once a month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second class matter June 28, 1935, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted 1935 by Popular Publications, Inc. Single copy price 10c. Yearly subscriptions in U. S. A. \$1.00. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although all care will be exercised in handling them.

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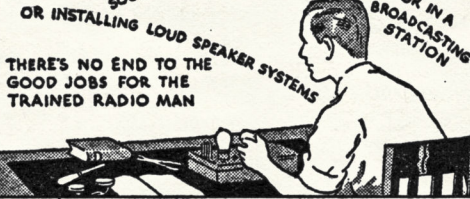
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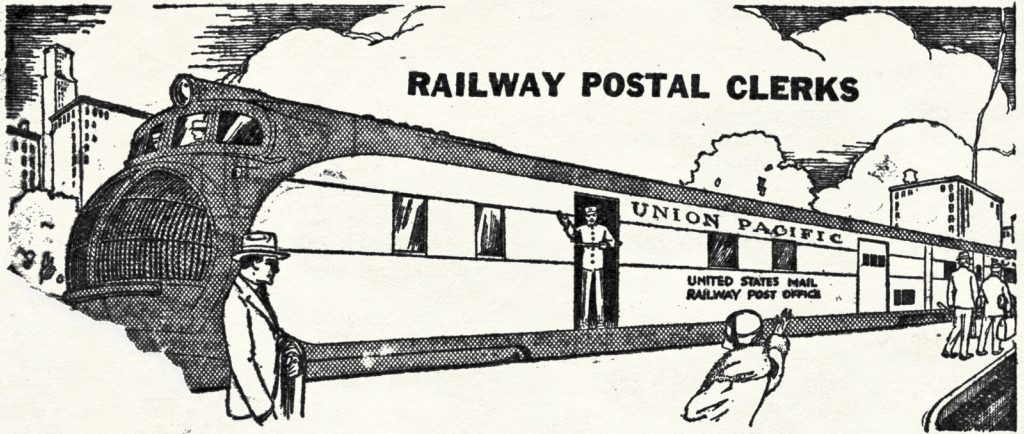
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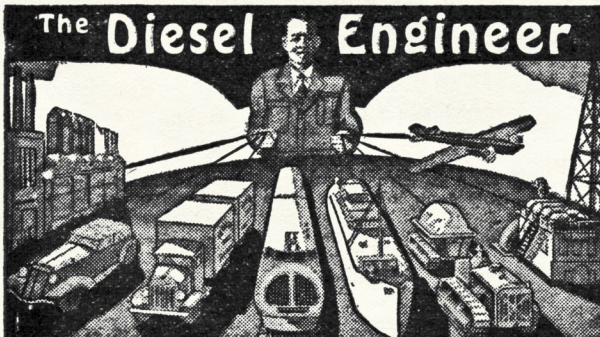
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THE MARK OF THE RAVEN

A VEE BROWN NOVEL

By Carroll John Daly

Author of "Dead Hands Reaching," etc.

*On their chests they found it—
driven into the flesh by some mad-
man's killè—the symbol of the death
bird. What was the ghastly secret
behind those murdered men—and
women? Why did Doc Raven van-
ish just as the reign of terror broke?
And why did Detective Vee Brown,
the Crime Machine, send an un-
protected girl as bait for the corpse-
maker?*

CHAPTER ONE

The Dead Man's Chest

THE MAN was dead. I had a good opportunity to look over Vee Brown's shoulder and view the body. It was a gruesome sight, but I shuddered more at the almost inaudible hum that came from Brown's lips.

I knew, though no one else did, that this slender, slightly built, first-grade detective, Vee Brown, assigned to the district attorney's office, was also the unknown Vivian, composer and writer of many of our most popular sentimental songs. Killer of Men he was known to the police and the criminals. Master of Melody he was known—or rather unknown—to hundreds of thousands throughout the nation who hummed his songs.





One slight misstep and we would swing there at a rope's end.

Mortimer Doran, the bulky D.A., stood silently against an iron upright. The taller and more powerful, if not so heavily built Inspector Ramsey knelt beside the body. His face did not carry the worried look of the district attorney. Rather he looked up at Brown and sneered, made sure he had Vee's attention, then whipped down the shirt that draped the dead man's chest.

IF BROWN did not gasp in horror, I did. At first I thought it was just a tattooed raven upon the bare chest of the dead man; then I knew that it was not a simple raven. The outline of the raven was cut deep into the chest; cut in a series of sharp little holes through the skin; many holes that must have punctured the chest by means of thin nails—nails that had left that terrible outline of the bird. The single eye of the bird was larger and deeper as if bigger nails had dug it there. Yes, the series of deep holes that made the outline of the raven so vivid must have been pressed there by a sharp instrument, or driven there by an implement whose sharp-pointed spikes had been fashioned in the form of a raven.

"Well"—Ramsey glared at me as if my gasp had hidden Vee's, but it was to Vee he spoke—"well, Mr. Detective Vee Brown, what do you think of that?"

"If you mean does it nauseate me—no," Brown said very slowly. "If you mean do I wonder—yes. I wonder at your aptitude, Ramsey, for digging up people with the mark of the raven on their chests. Of course, I mean dead people."

"It's grotesque." Mortimer Doran ran a hand across his mouth, and said to the medical examiner who was pulling down his sleeves: "What do you say, Doctor? Did the same blow that planted that horrible bird upon his chest kill him?"

Doctor Stern looked at the D.A. for nearly fifteen seconds. "That," he said finally, "is simply my opinion."

"And a damn poor opinion." Ramsey came to his feet, brushed off his knees, for the old warehouse was thick with dust. "Do you think a man walks around in this kind of weather with his shirt pulled open so that someone can step up and pound the death raven into his chest?" And more sarcastically, "Or perhaps he opened his shirt to receive the blow."

"I was only hazarding an opinion." The doctor stiffened. "When I get the body to the morgue, I can tell you definitely the cause of death. At best my examination was cursory, and my opinion only a guess."

"And a very good guess, Doctor." Vee Brown looked at Stern as he pulled up the dead man's sleeves and disclosed the welts upon his arms. "Quite evidently the marks of ropes, Doctor; ropes that bound a live man. It would hardly be necessary to tie up a dead one."

The M.E. looked appreciatively at Brown, said: "There was an abrasion on the neck, too, which might have been from a rope. But I found no signs of violence sufficient to cause death except the nails in the chest. It is quite possible I—" The doctor stopped, picked up his bag, said even more stiffly: "You may remove the body at your convenience."

IT WAS rather gruesome after that. Flashlights popping, men talking in loud voices that echoed dismally about the damp old place.

Over in a corner, Mortimer Doran was slightly irritable when he spoke to Brown; Vee Brown who chose only the cases that interested him, and more than once through his own stubbornness had been dismissed by the D.A. only to be taken back again a half hour later.

Doran said wonderingly: "This is the third body. All three were hacked to death in the same way. And it doesn't

make sense. Good God, Vee, don't you fancy this—this sort of job?"

"He fancies it less the more he sees of it," Ramsey cut in. "Now, what's the mastermind's opinion?"

"Well"—Brown grinned at Ramsey and I turned my head as the body was lifted and carried away—"there's an old French proverb, 'Find the woman.' Then again, Inspector, the killer might be mad since you assure me there's no connection between the three men who met death. Let me see—" And to me, "Tell me again, Dean, who were the other two men?"

"Tony Lazzario. He was a Greek not an Italian; did two stretches in prison, one for stabbing his wife in the chest."

"In the chest, eh? Interesting, but unimportant. The other?"

"The other," I said, "was Hamilton Hawthorne, a broker who was rather well-to-do."

"Yes, I know," Doran cut in quickly. "A friend of Daniel Harrison, one of my assistant district attorneys, Vee. Harrison is slated for a judgeship, you know. So you have been looking into it with Dean Condon."

"Only as an amateur detective does in a book. It was Dean's idea—solving murder from an armchair. I must admit we didn't get very far. But we did discover that there was no possible connection between the Greek of the underworld and the broker of the upper. This one here—his face seemed familiar."

"It was," Ramsey jarred in. "Ned Dorgan. Three-time loser, forger, confidence man."

"Come, Vee," Doran cut in, "Ramsey and I are at our wit's end. If the man isn't mad, there must be a motive. You've been grinning for some time. Have you found a—" And when Brown started to shake his head, "Can't you even suggest a motive?"

"He can't," said Ramsey. "There isn't any."

"I can certainly suggest one." Brown was emphatic. "Of course, it's possible that we have a homicidal maniac with the hobby of hammering ravens onto men's chests. But even he might have a motive."

"And that motive?" Ramsey sneered.

"Simply a warning to others. Where the raven driven so violently into a man's chest might mean nothing to you, it may mean something to someone else."

"But," objected Doran, "these people could not have known each other—at least Hawthorne and Lazzario, the Greek."

"You could verify that and perhaps have." Brown paused. "But the person this warning is sent to might very easily have known both of them, as well as the dead man here. So we have a person who mixed in both the upper and lower circles. You must find the person to whom the warning is sent. That person will know all three of the murdered men and also the significance of the raven."

"And only seven million people in the city," Ramsey sneered.

"Seven million and one"—Brown smiled pleasantly—"and that one is the key to the solution of the crime—Old Doc Raven."

RAMSEY came off the box as though something had exploded beneath it. Mortimer Doran, too, was on his feet. But it was Ramsey who was talking.

"Doc Raven hasn't been mixed up in crime for over ten years. He's been reforming criminals rather than encouraging them. He—" Ramsey paused. And then, "At least that's what the commissioner believes, and what Mr. Doran here believes. Doc Raven has a nest of jail-birds down at his place now. I've wanted to clean them out. That's why we have laws—criminals consorting."

Doran ignored Ramsey's outburst, said to Brown: "By God, Vee, that's unfair—downright injustice to the man. There's nothing but his name, Raven, to connect him with this crime."

"There's not even his name." Brown shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not sure of his right name, though I think it's Thompson—just plain Thompson. Doc Raven is a nickname. Everyone's called him that for years, and if Ramsey here would cease his childish impulse to startle me by stripping down the shirts of dead men, and strip down the shirt of one live man instead, he'd find out where Doc Raven got his name."

"You mean—" Ramsey started, but Vee Brown beat him to the punch.

"I mean," said Brown, "that there is a bird tattooed upon Doc Raven's chest. A bird that gave old Doc Raven his name. A bird which is the spitting image of the bird upon our dead man's chest. Quite correct, gentlemen, a raven—with deep-sunken eyes."

Ramsey was muttering something about a phone, giving sharp orders to a young detective. Mortimer Doran had a hand on Brown's shoulder, gripping it.

"What made you think of this—discover this?"

Brown shook himself free with a quick, vicious little twist of his slender body. He had almost a horror of people placing hands on him. Then he said sarcastically: "Nothing made me think of it. Doc Raven's rather proud of that bird. Had it done in Liverpool years ago when he was a sailor. Will be glad to show it to anyone who—"

"I don't mean that. Damn it, Vee, you're exasperating! I mean Doc Raven's connection with the whole terrible mess." And when Brown didn't answer, "Election's coming on soon and the opposition papers are riding both my office and the

police department. And besides, Hyman Sheridan's raising hell over things."

"Politics, eh? So Hyman Sheridan has his nose in this business."

"Everyone has his nose in it—from the lowest ward-heeler up to Sheridan himself. It's a wonder he hasn't been here already. He's left orders to be called the very next time anything happens. I sent Dan Harrison up after him. He'll be along in a minute."

"Orders?" Brown had a way of pushing up his eyebrows that must have been very annoying.

"He's a citizen," Mortimer Doran stormed. "He has a right to know what is going on." And suddenly, "Hell, Vee, why talk like children. Everyone knows Hyman Sheridan is the big man in the party. He's the man who keeps it together—keeps the wheels oiled."

"I guess he keeps more than the wheels oiled." Brown stopped, listened, and then, "From the pleasant, ingratiating voices of the police, I'd make a guess that your friend, Sheridan, is here."

HYMAN SHERIDAN strode into the warehouse followed by the placid, ruddy-faced assistant D.A., Dan Harrison. I had never met Sheridan before. He was a tall angular man with an abrupt way of getting his words out.

There is little use in going into his life. He came up from the "streets of the city." His career—from newsboy to power in politics—has been hashed over and over by the newspapers and a dozen different magazines. He spoke to Doran in a loud booming voice and I think he was the first man I ever heard call the district attorney, "Mort."

"Mort"—he hammered out the words with a gruff sort of friendliness that had all the ear-marks of direct honesty—"I don't like this thing a bit. Not one damn bit! The papers are raising—" He

paused, pulled the cigar from between his thick lips, pointed it at Vee and said: "Brown, eh? The killer detective who gets his man. Well, what are you going to do, Mr. Killer Brown?"

"About what?" Vee came no higher than the political leader's armpits.

"What?" Sheridan stormed. "These damned raven murders. This maniac who hammers a bird into people's chests."

"Maniac and hammers, eh?" Brown rubbed his chin. "You seem very well informed, Mr. Sheridan."

"I am. I am. Too damned well informed." He glared down at Vee, his eyes little points of steel. "It's this raven killing I want stopped—and stopped now."

"If that's all that's worrying you, why I'll clean it up before election."

"Damned if I don't believe you will." Sheridan seemed to study Brown with shrewd appraising eyes. "It's a mad-man?"

"Perhaps. A man mad with fear that the power he has, and the future power he will grab, will be taken from his grasp."

Hyman Sheridan started to speak, stopped. There was an angry glint in his eyes that faded almost at once. When he did speak it was to Mortimer Doran. He said: "I don't want to interfere with your department or the police department. This Vee Brown is a cocky little rascal and there's no doubt he's done some good work. Turn him loose on these raven murders; give him full play. But"—his cigar came out of his mouth—"let the police force stick to it just the same. It's hell, Mort—it's just hell."

Hyman Sheridan turned in the doorway, popped the cigar once more and growled: "We're going to give this city a clean, decent administration whether they want it or not." And he tramped out of the warehouse with Dan Harrison on his heels; Dan Harrison who knew enough not to open his mouth.

MORTIMER DORAN stared after them, avoided Brown's glance, said: "That's a bright lad, Dan Harrison. Going places some day."

"Bright enough to camp on the tail of Hyman Sheridan anyway."

"Look here, Vee—" Mortimer Doran started, but Brown cut in on him.

"Are you or Dan Harrison going to try that Cronk Elliot case? Harrison has been doing some pretty good work lately—stealing your thunder."

Doran said: "I'm trying that case myself."

"Are you going to try it now or after election?"

"What do you mean by that?" the D.A. demanded. "There are times, Brown, when you go too far."

"I mean," said Vee, "isn't it true that Cronk Elliot says that if he's 'railroaded to jail', a big shot will take the jolt with him?"

"God!" said Doran. "They all say that—all threaten something like that."

"In this case doesn't he threaten Hyman Sheridan?"

Doran's hands came far apart. "I've heard that, too, heard it dozens of times. They all know someone who knows Hyman Sheridan or who has something on him. Elliot's a big shot in his line—a very big one. The charge is not so serious. He didn't threaten Sheridan."

"Any other cases?" And when Doran started to shake his head, "Any murder case—big or small."

"Well, Frank Whitey. It's an open-and-shut affair. Harrison is trying it. Whitey killed a waiter in a hold-up. Not much of a criminal, Whitey. Has a cheap lawyer—cheap friends."

Brown shook his head. "Back to the Elliot case then. You say it's in the bag?"

"In the bag." Doran nodded. "Star witness and that sort of stuff. I've got

the lad who'll put the finger on Elliot safe in Europe."

"Ah!" Brown exclaimed. "He may be too safe. He may not come back from Europe."

"What would prevent him?"

"The outline of a raven hammered into lead men's chests," Vee said easily.

"That's rather far-fetched, isn't it?"

"All crime is far-fetched."

"Well, we won't have to wait long now. Ramsey telephoned the boys to pick up Doc Raven. They'll work what information we need out of him.

Brown shook his head. "You would hardly expect Doc Raven to go around knocking imitations of his own decoration on men's chests. No, he may be very proud of that bird, but hardly enough to advertise it quite so forcibly. Doc Raven is simply the connecting link. The man who sends these messages of death knows that the one receiving them will recognize them. The murderer, the dead men, the person who is being warned, all in some way are connected with the raven on Doc Raven's chest."

"Well, the Doc will tell us about it. He'll know if any living man does."

"Any living one." Brown looked toward the ceiling. "But here's Ramsey now. As usual he's the bearer of unpleasant news."

Ramsey was. He panted out the words as if he had run from the nearest telephone booth. "Doc Raven's gone. Hasn't been seen since a week ago last Tuesday."

"A week ago last Tuesday," Doran gasped. "That was the day of the first murder. You think—"

"Think, hell," said Ramsey. "I know. Flannery reported the boys around his place say he acted like a madman before he left—didn't even stop to take a hat or coat."

"Well"—Doran turned on Brown—"what do you think of that?"

Vee's eyes knitted.

"I must admit," he said slowly, "I don't know what to think of that. But Ramsey must admit also that he doesn't know what to think of it—or anything else for that matter. Come on, Dean."

CHAPTER TWO

Crossing the Bar

WONG, our Chinese servant, let us into our penthouse atop one of the city's finest apartment houses. It was close to ten o'clock and Wong was profuse in his description of the young lady who had called in our absence. He said: "One minute very erect important lady who did million-dollar walk up and down room. Next moment lady of the night who creep cat-walk back and forth."

Vee grinned. "So she put on a show for you, Wong."

"Yes, but she not know she did. I watch by wrong crack in door. When my presence is there she is grand lady. She was grand lady when she explain she unable wait longer."

"No message, no promise to return? All right, Wong." And when Wong was gone, "We'll meet her again, Dean. A woman in fear who came on impulse. Time discouraged her much as time discourages the child in a dentist's waiting-room. But you want to talk about our raven deaths. I don't mind telling you they interest me greatly."

"Then you're going to work on it?" I had been eager to get Vee to solve this case ever since the first body was found and he had shaken his head and told the D.A. he wouldn't even consider it.

Now he dropped into a chair and threw back his head. "Good old stupid Dean. No wonder I appear clever enough to fool the others. It's in contrast to you that they must see me. Going to work on the case! Why, I've been working on

it for days. So you think I was wasting my time playing silly guessing games with you?"

"Then it interested you from the beginning?"

"It did not. It was my music—that damned song. It goes like this—" He paused, shook his head. "I've got it running now. It was the raven murders that did it. Music and murder—murder and music. Each brings me the solution of the other."

"But you suspect someone—a woman? You spoke of a woman. Was there any definite indication—"

Brown laughed. "I just threw the woman in for Ramsey's benefit or perhaps just my own amusement. But crimes of such fantastic violence do generally involve a woman."

"Then you don't really know anything?" I was disappointed and showed it. "Haven't you any ideas?"

"Ideas! God in Heaven, Dean, if I let my imagination go I'd have hundreds of ideas and be arresting or shooting half the city of New York. There's Hyman Sheridan for instance."

"Vee—" I said. "You couldn't suspect him—not seriously. Oh, I know you don't like him. But he's far too big a man and too old a one to start murder."

"Why?" he snapped back at me. "There is no age to start murder. And there is no man too great to go in for killing. Hyman Sheridan is a great power. All his life he fought for that power. Now—suppose a single thing out of his past arises to tear that power from him. He must act at once to save himself. He must maim and destroy and kill. Take one look at Hyman Sheridan. What would life be to him without that power? Besides, how do we know that what threatens his power may not also threaten his life. Would he kill to protect both? Bah

—you talk like a child, Dean! He'd kill in a second—in a split second."

"But like that; the horrible blood-soaked raven. Vee, you can't believe it. It would be easy enough to check up where a man of such importance was at the time of these deaths. A dozen people would know."

HE GOT up and paced the room. "Would they? They don't, Dean. No one knows. Of course I can't go directly to such a man and ask him point blank where he was. Though I threw out my line tonight."

"You—you hinted then when you spoke of power."

"Did I?" Lips twisted whimsically at an angle. "But I wasn't thinking of that. I was just letting him know that I was on the job and that I'd find the man. If he is the man it's up to him to strike; strike at me."

"But why?" I demanded. "Doran's been hot on this thing. Ramsey, too—and no one has struck at them."

"Why?" he echoed in surprise. "When I go after a man I get him. You know that—the murderer knows that."

"Vee"—I just blurted the words out; I couldn't help it—"you're the most conceited man I've ever met."

"Nonsense." He looked at me quizzically. "Doesn't the criminal fear me? Is this murderer any different than a thousand others? Conceited! God, man, I'm downright noble!" And for the life of me I couldn't tell if he was kidding or not. "Don't I offer myself as the sacrifice, as the human bait that will draw this murderer to me?"

"And you honestly believe Hyman Sheridan is the man?"

"No, I don't. But I don't believe he isn't, either. Nor do I believe that the criminal, mad or sane, if he has not already completed his purpose, will continue

with it once he knows that I'm on the case. He'll arrange to kill me first."

"And what will you do?" I couldn't keep the irony out of my voice.

Vee Brown lit a cigarette, smiled at me. "I'll shoot him to death, of course," he said simply.

I don't know what I might have answered then if the phone hadn't rung. It was Mortimer Doran. He didn't ask for Brown but spoke quickly to me. "Tell Vee to get down here at once. There's been another murder. . . . Yes, another body. It'll be a surprise to him."

I turned and relayed Doran's message to Brown. It was like him not to get up and come to the phone. In his place I would have jumped forward and torn it from my hand.

"It won't be a surprise to me," Vee contradicted while I held the wire. "Tell Doran I know. This time there was no need to hammer the raven into the victim's chest. The dead man is Doc Raven himself."

Doran's laugh was not pleasant when I told him. He said: "Tell Vee to read his detective books some more. This time it's a woman."

Vee came out of the chair now all right. But it was the D.A. who wasn't interested when he grabbed the phone. Doran had hung up.

"God!" Vee was grabbing up his coat and hat as he talked. "I might have known; might have guessed that. It was the woman who was here this evening."

For the second time in a few minutes, Vee was wrong. But we didn't know it then, and didn't find it out until much later.

IT MUST have been an hour after Vee had left that the phone rang again. I recognized the voice at once. It was Chester Lathrope whom I had known but slightly at college and associated with even

less since leaving it. My greeting was not very cordial for the only calls I had received from Lathrope within the last year or two were requests for loans, the amounts of which were now growing smaller and smaller as he went further and further down the grade. Drink and women mostly, though there was talk of bad checks at the club before he dropped out.

"It's not a touch, Dean." He must have guessed I was going to hang up, for he got the words in quickly. "It's worse than that or better perhaps. I'm in a blue funk. It's Vee Brown I want." And when I told him stiffly that Brown was out, "Great God, man, you don't understand! It isn't money with me tonight—it's a terrible fear. These raven murders. Don't you understand? Can't you understand? I saw the killer tonight. The Raven! I saw him just after he drove that thing into a young girl's chest." A long pause while I frantically clicked the wire and then, "Get Vee Brown. It's my life now, for I think the killer saw me."

I was as excited as he was when he told me he'd know the man's face again, and that he knew his name. But he wouldn't tell me his name, kept asking for Brown and his voice began to tremble.

"I'm in a saloon, in a telephone booth. I'm afraid to leave the place and I'm afraid not to. Have Brown come here. No, no, no"—his voice grew shrill—"I won't tell you the name. Come and get me out of here. Come, but get word to Brown where you're coming. I won't leave until he comes. God, you're no better than I am! They've been watching me at the bar I think. I'm afraid they'll hear me talking now. Though what difference it would make to these people I don't know."

Then he threw the bomb that made me assure him I'd be there as soon as possible.

"The saloon's all right," he was saying. "Cheap dive for a fellow like you who's stayed on the top, but good enough. It's the outside I fear. And they put a guy out who can't pay, and don't permit sleepers at the tables. Better bring a couple of detectives with you or Inspector Ramsey." A long moment there while I sucked in my breath. "Or maybe I'd better call Ramsey. Do you know his home number? I tried headquarters."

The idea had entered my head at first that the whole thing was a fake and that he simply wanted to get me down there to borrow money. But now all suspicion and unfriendliness went out of my voice. The whole police force was seeking the raven killer and Ramsey would give his right arm to find the murderer before Brown. No, I couldn't let Vee down that way.

So I assured Lathrope that I would start right away, made a careful note of the address he gave me, far over near the river on the East Side. I advised him to go easy on the liquor, and to tell them a friend was coming who would pay for what he'd had. Then I hung up and was dashing for my hat and coat, shoving a .38 into my pocket.

I thought of the note for Brown, and wrote exactly where I was going and why, hesitated, tore up the note and scribbled simply that I was to meet Lathrope at a cheap saloon. Then I put down the address and finished with the instructions that Vee was to come there as he would "learn something to his advantage."

A mistake that sort of note? Yes, I knew that later. But in a way it was Brown's fault. Suppose I wrote him the truth and he came there and Lathrope had nothing worth while. But then you don't know how it is to be the butt of Vee Brown's derision. If things turned out well I might do a bit of crowing of my own. As a matter of fact I might even know the name of the raven killer and be

back in the penthouse with my information when Vee arrived.

I PASSED up a taxi for the subway. Partly because of speed, and partly because the address told me that a taxi would be unusual, perhaps even suspicious in such a neighborhood.

In the subway I had pleasant thoughts. I'd pay Lathrope's bill, give him a few more drinks, slip him a couple of dollars, promise to take care of him, then get the name of the Raven out of him. I pictured myself sipping brandy and soda in our comfortable living-room when Brown came in. I even imagined myself sticking my pipe in my mouth, lifting a book from the shelf much as Brown did when he wanted to be particularly provoking, then closing it up after a moment and saying: "Oh—by the way, Vee, if you haven't finished up on those raven murders I might give you the name of the killer."

But the picture was not at all pretty, as I left the subway and walked down that dirty dismal block. Then I had other thoughts—wild ones they seemed—of Lathrope being in with the raven murderer and trapping me to my death. But I dismissed that with a shake of my head. Lathrope never met a criminal in his life. Lathrope never—

I saw the cop. A great hulk of a man standing there on the corner by the curb as if he expected to be attacked any minute. And what's more as if he'd welcome the attack if it came. I had misgivings then, but I thought of Vee's dislike of the police and of the riding he'd give me, and passed by without a word.

The place itself was not so terrifying. Dull lights burned through dirty glass. Two or three people sat about tables in the very front of the saloon. A single man leaned against the outside of the bar.

I buttoned my coat, felt of the gun in

my right-hand overcoat pocket, pushed open the door and went in.

The big bruiser who was leaning over the bar never looked up. Two men at a table turned, cast curious and perhaps envious eyes at my attire and sank their faces into their beer. The bartender in a clean white coat was wiping the bar. Certainly aside from the vermin that must have infested it and the possible disease germs that might have lurked in the glasses, there was nothing alarming about the place.

The bartender flopped his rag down on the bar as I leaned against it and without a single look at me said: "Beer?"

"Yes." I watched him draw it from the tap, rub the foam off and fill it up again. Then he set it before me. I looked along the bar toward a door and casually inquired: "Back room, eh?"

He didn't speak right away, just stared at me; noted that my hat was new and well shaped, that the topcoat was expensive and neatly tailored; even took in my tie, I think. Then he said: "Tables for ladies. Entrance on the side. Gents alone are served here. Nosey guy?"

"No." I smiled and then, "I was looking for a friend. Lathrope—Chester Lathrope."

"Oh—him." He turned his head toward the huge, unshaven man said: "He's looking for Lathrope, Jake. Must be one of them guys Lathrope's been beefing about—going to do things to him if he's put out." And turning back to me as the big man fingered his small glass of amber-colored liquid, "Well, you'll get a chance at Lathrope if he don't come across—a buck eighty-five."

I saw the opportunity to make myself solid with the house.

"I don't want to take Lathrope out if he's here," I said and took a five and tossed it across the bar. "That's for what

he owes—and what he may want. I'm his friend."

The bartender picked up the five, held it to the light. There was a pleased, yet sort of comical expression on his face. He jerked his head toward the big man. "Have a look, Jake. Some friend. Take him to Lathrope. This is the lad he was expecting all right."

I knew and I didn't know. That is, I knew too late. Jake moved slightly down the bar, but he wasn't looking at me; wasn't looking at me even when his huge body spun and his right hand gripped mine and held it there. But I did know when the bartender leaned over the bar and jerked his wrist. Something black that was held by a strap to his wrist slipped into his hand.

After that the flying blackjack—quick, sure, yet unhurried. Lights in my head, sagging knees, the twist to my body as I was half shoved, half carried and twirled by the enormous Jake into a room directly across from the bar. I could still see the bartender leaning on the bar, wiping it methodically as a door closed. Then blackness, as I was hurled across the room.

CHAPTER THREE

Voice of the Raven

THERE was no blackness inside my head. In fact there was too much light. Dancing sparks of fire, but an unpleasant clearness; a clearness that I had not only been fool enough to trap myself but, fool enough to trap Vee Brown. I was staggering to my feet when I heard the sudden jar above the door, and the lights went on. I looked up where the jar came from and knew what that meant. A heavy wooden transom had closed above the door. I could see the thickness of it and the lines where it did not quite fit.

The big unshaven man was coming toward me in great strides when I thought

of my gun. I shoved my hand into my pocket, realized it wasn't there, and he hit me on the chin.

A voice said: "That will do, Jake. Mr. Condon is harmless—quite harmless."

Then I hit the wall and slid down it to a sitting position.

The voice spoke again, and I could not locate it. "Mr. Condon has been kind enough, I hope, to lead our esteemed little friend, Detective Vee Brown, to our place." And just as I thought I had located that voice behind a curtain, "Ah, I see you have found Mr. Lathrope whom you came to meet."

And I had. I was staring in horror at Chester Lathrope or what was left of him. His body was sprawled there in a chair. His coat was off, his shirt a mass of bloody threads. His bulging eyes were alive—or dead rather—with terror.

Even though that caved-in chest must have been struck a terrific blow, I felt more than saw the blood-soaked outline of the raven there beneath the shirt. I knew that the voice came from behind a curtain and that the voice was that of the killer. It was soft like a woman's, yet it was a man's voice—cleverly disguised. As if the man held a handkerchief to his mouth while he talked.

And all the time he talked something creaked; creaked dismally and steadily in that room.

"You really musn't blame Mr. Lathrope, Mr. Condon," the voice went on. "He was, to a certain extent, telling you the truth on the phone. He was invited in here for a drink, a gun stuck in his back, and he was ordered to give you the message he did. I had discovered he knew you at one time. And I discovered he was in the habit of borrowing money. I'll say this for him, the offer of money was not what made him call you. It was fear—just fear. Poor fellow. He died like that simply to add color to my plans. One

more or less would hardly matter now.

"Jake—the ceiling light. Mr. Condon must have his fun. You know he joined up with his friend, Vee Brown, for the thrill of it." And the voice suddenly growing harsh, almost guttural behind the curtain at the end of the room, "Tonight he shall not be disappointed. That's right!" This last as the sudden glare from a light in the ceiling nearly blinded me. "Look, Mr. Dean Condon—the ladder nearest me first. That one is for you."

I did look but did not understand. I saw simply an ordinary step ladder; one of the high strong ones which are found in almost any private house. Its legs were spread wide apart; its supporting bar firmly in place, bracing it. From the ceiling above the ladder and suspended from a strong hook was a thick length of rope, and to that rope was attached a square of cardboard. I read the name upon it—*DEAN CONDON*.

Then the second ladder, identical with the first, but this time the square of cardboard on the dangling rope read—*VEE BROWN*.

I heard the creak again—steady—steady. Then I saw the third ladder. And the legs of this ladder were not spread far apart and braced with the strips of metal. Its legs were pressed tightly together as if it were ready to be put away in a closet. Then what balanced it upright upon the floor? This was the creaking I had heard. I could see that ladder moving back and forth—back and forth—and groaning as it moved.

IRAN my eye slowly up it—very slowly. I saw the top; the shoes there; shoes that were worn by small feet—a woman's feet. And I saw the legs above those feet and then—

God in Heaven! I saw it and I think I cried out. The woman's hands were tied behind her back, but her feet were free.

It was with her feet that she steadied that ladder; kept it creaking back and forth. Kept it creaking that way so that it would not topple from under her, throw her from her precarious perch and— Yes, and leave her hanging by her neck from the ceiling.

For where the rope held a square of cardboard above the other two ladders, above this one the rope encircled a human throat. The least misstep, and that bound and gagged woman would twist and twirl and strangle to death.

Doubly cruel was the fact that her toes just barely settled on that ladder. It was horribly and viciously brutal and I had to gasp in admiration at the courage of the woman who kept her feet so steady as she balanced the ladder which kept her alive.

If she were beautiful or not I could not tell. Her eyes were round and steady and although for a moment they settled on mine, I saw neither fear nor terror in them. Just a determination as she tried to bend her head and keep her eyes upon her feet. And all the time her breath came in gasps through dilated nostrils.

The voice said: "You admire her courage, Condon?" And there was a quick change from the light mocking softness, as if the man hated the woman, hated her for her courage. "Well, Mr. Condon, you are next. We'll see if Vee Brown finds you swaying back and forth, clinging to the slightest chance of life as the woman does, or if he finds you swinging gently and pleasantly on the end of the rope without a care or a worry. Jake!"

I fought, at least I tried to fight, but I don't think I reached my feet before the blow struck me. Things were clear—always clear; no merciful blackness. I think I started to scream when my hands were bound behind my back, but I saw the woman then. The girl and the ladder swaying and creaking and her little feet balancing it, and I didn't scream.

I struggled though, against the gag, and

was cracked on the head. This time a very short period of blackness before I started to struggle again. Then I didn't struggle. I remained perfectly still.

The voice was saying: "Come, come, Condon, be half a man. The ladder hasn't even been pushed together and you're getting ready to fly off."

I didn't move but froze just as I was. My feet—just the balls of them—barely reached the top of that ladder. My hands were bound behind my back. A gag was in my mouth. But most of all a rope was about my neck; a short length of rope that was attached to a strong hook in the ceiling.

The slightest movement on my part meant death by strangulation. And in another moment, a lack of movement or the wrong movement on my part meant death just the same, for the voice was saying: "That's fine, Jake. Now—fold up the ladder. Slowly. I don't want his death to be on my hands." Then a short laugh as Jake moved forward.

My eyes popped and I cried out inwardly, for no sound came from my gagged mouth. My legs trembled. I felt this was the end. My eyes were riveted on a large flat-headed hammer in the corner. A hammer with a long handle and the head of—yes, of bloody nails. I knew then and I didn't know. Things whirled so. But I thought of the girl and set myself, tried to bite into the gag, tried to keep the fear from my bulging eyes.

And Jake gripped the ladder.

A DOOR creaked. The ladder began to scrape across the floor, stopped, steadied itself. The voice spoke. There was a sharpness in it, but it was still soft, muffled. There was an eagerness in the voice now, and excitement.

It said: "Let him be, Jake. I just got word that Vee Brown has left the subway and started down the block. No, no,

I don't want Condon dead—yet." A queer, nervous, almost hysterical, stifled laugh. "I want him to have the thrill of seeing the master detective step into the trap he set for him. Vee Brown is coming alone. Careful with him, Jake; very careful with this Vee Brown."

Jake laughed. "Little runt, eh? O. K., boss. It will go off just the same."

"Right—right." The voice could not keep the tremor out of it. "Lights out. Transom open. Condon may watch Brown's coming just as the girl watched his coming. The stage is set."

There was a click and the ceiling light went out. Another click and the lamp by the wall faded. Complete darkness. Then a thump as the transom opened. I was looking straight down into light; straight down at the bar through that broad opening above the door. And the picture I saw was the same picture I had seen when I had walked to my death—the death to come—less than half an hour before.

There were the two men drinking beer in the front. I could make out their figures in the dirty mirror behind the bar. There was Jake. I could see his elbow on the bar, his crouching figure in the mirror. And there, too, was the bartender, laboriously rubbing down the bar. But he wasn't so sure of himself as he had been before. Twice I saw him flip the blackjack from the wide sleeve of his spotless white coat. He seemed nervous and glanced toward the door. Certainly he was not the same man who had leaned almost indifferently over that bar and pounded the leaded leather upon my head.

Jake slid down the bar and spoke to him. Distinctly I heard the words as if some invisible wire brought them to me.

"Not nervous—not nervous about a little runt, eh Willie?"

The bartender coughed. "Nervous? Not me. But if I knew who his nibs was—"

He jerked a thumb toward the door below the transom.

"I know," Jake said, "and that's enough. Let's see you go through the flip again—like it was just a dummy."

I shuddered. It was all one single mechanical motion of the blackjack this time, perfect in its timing.

Jake grinned evilly, nodded, took up his glass and moved slightly down the bar and waited. I waited too; waited for the fall of feet I did not hear. Then the street door opened. I saw it; saw it in the glass behind the bar, just as you might look at a moving picture when the camera is out of focus.

Vee Brown had entered the bar, was coming straight down it to the death to which I had led him. I saw him plainly now as his shadow passed out of the mirror and entered into my direct vision. He was humming softly.

When he spoke his voice was loud and clear and pleasant, no worry in it. He said: "Good evening. Ah, I see you anticipate my needs—a beer. I've come looking for a friend."

"Yeah?" The bartender came down the bar to where Vee stood. He acted almost as he had with me, but for the split-second glance he tossed at the huge form of Jake sprawled across the bar.

"What's this friend look like?" The bartender tried to make his voice surly but somehow, despite the twist to his lips, he looked nervous, even frightened, and I saw Jake raise his head, half turn it, then slip a hand into his pocket. Vee was right. His name stood for something. It stood for fear.

"His name"—Vee half lifted the glass of beer which was a mistake, of course, but then he couldn't know that—"is Dean Condon. That's a lovely white coat you're wearing this evening, bartender."

CHAPTER FOUR

Beer and Bullets

JAKE had already started down the bar toward Vee and I saw that his right hand which had been empty now held something black. A gun? Yes. And I—I thought that I might help Vee, if it wasn't too late. I had brought him to his death. I was to die anyway. I had been glad when Jake had pushed the ladder apart again. Now I wished he hadn't. I could kick it from under me, let it fall to the floor with a crash that might warn Vee.

Now—I didn't know. The ladder might simply slide along the floor unless I could get my foot beneath the broad top and kick it over. The scraping sound itself would serve no purpose; simply force me into hanging myself. I tried, desperately tried, to get my foot beneath the top of that ladder, nearly strangled myself doing it. And all the time my eyes were glued upon Jake, the bartender, and the small back of Vee there by the bar.

"That's a lovely white coat you've got," Vee said again.

There didn't seem to be much sense in that remark. It surprised both the man behind the bar and Jake as much as it did me, for Jake paused, and the bartender spoke.

"What do you mean—that crack about the coat?"

"I mean," said Vee, "just as they meant in the old melodrama. The jig's up unless you produce Mr. Condon and—"

It happened. The bartender's wrist jerked quickly and the blackjack flashed. Jake stepped forward and his gun came up.

After that there were two shots; two shots and a broken beer glass upon the bar. I can't describe it more. I don't know that I saw more. Just Vee's sudden sideways and backward movement, and the two darts of yellow-blue flame.

The bartender's blackjack stayed for a moment in the air before he crashed behind the bar. Jake's lunge forward was broken as if a battering ram had hit his chest. I can't explain it. Just Vee Brown with the smoking guns, one in either hand, and two dead men—the one behind the bar and the one before it.

I could see how still Jake lay. I knew that he was dead. Willie, the bartender, I couldn't see, yet somehow I knew—just as if I had looked down at his face—that he, too, was dead.

And Vee? Crouched there against the bar like some animal on the kill, he raised his right hand and drew a bead on the two figures who had jumped from the table in the front and were darting to the street.

I saw his burning eyes, heard him mutter: "The rats deserting the sinking ship." I even saw his finger tighten, for his knuckles whitened. But he didn't shoot. He straightened, looked around and spotted the door almost at once.

"Dean," he called, and then louder, "Dean Con—" He broke off in the middle of my last name, listened, and I think he heard the creaking sound. Suddenly he dug a hand into his pocket, produced a small flashlight, and the next moment I was blinded with its light as he directed it through the transom and into my face.

I couldn't see his face then, but as he dropped the torch I did. It was distorted with rage and hate—and horror. Vee thought I was dead, thought I was hanging there. He thought—

The next moment he had flung open the door and was in the room. I saw his flash dart quickly about, heard the click of the light button and finally his sigh of relief.

I did everything a gagged and bound man could do to attract his attention to that curtain. And he did follow my eyes, for he tore the curtains apart, pulling one of them entirely from its fastenings.

I saw the open door behind the curtain, heard Vee close it, and turn the key in the lock. Then he was up that ladder, supporting me in his arms, cutting the rope from above my head, tearing the gag from my lips and setting my arms free.

"The girl—the girl," I cried. "She may have been there for hours, while I—"

"While you are my friend, Dean, who has damn near strangled himself already."

I GUESS I helped him get the girl down. At least I think I did. And I remember saying something to him about the Raven and that the men outside would be coming back.

"Hell, no!" Vee was emphatic. "They were cheap hoods at best. I gave the two dead men their chances, Dean." This as we carried the girl across the room and placed her on the curtain he had dragged down. "You remember the crack about the coat? Unless they talked then it meant death. They wanted death. They got it."

"What did the coat have to do with it?"

"The coat! It gave away the whole show. Borrowed for the occasion, I suppose. It was the only clean thing about the place. A dead give-away, Dean. I knew you were dead or in trouble the moment I came in and saw it."

Vee locked the front door of the saloon and pulled down the shades. Then he got water for the girl and held her head while she drank it. She tried to talk but evidently couldn't—just queer gurgling sounds in her throat.

Vee listened to all I had to tell him, nodded his head, finally spoke.

"The doors are very heavy for such a place. I don't think the shots were heard outside and I believe the two beer drinkers were simply set-ups. If there was a man outside to watch for your coming and mine he also could be used to keep cus-

tomers away." He stepped toward the bar, lifted Jake's gun and handed it to me. "I want to be ahead of Ramsey on this thing, Dean. Use the gun to protect yourself and the girl, and to see that she doesn't run away on us. I'll look the place over. There's no longer any danger. I have two dead men lying outside. It's surprising what a quieting effect a couple of corpses have on criminals with homicidal tendencies. Take care of the woman."

Then he was out the door to the bar closing it behind him.

With the gun in my hand I sat down beside the woman and bathed her head, wiped the blood from it. She wasn't exactly beautiful but there was character in her face. Character for good or for evil I couldn't tell. She had great black eyes, just as black as Vee Brown's. They stared unblinkingly at me. At length she spoke.

"Water," she said, and when I gave it to her, "That was Brown—Vee Brown, the killer detective."

I never liked that description of Vee. I said: "That was Detective Vee Brown." And less stiffly, "He did kill tonight. To save you and save me."

I couldn't tell from her voice if she were of the night or a girl you'd meet in one of the homes uptown. Her age? Well, twenty-five or even less.

She gulped the water and I listened to Vee's feet outside; listened and waited. As I sat there with the gun in my hand, the girl braced herself by both hands and pushed her back against the wall.

She said—and I thought with some difficulty: "You were very kind, Mr. Condon, very kind indeed. If you had not come I would have gone through the tortures of the damned before—I'm sorry to have caused you this terrible trouble."

"It was, you who were brave," I encouraged her. "And don't think about the trouble. If Vee Brown discovers something from it why—"

"But it isn't that. It's my being ungrateful. The trouble I am going to cause you now is what bothers me."

"Nonsense." I half waved the gun and she did it.

She shot out her foot—out and up. The toe of her shoe caught me squarely on the wrist and sent the gun skyrocketing across the room. She was on her feet too, almost as soon as I was, and we both started toward that gun.

SHE fooled me completely. I never would have thought of dashing for the gun if she had not started in that direction. Why, she was just a slip of a thing who had been through hell, and there would have been little difficulty in grabbing and holding her. But her sudden dash as if for the gun confused me. I hurled her aside, felt her foot crash against mine and diving forward I had the gun; had it and swung. Swung to realize fully how she had taken me in.

I turned with the gun in my hand. Turned in time to see her open the door by which the raven killer had left; open it and close it behind her. I saw Vee enter the other door just as I reached the one she had passed through. I grabbed the knob.

"I'm quite sure, Dean, that pursuit is useless," Vee said. "You will find the door locked on the outside. The key was on the inside only a few minutes ago, but not now."

He was right—the key was gone.

"Lord, Vee," I tried to explain. "After we saved her life I didn't think—"

"The sentence is quite complete." His voice was hard, and there was disappointment in it. "You didn't think, Dean. Indeed you didn't."

I told him about the hammer being there, the nails in it, and that the killer must have carried it away. "It seemed small, Vee, very small to do so much dam-

age. I couldn't tell if it contained the head of the raven. It was—was red."

"Blood, eh?"

He jerked his thumb toward the body of Lathrope beneath the curtain I had thrown over it. "Well, it could be small. It's a raven not an eagle, you know. Doc Stern tells me the nails must be very thin and sharpened to razor-like points on the end. Digs right through the chest wall." He paused, cursed softly. "After all, I suppose I must have the police in. I was wondering if we should mention the girl."

"We'll have to, Vee. After all you can't do that and—"

"Why not?" he snapped. "After such a harrowing experience you could easily forget her presence. As for me—I was struck with horror and—and—" He stood looking up at the ropes. "God, Dean, do you suppose the girl was a fake?"

"A fake! You must be mad. To stand there like that—balance herself like that. It was the most remarkable act of courage I ever saw."

"Wasn't it!" he nodded. "That's what made me wonder. You see, Dean, the rope that was around your neck had a slip knot. The ladder goes, the rope tightens, and blooey—no more Dean."

"Yes, I know." I ran a hand inside my collar. "And no more girl either."

Vee Brown's laugh echoed dismally in the small room. "The rope around the girl's neck was tied in its own loop, tied so that even the weight of the girl's body suddenly put upon it would not loosen that knot. You understand what that means? It means the girl would have hung so—much as she was hanging. But she would not have strangled. Dangled for a bit perhaps—or perhaps not. Her head might have slipped through the hole and she would have fallen to the floor."

"You mean—" I gasped. "Mean that she would not have been hurt at all?"

"Certainly not fatally and probably not

at all. She was rather nimble with her legs."

"But why put on a show like that for us when we were to die?"

"That's the part I don't understand." He stroked his chin. "Certainly we were to die. There could very easily be another reason, Dean, and the little lady was just as brave as you thought her. She might not have known of the knot."

"But why all that if she was not to die?"

"Perhaps," said Vee, "this Raven could not kill her, dare not kill her. Perhaps he let her think she was to die as we were to die. Perhaps she was to live because he wanted something from her. Information that she held—that she would not give. Yes, I'm inclined to believe in the little lady. She was threatened with a death they dare not give her."

"Dare not give her?"

"Certainly." Vee twisted the corners of his lips. "We hear too often of those who know too much to live. Now, we find the thing reversed. The girl knew too much to die. Evidence of some kind; information she might leave behind. Come, we'll give Doran and Ramsey a buzz and hustle right uptown. I'd like to know where our political wizard, Hyman Sheridan, spent the last few hours."

"You're still on that—" I started and stopped. Vee was out by the bar, slipping a nickle in the slot in the dirty telephone booth.

After a while I heard him say: "That's right, Ramsey. One with the raven on his chest, and two others just as dead. . . . Certainly, I killed them. . . . You astound me, Inspector, to curse in the presence of the dead."

After that he called Doran, talked for a few moments and came whistling from the booth, walked leisurely behind the bar, drew two glasses of beer, and plac-

ing one on the bar before me sipped the other slowly.

"It's not bad beer, Dean. I had a taste of it just before the boys got playful. The poor get the best of things after all." And rubbing the foam from his lips, "There, there, Dean, I'd feel the same about things as you do if I let myself go. After all, death is a business with the undertaker, the policeman, yes, even the writer of songs. Come. This is not a house of motion-picture horrors. No one will steal the bodies while our backs are turned, and if they did, they are welcome to them. We'd better go now, before Ramsey comes."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Man from Liverpool

VEE didn't talk until after we found the taxi and neither did I. He wanted to think I guess, and I didn't. I just wanted to forget. Uptown Vee ordered the taxi driver to go straight to Sheridan's big house close to the Drive. We were almost there when I saw her.

"Vee, Vee," I cried clutching at his arm. "Look—a woman—a girl. She's gone in a car."

Vee Brown called to the driver. The car stopped and we were on the sidewalk almost at once. But the car was gone, the tail-light turning onto the Drive a hundred yards down the street.

"Did you see her?" I asked Vee when the taxi had gone and we stood two doors down from the four-story Sheridan house.

"Yes, I saw her." Vee nodded in agreement. "I know what you're thinking, Dean. Could you swear on the stand that it was the girl on the ladder?"

"No, of course not," I told him indignantly. "It was just on my mind."

"Ah." Vee shook his head. "You don't know the number of women who are on Hyman Sheridan's mind." And half hope-

fully, half jokingly, "But you couldn't swear it wasn't the woman either."

And when we mounted the steps and stood in the vestibule looking at the dim lights behind the double doors with glass in the top, I asked: "What do you want to find out from Hyman Sheridan?"

The door was opening even as Vee spoke.

"Ah—good evening, Mr. Sheridan. You keep late hours."

Sheridan, fully dressed, peered steadily at us. "Brown, eh? Detective Vee Brown. About the raven killings? Yes, I heard. It was a young girl tonight."

"That's right." Brown shoved his way in and I followed. "But not the young girl who just left your house. Fortunate that I know her quite well."

"Indeed," said Hyman Sheridan as he led the way into a library and snapped on light. "How interesting."

After that silence while Hyman Sheridan walked across the room, passed behind a large flat desk, turned a swivel chair and sat down easily in it. For a full minute he sat and looked at us. Then he pulled a humidor across the desk, opened it slowly and took out a large cigar. All the time he kept his eyes on Vee.

He bit off the end of the cigar, lifted it from between his teeth with thumb and forefinger of his left hand, placed it carefully in the ash tray before lighting it. He puffed several times, leaned far back in the chair, folded his arms across his chest and spoke to Vee. "Just why am I indebted to you for this visit?"

Vee answered almost at once. And his answer brought the stolid, supposedly imperturbable Hyman Sheridan bolt upright in that chair. Brown said simply: "I have come to see if there is a raven tattooed upon your chest."

The great Hyman Sheridan was disturbed and showed it. For a moment

sparks flew from the end of his cigar, then it settled down to burn like a chimney fire. It was some time before he spoke. "I have heard that you go directly after what you wish, Brown, but I didn't know you were this direct. Tell me again just what you wish to know."

"I wish to know if there is a tattooed mark on your chest—a raven. You are quite aware, Mr. Sheridan, that I could stick a gun on you, tear down your shirt and make the discovery for myself."

SHERIDAN looked steadily at Brown, said: "And you are quite aware that I could lift that phone, call a certain number and have you dismissed entirely from the department. You're everything I've heard about you, Brown. Well, you've got the gun. I've got the chest. You wouldn't do it."

"No," said Vee, "I wouldn't do it. Nor will you lift the phone and call Mr. Doran's number."

"No," said Sheridan. "Perhaps not while you stand there threatening me. But I will as soon as you are gone."

"I don't think so," Vee told him, and I don't think I ever saw him so much in earnest. "It was a young girl tonight. I understand she was a protégée of Doc Raven. Doc Raven, Mr. Sheridan. Doc Raven, whom the police left alone because of you—because of your orders."

"So you know that." Sheridan's thick lips parted. "If they left him alone at my suggestion, not order, there isn't much secret about it. Doc Raven did a lot of good."

"And a lot of bad in the beginning when he first came to the city. Let me see. You and he landed at the Battery in Nineteen Seven. He chose one kind of crime; you went into politics. Your paths crossed later and—"

"And—" Hyman Sheridan came to his feet, leaned heavily on the desk. "You

could only find that out from Raven himself. How? By threatening him with something out of his past?"

Brown shook his head. "Directly the opposite, Mr. Sheridan. I discovered it by promising not to disclose something in his past—not by threatening to disclose it."

Hyman Sheridan smiled. His lips were grim, a thick heavy purple. He spoke very slowly. "I'm going to break you, Brown; break you entirely. When I was a much younger man I watched politicians start out and fail. It was not so much that their past caught up with them, but that they paid to hide that past, put themselves under obligation to hide that past, were forced into acts that made the past sink to insignificance compared with their present. I made one rule then, and I stuck to that rule. It is that the man who permits himself to be blackmailed once, permits himself to be blackmailed forever. I've weathered many storms, taken many threats."

Sheridan paused for a long moment, took his cigar from his mouth, pointed it at Vee Brown. "There are plenty of skeletons in my closet. Plenty of people have rattled them. When I got off that boat down at the Battery in Nineteen Seven I breathed the air of New York and swore to stand squarely on my own two feet. I'm standing right on them here tonight. I'm not saying that by raking up my past associates you can't hurt me or hurt the boys at election time. But I am saying—get out of my house, and take a try at it. As soon as you leave I'll lift that phone and strike. There're two reasons I don't throw you out—now."

"And the reasons?" Brown faced the big man squarely.

Hyman Sheridan smiled as he towered above Vee. "One reason is your size—perhaps lack of size."

When he said no more Brown added:

"And the other reason is the fear of burning lead."

Hyman Sheridan repeated the words after him very slowly. "And the other reason is the fear of burning lead."

For a long time they faced each other. It was Vee who spoke just as if no words had been passed between them.

"When you and Doc Raven sailed together from Liverpool. When—" Brown paused, took a step forward, leaned over the desk his face very close to Hyman Sheridan. "Did you, too, have a raven tattooed on your chest? It won't look well in the papers, Mr. Sheridan. 'Raven Murders. Has Political Boss Got Death Sign Upon His Chest?'"

"And if I haven't?"

"If you haven't"—slender shoulders went up and down—"where can there be a story, then? Look here, Mr. Sheridan. I've come to you and given you straight talk. There's no blackmail in it. I've got nothing to tell you; nothing to hide from you. Show me your chest, and raven or no raven I pass you my word that neither Dean nor myself will ever mention it to a soul."

"Even after I have you dismissed from the force?"

"Even after you have me dismissed from the force."

HYMAN Sheridan hesitated, walked around the desk, laid a hand on Brown's shoulder. "You puzzle me, Brown," he said slowly. "Puzzle me greatly. You were either a fool or a very wise man to come to me like this tonight. You want to find the raven murderer. I want you to find him. I'll give you ten thousand dollars now—to work my way."

Brown looked at him a long time, finally said: "I am paid by the city."

"You can't be bribed, eh?" Sheridan was saying. "I couldn't bribe you."

"No, nor could you fool me by a pre-

tended bribe. There's your phone." Vee backed toward the door.

"I won't need the phone." Hyman Sheridan walked toward the door with us. "I guess you're honest. I'll be with you, Brown, while you search for this—this terrible criminal."

"That's right, Mr. Sheridan. And I'll be with you too."

And when the door closed behind us and we went down the steps Vee said: "He was friendly and he wasn't friendly, but he never showed me his chest."

"He acted," said I, "like a man who had something to hide."

"We all have something to hide."

"But he acted like a guilty man."

"Like a guilty man." Brown snapped out the words. "I've heard that thousands of times, read it ten thousand times. But for God's sake, Dean, will you tell me what a guilty man acts like?"

I knew or I thought that I knew, but for the life of me I couldn't tell Vee Brown. But I did question him all the way home about his strange attitude toward Hyman Sheridan—and what good it did him—and why he put himself in bad with a man of such power.

"In bad." Vee shot the words from between tight lips. "What do you mean, 'in bad?' If he's the straightforward man he pretends to be, he should do everything in his power to help find this murderer. Yes, even to baring his chest. If he's committing these murders or is behind them or in any way connected with them, then in the long run he can do me no harm. He's a wise man, Dean. That crack about blackmail was right and he's weathered many storms."

"But the raven on his chest—what put that into your head?"

"Doc Raven," Vee told me. "I've known the doc for years and he has done much good. I knew he landed here with Hyman Sheridan. Such information is

not bad to have. I knew also that the doc had the raven tattooed on his chest before the ship left Liverpool. I'm a lad who likes to know things. But I never thought to ask the doc if Hyman Sheridan also had a raven upon his chest. He doesn't seem like the man for it I'll admit. But remember, that was twenty-nine years ago. They were both young men then."

"And would the raven on his chest mean so much—would it prove Sheridan guilty?"

Vee Brown shook his head. "On the contrary, Dean, it would prove him innocent—entirely innocent, I think."

And from that cryptic remark I learned absolutely nothing.

CHAPTER SIX

Dinner at Seven

I DIDN'T see Vee next morning when I got up. It was late afternoon before he came in. He just tossed himself into a chair and smoked butt after butt.

"I've been busy," he told me, and I knew that he had been unsuccessful or he wouldn't be so ready to talk. "I went straight to see Hyman Sheridan and asked him point blank where he was at the time of the murders. He wouldn't tell me, Dean. He's a different man today, too. No more threats of getting me off the force—just the hope that I will work things out. Damn it, I don't know what to make of him!"

"I guess he doesn't know what to make of you either, Vee."

"No—he doesn't. But he says he's not going to interfere with me in any way. Now, what does that mean, Dean? Does it mean he wants me to solve these murders? Or does it mean he's guilty and is planning my death? Damn it, I'm beginning to find something to admire in the man. If I could only have a look at his chest."

"He wouldn't show you that. Why is it so important?"

"Important Dean! Why if a raven is tattooed on his chest—" And after a pause, "I've been down to Doc Raven's place and there's no doubt he left a queer impression when he departed. Inspector Ramsey has discovered what I discovered. That flat-faced hammer you saw last night. Well, Doc Raven had it. Yes, I've met and talked to men who have seen it. They were frightened, Dean, but they told me the truth. Raven picked it up years ago—but it doesn't matter. It was a form of savage death torture."

"But what did Doc Raven want with that—that thing?"

"What do men want with battle axes and scimitars and odd weapons of the Middle Ages. It's a throw-back in them, the desire to possess odd weapons, stamps, coins, other things that are hard to get. But Raven got it long before he was tattooed. He was drunk that night in Liverpool—at least so two fellows told me who heard the story many times from Doc Raven himself. He walked in to the tattooer, drove the nailed outline of the raven upon a table and asked for a tattoo just like it." Brown paused, paced the room and then, "He also said that a single blow with that raven hammer would kill a man and leave the mark of the raven there. There would be no reason for these men to lie to me; every reason for their telling me the truth."

"But I would like to know if Hyman Sheridan was with Doc Raven the night he was tattooed; and if he was, did Sheridan know of the death hammer—the raven of death?"

"You still think—"

"No, no—" Vee clutched at his head. "I'm like you; like Ramsey—I can't think any more. The thing's fantastic. And that's the trouble, Dean. It's too fantastic

to—to actually be fantastic. It's very real and very terrible and very—"

He turned on his heels, entered the music room, slammed the door behind him. But though I listened I heard no sounds from the piano. Not even a single finger upon keys—which was very strange with Brown.

IT WAS just before half past six that Vee came hurrying from the music room, shouting for Wong. To me he said: "It's seven-o'clock dinner, Dean—and you're sitting around as if we dined home tonight. Come, get moving."

I did get moving, hiding my irritability at Brown. It would be useless to argue with him. He would be so certain he had told me. We did get dressed somehow and were in the taxi before I asked in a low, sarcastic voice where we were going.

"Mortimer Doran's, of course. And I imagine it will be a most unpleasant affair."

But it wasn't at the district attorney's house that we were to eat that night, for Mortimer Doran was impatiently pacing up and down beneath the huge canopy in front of his apartment.

"No, no, you're not late, Vee." Doran was at the door of the taxi as soon as it pulled to the curb. "It's just my impatience. The commissioner has every man in the city on the hunt for Doc Raven. He's dropped out of sight completely."

Vee nodded, said: "Certainly Doc Raven would have no trouble in hiding out if he wished to. Half the criminals are his friends." And after a moment, "And though the police will find that a great drawback they should also remember that the other half are his enemies. I happen to know he's broken up many a contemplated job either by drawing the men back from crime, or intimidating them by threats of exposure."

"He must be mad, Vee." Doran gave an address to the driver.

"Mad or sane he would still have his enemies, though perhaps not so many friends. Loyalty in the underworld is not generally inspired by friendship or devotion; more by a simple fear of the consequences of disloyalty. A madman would have difficulty in holding such friendships with a city wide manhunt now on."

"Perhaps, perhaps." Mortimer Doran tapped on the window with his cane. "The third house on the left, driver. There, there don't bother to turn around. Stop across the street." And as we got out, "It's Dan Harrison's place. Bright young fellow, Vee. Want you to have a good talk with him. Got ideas of his own that Hyman Sheridan assures me will surprise us."

A neat maid opened the door. Dan Harrison greeted us almost at once. His ruddy face seemed slightly pale and his smile a forced sort of grimace—like a politician at the end of a long day just before election.

I was slightly surprised when we entered the library and Hyman Sheridan came to his feet. Brown twisted up his lips said: "Under different circumstances I might consider it a trap. Now—a sort of intimidation committee."

Sheridan smiled, extended his hand to both of us. Doran looked puzzled. Dan Harrison simply glanced toward the door behind us, visibly nervous.

Hyman Sheridan's smile now was almost cordial, but certainly not pleasant on that hard, uncompromising face. I think for the first time I really saw the power of the man, and realized, too, what he must have gone through to gain it. And maybe with a little gulp I realized also the extent to which he might go to retain it. But Sheridan was talking.

"Entirely the opposite of intimidation, Mr. Brown. In fact, we are seeking your indulgence, taking you into a confidence,

giving you a trust which may help solve the raven murders. In plain words, I am going to lay a few cards on the table that will surprise both you and Mortimer Doran. Mr. Condon we may regard as—"

"As part of the furniture," Vee grinned. "We will not break any confidence that does not effect our duty to the citizens."

"To Mr. Doran for whom you work." Sheridan narrowed those keen eyes. "I—" He paused, stepped toward the door and took the woman's hand. "Mrs. Harrison is joining us at dinner. Irma, this is Mr. Vee Brown and his friend, Mr. Dean Condon."

I turned slowly and looked directly at the woman. Looked? Rather stared. Though her evening gown was cut low disclosing a long white throat and slender shoulders and her hair was—was— But no more of that. It was the girl of the ladder; the girl who had kicked the gun from my hand; the girl who had run out on me the night before. In contrast to her modern gown she wore a peculiar thickness of black velvet about her neck. However, I thought that I saw just the slightest mark of circular rawness where the rope must have bitten into her throat.

I HEARD Brown speaking, knew that the woman held her hand out to me. Knew that I took it, for I felt her fingers tighten about my hand, whether in warning or simply encouragement, I don't know. But her smile seemed to hold something back in her eyes. Something just for me? I don't know that either. I was stunned.

Dinner? Yes, I guess I ate. Vee sat next to Mrs. Harrison, chatted lightly and she nodded and smiled and watched me. There was something more than reserve about her attitude. Not haughty exactly, but as if she were with us in body only. Yet she watched me.

Hyman Sheridan seldom took his eyes off the girl. Twice he nudged me and whispered when she was in conversation with Brown. "Beautiful child, Condon. Remarkable woman. None like her. She's—yes, she's slated to make her husband famous—if nothing untoward happens."

"What do you mean 'untoward'?" I asked.

"Something that I hope your friend, Vee Brown will prevent after knowing her, talking to her. Take Harrison there. Wealthy family, social standing, engaged to a girl who had everything money could buy; one of our wealthiest heiresses. But he lost everything as thousands of others did. Down—nearly out—he met this girl, married her. And now look. We'll get him a judgeship right after election and shove him to the Supreme Court in no time."

"And the woman, his wife, is responsible for—all this?"

"Without her he'd be a common ambulance chaser. But he's a fine man—just needed a woman like that to push him. Owes everything to her."

That was about all of that until the end of dinner. Irma Harrison made a charming hostess and if she were fighting anything, it was hard to tell it except perhaps from the slight tremor of her lips which she controlled at once when she saw me looking at her.

Yes, it was hard to believe. Damned hard to believe that this woman who sat so erect and composed had, less than twenty-four hours ago stood balancing that ladder with the rope about her neck. My admiration turned suddenly to doubt. Had it, after all, been a fake; a thing to throw fear into Brown and into me and our deaths were not intended? But that seemed impossible. Who, knowing Vee Brown, would attempt to frighten him?

The dinner over, coffee brought, Irma Harrison rose from the table. We all came

to our feet as she left the room. When we sat down again Harrison started to talk, hesitatingly at first, more sure of himself or at least more resigned to what he was saying as he went on.

"Mr. Sheridan," he began, "has assured me of your confidence and advised this talk. Gentlemen, that charming woman who left this room, my wife, has placed me in a position where I must betray my trust to the citizen or betray my wife." He paused now a long moment and then, "It was my decision to betray my trust. It is my wife's decision to have me betray her."

Mortimer Doran was shocked and showed it. He started to speak, but Hyman Sheridan stopped him.

"Harrison," he said, "is speaking through my advice. He is willing to sacrifice his future. I don't think that is quite necessary, at least yet. The betrayal of his trust in this case is of little importance except in a man's conscience—Dan Harrison's conscience. I think upon the bench he will serve the people better. However, it is for you, gentlemen to judge him and perhaps help him." Sheridan puckered his mouth for a moment and then, "I am very much interested in Dan Harrison's future, more so than the future of any other man in this city. Any man at all. I want to be fully understood."

WE all nodded. There was no misunderstanding Hyman Sheridan. Dan Harrison waited—when no one spoke he started.

"Irma, my wife, was brought up among criminals. She has been in prison herself. Her father was killed in a gun battle on the East Side many years ago. There is little doubt that she took part in many crimes. Then Doc Raven found her, was impressed greatly, to put it mildly, and through Doc Raven I met her and married her."

"That," said Hyman Sheridan, "is not entirely true. I think that I had a good deal to do with the marriage. I arranged for the girl to go west, to assume another name, have Dan meet her on a vacation, marry her and bring her on to the city. I was greatly interested in Dan—and in the girl."

"In which first?" Vee shot in suddenly, his eyes on the ash of his cigarette as he knocked it into his half-empty coffee cup—a disgusting habit he had.

"Does that matter?" Sheridan snapped. "The girl has a brilliant mind. She knows life. Yes, and death too. Environment alone was to blame for her past. Environment has been taking care of her future. Harrison loved her and needed her. She loved Harrison. Dan will go far. Together they have already gone far."

Harrison coughed, spoke. "Any man would work for Irma, of course. I have tried to do my best. But the truth is, gentlemen, that what little success I have had, what future is in store for me is entirely up to Mr. Sheridan. I feel certain I shall not break his trust in me. That is why I have you here tonight. That is why I seek both advice and protection. In plain words, unless Frank Whitey, the murderer of a waiter, is not set free, my wife's whole past will be disclosed to the public; to the papers who are against the administration."

Mortimer Doran looked at the hard cold eyes of Hyman Sheridan which were fastened on him. He sipped at his coffee. Under the glare of those eyes the question in them didn't need to be spoken.

Mortimer Doran said: "Of course, Frank Whitey's case is a small one. It's drawn little interest in the papers and there may be many extenuating circumstances which—"

"Which should remind you that the waiter who was killed was a citizen." Brown threw the words in. "I'm for do-

ing anything that will help Mrs. Harrison, and perhaps some way can be found without betraying your oath of office."

"And I," said Harrison before either Mortimer Doran or Sheridan could horn in, "find the thing out of my hands. You see, I agreed to deliver my evidence—even quash the indictment. I confess that, gentlemen. But Mrs. Harrison knew, took possession of the papers, has them now, and will not give them up."

"God," said Sheridan. "She would be like that—exactly like that."

"Who," said Vee, "made the demand for this evidence?"

Harrison hesitated. I could see the color run in and out of his face.

"The best friend my wife and I had, with the exception of Mr. Sheridan. I mean Doc Raven." And when he saw the jolt he gave all of us, "Don't misunderstand me or him, gentlemen. Doc Raven demanded it to save her. Doc Raven would be the go-between though he is now against crime and has not done a dishonest act in close to ten years. Yes, he demanded those papers that would free Frank Whitey and hide Irma's past."

"And then what?" said Vee. "Mr. Sheridan will tell you that once you permit yourself to be blackmailed you will always be blackmailed. Frank Whitey, out of jail, would have the same information about your wife as he would have in jail. What then?"

"Then"—And Dan Harrison's hands clawed into the table cloth—"Doc Raven would see that Frank Whitey never talked. I thought at the time he meant things he could threaten him with. But Doc Raven talked wildly to me—strangely to me."

IT was Hyman Sheridan who leaned across the table and gripped Harrison's hand. "You never told me that. Just what do you mean?"

"I mean," said Harrison, "that I re-

fused to have any dealing with Doc Raven. There was something odd about his actions and—and—" He wet his lips with his tongue. "He said such a situation would never arise again; that Irma's past would never be threatened again. That I could never say that Irma dragged me down when I was up. As if I'd ever think of such a thing."

"You think he was mad?" Doran questioned.

"I don't know. God, I don't know! He was as fond of Irma as if she were his own daughter. You know that, Mr. Sheridan."

"That's true," said Sheridan. "That's true. She didn't visit him as she used to—not so often."

Harrison half averted his eyes. "I'm afraid that was my fault. I wanted her to break with the past—entirely with the past. I thought that was best."

"That was right," Sheridan agreed. "I spoke to Doc Raven. He seemed to see the necessity of it. He never struck me as a man who'd go mad."

Vee said: "And these men who died, Mr. Harrison. Would they have known of her past? Would Doc Raven know they knew of it?"

"I don't know. I think so—some of them." He hesitated. "My friend, Hamilton Hawthorne—the broker, you know. He knew about it."

"Did Doc Raven know that he knew?" Vee questioned.

"No, I don't think so—" A moment's thought. "He must have. I think Irma told him."

"It's as plain as it can be," Mortimer Doran cut in. "Just as Ramsey said. Doc Raven—the hammer he had is missing. He left the house like a man in a trance."

Hyman Sheridan said: "And there you are, Vee Brown. Something, perhaps, to work on. Perhaps nothing to work on. Doc Raven was as fond of that girl as—

as—" He paused. Then, "As any man could be. Understand, I don't think he had a hand in this. But he'd kill in cold blood to protect her. Cold blood, understand—not hot blood. Now, Mr. Brown, you've got your ethics or pretend to have. You're here tonight to talk to Irma Harrison. She's willing. Simply remember we are all here as men, not as machines; not even as public servants. As for me, I'll stand by her in anything you suggest. She's waiting for you above."

"Good enough." Vee Brown came to his feet. "I shall be glad to talk with a woman you so very much admire." And as Harrison directed him to the stairs and the sitting-room above to the right, "I'm sure she's a very brave little woman."

Vee winked slyly at me.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Saint Bernard Condon

VEE BROWN was not upstairs over three minutes when he called to me from the head of the stairs. "Come up, Dean." His voice was just a bit irritable. And when I reached the top of the stairs, "It appears that your cherub-like face lends a confidence." And as he led me to the little sitting-room, "A Saint Bernard is a very valuable and loyal animal, but much too big for the house. But since you wish him, Mrs. Harrison, here he is."

The girl sat straight and stiff in a chair. She stretched out a hand and took mine, said simply and decidedly unaffectedly: "I've lived close to death and crime and the law all my life. Detective Vee Brown represents death; something I have lately feared, at least fear in the horrible manner of last night. I have thanked Mr. Brown for being silent. You, Mr. Condon, lend a confidence; one of that world I am trying to fit myself into. Last night Mr. Brown was a police machine doing a job. You were a man protecting a wom-

an. Sit down near me please. Now, Mr. Brown, shall I talk or will you question?"

"Both," said Vee. And with a grin free from rancor, "And Mr. Condon will simply comfort."

The woman turned her head and looked straight at me. Her eyes were deep. You seemed to look far back behind them and see things. A deep sort of sadness. Not hope exactly—just a determination to go on.

"Mr. Brown"—she turned and addressed Vee directly—"they didn't tell you everything downstairs. Mr. Sheridan has a trust and belief in me that it would be impossible for anyone to live up to. I have done my best. It was really Mr. Sheridan who found me first and Doc Raven who arranged for my care in a very respectable rooming-house." Firm lips smiled slightly. "They both have been fathers to me. Doc outwardly. Hyman Sheridan arranging things for me and gruffly pretending it was Doc Raven. I met Dan. I—I—went with him—I loved him and we were married."

"The past," Vee said, "is rather well cleared up. All but last night and the reason for your being there in that East Side dive." And as the girl shuddered slightly, "How did you happen to be there?"

The girl straightened, said: "Doc Raven sent for me."

"You mean he telephoned you or a voice like his telephoned you. Doc Raven had trouble with his speech didn't he?" And after looking at me, "He talked as a man might who was talking through a handkerchief if I remember correctly."

"Doc Raven always talked as if he were talking through his nose. Yes, it would be like the sound of a man talking through his handkerchief. Mr. Condon, no doubt, told you of that voice. Well, it was not Doc Raven's voice, but it was Doc Raven. He disguised that voice; perhaps talked

through a handkerchief as you suggest."

She sat a little straighter, opened her mouth twice before she spoke, then said: "Last night the curtains parted slightly and I saw his face; Doc Raven's face. He was very white, almost like a dead man. The snappy brightness had gone out of his eyes, but I saw him. He doesn't know that. I can't believe it, Mr. Brown." She came suddenly to her feet. "I can't believe it. Doc Raven was more than a father to me. He was going to kill me last night."

"I think not," said Vee Brown. "The knot around your neck was not a slip knot. It was a knot that would have held the loop—just as it was."

If he had intended to startle the woman into some admission he failed entirely.

"Yes, I know that. The odd voice told me that. It kept saying that he was a friend of Frank Whitey and that the case against Whitey must be dropped. Then he said that when the ladder finally slipped I would hang there awhile and he would drive the—the awful hammer in the corner into my chest—into my chest while I swung there. He couldn't know that I had seen his face for a split second."

"Yet, you wouldn't give him the evidence."

THE girl looked up. "I sent the evidence to Doc Raven for Whitey this morning. I determined on that when I read of the woman who was murdered. She was my friend—my only friend in those—those days before. Don't you see? Don't you understand! I'm a bad woman that men wanted to make good. Well—I've been good; painfully, terribly good. I've had women in to train me to act as good women act; women I despised and who despised me. I've tried and I've failed. I might have known. I've seen too many come out of the big house, prison"—she

half sneered the word—"to know that as you start the path so will you finish it. It goes up and down, and there's no room to turn around. I stood on that ladder last night for Dan, for his career, for his future. And this morning this raven killer threatened to kill him—kill Dan, and I sent the evidence he wanted. I stayed alive so that I could send it to save Dan."

"Why would Doc Raven want to kill you?"

"I don't know. I don't know. He once chanced his own freedom to save me." She fell back in the chair and buried her head in her hands.

Vee asked: "Did you know anything about Doc Raven—anything that could harm him?"

"I—I— Yes." She nodded her head up and down slowly. "I could send him to prison, but he knew that I would be torn to pieces before I'd talk."

"But you sent him the evidence. You could send him another message then. You think he wants to kill you?"

"I don't. I don't." She fairly shot the words out. Taut nerves were giving. "Yes, I suppose I could send him a message through the same person. I leave it at a newsstand for a Mr. McBride."

"Good. Good!" Brown got to his feet, walked over to a little typewriter on the small desk in a corner of the room. "You use this often?"

"Often? Yes, most of the time."

"Fine. A piece of your note paper please." And when she gave it to him he put it carefully into the machine and picked laboriously at the keys. Finally he pulled it from the typewriter, carefully surveyed what he had written and said: "An envelope."

Vee carefully sealed the envelope and put it in his pocket. "Don't tell a soul about this—not anyone."

She looked at him a long time, looked

at me. I nodded my head. Brown's lips curled.

"Not a word to a soul," she said. "I trust you."

"Me or Dean?" Vee turned to me. "Some day, Dean, you'll have to tell me what this strange charm is that you hold over women." And suddenly, "Another thing, Mrs. Harrison. Your husband wanted to give up this evidence but you had it and wouldn't turn it over. He didn't mention that you had already disposed of it."

"I thought that I had told you he didn't know," she said to Vee. "The evidence itself is worth very little except for the assurance to Frank Whitey that he will never come to trial. You see, with the evidence in Whitey's hands or in his lawyer's hands, Dan would have to free him. Dan could hardly explain how the evidence reached Whitey without incriminating himself—tossing over his future."

"I think," Vee said, "that we won't tell your husband or the others about your giving up this evidence. At least not yet. I think we may be able to clear things up for you."

"I'm afraid," she told Vee, but it was my arm she clung to as we walked to the door. "For the first time in my life I'm terribly afraid. It's death. I feel it. I know—know that I'm going to die. I want to get away. No criminals—no police, just be by myself."

"That's odd." Vee looked at her a long time. "Certainly you're not a nervous woman." He stretched out a hand, lifted her chin. They stood almost on a level then, and black eyes met black eyes. "You went through hell last night—why this sudden fear?"

HER big eyes looked uncertain. She said: "Last night I felt I had to live. I don't know why. I should have welcomed death. It would have freed Dan.

Scorn heaped upon the dead would only reflect glory on Dan. They couldn't hurt him with my past then. I sold him out to save his career. Not for myself. I did what I felt he could never think of doing but for me. Now, I've lived close to death and I know—know the feel of it. I can't be wrong. I'm absolutely sure of death—very shortly."

There was a strange sort of look in her eyes. A look that wiped away the cynical smile that Vee Brown started. Vee didn't look at me then, didn't joke lightly then. He stretched out both his hands and put them on the woman's shoulders. "You're not telling me everything," he half accused.

"I'm telling you everything," she said. Truth, sincerity rang in every word. "I wish to God I weren't. And I can't believe Doc Raven has so treated me. Someone drove him to it."

"How long were you on that ladder last night?"

"Over half an hour, I think."

"Over half an hour after you saw Doc Raven?"

"Over half an hour after I saw Doc Raven."

Brown nodded, gripped her shoulders tightly. "We'll send you away for a bit. Send you away alone. You'll do as I say?"

"Yes, yes," she said quickly. "And Dan—I don't know why but I'm afraid for Dan. I love him so much."

"Dan will be all right," Vee told her. "And you too."

"No," she said. "No, I'm going to die. I know that."

SHE took my arm as we went downstairs, clung to it tightly. Once she looked up at me, opened her mouth to speak, didn't, and then finally did whisper: "It should have been a man like you. Free of the night, free of the police, free

of the courts, free of politics and money and graft. The upper world. The good world kills with smooth talk instead of smoking guns. Sometimes I can't understand it all. I got what I wanted. The man I wanted. The position I wanted and now—"

But we were at the foot of the stairs turning into the library.

Vee said abruptly, addressing all three men as one: "I presume, since I was brought here tonight that you are relying on my judgement. Mrs. Harrison has a confidence in Doc Raven that I do not personally enjoy. She has been quite frank with me—" He looked at the woman and smiled. "At least I hope she has. I am taking the liberty of sending her away for a few days—until I clear things up."

"And you think you can clear things up. You do, Vee?" Mortimer Doran was more than anxious. "It's devilish, absolutely devilish."

"It centers around Doc Raven," Vee told them and I thought with a good deal of common sense. "He must be here in the city. And if he's here in the city he must be found. Oh, I know the dragnet's out, Mr. Doran. I know the commissioner has every available man on the job. But you won't find Doc Raven by looking into people's faces, by questioning all his friends and acquaintances. I'll want a bit of authority, that's all. I'll even work with Ramsey. I'll want a reign of terror through the underworld. I'll want every known criminal picked up. I'll want the word passed along that the raids will continue until Doc Raven is found. We'll have the crooks working for us in twenty-four hours. There must be someone in the city who knows where he is."

"By God," said Doran, "we'll do it!"

"And Mrs. Harrison?" Hyman Sheridan looked over at the girl, his eyes steady, peering as he watched her. "You

are sending her away. You think she's in danger?"

"Only in danger of a breakdown. I've talked to her. She wants to be by herself—absolutely by herself. And I've picked that place of Dean's. The little bungalow down on Long Island."

"Good, God, she's not going to Long Island alone!" Harrison crashed in.

"It's no summer place." Vee dismissed his outburst with a laugh. "It's a little investment in Fair Haven that Dean picked up—right in the village. That he hasn't been able to rent it doesn't matter."

"There are tenants coming in the first of the month—" I started, but Vee stopped me.

"Mrs. Harrison won't want it that long. A few days at most. Dean will drive her down and come right back and—"

"She's to have police protection, of course," Hyman Sheridan said.

Vee shook his head. "Why should she? Don't you see what she wants, what she needs? To get away from just that she'll stay there by herself. There is no reason in the world why anyone should harm Mrs. Harrison now. Can't you understand? It's the police she wants to be away from. Even I grate on her nerves. You'll go, of course, Mrs. Harrison?"

She gripped my arm, muttered: "Yes."

THEY had it out after that while the maid went up to help Irma Harrison with her bag. And I think Brown told them that she had already disposed of the evidence. I know that he said: "I don't like to rake up Mrs. Harrison's past, but the psychology of the thing should strike all of you. She was taken out of the world of crime only to be suddenly thrown back into it again. Threats of ruining your career, Mr. Harrison, threats of exposure, detectives, police, the district attorney. She'll be perfectly safe at Fair Haven, and she'll be alone. It's

a short drive." And Vee described to them exactly where the house was in the little village—and the nearness of neighbors.

I stood in the hall with Irma Harrison while the three men still argued inside. They weren't certain yet. Even Mortimer Doran, who seemed relieved at first to have Brown take charge of the whole thing, wasn't sure. After all, I thought Dan Harrison took it best. However, he did say: "And you won't even be down that way, Mr. Brown?"

"No." Vee was emphatic. "No one will. Dean will leave her and return. Besides, I have to get down along the Avenue, threaten and cajole and bribe. Everything settles about the raven on Doc Raven's chest. Mr. Doran will call Ramsey now and send out the orders to drag in every known criminal. I'll spread the reason—and see what happens."

"Yes, yes, to be sure." Mortimer Doran picked up the phone.

Vee came to the car with Irma Harrison and myself. Hyman Sheridan stood on the top step and looked at us with steady bird-like eyes.

"Don't forget to stop and deliver the letter." Vee slipped the envelope to Irma, and then to me, "You'll have time to take her for a dance or two at some roadhouse. I mean it, Dean. It'll do her good. After that just see Mrs. Harrison comfortable at the house. She'll be quite alone."

"But I don't know as I want to be that much alone."

"You promised," Vee told her. "I'll watch you down the street. And above everything, Dean, return to our apartment at once. That's important. I'll need you there."

"All right," I answered. I saw Dan Harrison in the dim light of the vestibule, noted the doubtful way he rubbed his chin as I jumped the car from the curb.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Lonely House

WE weren't followed, that much was certain. No car moved up and down the block. But I was bothered; very much bothered. Vee Brown had not told the others that the girl feared—yes, even expected death.

Still, after all, she couldn't find a more secluded spot to hide away. Who would think of the little bungalow in Fair Haven, "Dean's Folly." I liked Vee's nerve. He had picked the place up himself, but I always thought it was just to take it off a friend's hands—a friend who needed money.

Yes, who would expect Irma Harrison to be hiding out there? No one. I gulped. Sheridan knew—Hyman Sheridan knew, and Vee had said— But good God, he couldn't suspect Sheridan now or certainly he wouldn't have sent the girl there.

I didn't have to remind Irma of the letter. We stopped at the first Western Union and she got a boy to deliver it to the newsstand at once. Then she climbed back into her expensive roadster and we were off. We didn't talk through the traffic and were over the bridge and out toward Jamaica before I tried to make conversation.

"Not now." She slid along the seat close to me, gripped my arm, tossed off her hat and rested her head against my shoulder. "You'll understand I think, and not mind. You're big and you're honest and you're comforting, just as Detective Vee Brown said you were." And after a bit, "I think Mr. Brown rather flattered than insulted you. I never had a Saint Bernard. I think I'd like one."

At first I didn't like it, then I did. She had a way of making things seem right.

She said: "I hate policemen and criminals. I hate Dan's profession now—the

law. But he must have loved me a great deal. We parted first, you know. Dan to go to the girl he had been engaged to before he lost his money—and me to go to—I don't know where I would have gone."

"But he came back?" I made conversation. Her hair was brushing my cheek, my neck. I was slightly embarrassed—yet she seemed so natural about it.

"Yes, he did. No one had ever asked me to marry before." She laughed sort of harshly. "My set didn't do things that way. Dan talked fast. I was the only one. I had to be the one. He was so cold, almost desperate and then—when he held me in his arms he seemed to melt. Funny—" she added. "He had held me so before."

I thought we'd drive straight to the house in Fair Haven, but we didn't. She wanted to stop and dance. I looked at her tired eyes, her listless body almost limp there beside me and shook my head.

"Just for an hour," she pleaded. "The doctor prescribed it. I heard what Mr. Brown said to you—in fact he almost insisted on it."

So we danced for an hour. And she was beautiful despite the tragedy in her face.

IT WAS half past eleven when we left the roadhouse, and close to twelve o'clock when we reached Fair Haven. Without Brown having told me, I did have the good sense to park the car two blocks away and around the corner, and carry her bag to the little house. There was a chill in the air and she walked briskly beside me, her listlessness gone, her step light, a bit of color in her face.

There was a surprise when we reached the little two-story bungalow. My hand ducked quickly for my gun, then I recognized the man who emerged suddenly from the big porch chair. He was Jeff

Greeg, caretaker of many of the summer homes down near the water.

"Mr. Brown telephoned me, Mr. Condon," he said. "Here's the key to the front door. I lit the fire and made things quite cozy. There's the little room in the cellar locked off. I've taken the liberty of storing some things in there. You won't be a-needin' that. Then the front bedroom upstairs—the closet is locked there too. I put some of the silver and Mr. Brown's rifles and them expensive fishin' rods in it at the end of the summer. I got the key if you'll be a-needin' it." He rubbed at the stubble on his chin, looked at the bag in my hand. "I could move the things out and put them in the back room if the lady needs it."

"No, no," Irma Harrison said at once. "I could use the back room and—"

"You can't do that—not now." Jeff Greeg shook his head. "I had to get linen from the missus and I fixed up the front room. The linen in the house is damp. But I'll dry it out before them tenants come next month."

Irma Harrison was getting nervous. I said: "All right, Jeff—fine. We won't be needing you now."

Jeff moved from one leg to the other. "The electric light is turned on all right, but I didn't light it up. I didn't know as you and the lady would prefer that." And when I straightened, "Oh, I ain't aimin' to say nothin'. Mr. Brown was strict about that. He says as how he won't be gettin' over and you was to give me ten dollars. Them was his exact words."

I know Jeff, but I didn't argue it out with him. It was ten to one that Vee had said five dollars, but Jeff would explain that later; that he "never was good at hearin' over a telephone." So I gave him the ten dollars, put the key in the door and watched Jeff go down the steps

slip across the street, pass between two dark houses and disappear.

I was a little put out with Vee. But after all, he hadn't given me a key. I had expected to get through a window.

WE ENTERED the house and I switched on the electric light. It was damp in the hall but pleasantly warm in the living-room. Before leaving Irma Harrison alone I decided to go over the entire place—put her more at ease.

She followed me—living-room, kitchen, small dining-room. Then down to the cellar where I found the door locked as Jeff had said. The second floor consisted of two small bedrooms and a large one.

She laughed, too, in the front room when I looked under the bed. I got up, tried the closet door and found that locked too, just as Jeff had told us it would be. But the room was spotless, a lamp beside the bed, clean sheets and two blankets. I snapped off the ceiling light and left the bed lamp burning.

"Well," I said, "I guess I'll leave you now. There will be no one to bother you here; threaten you here."

She followed me downstairs to the living-room, insisted that I smoke a cigarette before I left, curled herself up on the rug by the fire and started in to talk. It was interesting, informative, much more than she had told Vee and I listened; listened as I watched the clock and smoked several cigarettes.

"You don't question me, Dean." My first name just came naturally now. "And that's because you don't want to worry me. You want to take it off my mind. But I want it on my mind. It's like death, isn't it? People come to the house and discuss nothing else—and it helps. It relieves the tension. I want to talk about it now."

"Just what—Irma?" The name didn't come so easily from me.

"The whole thing," she told me. "It started with Frank Whitey. I was happy enough, I guess, though Dan worked day and night, and didn't want children. I think they might have helped. But it would be worse now wouldn't it, if there were any?"

I SAID I thought it would and she went on. "You're easy to talk to, Dean—very easy." She stretched out a hand and gripped mine. "You see Dan got the threats first—not threats then, but direct word from Doc Raven. Doc came to the house and told Dan of Whitey's threat and wanted the indictment quashed. Dan wouldn't do it at first, then I was afraid he was going to, and I got hold of the evidence—and Doc came straight to me.

"He loved me, Dean—like a father. I knew that, and I refused to sacrifice Dan. He tried to explain that it wasn't a sacrifice, that no one would know, and that he could keep Whitey silent later. And I wouldn't give in and Doc Raven—well, he just dropped out of things and these murders started. Every one of them directed at me. My friends, people who knew of the raven on Doc's chest. There was Hamilton Hawthorne, the broker, too; Dan's friend and my friend. He knew of my past, every bit of it. Yet, he treated me with more respect than any of the others—those honest, respectable people.

"And each death was a warning to me; a threat to me to deliver that evidence; get Dan to quash the indictment. And Dan would have done it, too. He begged me to let him—and I couldn't. And finally Dan insisted that we tell the truth to Hyman Sheridan, and Sheridan brought Vee Brown in."

"Were you at our apartment the other night? Did you come to see Vee?"

"Yes, I did. I had to. I was half mad. I couldn't find Doc Raven, and I

doubted he made the appointment to meet me. I wanted—Doc Raven had once told me that if I were in trouble, grave trouble, to go to Vee Brown."

"But why would Doc kill these people?"

"He didn't. He couldn't. I always thought it was a plot to make me free Whitey. And then the deaths—and the raven—just like the bird on Doc Raven's chest. And Doc had disappeared. After each death I got a telephone call—that Doc Raven would finally die if I didn't act. Then the call to come and see Doc Raven—and I went. Jake Wolfe—oh, I had seen him in the old days—met me, struck me, and hung me there. Then I saw Doc's face—a split-second flash of it—like a ghost without life. But he loved me. He couldn't kill me. Couldn't harm me. Yet he was there—and the voice. I can't understand."

She was very close to me now, her head against my knees. Maybe I ran my hand through her jet-black hair, maybe I just held that head. Then I came abruptly to my feet.

She followed me to the door—calm, straight, clear-eyed. My hand was on the knob when she threw her arms about me, clung to me, sobbed: "You can't. You can't go. Dean, Dean, I can't let you go!"

She was crying though no tears came. Just the movement of her chest—the sobs that stuck in her throat. Poor kid. I guess she didn't know how to cry any more.

I tried to push her gently away, explained: "You heard what Vee Brown said. I was to return at once. He needs me."

She clung to me desperately. "No, no. God—I can't. I couldn't stay here alone now. Think for yourself. Remember last night. I'm not the woman of the night I was once; the woman Brown thinks me. I went through hell last night.

I couldn't do it again. If you go, I go with you."

"You're overwrought. You need sleep," I said somewhat foolishly. Certainly she was soft and warm and nice to hold and—and I pushed her from me.

"Sleep—sleep! Do you believe that! Do you think I could sleep here alone with my thoughts of last night? Listen, Dean, listen. Look at me, Dean. Don't I need you more than Vee Brown could possibly need you? Stay tonight; stay down here by the fire. Stay, and I'll go upstairs to bed—and to sleep."

"But Vee—" I started.

"Promise," she said. "Or I leave with you and go straight back to town."

She was at the door barring my way. Then she turned and her hand gripped the knob, her other hand the key. "Your word," she said, "that you'll stay." She laughed a bit shrilly. "Imagine my taking anyone's word, but I'll take yours; be glad to take yours and—"

"I'll stay," I told her. "If you'll go right to bed."

"Your word?"

"My word."

And she did it. Jumped forward, ran past me and went straight up the stairs.

For some time I heard her moving, then the creaking of the bed, and her voice called: "Good-night." But the door of the front bedroom had not closed.

I WAS right and I wasn't. Certainly I hadn't obeyed Vee's orders. But then, how could I? Who could foresee any such fear of being alone in a woman like Irma Harrison? A woman who had faced death on that ladder and kept her head. But no man can know what goes on inside a woman. Even Vee couldn't realize how near the breaking point she was. I pulled out my pipe, put out the lights and sat close to the fire thinking.

Once I dozed off, awoke and sat up.

I thought I heard steps—but I couldn't place them, and I wasn't sure. I got up, stretched, took my gun from my pocket, and going to the front windows, knelt down and peered under the shades. The little street was deserted; not a sound.

I took off my shoes and went up the stairs. I hadn't noticed how those stairs squeaked before. Now they seemed to wake the dead. There was no sound in the front bedroom, yet the light shone plainly through the open door guiding my way. I was alarmed then. Things were so quiet. Not a sound; not even the sound of breathing.

I walked quickly down the hall, reached the door, peered in, and my heart dropped back in my chest again. Irma Harrison lay quietly on that bed. She was on her back, one white arm curved beneath her head, the other upon the blanket. She was breathing easily, noiselessly, but her chest rose and fell slowly.

The lamp just by the side of her bed was lit. I tiptoed across the room, passed around the bed, reached the lamp, stretched a hand toward it and she opened her eyes. There was no sudden start, no fear in her voice. Her lips parted, her eyes lit up slightly.

"You're watching over me, Dean," she said. "I knew you would. When things are over with, when the horror of it all is gone, then I'll get Dan to buy me a Saint Bernard."

I don't know if I liked that or not. I guess I smiled rather stupidly.

She didn't speak after that and neither did I. Her breathing became regular. Her lips seemed to part and I think that she smiled—at least her teeth showed, and her mouth was very rich and full.

I turned out the light and went downstairs and back to the fire. Once I picked up my hat and coat, decided to leave. But I didn't leave. I couldn't leave. I had given her my word. The second time I

thought of going down to some all-night drug store or garage and telephoning Vee. But I didn't. I tossed my coat over my knees, put the gun on the seat beside me, watched the fire burn low, and leaned back in the chair.

Someplace distant in that town a clock struck. Two, I thought. Two, I was sure—two—and I was asleep.

CHAPTER NINE

The Death Hammer

THE ladder swayed back and forth beneath my feet, the rope tightened about my neck. For the life of me I couldn't balance it any longer. I looked over at the girl and wondered how she did it. Then the ladder was going—going—going. And I whispered hoarsely: "Vee, Vee—"

A voice said—that same voice that spoke as if through a thickness of cloth—"Vee isn't coming. Irma Harrison invited me here tonight instead."

I was dreaming no longer. I was wide awake. I jarred erect in that chair. A shadowy figure stood by the chair. There was something above him. Something that glistened for a moment in the dull light from the dying embers; glistened just as the clock struck again—and this time struck three.

And then I knew what the thing was so far above the figure. It was a man's arm with a white hand on the end of it. And that white hand gripped a thick handle. The handle of a hammer—the handle of— God in heaven, that hand gripped the death raven! The same implement I had seen in the East Side dive the night before. But now the nails were clean, polished, glistening in the light from the dying fire.

Maybe I cried out, maybe I didn't. But I did raise my right arm, did twist my body, did see the gleaming nails des-

ending. The raven! The raven was to be found upon my chest!

My arm shot upward. The hammer struck with terrific force, turned in the air and the heavy wooden back of it struck me fairly on the side of the head; struck me as I was leaning forward, struggling to leave the chair. And I left the chair, pounded down hard upon the floor, knelt for a moment then tumbled over on my back.

Blood ran down my face, got into my eyes. I was out and I wasn't out. That is, I was able to see, able to hear, fully conscious, yet unable to move.

There was the shadow in the darkness, standing above me. Just a dull outline, but in its hand the hammer of nails, the hammer of death, the death raven.

The figure stood very still and very silent. Then he leaned forward, his face a dull blotch of white in the darkness. He flipped a bit of paper from his pocket to the hearth, consciously or unconsciously. Then he bent quickly, jerked my vest open and tore down my shirt.

I tried to move. I tried to shout. Frantic orders from my brain to my muscles brought no response. I could not move. It was like a dream, a terrible nightmare. Yet it was true—true— He was gripping that hammer of death in both hands, beginning to raise it when a voice from above called; the voice of Irma Harrison.

"Dean, Dean—" it called softly. "Is everything all right?" There was just the question in her voice; no terror, no alarm, not even anxiety.

The figure turned abruptly and went toward the stairs. I heard his steps across the hall, heard his feet hit the bottom step and start very slowly to ascend.

Things broke inside my head. A thousand lights, a thousand thoughts. And one thought—one dominating thought. The Raven, the fiend, whoever he was,

was there to murder Irma Harrison. Just as she feared death—just as she was sure of death, so would it happen. The Raven had come for her.

One thought after that. My gun was gone. At least I could not find it, and I wouldn't have the time to find it. The tongs, the poker by the fireplace—anything—anything to save the girl from horrible death. Yes, the man had turned at her first call. I could come later. He was afraid the girl would escape him.

Poker, gun, everything was forgotten. Just one thing. To get above, to reach the man before he reached her. To—to—

I was on my feet, staggering across the room, blindly finding the stairs, rubbing the blood from my eyes. But what did it matter? It was dark—all dark, both above and below. I was on the stairs, swaying, gripping the banister, trying desperately to throw myself up them and not tumble back down. I saw the light above me, a light that darted across the hall. Just a ribbon of light from an electric flash.

I GUESS I made that landing, staggering as the man entered the girl's room. I could follow the light now, find the door. And I went to my knees, crawled along, dragging myself by inches. I reached the door, clutched at the wall, climbed to my feet and stood there helpless to move; helpless to act, yet seeing everything that went on; seeing it as plainly as I ever saw anything in life; seeing it despite the blood that ran across my eyes.

Irma was awake, wide awake, and there was terror in her eyes now, for the flashlight settled directly upon her face as the figure behind the light approached her side of the bed, placed the hammer with its thin, sharp spikes on the blanket, let the light glimmer on it as he spoke, spoke

in that muffled voice, the voice of the night before.

"I've come, Irma," the voice said. "Remember? You saw me shoot a man to death. You and he both knew, and both of you cashed in on it. Cashed in because I shot him through the back of the head. Now—now— You can guess. you can know. See!"

I think the flash swung for a moment from Irma's face to the man's face, but I can't be sure. I was in a position to see only the back of the man's head. But Irma saw his face, for she cried out.

"You—you—God! You can't!"

He could and he did. The flash shot to the girl's face again. The hand that held the hammer flew out, gripped the covers, the girl's night dress, tore them back. There was a laugh, a hard sort of laugh. And with the light held directly on the terror-stricken girl, the hammer of death flashed into the air, disappeared back in the darkness, then coming back into the light, started downward.

The girl cried out. I cried out. And a shot came. Blood showed on the whiteness of the Raven's wrist. There was another and another shot. The light danced crazily about the room, made circles on the ceiling. The figure staggered from the bed, swayed back to it again. The nailed hammer was in his left hand now. The flashlight lay upon the bed. And two more shots blasted like the explosion of dynamite in that small room.

The figure twirled this time, staggered once, then crashed face forward on the floor. I could hear the body hit, and almost at the same instant hear the spiked hammer that he still gripped in his left hand dig its nails into the wood.

It was then that I found the wall button and flooded the room with light. Things were not clear; not at all clear. I knew that Irma lay there on the bed, and I knew that there was a strange look

in her eyes. She seemed in a trance, uncertain, unknowing.

Then I saw the open closet door and the little figure that stood just outside of it close to the window. He was straight and stiff and with a curve to the corners of his mouth. He said, and his voice was hard: "There's your raven killer, Dean. I'm afraid I killed him though I tried not to. And you damned near ruined things by your presence here." And suddenly as his eyes riveted upon the girl, "Hell, Dean, she's going off—going mad."

Vee jumped across the room. I saw him step over the body that lay so still upon the floor, its face buried in the rug, a handkerchief near the side of his head—the handkerchief he had held in his mouth when he talked.

I WAS almost around the bed when Vee struck her. Once, twice, three times he cracked her with his open palm across the face. "Come, Irma," he said sharply. "Get up and get downstairs. You're not a woman to be broken by this. You recognized him before I shot, eh?"

And the girl was answering. The madness was going out of her eyes. She said: "Yes, I recognized him before he—before you— Is he dead?"

"Vee," I asked, "who is he?"

"Who do you think he is?" Dean was shaking the girl as he spoke to me. "She recognized him and that was the biggest shock."

"Not Doc Raven," I said. But I didn't touch the silent figure that lay there.

"Of course not," Vee threw back over his shoulder. "It's Sheridan. Hyman Sheridan. He was a friend of Doc Raven's, and the doc must have threatened him with something in the past. He made the killings elaborate enough and—"

"Vee!" I cried as the body stirred. "He's alive."

"Good—see if he can speak. Get a statement from him. Just why he did the whole thing. Turn him over. He'll die any minute—every slug went into his body. I don't dare leave the girl. If she goes off now she'll lose her reason. Sheridan was her friend, you see. He gave her that car, gave her an allowance. I discovered that at the bank today. Maybe she blackmailed him. I don't know. But you heard him say she and another saw him shoot a man to death, and cashed in on it. Hell, Dean, get a statement from him." And Vee went to shaking the girl. "I'm all in. I damned near smothered in that closet."

The man lay partly in the shadows, his face flat against the rug. His hands were moving, clawing at the rug; blood was thick beneath him. I didn't like it, but I finally knelt on the floor, got an arm under him, lifted him slowly and swung him over on his back. His head flopped grotesquely, then fell back on the rug. His face was directly in the light.

"God! Vee!" I cried coming to my feet. "It's not Sheridan. It's Dan Harrison—Irma's husband!"

Vee swung from the bed, left the girl at once, stood over the gasping Dan Harrison. I don't think I had ever seen him quite so stunned. It was a full minute before he spoke.

"Don't tell a soul about this, Dean. It was my—my little joke on you. But it doesn't matter. I trapped him here. I—I— Take that girl downstairs if you have to carry her. I think the man can talk, and will talk."

I did have to carry Irma. And the man did talk.

Irma talked, too, when I got her in the big chair in the library, and after Vee had the excited neighbors telephone Mortimer Doran for him. She talked while the village constable stood on the porch outside the door.

"He killed a man, yes," she said. "But I never would have told. I thought he shot him after he himself was wounded. That's how I met Dan. Doc Raven protected him and I nursed him. Doc did it for me. To think—to think that Dan thought I would betray him. God help me, I loved him. He must have loved me, for he married me; came directly from her to me, though I knew he was seeing her again lately. She's rich and important, and her picture is always in the paper."

DAWN was coming up. Irma Harrison was in the closed living-room. Mortimer Doran, Inspector Ramsey, Hyman Sheridan, Vee and myself were gathered around the dining-room table.

"I have his dying statement," Vee was telling them. "But I'll go through it again. You see, Dan Harrison never wanted to marry the girl. He didn't kill Paul Merkle in self-defense. He shot him through the back of the head. Merkle wounded him while lying on the sidewalk. Doc Raven knew that; the girl didn't. When Dan finally left Irma, Raven went after him. He told him all that you'd do to advance his career, Mr. Sheridan, and when Harrison still insisted upon marrying this other girl and her money, Doc Raven threatened him. Irma loved Dan Harrison. He would marry Irma or burn in the chair for murder. He chose to marry Irma.

"Harrison didn't really think of killing her at first. He didn't even mind the allowance you gave her, Sheridan, though he knew about it, nor the expensive car. He was not jealous of things that made it easier for him. But Doc Raven came to him and told him he would have to let Frank Whitey go. Doc Raven was just as fond of Irma as you were, Sheridan. You know that, of course."

"Of course," said Sheridan. "We both

worshiped the girl. But what made Harrison go in for these awful murders?"

"Doc Raven. Raven didn't want that past of Irma's brought up. He wanted her to be a great woman. He threatened to disclose the murder if Harrison didn't free Whitey. Harrison in pretended excitement over the imaginary disappearance of Irma and the promise of delivery of the evidence for Whitey, trapped Doc Raven in the East Side saloon. Then Doc Raven disappeared. But he had a few friends; friends who looked for him. Remember, now I'm quoting from the words of a man who is dead—Dan Harrison. Harrison told me that these people rang him up about Raven, and it was then that he got the idea of using the hammer—Doc Raven's hammer. He knew where Doc kept it. Doc Raven saw young Hawthorne, the broker, and told him that if he disappeared to go straight to Harrison. Raven disappeared. Hawthorne went straight to Harrison and died for his trouble. The other murder—of the girl—was about the same. Harrison decided then to put the whole blame on Doc Raven. Decided at the end to kill his wife, marry the heiress, still keep his friendship with Sheridan, and even get the Supreme Court judgeship.

"But who knows what goes through the head of a man who has once killed so horribly. Of course, he believed that the girl forced the marriage, too. Thus, a growing hate that he hid even from her. He was your assistant, Doran. He was in a position to meet criminals and control them either under his own name or another."

"Of course, of course." Mortimer Doran was glad and he wasn't glad. He was thinking up a statement for the papers that would cover him and his office. You could see that on his face. He asked Vee: "But how did you know it was Harrison, and that he would come

here tonight; come here to kill his own wife?"

Vee shrugged his shoulders, looked at the silent Ramsey, said: "How I knew it was Harrison is my secret. That's why I riled Mr. Sheridan, pretended that he had too much interest in the case. I wanted to put Harrison off his guard," Vee lied easily, even grinned over at me. "And how I got him to come here? Well, I wasn't certain of him, of course. But I wrote a letter to Doc Raven, for I knew Mrs. Harrison had sent the evidence to someone representing himself as Doc Raven. And I knew—at least events proved that I knew—that the one receiving that letter would come here, leave the letter, addressed to Doc Raven behind him as evidence that Doc Raven came and murdered the girl. Of course Harrison wished to create the impression that Doc Raven was mad."

"But what did the letter say?"

Brown lifted the letter from his pocket, the one Harrison had dropped by the fireplace. He read it aloud to us.

"Dear Doc—

I still believe in you. Come and see me at once. I will be at One Fourteen Elm Lane, Fair Haven, Long Island. Come late tonight. I'll be alone.

Always,
Irma."

"Now, gentlemen"—Vee stood up and became a little bombastic—"You see that the one who received that letter and who meant harm to Irma could come here, find her alone, kill her, and leave the letter sticking the crime on Doc Raven."

RAMSEY spoke for the first time. "But how did you know that that letter wouldn't be received by Doc Raven himself?"

"I didn't know for sure when I had Irma Harrison send the letter. But I sus-

pected that Doc Raven was dead. I've told you now that Mrs. Harrison was there in that East Side saloon, but I didn't tell you that she saw Doc Raven there. Just a fleeting glimpse of his face; a white face—like a dead face. And I wondered if Doc Raven was the killer or if the killer was moving Doc Raven's body behind the curtains. I wondered if she saw the face by accident or design on the part of the killer, so that she might tell someone—maybe Mr. Sheridan—of seeing Doc Raven. Yes, I think Harrison would have seen to that. You see, he had grown to hate her, but he couldn't kill her until that evidence was safe in his hands—the evidence that she thought she was sending to Doc Raven for Whitey. That's why he let her live that night on the ladder. He felt the experience and the fear for her husband, himself, would force the evidence from her. He planned to put Doc's body where it would never be found.

"Harrison didn't tell me everything before he died. And I didn't know when I waited in the closet; didn't know just who would come to the house. If Raven was dead, the man who got that message would come. If Raven was alive, he'd come friend or foe." Vee shrugged his shoulders. "It didn't matter to me in the closet. If someone came to kill the girl, that someone was to die."

"And did," said Sheridan.

"And did," echoed Vee. "But it's no longer guess work about Doc Raven. Harrison buried his body in the yard behind that saloon. He had kept him prisoner for days. Once he nearly escaped and so—his death. You must have overlooked it in your search, Ramsey—a loose flagging in the backyard. Harrison told me. It's a wonder you didn't find it, Ramsey."

"Hell," said Ramsey. "We weren't

looking for more bodies. Three seemed plenty."

Vee spoke to Hyman Sheridan: "You have a raven tattooed on your chest then, Mr. Sheridan?"

"Yes. Doc and I had it done together years ago in Liverpool. Why?"

"No man with a raven tattooed upon his chest would so call attention to it with such horrible murders. If you wish to, Mr. Doran, you might say that Harrison was mad."

"No!" Sheridan pounded the table. "We'll give the people the truth. I never knew a saner man."

"Well," said Vee, "he was probably as sane as I am." And with a short laugh, "Which isn't saying a hell of a lot."

After a pause Hyman Sheridan said: "Irma Harrison is like a daughter to me. She kept these threats from me in the beginning. But she came to see me often—and I knew she was worried long before she told me."

"Ah," said Vee, "I see. I thought at first it was just stubbornness and your own importance when you wouldn't tell me where you were the nights of the mur-

ders. Now I see. You were with Irma Harrison, and I think that Dan Harrison took advantage of those visits to— to do a bit of killing."

"He did. He did." Sheridan nodded. "If I had only known that Doc Raven forced that marriage this never would have happened. Well, it's over. It's got to come out." He came to his feet. "And, of course, I've got to take care of Irma."

"Certainly." Vee grinned. "In a fatherly and financial way. But what she needs is comforting. Dean—you'll attend to that for Mr. Sheridan—and for Irma too. She's been asking for you."

I glared at Vee, but I did get up and start out through the hall to the living-room. Vee followed me into the hall.

"We are always learning things in life, Dean." He put an arm about my shoulders. "Tonight we learned that a woman's intuition cannot be relied on. She was sure of death; absolutely certain of her own death. Yet, she's alive—very much alive." And when I didn't say anything, but gripped the knob of the living-room door, "And Dean, I just got the name for my new song. I'll call it *My Comforting Man*."

In the Next Issue—A Smashing Race Williams Novel by Carroll John Daly

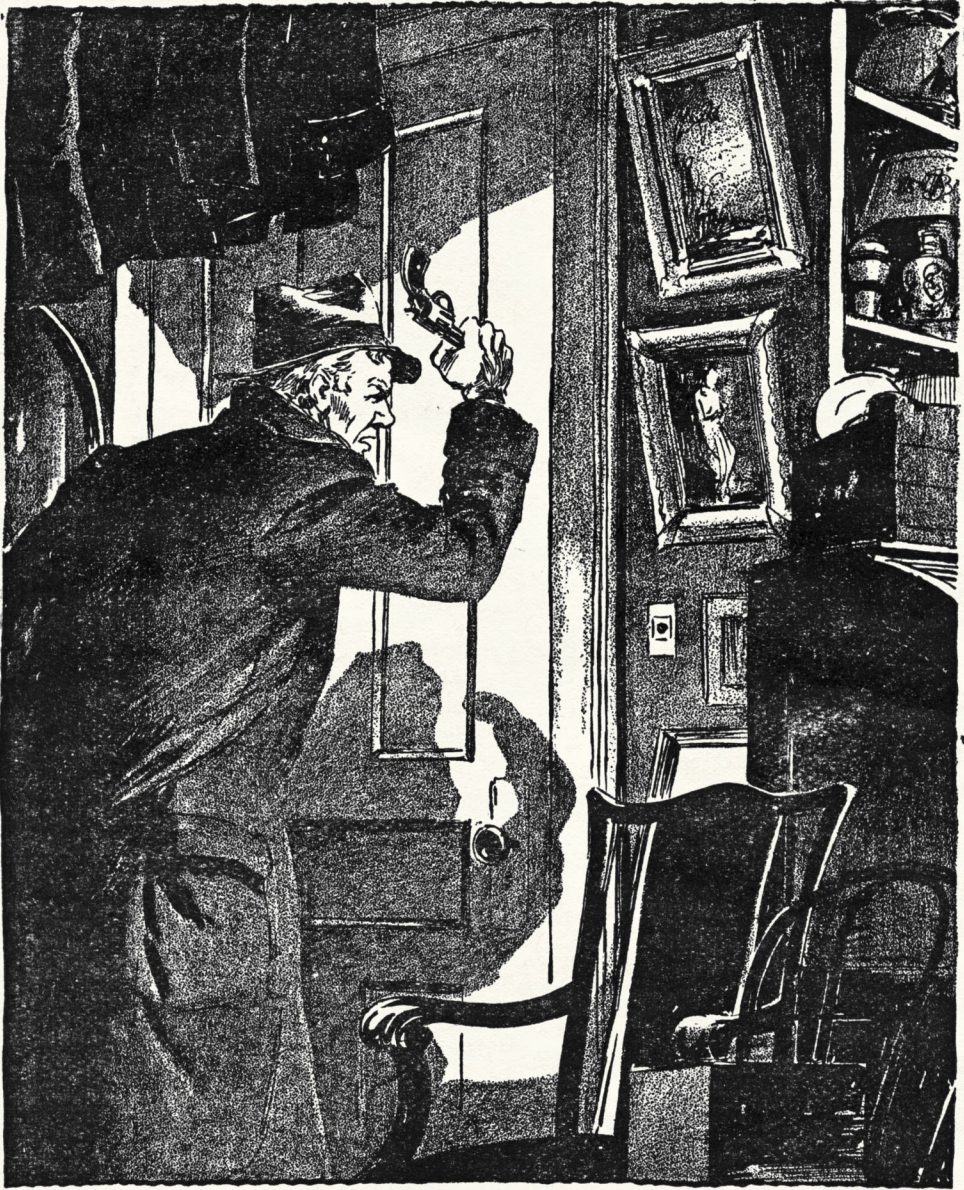
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PROBAK JUNIOR



BLOOD IN THE DARK

CHAPTER ONE

Greetings—Big Boy

THE regular afternoon plane from New York was due at Danbridge at three ten. At three five it was two thousand feet above the West End

What with the keyhole-peeping kraut reporter, Stormy Scholtz on had about as much privacy on the Add Hube Boggany, the pride of and it's easy to see why Cardigan he had to play host to at the cock-

top down," Cardigan suggested.



A Cardigan Story

By Frederick Nebel

Author of, "The Curse of Cardigan," etc.

*columnist, Mae Riley, and the nose
his trail, that big dick from Cosmos
Mackworth case as a flagpole-sitter.
the force, to his list of watch-dogs
crabbed at the uninvited company
eyedest crime party of the New Year.*

Viaduct and the factories. At three six it was dropping down across Mohican Park and the Post Road Parkway. At three seven it crossed over the business district and at three eight the pilot throttled down above the Fair Grounds. The airport was beyond. The pilot got the O.K. flag from

the administration-building tower and at three ten he spun his wheels on the landing field and waddled up to the cement ramp.

Cardigan was the third to get off. The lean wind driving across the field bagged the skirt of his shaggy old ulster against his legs, wrestled with the shapeless brim of his battered fedora. Four persons got off after him and inside the gate a group was waiting for the arrivals. There were shouted greetings. There was the dry nasal voice of a uniformed telegraph messenger.

"Telegram for Mr. Cardigan . . . Telegram for Mr. Cardigan."

Cardigan raised his big head, opened his mouth, started a gesture upward. But he caught himself instantly, dropped his head, jammed his hand into his overcoat pocket. His other hand lugged a scarred Gladstone. He tramped through the terminal and was the first to climb into the airport bus. He could still hear, but faintly now, the nasal-voiced messenger intoning his name. He paid no attention. Other passengers entered the bus. The driver got in last, tooted the bus off the cinder parking space and hit the wide cement road to town.

IT WAS a fifteen-minute ride to the airways office on Central Avenue, in the heart of the city. Cardigan did not go to a hotel. Hefting his bag, he started walking, his shoulders rocking and his big feet hitting the pavement hard. In Tuttle Street, ten minutes later, he came to a short row of rooming houses, chose one at random and climbed six stone steps to a glass-enclosed vestibule. He got a bedroom and sitting-room on the third floor.

"It's clean and comfortable," said the sharp-eyed, sharp-nosed man.

"How much?"

"How long does the gentleman want it for?"

"Make it a week."

"Then I would have to have twelve dollars."

Cardigan scooped up his bag and said, "Good-by."

The sharp-eyed man swallowed. "How much would the gentleman like to pay?"

Cardigan stopped on the threshold. "Eight bucks."

"Ten would be the minimum."

"Nine."

"At nine fifty I lose money."

Cardigan skated his bag across the floor and paid the man nine fifty. He gave the name which he had used on the flight from New York: John Baker. The man explained that there was a pay-telephone on the wall just outside the door, and left. Cardigan did not remove his overcoat. He lit a cigarette, hauled a bottle of Irish whiskey out of his bag and took a long swallow. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he finished the cigarette, took two more swallows of whiskey, slapped the cork into the bottle and went out.

There was a telegraph office at the corner of Central Avenue and Tuttle Street. Cardigan went to the man at the desk and said: "I pulled in on the three-ten plane from New York. I was expecting a telegram to meet me at the airport. The name's J. Cardigan. See if there was a slip-up, will you?"

The man walked to the rear of the office and did some telephoning. Then he looked through some papers. In a minute he returned to the desk, saying: "There was a message and the boy paged you."

"If he did, I didn't hear him."

"You have identification, I suppose?"

Cardigan slapped down his wallet, flipped it open. The man scanned it, then handed Cardigan a telegram. The message read—

GREETINGS BIG BOY

ED

Cardigan muttered, "H'm," crumpled the message and thrust it into his pocket.

"Just as I thought," he said. "A gag. Let me have an envelope and a piece of paper, will you?"

The clerk supplied them and Cardigan wrote—

Dear Mr. Clayburn,
There's been a leak. Run over to 402
Tuttle Street, third floor, number 33.
J. Cardigan.

He folded the sheet of paper, slipped it into the envelope, sealed the flap. On the envelope he wrote, *Mr. Samuel Clayburn, Editor, The News-Post, City*. He said to the clerk: "I want this delivered by special messenger to this man in person. Get that straight—in person. I don't want anyone else—office boy, secretary—anybody—signing for it. O.K. How much?"

"Really," the clerk said, "the News-Post Building is only halfway down the block."

Cardigan tossed a dollar bill on the counter. "I know. But I get sick riding in elevators and I can't hear over the telephone. Change that bill and shoot that letter off."

AS HE ducked out of the office he almost ran into a girl and in trying to avoid hitting her he slammed into a small fat man who was carrying an armful of bundles. The fat man sat down on the pavement and the bundles spread themselves over the sidewalk. Cardigan picked the fat man up and, ignoring the abuse the fat man heaped upon him, went about gathering up the bundles, which he piled back into the fat man's arms.

"Sorry, buddy," he said.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't look where you're going! Why don't you look where you walk? Do you think you own this sidewalk? You ought to carry collision insurance!" The fat man got a firm grip on his bundles, gave Cardigan a red-faced exasperated look, and trotted off.

"Clumsy as ever, aren't you?" said a dry feminine voice.

Cardigan turned. The girl he had almost knocked down was a lanky blonde dressed in a belted tweed coat and a disk-like hat almost innocent of a crown. She fell in step beside him as he started up Tuttle Street.

"What brings the great maestro to Danbridge?" she asked.

He said: "The last time I saw you, Mae, you were trying to tell a barman how to mix a side-car in an East Side bar."

"I told him, didn't I? No kidding, Jack—what are you doing in Danbridge?"

He stopped at the next corner and looked darkly at her. "Listen, Mae, you're a nice gal except that you ask too many questions."

"I asked only one."

"I'm here to attend a flower show."

"Ha, in November!"

"Well, you ask questions, you've got to expect answers. Now be a good girl and go where you were going."

"I was going this way."

"You were going up Central Avenue when I missed hitting you."

She shrugged, smiled ruefully. "You sure know how to hand a girl the cold shoulder."

"I'm busy, Mae, and I like to walk alone."

"Tailing some big batter and yegg man?"

"Well, a client of ours lost his shadow and I'm trying to find it for him. See you soon, Mae."

"I'm on the *Morning Express* and I go to dinner when asked by big Irishmen, even when they've got bad manners. Sure," she said, turning on her heel, "see me soon, by all means."

"Yeah," he said after her, "along about Nineteen Forty or sometime."

He strode on, shaking his head. If there

was anything worse than a prying newspaperman, it was, he figured, a newspaper-woman. Whatever Mae Riley heard went in one ear and out through her mouth.

Tuttle Street was fairly crowded and when he reached the entrance to his rooming house he turned and looked back. Mae was not in sight. A lad of about twelve was standing on the curbstone looking up at him and giggling.

"What's so funny, son?" the big op said.

The lad only giggled some more, then turned on his heel and fled across the street.

Cardigan went up to his rooms and looked at himself in a mirror. He didn't see anything that he reasoned was worth laughing about. He muttered: "The brat's probably screwy. He'll probably grow up to be one of the city's prize politicians or"—taking off his overcoat—"a detective-sergeant."

Thinking of Mae Riley again, he frowned, shook his head.

SAMUEL CLAYBURN was a square-shouldered man of a little better than medium height. He had a pair of big, strong hands. His legs were limber, sturdy. He wore a derby and a dark gray overcoat. His face was broad, ruddy, full of small muscles, and his eyes had a look as direct as a slap in the face. When he had walked into the room, Cardigan gave the door a kick and it slammed shut.

"Sit down, Mr. Clayburn."

Clayburn pitched his derby onto a divan and sat down beside it, thrusting his hands deep into his overcoat pockets, hanging one knee over the other. His expression was that of a man who had considered things on the way over and was still considering them.

Cardigan said: "Drink?"

"Not now."

Cardigan took one himself and leaned

against the wall next to the window. "Some smart sweetheart tried to pull a fast one on me but I think I nipped it in the bud. As I was getting off the plane a messenger with a telegram began calling my name. I almost fell for it but there was a little birdie on my shoulder. I gave the messenger the go-by."

"Where's the fast one come in?"

"Well, when you phoned me over long distance you suggested it'd be a good idea if I traveled here under an alias. I did that. John Baker. That's what I'm in here as, too. Somebody knew I was traveling under an alias and this same somebody didn't know what I looked like. So he sent a telegram to J. Cardigan, arriving on the three-ten plane, in the hope that when my name was called I'd ask for the telegram. He must have been in the crowd waiting at the airport. Well, I gave the telegram the go-by. To make sure it was a fluke, I later went around to the telegraph office and got the message. It was a fluke. 'Greetings, big boy. Ed.' I don't know anybody here named Ed."

Clayburn sighed, pulled out a cigar, bit off the end of it and put it in his mouth. He didn't light up. "That was a fast one," he mused out loud, his face wrinkled with worry. "But you used your head. Why'd you send me that letter by special messenger instead of just phoning or dropping around?"

"I figured, after I found that the telegram was a gag, that somebody in your office knew I was coming here. This somebody knew I was coming under an alias but he didn't know what the alias was. But he knew I was coming, he knew what business I'm in, so he told somebody else. You should have made that call over a private wire, or from an outside telephone booth. There's a heel on your paper somewhere."

Clayburn lit his cigar, stared into space and muttered: "*M'm*, must be." Then he

drew some papers from his inside pocket, laid them on his knee and leaned back. "The reason I got you here, Cardigan, was to see if you could locate my boss, Silas Mackworth, publisher of the *News-Post*, of which, of course, I'm editor."

Cardigan said: "That's a swell beginning. You work for a guy and you don't know where he is."

Clayburn regarded him levelly. "This is serious, Cardigan."

Cardigan was bent backward, draining his glass. He crossed the room, set the glass down and said: "How serious, Mr. Clayburn?" He opened a packet of salted peanuts and, leaning back against the highboy, began popping them into his mouth.

CLAYBURN regarded him for another moment, then said: "Very, very serious. Mr. Mackworth's in the habit of writing our leading daily editorial. It may come from anywhere and by various means—telegraph, cable, special delivery, telephone. Sometimes, of course, he writes it in the office. He's been writing his paper's leading editorial for ten years. For the past two years," Clayburn went on, "he's been hammering against the left-wing political group which now practically runs this city. During the past six months, due in no small measure to our paper's efforts—and particularly Mr. Mackworth's editorials—the die-hards have been growing in strength, with a grand chance of copping municipal leadership at the next election.

"Suddenly, three days ago, I received his usual daily editorial, this time by special delivery. Except that when I read it it was very unusual indeed." Clayburn leaned forward. "After having hammered the left-wing group for the past two years—suddenly, without warning, without any intimation whatever, he attacked in this editorial the die-hards and everything they

stand for. Without any reference, you understand, to his former loyalties! Just plain out with it!" He leaned back, a look of shock and bewilderment staring from his eyes. His voice dropped. "I did not publish that editorial. I tried to locate him. He was not home. He was not at his club. He was not at his mountain camp. I couldn't locate him anywhere. Next day I received another editorial along the same lines. This morning I received a third, hotter than either of the others." He shook his head. "I refuse to publish any of them. I can't understand this complete change of policy. I can't locate him."

"Hasn't he bawled you out yet for not publishing them?"

Clayburn struck his knee. "I tell you I've had no word from him except these editorials! If he called me up and bawled me out, then I'd know—and I'd go ahead and print them. But no word, you understand! Nothing but these damned editorials that would kill any chance the die-hards ever had!" He dropped his shoulders. "He's long been a dynamic man, full of nerves. I'm afraid his mind's cracked up and he doesn't know what he's doing."

"Is the writing his?"

"The signature is. He always writes on a typewriter. It's his typewriter—a portable. I've had the type checked by an expert. His style sounds the same—it was never out of the ordinary. But his political charges and counter-charges are outrageous. They're libelous. No man in his right mind would write them. They're so flagrantly false that we'd be sued up to our eyeteeth!"

Cardigan said: "Any of your reporters been looking for him?"

"No. In fact, they don't know. Nobody in the organization knows. I've written the leading editorials myself. If the Old Man has cracked up I don't want

it known, I want to get him straightened out again." He stood up abruptly. "If I can locate him!" he cried. Then suddenly his voice was low, normal; his stare slapped at Cardigan. "That's why I got you here."

"Where were these editorials mailed from?"

"No return address, of course. They were postmarked at the Terminal Station—that's down near the railway station."

"And you say he was in the habit of hiking around and sending in these editorials from almost any place."

Clayburn nodded. "It was nothing at all for him to stay away from the office for three or four days at a time—but the daily editorial always came in. It wasn't until this morning I actually got panicky about the thing and phoned you."

"Did he write or dictate his editorials?"

"He always wrote them on his own typewriter. He liked it that way."

"O. K. Suppose you give me samples of some he wrote before this change and the ones he wrote afterward. Also get me a photograph of him. Give me a list of the addresses where he might be found—the ones you tried to locate him at. Was the paper that these last three were written on the kind he always used?"

"Yes."

"Send the stuff around to me here. John Baker. Better use an outside messenger. If I phone you, I'll use that name, too. I don't want it to get around that I'm in town, because I'm known here—the cops especially know me and take a great joy in making my life miserable. How does the *Morning Express* rate?"

"Our mortal enemy," gritted Clayburn. "They're high on top of the left-wing bandwagon."

"Who could have heard you phoning me on long distance?"

"My secretary Luella Deya, or the switchboard operators."

"Say nothing to any of them. Send me their names and addresses and when they'll be off duty. And give me your home address and phone number."

Clayburn nodded. He said: "I hope, of course, that no one recognized you when you arrived."

Cardigan laughed roughly. "When the plainclothesmen recognize me they slap me on the back. They're all right, they're nice guys, some of them, but a man in the agency business, like me, has a hell of a time combing those babies out of his hair."

It was not until Samuel Clayburn had gone that Cardigan remembered how completely Mae Riley had recognized him.

CHAPTER TWO

Mae Riley Reveals

AT nine next morning Cardigan walked a couple of blocks up Tuttle, bought the *Morning Express* and sloped into a lunchroom. He ordered a double orange juice, three fried eggs with Canadian bacon, hard rolls and a pot of coffee. He went through the meal with great gusto and had shaved his appetite down to the coffee when he came across the item on the third page. The item made him sit up straight; it made him scowl savagely; to his lips it brought a low, bitten-off oath. In the column *Mae Riley Reveals* he read:

FAMOUS DETECTIVE VISITS HERE

Jack Cardigan, chief field operative of the Cosmos Detective Agency, arrived in town recently and is staying at a rooming house in Tuttle Street.

When questioned as to his reasons for being here, the nationally known private detective refused to comment.

He did not finish his coffee. He folded the paper, rose and took his meal check to the cashier's wicket. He paid his bill.

In the street, where a capricious wind was spinning scraps of paper, he stood for a moment buttoning his shabby ulster and staring with hard dark eyes unseeingly into the faces of pedestrians. He strode down Tuttle Street with a wicked warp to his lips and a stiffness in the back of his neck. He turned right into Central Avenue, stretched his legs for four blocks and then turned left into Raymond Street. Halfway down Raymond Street he entered the Express Building and went up to the news room. A gum-chewing youth was sitting at a desk behind a wooden railing.

Cardigan towered at the railing. "I want to see Miss Mae Riley," he said.

"Name?" chewed out the youth.

"An old friend."

"That's what you say. What's your name?"

Cardigan kicked open the gate in the wooden railing and two men in shirt-sleeves and green eye-shades stood up from a couple of desks. One said: "What's on your mind, pal?"

"Mae Riley."

"I didn't let him in," the office boy said. "He just—"

"I know, I know," the spokesman said; and to Cardigan, "Take it easy, pal. You can't sail in here like you owned the place."

Cardigan snapped: "O. K., buddy. Then get me Mae Riley."

"For why?"

"I want to kiss her."

"Well, this ain't a love nest, so back-fire out, pal."

Cardigan said: "Maybe I want to knock out her permanent wave. At any rate, I want to see her. Where is she?"

"She's not in yet."

"How long did it take you to think that up?"

"One second flat, lard head. Fall on it and slide out."

"Ah," said Cardigan, "on top of being smart, you're tough."

"Yeah, and you don't rate tenth either way. With a kisser like yours you couldn't be smart or you'd have done something about it years ago—committed suicide, for instance. And as for being tough, I never saw a windbag yet you couldn't puncture."

"How is it you manage to keep your feet on the ground?"

"I miss the point."

"With all the wind you could get a job in any man's army as an observation balloon. What other name do you go by besides horse's neck?"

"Scholtz to you and preferably Mister Scholtz."

"You go in for low comedy too."

"What are you trying to do?"

"I'm trying to see Mae Riley."

Scholtz, who was a hefty broad man with a slab of yellow hair lying atop his green eye-shade, said: "If you don't take the air, sailor, I'll bust a typewriter over your head and you'll need more than a typist to pick the alphabet out of your dandruff."

A dozen men had gathered behind Scholtz and one of them said: "Go ahead, Stormy, take him; we're all behind you."

Scholtz said: "You guys mind your business. I can handle this hunk of bad cheese and if I can't I've been a cripple for years without knowing it."

A man came striding importantly among the desks shouting: "What is this, a bargain sale? I told you, Vincent," he yelled at the office boy, "not to let any tramps or salesmen or Armenian rug merchants in this office." And to Cardigan, "Well, get out, get out! What do you want here anyhow?"

"Mae Riley."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, how about me? Don't I want Mae Riley? Haven't I been trying to get hold of Mae Riley?"

Isn't she supposed to be here at nine? And was she here at nine? No! Is she here now? No! And you want Mae Riley! What about me? I'm her boss, I employ her, I pay her. Haven't I any rights to Mae Riley? Answer me! Who has a better right to Mae Riley between the hours of nine and five than I have? Have you? No! Who has? Nobody, damn your eyes!"

Cardigan muttered, "Ga-ga, poor guy!" and turned and swung his big feet out of the office.

IN the street below he stood on the curb deliberating. In his pocket he had the names of the three switchboard operators and the secretary who had been on duty at the *News-Post* when Clayburn made the call to the agency. He was not ready, however, to come out in the open, to reveal his identity by questioning any of these four persons. Last night he had learned from Silas Mackworth's butler that the publisher had left three days before carrying his portable typewriter and a portfolio. Where he had gone the butler did not know. There was nothing unusual, he had said, about Mr. Mackworth's sudden departures for parts unknown. Mackworth had not, according to the chauffeur and the butler, gone in his limousine. The servants had become used to the great publisher's eccentric habits.

Cardigan decided on a novel course of action. Standing there on the curb, he figured it would be a good idea to hire a local private detective agency to shadow the three operators and the secretary and to get full data on their background and the people they associated with. Nothing would have to be said about why he wanted such information. He knew of a pretty good local agency.

He put his head into the wind and strode down Central Avenue and on the corner of Tuttle Street a big hand landed

heartily on his shoulder, a voice said: "As I live and breathe, my old bosom friend Jack Cardigan! The good old Cosmos Agency in person; hears nothing, sees nothing, knows all."

Cardigan stopped, turned. He made an effort at showing surprise and good humor. Detective-sergeant Hube Boggany was all grins. He was built somewhat along the lines of a rhinoceros, a leathery faced, huge man wrapped in a baggy raglan overcoat, with a sporty yellow fedora aslant on his blocklike head. Grey spats overlapped ruddy brown shoes.

"Good old Hube Boggany," said Cardigan trying to be hearty. "Where'd you get the outfit?"

"Ain't it the nuts, boy! Me wife thought the clothes I was wearing was too, she said, somber kind of. Clothes make the man, she says. I feel ten years younger since I been wearing these new models. I see by the *Morning Express* that you're in town. I figured if I hung out around Tuttle Street I'd see you sooner or later."

"Anything particular you wanted to see me about?"

Boggany waved his hand. "Nope, nothing—nothing at all. Just to say hello. Where you stopping, at the Bellman?"

"Uh-uh."

"The Dodge?"

"No, Hube."

"Oh, prob'ly the Chester, then."

"Wrong again."

"H'm. Where, then?"

"Oh, with a friend."

"Ah," grinned Boggany, his bright little eyes jiggling. "Well, I suppose you come up see the auto show."

Cardigan chuckled. "Nope."

"M'm. Ah, I know. You come here to help organize that new railroad police."

"Never heard of it."

Hube Boggany looked crestfallen. He gave Cardigan a sly little glance, then

stared at the pavement. Finally he heaved, grinned, slapped Cardigan on the arm. "Whatever it is, Jack, I know it's O. K. I ain't really interested in what you're doing."

"That's what I thought," said Cardigan.

"Come on. I was just about to head up Tuttle. I'll go along as far with you as you're going."

"I wasn't going up Tuttle, Hube."

Boggany looked pained. "Well, come to think of it, I got to go along Central here a ways. I'll go along with you."

"I just remembered," Cardigan said. "I've got to go up Tuttle."

Boggany looked very unhappy. He remained on the corner looking unhappy while Cardigan wheeled off and started up Tuttle Street. A couple of blocks farther on Cardigan could see in the rear-view mirror attached to the spare wheel of a parked car that Boggany was following. The detective was worming his way among the cars parked along the curb.

CARDIGAN turned and entered at random a five-storied rooming house four blocks from his own. The vestibule was dark and he could not be observed from the street. But he saw Boggany standing behind a parked sedan directly across the way. Cardigan killed about five minutes in the vestibule, then strode out and returned toward Central Avenue. A backward glance showed him Boggany crossing the street and entering the rooming house.

He changed his mind about going to a local agency. He walked through the city until he found a street corner that was practically deserted. It was in a down-at-the-heel section of the city. There were crumbling abandoned buildings on three sides of the intersection; on the fourth was a board fence concealing what he discovered was an empty lot.

He returned to Central Avenue and sent a note by special messenger to Clayburn. The note read—

At about noon I'll phone you and use my own name. I'll tell you to meet me at two this afternoon on the corner of Race and Fillmore Streets. You agree to meet me there, but don't do it. Just stay where you are.

At eleven o'clock he telephoned police headquarters and asked for Hube Boggany. In a moment Boggany came on the wire.

"Hube, this is Jack Cardigan. Will you meet me at two this afternoon on the corner of Race and Fillmore Streets?"

"What's up, Jack?"

"I want to show you something around there."

"O. K., boy. I'll be there!"

At noon Cardigan telephoned Clayburn. He got the secretary first and she switched him over to Clayburn. He said: "This is Cardigan, Mr. Clayburn. I'd like you to meet me on the corner of Race and Fillmore Streets at two this afternoon. I'll be wearing a light gray raglan coat, a yellow hat, brown shoes and gray spats."

"Very well, Mr. Cardigan," replied Clayburn. "I'll be there."

Cardigan hung up, rubbed his hands together, and went around to a grill room for luncheon. He drank three Dry Martinis, four beers with the luncheon, and afterwards lighted a fat black cigar. He felt just about right. He figured it might be a good idea to take a gun along to the two-o'clock date, so he headed up Tuttle Street toward his rooms and went through the vestibule at exactly one o'clock. He went up the stairways three steps at a time, humming off-key. He got his door-key out on the way down the third-floor corridor and wiggled it in the keyhole while juggling the knob. The door opened easily and he barged in, slapped it shut and glanced up into the muzzle of an

automatic. The man behind the automatic was Stormy Scholtz from the news room of the *Morning Express*.

Cardigan growled: "Put it down, Scholtz. It's a bad idea."

"For you, yeah. It's your own gun, pal, and your choice in guns is swell. Tack your tail onto that chair there and be brighter than you look."

CHAPTER THREE

The Death Double

CARDIGAN'S face wore a sheer, thin smile; it was fixed to his lips and had nothing to do with the dark unwavering light in his eyes. Scholtz stood lazily back on his heels, his heavy legs bowed, his stocky neck rooted firmly to his broad, powerful shoulders. His hat was haphazardly on the back of his head and a slab of yellow hair protruded and reached halfway down his forehead. His broad, well packed face was bare of any expression except one of gravity. His eyes were calm, certain, steady.

"So it's Baker here," he drawled. "One of the lads at the office swore you were Cardigan. I found the address on a slip of paper in Mae's apartment."

"She didn't know the address."

"The hell she didn't. She told me it last night but I wasn't paying much attention so I forgot it. She gave a kid a quarter to follow you and see what house you went in, after you shook her yesterday afternoon."

"She's too bright to live, that gal."

"That's the conclusion I figured you might have come to after you read her puff in this morning's *Express*."

Cardigan squinted, growled: "Clear that up."

"Mae's disappeared."

Cardigan's squint grew deeper. He used a hand to scoff at the remark; snapped

out: "You're drunk or screwy or both!"

"Yeah? Suppose you find her then."

Cardigan made an impatient gesture. "Listen, put that gun down, will you! It's practically on a hair trigger!"

"What did I tell you about sitting down?"

"All right, I'll sit down. There—now I'm sitting down. Now be sensible and put that gun down."

Scholtz was imperturbable. "I'll take care of this end, Cardigan. You take care of yours. Where's Mae?"

Cardigan wagged his head hopelessly. "Mae, Mae, Mae! How the hell do I know where she is? You saw her last night. You said so yourself. Then you saw her after I did."

"Skip all the bushwah, kid, and get down to business. I'm feeling business-like as hell. You sailed into the office this A. M. mad enough to knock her teeth out—"

"I was, by cripes! By cripes, I was! That loose-mouthed dame has caused me to miss more tricks in the ten years I know her than any two police departments put together! Mae's all right except that somebody once told her a newspaper reporter mustn't keep anything from the public. I didn't want anyone to know I was in town. Half the success of my business is based on the surprise move. She killed half of it by blabbing in her column that I was in town."

Scholtz regarded him with heavy stoicism for a full minute. The gun he held never wavered. He said presently: "All right, if that's a prologue, let's go into the story. Why did you come to this city? What's your business here?"

Cardigan stood up and said: "Horses, horses! You know damned well that if any business was important enough to bring me here it's important enough to be my own business, not public property."

"So important, maybe, that Mae got wind of it and you salted her away. Then you crash the office this morning looking for her, just as a stall. Sit down."

"I'm going to stand, reporter, whether you like it or not. And listen to this: if I knew where Mae was at this minute I'd be there boxing her ears. Two years ago in New York I was living at a hotel under an assumed name keeping tabs on a guy that was suspected of being in a fake-insurance swindle. Mae sees me in the lobby one day. I practically on bended knees beg her not to mention to anyone that she saw me there. So next day there appears in the paper she was working on then: "What big Irish private dick is stopping at an East Fifty-third Street hotel under a phony name?" That was her idea of being mysterious. The guy I was tabbing bails out of that caravanserai so fast that he hasn't been caught yet. Now I don't know where she is, see? I haven't set eyes on her since I saw her yesterday afternoon in Tuttle Street. Pull your brains up out of your socks, reporter, and cut out acting the clown with that gun."

SCHOLTZ allowed a dry, mysterious smile to crawl across his lips. "We'll say you don't know where she is. O. K., we'll say that. But you know what you came here for and I don't. Now I want to know, flatfoot. Mae may be a baked-ham reporter but she's on our staff and that's that. She's missing. We want to find her. The general consensus of opinion is that the puff she gave you in her column is somehow connected with her disappearance. Now maybe some guys would like to know where you live. She mentioned that you lived in Tuttle Street but she didn't give the number. Now suppose you break down and tell me who the guys are you're working on."

"Nix," said Cardigan. "For one thing,

I don't know. What you just said sounds reasonable but I can't help you."

"Let me be the judge of that. I want to know, dumb ox, why you're here in Danbridge. Who hired you? There—tell me that! Who hired you?"

A lean measuring look had come into Cardigan's eyes. "You heard me once on that question, reporter. Why I'm here is none of your sweet damned business."

Scholtz barked: "All right, tie your tongue up! Tie it up at police headquarters and see if you'll tie it long! I'm going—"

"Now listen—"

"Back out! I'm going to trot you out and toss you into the loving arms of the first harness bull in the street! This dame has vanished and I'm going to find out where the connection is. Back out that door and keep your dukes high."

Cardigan did not budge. "Before you pack too much faith in that gun, cowboy, be sure of it. Did you jack it once before you swung it on me?"

There was an instant flicker in Scholtz's eyes; but he covered up, snapping: "Of course I did."

"Because if you didn't, the firing chamber's empty. I never jack a shell into the chamber until—"

Scholtz jumped back, slapped his left hand on top of the gun, jacked open the chamber. Cardigan hit him on the jaw as a shell flew harmlessly out of the side of the chamber. Scholtz, seeing that he had been tricked, that there had been a shell in the chamber all the time, exploded ragefully. It was his undoing. A hard, able-bodied man, he might have done damage, but his rage and chagrin blinded him. Cardigan leveled him with two blows and slapped the gun out of his hand as the reporter went down. Scholtz did not quite reach the floor, for Cardigan grabbed him by the coat lapels and, still keeping him in motion, piled him onto the divan.

Scholtz looked dazed but he none the less stood right up on his feet again and took a couple of wild swings. Cardigan slammed him in the belly with the muzzle of the gun, held it there, hard, and chopped off: "No kidding, reporter; it's loaded!"

Scholtz's arms dropped to his sides. His chest and shoulders were heaving but there was still anger and fight in his eyes.

He panted: "I ought to get kicked in the mouth for falling for a trick like that."

"You will if you don't suddenly civilize yourself, baby. Now I'm not being tough. I don't have to, with a gun in my mitt. So tame down. Pick up your hat and get the hell out of here."

Scholtz swung across the room, grabbed his hat, banged it on his head. He strode to the door, said, "I'll be seeing you, Irish, in a big way," and slammed out.

Cardigan, listening at the door, heard his feet club down the two flights of stairs, heard the hall door slam shut. He hopped to the window, looked down and saw Scholtz striding away down the street. He turned from the window with a sour, disgruntled face. It was twenty past one by his watch. He relighted his dead cigar and tramped out of his rooms, down the stairs. In the main corridor he found a back door, unbolted it and stepped into a yard. There was a low wire fence which he scaled easily; dropped into an alleyway and came out on the street beyond. It was half past one when he came to Race and Fillmore Streets. He waited until a woman wheeling a baby carriage had passed and then swung up and over the board fence. In a few minutes he found a knot hole that gave him a pretty generous view of the intersection.

AT five minutes to two Hube Boggany appeared on the corner puffing energetically on a cigar. He rocked com-

fortably back and forth on his heels, the wide brim of his yellow hat flapping in the wind, his brightly polished shoes flashing in the sunlight. He looked well fed, happy; he looked like a man who was anticipating some good fortune. But as he glanced again and again at his watch, and as the minutes passed and welded finally into half an hour, he began to look displeased. No more than a dozen pedestrians had passed during that half hour. At twenty to three Hube Boggany stamped his foot impatiently, looked up and down the street, snorted, and rocked off.

Cardigan saw him vanish beyond range of the knot hole, but the stout detective's footfalls were still very audible. And presently there were other footfalls. A man appeared walking past the knot hole; he was headed in the same direction which Hube Boggany had taken. Cardigan could not see much of his face, for his coat collar was turned up. He waited until the man had passed on. Then he stood on his toes and looked over the top of the fence. Boggany was two blocks up Race Street, with the man a block behind him.

Cardigan cleared the fence and landed on the sidewalk and instantly jumped behind a large tree. Cautiously he peered round the edge of it and the skin on the back of his neck tightened. He saw Hube Boggany standing on a corner, his hands on his hips, the broad back of his coat wrinkled. He saw the man with the turned-up coat collar in the act of kneeling down behind an ashcan and drawing a gun from his overcoat pocket. There was no doubt about what he intended doing; he intended taking a shot at Hube Boggany.

Cardigan knew that his stunt had worked, but right now it was on the point of taking an awful tangent. By phoning Clayburn and describing himself as Boggany he had drawn what he had hoped to

draw—somebody connected with the person in the office who was obviously giving out information; somebody who was connected with the disappearance and strange editorials of Silas Mackworth. But he hadn't looked forward to what was taking place now.

He shouted, "Hey, you!" but did not move from behind the tree. He saw the man with drawn gun duck down behind the ashcan. He saw Hube Boggany turn around slowly, stare in one direction, then in another. The man behind the ashcan could not be seen by Boggany. The headquarters detective sniffed the air, scratched the back of his neck, then shrugged and turned off into the side street, vanishing. Cardigan mused that Hube Boggany would never know how close he had come to death.

The Cosmos op had his hand on the gun in his pocket. The man behind the ashcan was still motionless, his attitude tense, alert. After a minute he began cautiously to peer around, his head moving slowly, his eyes roving warily. They stopped suddenly, fastening on the tree. Cardigan must have stuck his head out farther than he thought. The man instantly whirled, facing the tree. There was a short block between them. He must have known that he had been caught in the act of pulling a gun on Boggany. He began slowly to work his way around the ashcan, to put it between himself and the tree.

Cardigan could have shot the man during that inept move but he had no desire to kill a man who doubtless was potent with information. He remained behind the tree. In a few minutes he could tell that the man was working backward from the ashcan. A woman carrying a market basket came round the corner and the man took advantage of her appearance to stand up and walk swiftly away. The woman was now between him and Cardigan. He kept walking swiftly away.

CARDIGAN stepped from behind the tree, turned up his overcoat collar, yanked down his hat and started. His hand was still on the gun in his pocket. The man was two blocks beyond and when he glanced round and saw Cardigan following on the opposite side of the street he strode even faster. He turned right at the next block and Cardigan broke into a run, running on the earth between the sidewalk and the curbstone. When he reached the corner he saw the man striding down the side street, only half a block away. This street was for the moment deserted, and it happened that at that instant the man was not looking round.

"Pull up, you!" Cardigan yelled, drawing, leveling his gun.

The man dived behind a lamp post as two small girls came skipping out from an areaway into the line of imminent fire. Seeing Cardigan with a gun drawn, they squeaked and cowered and then ran around in circles. The man behind the post was no fool; he simply ran away down the sidewalk. The little girls ran this way and that. Cardigan, charging forward, swung to the left to avoid running over them, but one of them seemed possessed of the same idea. He almost fell over her, he did stumble and lose headway. Seconds were precious. The man was well ahead. Then the second little girl got in the op's way and in trying desperately to avoid trampling on her he fell over his own feet and added a year's wear to the elbows of his overcoat. When he regained his feet the man was out of sight. He strode angrily on and reaching the next corner stood there boiling with anger and frustration. There were quite a few people here; they were marketing or just standing around. Busses rolled by, and trucks, and a few taxicabs. Across the street was a saloon.

Cardigan crossed and pushed open the door and stood up at the bar. He was

scowling to himself, and he growled: "A double rye."

Hube Boggany, who was having a beer at the other end of the bar, picked up his glass and brought it down to Cardigan's elbow.

"I thought we had a date, Jack."

"We did, Hube," Cardigan growled.

"But I got tied up. I'm sorry."

"What was you going to show me?"

"Well, Hube . . . well, it was this way.

Some guy phoned me and said a certain party told him I was in town and gave him my address. He said he'd heard great things about me. He asked me if I was interested in making five hundred bucks. I said anybody was interested in making five hundred bucks and I asked him what I'd have to do? He said it would be something a little on the shady side. Well, I was going to hang up on him. Then I thought of you. I figured here was a chance to give Hube Boggany a break. So I said, 'O.K., let's hear it.' Then he told me to meet him at two at Race and Fillmore. So I phoned you to be there too. Then I got tied up. This guy said he'd wear a brown hat, a brown double-breasted overcoat, and he'd carry a cane. Did you see anybody around there dressed like that?"

"No, Jack, I didn't."

"Maybe you didn't notice. It makes me sore as hell, Hube. There might have been something hot there that might have given you a break. Ten to one the guy was a heel."

Boggany looked interested. "Maybe he'll call you again, Jack."

Cardigan frowned, said intimately under his breath. "Maybe the guy did show up, Hube, and recognized you for a copper."

Boggany nodded. "Maybe, Jack." He drank his beer thoughtfully. "You know, Jack, I think I've figured out why you're in Danbridge."

"Good. Why?"

"You're hunting them counterfeiters that's supposed to be operating here."

Cardigan said nothing, one way or the other. He tossed down his drink and gave Boggany a large wink. Boggany chuckled, rubbed his plump hands together. He clapped Cardigan on the back.

"Yes, Jack, old kid, I knew I'd figure it out sooner or later, I knew."

Cardigan clapped Boggany on the back. "Good old Hube!"

"Ah, good old Jack!"

Then Cardigan looked at the clock on the wall, exclaimed: "Hell, I'm late for a date again!" He tossed a half dollar on the bar, said, "Got to scram, Hube!" and was out of the bar before Boggany could get himself straightened out.

HE phoned Samuel Clayburn from a midtown booth, using the name of Baker to the office switchboard and to the secretary who answered. The voice of the secretary was not the one who had answered on an earlier occasion. Then Clayburn was on the wire.

Cardigan said: "Who was the secretary just answered?"

"She's not my secretary. She's a girl I drafted from the general office. My secretary became ill and had to leave about an hour ago."

"That's what she said!"

When he left the booth he took some memoranda from his pocket. Luella Deya, 449 Kingstown Street. There was a cab handy and he climbed in and ten minutes later the cab stopped and he got out. Before him stood a six-storied red brick building with two potted spruces outside the entrance. The apartment house had a small lobby with a mat rug on the floor. There was nobody around. Cardigan went to the rear and found a door with the word *Superintendent* on it. He pressed a button and in a minute a

fat man appeared yawning and rubbing his eyes.

"Where's Miss Deya's apartment?" Cardigan asked.

"Third floor. Thirty-two."

It was a walk-up. The staircase was narrow and the steps were of dull red tile. There were three doors on the third landing and Cardigan pressed the button of 32. He pressed it three times, at intervals. No one opened the door, so in the end he fiddled around with his set of master keys. It took him five minutes to get in.

The apartment was very small. The living-room was small, the bedroom was smaller, the kitchen was little more than a hole in the wall. The apartment was also empty. But Cardigan saw signs. A closet was bare of any clothing. A bureau was completely empty. The door of the bathroom cabinet was open and the cabinet was empty except for an almost depleted tube of toothpaste and an empty bottle of eau de cologne.

He went down to see the superintendent again, and said: "When did Miss Deya move out?"

"She didn't."

"Well, she did."

The fat man pawed sleepily at his chin. "She must be crazy. Only the other day she paid her rent a month ahead."

Cardigan shrugged and left the building. He felt like a man all tied up in knots and it angered him that while having a beautiful set-up laid out before him there was no way of making it pay dividends. He had lost the man who had been on the point of taking a crack at Boggany. He had lost Luella Deya, the connecting link.

He strode on in the blasting wind, his face reddening with the cold. He walked ten blocks without realizing it and then looked up to find himself in front of police headquarters. A car came skidding

around the corner and braked to a sharp stop. The chauffeur, a policeman, got out of the front and Hube Boggany got out of the rear and rocked toward the steps. He caught sight of Cardigan, flung up an arm.

"Hey, Jack! Hey, did I just have a close shave!"

Cardigan strolled up to him. "You look healthy enough."

"I am, but it's my fault I do, boy! Remember that saloon? Well, I walk out of there and I walk up Merton Avenue and I don't like the taste in my mouth so I stop at one of them chewing gum machines and get a hunk of gum. I'm looking in the mirror on front of it, admiring myself, when I see this bunny across the street pulling a gun." He tapped the large breast pocket on the left of his raglan overcoat. "This is the place to carry a gat, jack—no fooling. I scoop my gat out of here and turn and I don't hold six marksmanship medals for nothing. I drill that guy three times and all he does is bust the mirror in the chewing gum machine with a wild shot."

Cardigan swallowed. His bright idea had almost cost Boggany his life twice over the space of a very short time. He actually gripped the detective's arm, said: "Good work, Hube! I'm damned glad!"

Boggany shook his head, puzzled. "I thought for a minute it might have been the guy made the date with you, but this guy was dressed different—he had on a blue fedora, a black overcoat and he didn't carry no cane."

"Any reason why he should have taken a crack at you?"

"That's what gets me, Jack. None I know of."

"Who is he?"

"Who was he, you mean. He ain't anymore, boy. I put my postmark on him and mailed him where all rats go. He was a lug by the name of Toronto

Komoski. He used to be mixed up in a dog track several years ago; he used to slam down on crap games and I hear he was suspected of white-slaving. I never met him before but the copper on the beat knew him. . . . Well, I got to rush, kid. See me again."

Cardigan walked, and the shivers that danced up and down his spine were not caused by the cold wind. It made him sick when he realized how close he had come to being the cause of Hube Bog-gany's death.

CHAPTER FOUR

Stormy Scholtz

CARDIGAN shaved at six and put on a clean shirt. He put on the same tie he had worn since his arrival in Dan-bridge; it was, in fact, the only tie he had along. A stiff wind was rattling the windowpanes and this called for a stiff drink. He poured four fingers of Irish whiskey into a water glass and downed it. It jolted, but not unpleasantly. He dropped the empty bottle into a waste basket, piled into his ancient ulster and yanked on his shapeless fedora. Anticipating a thick, juicy steak, he drummed his big feet down to the main-floor corridor, pulled open the hall door and barged out through the lighted vestibule. Halfway down the outside steps he stopped short.

Mae Riley was leaning against the iron newel post at the foot of the steps. It was pretty dark. The street lights had been turned on but they were at her back and above, so he could not see her face clearly. But he knew it was Mae, he could tell by the outlines, the rig of her clothing. Standing where he was, he scowled down at her.

"Well, Alice in Wonderland, imagine my surprise," he said caustically. "The only difference between you and a bad

penny that turns up all the time is that you can toss the bad penny in the river. A wise gal, eh? I don't think so too much. Any town that you and me are in at the same time might just as well be a goldfish bowl as far as I'm concerned. Count on it, baby; count on it any time. When you're around I rate about as much privacy as a flagpole sitter or an incubator baby. All right, go ahead, hang your head. Be silent. Look injured." He strode down the steps, shook his finger at her and muttered: "If there wasn't a law against it I'd wring your neck. I'd—"

She rolled a bit against the iron newel post. He saw her hand slipping from the top of it, the fingers sliding across the iron. He grabbed hold of her arm. Her body rolled away from the newel post and he could feel her sway in his grip. He shook her.

"Mae!" he muttered, his eyes suddenly wide and sharp. "What's the matter, kid? Mae—"

She was, he saw, almost out on her feet.

He walked her up the steps, practically lifting her at each step. He got her into the corridor and then he picked her up in his arms and carried her up to his apartment, laid her down on the sofa. Pulling off her hat, he saw that her hair was tousled. There was a black-and-blue mark on her face. She was not completely out but she was not far from it. Her left hand was clenched and he saw a piece of paper protruding between its fingers. He pried the fingers open and took out a crumpled corner of a newspaper. Along the margin was written in pencil, *2221 McFadden. 3 rings. Top floor. Broken knob.* He thrust it into his vest pocket, dropped to his knees.

"Mae—hey, Mae!"

Her voice was wandering: "Came to . . . warn you . . . Jack. They tried to . . . get me . . . tell your . . . your ad-

dress." She sobbed. "Maybe I did . . . can't remember . . ." Her head rolled to one side.

He heaved up and headed for the whiskey bottle, then remembered that it was empty. Swiveling, he took a look at the door, bit his lip, then barged out and locked the door, ran downstairs. He knew where there was a drug store nearby and he reached it in three minutes and bought a pint of rye and a bottle of smelling salts. It took him another three minutes to reach the vestibule of his rooming house. When he got up to the door to his rooms he had a time locating his key; he found it finally but as he was trying to make the keyhole he saw that the door was not completely shut. He gave it a kick and it swung inward. The room, which he had left lighted, was in darkness.

HE reached in and felt for the light switch, turned it. Nothing happened. He stepped into the room and went groping across it to where he figured the sofa was. His foot struck something that was at once soft and resistant. He dropped to one knee and his bare hand felt around, came in contact with an arm, a hand. His fingers slipped over something moist and a little warm and not thin. He knew that it was blood. There was blood here in the darkness beneath his hand.

He rose, his throat dry and thick, and felt his way into the bedroom. That light switch worked. He saw that the single wall light in the living-room had been broken. Taking a globe out of the bathroom, he screwed it into the living-room socket. Light glowed in the room. He felt warm and his chest felt tight and congested and there was a heavy brown look on his face.

Mae Riley lay on the floor in front of the sofa. Her coat was open and there was a red stain about four inches above her right hip, a bit to the front. Her

right hand, lying on the carpet, was next to a lean-bladed knife. The blood on the handle hinted that she herself had drawn the knife out of her wound before passing out. Cardigan bent over her, felt her heart beats. They were hardly perceptible. But she still lived. He stood up and took a long step toward the door, intending to go to the wall phone in the hall and call a doctor.

But Stormy Scholtz stood in the doorway holding a revolver. You couldn't make out his eyes for the pale glimmer in them.

"Caught you, eh, Cardigan?" he said slowly, dangerously.

"Look out, fella. I want to get to that phone in the hall."

"How smart, how very smart."

Cardigan's face was red, angry. "Don't be a fool! I want to get her a doctor!"

"Stay where you are."

"God, I tell you she needs a doctor and I'm going to—"

Scholtz cocked the trigger. "You keep your hands up!"

"A doctor, I tell you! I'm going to—"

He started forward and Scholtz fired. The boom of the gun shook the window-panes. Cardigan stopped dismally in his tracks, with a feeling of having been hit on his left arm with a club. For a minute there was no other feeling. Then a line of fire seemed to enter his arm and flash up to his shoulder, across his chest and neck. He winced and leaned on his good right arm against the table.

He muttered: "For God's sake get her a doctor! Some guy knifed her! I was going out before and I met her on the steps outside. She was about to cave in. I brought her up here and ran out to get some smelling salts and when I came back there she was, knifed. Get a doctor—better get an ambulance!" With an outcry of rage he barged past Scholtz, headed for the phone. But he saw the sharp-faced rooming-house proprietor in the

hallway. "Get an ambulance!" he roared.

The sharp-faced man hopped to the telephone.

Scholtz was on his knees beside Mae.

"Geez, Mae," he muttered.

Cardigan was saying: "You fat head, I've got a sweet arm on account of you!"

SCHOLTZ stood up and said: "One more chirp out of you and you'll have a new kind of belly but it won't do you much good."

"Yeah? Well, listen to me, angel child. I had nothing to do with this. But maybe I've got an idea who did. And that's where I'm going, bum arm and all." He fished the torn bit of newspaper out of his vest pocket. "Read that, if you can read."

Scholtz scowled at it.

Cardigan demanded: "It's Mae's writing, ain't it?"

"Yes, and what about it?"

"That's what she gave me when she came here, and that's where I'm going. I ought to go to a hospital but what's the sense of getting patched up and then going out and getting all unpatched again. I'll get it all over with at one time. She's probably been held and slapped around a bit. She probably escaped or gave my address and was released. Anyhow, she came here. Why whoever knifed her didn't go for me, since it was my address they wanted, I don't know. It's screwy but I'll unscrew it. Give me that hunk of paper. I trusted to my memory once on an address and crashed into an old maid's home instead of the place I was supposed to crash, a creep joint. Come on, stupe, give me it!"

Scholtz was beginning to look excited in a heavy way. "Now wait a minute. Look at your hand, it's all bloody. You can't go around that way."

"I can't, can't I? Why, once in San Francisco—"

"Hurdle the autobiography. I'm not impressed. You stay here and I'll go. I'll dust this address better than a vacuum cleaner."

Cardigan slapped the piece of paper out of his hand, snapped it up before it fell to the floor. "I'm the laddie that's going, you kraut. You stay here and sharpen pencils for the story you're going to write. That's your business. Leave the rough edges to a guy that knows his way around—"

"Ha! You, for instance!"

Cardigan was on his way to the door. Over his shoulder he growled: "I've got no time to waste on guys that aim at a guy's belly and only bust him in the arm. Goom-by."

Scholtz bawled to the sharp-faced man: "Brother, you stay here with the gal till the ambulance comes. Tell 'em to spare no expense on this gal, the *Morning Express* will pay for it. Tell 'em I'll see them later—just say Stormy Scholtz left in a hurry accompanied by a bad smell named Cardigan, a so-called detective—ha!"

Downstairs in the lobby Cardigan crowded him, spoke in a low hard voice: "Reporter, you're horning in on my private parade."

"I'm keeping you honest, pal. Come on, don't be a thick Mick all your life. Let's go."

"I'm telling you—"

"And I'm telling you—"

"Nuts!" yelled Cardigan.

"And back at you—roasted!"

They ran down the outside steps, side by side, calling each other unpleasant names. Scholtz snarled at a taxicab.

CHAPTER FIVE

Big-Hearted Mick

NUMBER 2221 McFadden Road was a boxlike frame building of three stories. A store occupied the ground floor,

There were two show windows flanking a central door and above the windows and the door was a large wooden sign reading, *SECOND HAND FURNITURE BOUGHT AND SOLD*. Beneath this legend was another which said, in smaller letters, *Anything From A Fountain Pen To A Fire Engine*. The two stories above the store were dark. The windows, in fact, were boarded up. But there was a light in each show window and there was another light inside. The show windows were jampacked with all kinds of cast-off junk.

Cardigan said to Scholtz: "You let me do the talking."

"I'll let you do it as long as I think you're doing it right."

Cardigan glared at him and then headed for the door. He carried his left hand in his overcoat pocket. The blood had run down the inside of his sleeve and his pocket was sopping. But his right hand was good and he looked a little wild and very mean as he banged open the door and strode in. All kinds of furniture were piled crazily around.

A small, doughy-faced, pot-bellied little man got up from a roll-top desk and said: "Please it should be to meet you, shentlemens. So what is it I should doing for you, so what?"

Scholtz said: "We wanna buy a fire engine."

"Ho, ha—you wass refaring to dose sign. Shentlemens, dose sign is shast a shoke yet. Possibly a nize Cheependale table what it is bosting my heart for to sal chip at fur bocks—"

"Listen to him translate from the Greek," said Scholtz.

Cardigan glowered. "Shut up, stupe." And to the pot-bellied man: "What's upstairs, buddy?"

The pot-bellied man sighed. "Unly shonk—lots from shonk it would not pay you for to look at yet."

"Well, let's look at it."

The pot-bellied man smiled and caressed the lapel of Cardigan's coat tenderly. "Shentlemens, I'm resure you dot notting opstairs would making you pot wit' tan cents cash or credit even."

Scholtz, saying, "I think the way he translates is lousy," suddenly gripped the pot-bellied man by both arms. The latter cringed and seemed to grow two sizes smaller. He began to bleat, "Yi! Yee!" but Scholtz silenced him with a slap in the mouth and said, "Kick off that yodeling." And to Cardigan, "We've got no time to pamper this bird. Should I knock him cold?"

"No. He might come to. Pile him on that roll-top desk and pull down the roll."

Scholtz heaved the pot-bellied man on to the desk, yanked down the roll and locked it. Cardigan came back from having locked the front door. He spotted another door.

"Let's try this," he said, and went to it. It was locked. Beside it was a black push button. "Maybe this is the button. Mae wrote down 'three rings.'"

Cardigan pressed the button three times and waited.

"How's your arm?" Scholtz asked.

"Lousy, thanks to you."

"I don't care much. I just want to make sure whether I've got an able-bodied man along or a husk."

Cardigan's lip curled. "In the first place, kraut, I've got you along—you haven't got me along. And in the—"

There was a clicking sound and Cardigan grabbed hold of the knob, pulled the door open. Both strode headlong for a staircase. Scholtz shoved Cardigan out of the way, so he might go up first, but Cardigan beat him to it and began climbing fast. They did not try to muffle their footsteps, for there would have been no point in doing so. When they reached the second-floor corridor they saw that the windows at the front and rear of the hall were tightly boarded.

THEY climbed to the top floor, found another lighted corridor and heard the low sound of mixed voices. Cardigan spotted a door with a broken door-knob, motioned to Scholtz, and drew his gun. Scholtz drew his too and tried to get by Cardigan. Cardigan blocked him. Scholtz got mad and butted Cardigan out of the way and took two long strides. His left hand closed on the broken knob, he turned it, whipped open the door and jumped into a large room where four men and a woman were sitting or standing around arguing heatedly. They all stopped arguing and one of the men, who was idly spinning a gun, tried to use it. Scholtz fired without a word. Another man had come swiftly through another doorway. He tried to turn and flee but Cardigan, leaping into the room, barked: "Don't be bashful, son! Get in here!"

The man whom Scholtz had shot was staggering around like a drunk, his head hanging between his shoulders. Suddenly he fell down and lay motionless. The girl's hands were pressed to her cheeks, her eyes were wide with horror. She was a slim, sleek article, with black, wavy hair, and she was dressed in smart dark clothes. On a table stood a portable typewriter.

Cardigan said two words. "Luella Deya."

The girl's eyes jumped in their sockets and terror ripped down across her face and pulled her mouth out of shape. A portly man dressed in a black overcoat and a steel-gray fedora chewed slowly on a cigar. His little eyes, set in a red, egg-shaped face, jiggled brilliantly on the girl. A lean redhead with a giraffe's neck and eyes the color of silver watched the girl also. A handsome, swart-skinned man ran a white hand across his black, lacquered hair, cleared his throat.

"Who knifed Mae Riley?" Scholtz growled.

The portly man looked pained. He said: "My dear man, who is Mae Riley?"

Cardigan cut in: "Brother, don't start that. Mae Riley was here—she was kept here. She was knifed in my apartment. She gave me this address, the number of rings to get in it."

The portly man said: "All right, we'll say she was here—"

"Sure," snapped the giraffe-necked redhead, "she was here and she got out. Nobody knifed her."

Cardigan said: "Somebody followed her and knifed her."

The four men looked at one another, measured one another. Then the portly man happened to look at the girl. The girl's face was dead white. You could tell that her knees were shaking. She moved woodenly across the room and pressed close against the swart-skinned man with the lacquered black hair. The portly man looked at her back and his lips closed hard, a look of anger crackled in his eyes. The man with the lacquered hair pushed the girl away; he did it deliberately, stony-eyed. She wilted. She looked at the redhead and saw his lips move tightly in an oath. She looked at the fourth man but he looked right back at her with glassy eyes, as though he did not see her. She turned again to the swart-skinned man. She murmured: "Joe . . . Joe . . ." and went toward him again.

He ripped the back of his hand across her face.

Cardigan said: "Luella Deya."

She spun, her breath hauled in. "Yes—Luella Deya!" she screamed hoarsely. "I knifed her! I had to—because she saw me here, she knew who I was! I followed her after she broke out and I saw you take her in that house and I went up and listened at the doors and found the one by hearing your voice. When you ran out, I knocked on the door. I knocked hard. In a few minutes I

heard her fumbling at the snap-lock. She opened the door and then fell away. She never saw me. The first time I swung I knocked out the light. Then it was dark. I scrambled after her. I felt the knife go in—and I—I ran out. I came back here. I was afraid to tell them what I'd done."

Shaking all over, the girl pointed to a closed door. "Mackworth is in there—bound and gagged and blindfolded! He thinks he's being held for ransom. Every time he signs his name blindfolded, he thinks it's a note asking his lawyer to pay. But it's an editorial. He," she said, pointing to the portly man, "dictates them and I type them—"

Scholtz snapped at Cardigan: "Mackworth! What the hell is this about Mackworth? I know the fat guy—he's Luke Myer, a ward heeler—but—"

The girl was panting out: "It was his bright idea. He figured that with a few hot editorials in the *Post-News* all their readers who'd been rooting for the die-hards would swing to the left-wing crowd. And they got me in it."

"Who in particular?" asked Cardigan.

"Never mind who," she cried. "I spied, I lied, I did everything I could. I—I even knifed Mae Riley. I've got no excuse—none at all. I'm ready to go."

Cardigan clipped, "Keep 'em covered, Stormy," and crossed to the door she had pointed out. He opened it and looked in the room beyond. Silas Mackworth lay on a cot, bound, gagged and blindfolded. He was moving, trying to get free.

Cardigan said: "Take it easy, Mr. Mackworth. You'll be O.K. in a few shakes. We're salting these guys pronto."

He backed out, closed the door, and swung a look of black contempt at the four men. "By God," he said, "if any one of you guys had the guts that this gal has—" He broke off, cursed. He said to the girl: "I want to know who the guy is that got you into this."

She bit her lip. "You can skip that. I'm ready to go," she said. "I'm ready to pay for what I did."

Cardigan looked exasperated again. He said to Scholtz: "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to phone the hospital and see how Mae's doing. If she'll live, by cripes, I'm going to let this gal walk out of here!" His arm was paining and the pain was clawing at his whole body. His head felt dizzy. He roared: "I'm going to give her a break because these lice she got mixed up with aren't giving her a break!"

The portly man's jaw thrust out. "Like hell you will! She's in it and she'll stay in it with the rest of us! She did the knifing! And if you let her go, I'll tell!"

The swart-skinned young man had been biting his lip for some minutes. He suddenly ripped out: "Luke, don't be a rat! Let her go! You know as well as I do that Mae Riley never saw her. You know as well as I do, damn my guts, that she wasn't here when Mae Riley broke out. She must have been down in the street when Mae beat it. She knew Mae knew who I was. She followed Mae and did it to clear me. I'm the heel that got her into this and you're the baby that got me into it—so lay off, Luke!"

The girl sobbed: "Oh, Joe . . . Joe!"

Cardigan felt fever smoking throughout his body. He said: "Stormy, you go out and phone. If she lives and they say she will live, come back pronto. Wait a minute. All you guys, and you too, sister, stand against that wall and keep your hands up. Stormy, tip that light so that it glares in their eyes."

THE green-shaded lamp on the table was tipped and the men and the girl blinked against its glare. Cardigan crossed to the other, the dark side of the room, and sat down in a Morris chair. He said in a slow, heavy, savage voice:

"Now we're not going to talk, see? I'm not going to say a word. I'm just going to sit here while Scholtz goes out and phones and the first guy that so much as lowers one finger I'm going to drill him."

They could not possibly have seen him in the shadows, for the light flooded their eyes, shut off from them the other half of the room.

"O.K., Stormy," he said. "Make it snappy."

Scholtz went out. He drummed his heels down to the main floor, entered the store and let himself out by the front door. He ran four blocks to the nearest drug store, crowded into a phone booth and called the Central Emergency Hospital. He learned that Mae Riley was conscious and that the wound was only superficial; there was no chance at all of her not recovering. He called police headquarters and told them to send around the wagon. Then he raced back to the store, and by the time he began climbing the stairs fifteen minutes had elapsed from the time he had gone out.

He barged into the room and said: "O.K. She's O.K. Beat it, sister. But there's some guy here has to take the rap for that knifing."

"I'm the guy," said Joe.

The girl whimpered: "Joe . . ."

"Beat it, Luella."

She went slowly to the door.

Scholtz said: "Snap on it. The cops'll be here any minute."

She went out and closed the door and Scholtz, covering the four men, said out of the side of his mouth to Cardigan: "All right, big-hearted, I hope you're satisfied."

There was no reply.

The four men looked at one another, their hands still aloft.

Scholtz squinted at them. He muttered, "Not a move!" as he went to the table and righted the green-shaded lamp.

Cardigan still sat in the Morris chair. One leg was crossed over the other and his gun rested on his knee. But he was not looking at anybody. His head lay back and his eyes were shut. You could see the sogginess of his left coat sleeve. He was unconscious.

The portly man burst out: "By cripes, he's out! He must have been out for— We could have taken the guy and cleared out!"

There were police sirens in the street.

Joe chuckled drily. "The guy expected he'd pass out, that's why he didn't go to phone. That's why he pulled all that hocus-pocus about the light business. All because he wanted to see a gal get a break."

"He's fat-headed that way," admitted Scholtz, but there was a note of admiration in his tone.

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The brick wall swung open like the door to a vault.



When Tricky Enright was sprung from Folsom Prison he didn't know who had engineered his escape—or why. But it didn't take him long to find the living hell that liberty meant. A liberty even ghastlier than the time he'd spent behind bars, safe though—

SEVEN YEARS DEAD

By John K. Butler

Author of "Stairway to Hell," etc.

CHAPTER ONE

Me and My Shadow

I WAS still reading about myself in the papers when the three knocks sounded briefly on the door to my room. I glanced at my watch. It was only eleven ten. The knocks weren't supposed to come till midnight.

A man on the lam can't take chances. I had my plans for retreat all arranged. The window beside my bed opened on a fire-escape. Two stories down, in the alley, my rented coupé was parked. And in my room I had rigged up a gag for seeing who was outside in the hall.

I had taken a hand mirror from the dresser and poked the handle through the

tight-packed bristles of a broom. I'd lashed the mirror in place with string so it stood out at right angles to the broomstick. The glass transom over my door was let down. All I had to do was raise the broom straight up and hold it so the mirror above me was in the transom opening. The gadget made a crude periscope. It was better than standing on a chair to peep over the transom because I didn't run the risk of having a cop shoot my face off.

Three more knocks tapped the door panel. I looked up into my home-made periscope and saw it was a woman standing outside. She wore a red coat and a red hat.

"Let me in," she whispered, "I'm the person you're expecting." She hadn't glanced up to my mirror, so I didn't know what her face looked like.

I let her in.

SHE walked across to the foot of my bed, whirled around and leaned against the iron frame. Her hands, holding to the chipped enamel, were small and brown. I put my back to the closed door and looked her over. She was a Spanish type, very dark and beautiful—if you like them that way. Somehow she looked familiar but I couldn't place her.

"You're early," I said.

She nodded. "There's a change of plans. You're to come with me right away."

She spoke the words parrot-like. I had a feeling somebody had coached her in the speech. Somehow I sensed a slip-up and I didn't trust her.

"You brought something for me?" I asked.

Her mouth, large and crimson with lipstick, curled into a cynical smile. "Yes, I've got it."

She took a fat roll of greenbacks from her purse, handed it to me. I counted

the money over carefully. It was the correct amount, a thousand dollars in ones, fives, tens. I stuffed the wad into my pants pocket.

"What's this all about?" I asked, eyeing her closely.

"You'll find out soon enough."

"You'd better talk," I advised her. I pointed to the mess of newspapers on the bed. They all bore heavy headlines on my "sensational escape from Folsom Prison" the night before. "I'm hot," I told her. "Every cop in the state's hunting for me right now. I don't want to walk into anything."

She kept smiling in that cynical way. "You haven't walked into anything yet, have you?"

"No," I agreed. "And I don't intend to. A guy in my spot has to be careful."

She laughed. It was a hard, nasty laugh. "Anybody'd think you believed this newspaper junk yourself." She picked up one of the extra papers and quoted a lot of stuff I had already read.

"Lone Convict Escapes Folsom—Former Football Star in Sensational Break. Tricky Enright, Pacific University's ace halfback until his graduation in Twenty-five, made a spectacular end run from prison in the wee hours of the morning. Convicted in Twenty-seven and sentenced to serve a life term in Folsom upon his own confession of guilt in the Four Masked Men Train Robbery of that year, Enright ran across a moonlit prison courtyard with freedom as his goal posts. Armed guards formed his opposing team; bullets, rather than tacklers, sought to bring him down. Tricky Enright scored the first touchdown against the team of law and order—"

"Cut it," I interrupted.

She glanced at me, wise-eyed, hard; went on reading. "Tricky won illegal freedom by plunging into the swirling waters of the American River and swim-

ming away amid a hail of machine-gun fire from prison turrets. Nobody rooted for Enright on this touchdown—the former college star threw away his cheering section when he became a criminal. We are rooting for the law officers who protect us from the menace of the public enemy. Let us hope that Tricky Enright, criminal fugitive, has made his last touchdown.’”

I snatched the paper from her hands. “Forget that stuff,” I said. “I’ve read it.”

She laughed again, just a throaty scornful laugh. “Yes, I guess they taught you to read in college. They taught you so good that you read stuff like this and believe it. You think you’re a tough *hombre*.”

I worked the lever and shut the transom over the door. She was talking too loud. “I know what I am,” I told her. “I’m a guy that spent seven years of his life in a hell-hole you wouldn’t know anything about. Seven years—and that was only a taste. My term was life. Somebody offered me a chance to get out and I took it. I’m free now. It’s a hell of a freedom; a reward on my head and cops on my tail—but I couldn’t choose. I had to grab what I could get. Now I’m out and I’m going to be damned careful of every step I take.”

THIS time she didn’t laugh. She kept dark curious eyes on my face, studying something she saw there. “Yes,” she said slowly, “I know how you feel.” She looked down at her small feet in red leather shoes and kept her eyes away from me when she went on: “You seem to forget you’d still be in stir if we hadn’t got you out. Your escape was a fake. We greased the way for you. Folsom left gates unlocked. Guards fired over your head. All you had to do was walk out,

throw a rope over the wall and swim the river.”

I kept staring at her, trying to meet her eyes. “That’s the stuff I wanted to hear you say,” I told her. “I didn’t break that prison; somebody sprung me in a damned roundabout way. I don’t know who it was or why. All I know is I got a tip by the underground grapevine to open a certain book in the prison library. Instructions were in a note hidden in the book. They told how I was to go about making the break. I followed instructions. The guards didn’t shoot to hit and I got away. I found a tweed suit, a watch, a little money, and a railroad ticket on the Daylight from Frisco to L.A. The junk was hidden in the bushes as the instructions promised. I got rid of my big-house clothes and came to Los Angeles just as I was told.”

Now she lifted her eyes from her red shoes and looked at me squarely. “Right, Tricky, what’s keeping us? The same party that greased your way out of stir told you to come here. At midnight a young woman would knock three times on the door. She would give you a thousand bucks in ones, fives, and tens. I’m the woman and I gave you the dough. Let’s get out of here.”

I still kept between her and the door. “Sure,” I said. “I just wanted to make certain you were the right party. How did I know you weren’t a double-crosser that had cops waiting outside for me? After all, the note said you’d be here at midnight and you’re early.”

“I already told you about that,” she said quickly. “There’s nothing but a change in plans. You know I’m the right party or I wouldn’t be walking in like this; I wouldn’t have all the inside dope. I can show you where you can make some more dough like that roll I just gave you.”

Maybe I was making a sap out of myself for being so cautious. This girl had

given me the promised money and she had come to the place where I had been told to hide. She seemed to know all about it. Yet I still didn't trust her. For one thing, I didn't like the way she glanced at her wrist watch every few seconds. It seemed like a rush act to hurry me out of my room.

"Don't stall," she snapped impatiently. "You're on the lam and you've got the bull horrors. I'll bet you even look for cops under the bed. But you don't need to get scared of the people that smuggled you out of stir."

I shrugged. "I guess you're right, but it's a damned screwy set-up. I just wanted to make sure you came from the right people. I want to know what you're leading me into."

She sighed in an exasperated way and shook her head in scorn. "Do we have to go into that again?" She pushed herself away from the bedstead. "You panic me."

I went over to the bed and folded up all the newspapers. I didn't intend to leave them behind. A curious cop might wonder how so many papers featuring my prison break got there, and he might have them tested for fingerprints. I collected all my stuff. It wasn't very much—just what had been hidden for me in the bushes by parties unknown.

"Let's go, *señorita*," I said.

"Leave your key," she told me. "You're not coming back to this dump."

We walked down the dingy hall. There was no elevator. We descended two flights of worn, filthy stairs, and I took an eye-ful of the darkly deserted street before stepping out.

THE room which I had taken under the assumed name of Jack Frame, according to the instructions secreted for me in Folsom, was located over some cheap stores. The entrance was just a narrow doorway with a dusty porcelain globe over

it. Black letters painted in the lighted globe bore the one word—ROOMS. It had been a crummy place, even after seven years death in Folsom, and I was glad to get out of it.

We drove down Spring Street in my rented coupé. We went through the colored quarter, a Japanese district, and then pulled up before a grimy brick building. *SOUTHLAND HOTEL* was smeared on a plate-glass window in fancy gold lettering.

"This is it," the young woman said. "We'll go up to my room and have a few slugs of gin."

I kept studying her face and making no move to get out of the car. In the light from the lobby window her features were shadowed.

"Is gin all you've got up there?" I asked.

It was a stall. The way the shadows fell on her face made her look more familiar than ever. She said gin was all she had. I took her chin in my hand and turned her head to study her profile. She pulled away, calling me a foul name.

I grinned, said: "You're Rita Alvarado. I've seen pictures of you in the papers. You're Frank Rendon's moll. The law wants to find you so you can tell where your boy-friend, Public Enemy Number One, is hiding out."

She glared at me, her lips a dark wide curve, her eyes black glass. "So what?" she snapped. "We still greased you out of stir, didn't we?"

"Right," I told her. She got out of the car with a nod of her head that asked me to follow. I slammed the door after she was out, started up the motor. "I don't like gin. I'll be back when I've got a bottle of Scotch."

She grabbed the top of the door with both brown hands. Her face twisted in hard anger. "Nix on that stuff! You got

our dough—and now you want to take a run-out powder!”

I slipped the gear in. “Right now,” I grinned, “it’s me dishing out the orders. I’ll be back when I pick up some Scotch. You can take it and like it. What’s your room?”

She mouthed a lot of profane objections. I let the clutch out, nearly knocking her down as she fell off the running board. “O.K., smart guy,” she rapped out. “Two-o-six is the room. Don’t use my name. You better come back, if you know what’s good for you!”

I gunned up the coupé, leaving her on the sidewalk. It wasn’t Scotch I was after. A man who’s been in the big house as long as I was can’t get that particular all of a sudden.

I’d shaken Rita Alvarado because I didn’t like the set-up. She had given me the rush act out of my room. My watch said twenty minutes to midnight so I headed back for Spring Street.

I PARKED the car in the alley directly under the fire-escape. The lower steel platform had a sliding ladder that could be pulled down to the ground, but I knew those ladders made a lot of noise sliding and noise was something I didn’t want.

I climbed up on the roof of the coupé. It was a short reach to the platform. My actions were based entirely on hunch and a sound conviction that Rita Alvarado had been trying to get me out of that room before midnight, when, according to the screwy instructions, midnight was exactly the time she should have knocked on my door.

Going up the steel steps quietly to the landing outside my room, I heard a man’s cough. I stopped. The window to my room must have been up, just as I’d left it. The shade, showing the light still on, didn’t quite come down to the sill. The coughing came from my room.

I crouched on the landing, peering through the narrow space between the windowsill and the drawn shade. I saw the room, saw a man on the bed. He wore a tweed suit exactly like mine. Newspapers were scattered around just as I had scattered them.

The man sat up and bent over, coughing. His hair was gray. His face was—mine. I couldn’t move. I merely stared. It was like looking at myself in a mirror. Yet there wasn’t any mirror, and that man wasn’t me.

He went to the wash basin and ran some water, took a drink out of the glass. His coughing stopped but his face was scarlet from the strain. He had T.B.

I studied him as he walked back to the bed. The first shock of seeing a man who looked so much like me, though a walking shadow of myself, was over. I noted the difference between us. He had my general features but he was thin, gaunt. He must have weighed fifty pounds less—I don’t think he was over a hundred and twenty. His face was sharper and my hair wasn’t that gray.

Three knocks tapped the door. The feminine voice outside spoke softly but I could hear the words. “It’s the party you’re expecting.”

The gray-haired man straightened his tweed coat that was just like mine. He opened the door. A girl in a red outfit, red even to shoes and hat, entered the room.

It wasn’t Rita Alvarado. This girl was blond. Her face appeared young, fresh, with none of the exaggerated use of cosmetics that marked Rita as a woman who’d done a lot of living in bad company.

The red outfit had me puzzled. It was exactly the costume Rita had worn; the costume which was to identify the woman who would come to the room for me.

“Here’s your money,” the blonde said. “Ready?”

The thin man, rising, started coughing again, a sickly cough that pinched his lungs. He got it in check, pocketed the money she'd given him. "Yeah," he said, "let's scam, sweetheart."

His voice wasn't anything like mine. The blonde appraised him with a sympathetic expression. "You've changed, Mr. Enright. Years in that place— Father will hardly know you. We have some old football pictures of you—a round healthy face—"

She had spoken spontaneously. Now she looked sorry. The gaunt man reached for a hat on the bed, a felt hat identical to the one that had been concealed in the brush for me up near Folsom.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Enright." Her voice was soft, sincere. "I didn't mean to say anything to hurt you."

He took her by the arm. "Forget it, baby. The iron house does things to a guy. Let's blow, honey."

Her gray-blue eyes showed she was a little puzzled. I knew the "honey" and "baby" stuff didn't get over. She wasn't the type to be treated that way. Maybe she didn't think Tricky Enright would use the familiar terms of the underworld to a lady, a stranger, of her class. He wouldn't. This man who was passing himself off as Tricky Enright was a product of the gutter. Anybody could see that.

"Mr. Enright—" she began.

He patted her slim shoulder and she seemed to recoil from him in spite of trying not to. "Make it Tricky, sweet," he invited.

AFTER they had left the room I made time down the fire-escape. I kicked life into my car and cruised around the block to Spring Street. They were just getting into a long green roadster, a racy sport job. It looked brand-new. The low number on the license plates spoke of political drag.

I throttled down till they pulled away from the curb and had a good lead on me. The blonde drove north on Spring. She didn't let the roadster out and I just cruised along behind, not dropping far enough back to risk losing those twin tail-lights.

It took us over a half hour to reach the swank district of Pasadena. The houses, on wide lawns, ran only a few to the block. Most of them were dark. Leafy sidewalk trees veiled the street lights.

The roadster ahead of me began to slow down. I didn't. My coupé picked up on the other as the blond girl's arm extended out to signify a left turn into a driveway.

I passed them while they swung between lighted gate posts. A man in a tan overcoat, standing by one of the posts, raised his hat as they went by. I noticed that the gaunt man riding with the girl dropped a white hand on the outside of the door. It was a gesture the blond driver wouldn't be aware of. I knew it was a surreptitious signal to the man at the gate.

I drove to the corner, made a U-turn and went back. I slowed as I approached the gate, pulled the coupé into the curb so it stood in the deep shadow of a tree.

The guy in the tan overcoat was still by the brick post. The roadster, far back in the estate, had parked under a portecochère at the side of the house.

"Is this the Canfield place?" I called out.

The man at the gate shook his head. He had a hawk-like face with a prominent hooked nose. I made out his features from the lights on the posts. He ignored me, lighting a cigar.

"This is Nine Ninety-three," I said. "That's Mr. Canfield's number."

"You must have the wrong street, buddy," he told me. "This is the Rittenhouse residence."

I thanked him and cruised down to Colorado Boulevard. The lights of an all-night drug store attracted me. I pretended to use one of the phones in a booth for a while. Then I walked to the counter and spoke to the clerk.

"Is this man Rittenhouse that lives at Nine Ninety-three Lake the fellow who used to be president of the Pioneer Line Railroad?"

"That's the man—F. Howard Rittenhouse."

I walked out and began driving toward Hollywood. The name Rittenhouse was by no means strange to me. The man had gone to Pacific, class of 1908. I had met him in the locker room after a game with Stanford in '24. I had met him again at an alumni reunion just before my trial as an accomplice in the train robbery. That had been in '27. As president of the railroad, he had given some sort of testimony at the trial.

After I got sent up to Folsom, he had sold out his controlling interest in the line. He then had thrown big money into the stock market and sneaked out before the crash.

I drove into Hollywood and headed out over the Pass to the San Fernando Valley. My brother and his wife had bought a little farm out there. I figured it might be a good place to put up for the night. I needed some sleep. This thing had been a run-around since I broke Folsom in a fake escape about twenty-four hours ago. I had gone into it blind. I was still blind. I wanted to forget the whole crazy set-up.

CHAPTER TWO

Swivel-Hips

IT WAS around three o'clock in the morning when I found the narrow dirt road and followed it to the end. I recognized the little farm from letters my brother and Nora had sent me in Fol-

som. A white frame house all by itself in the fields. It was dark, silent. I parked the coupé and peered through the open doors of the garage. No car. I figured they must have gone into town. Still I didn't intend to sleep outside.

The hook on the back screen door broke out easily. I walked into the service porch and lit the light. The floor was scrubbed clean. Wash tubs gleamed.

I knocked on the kitchen door—just in case. I called Bill and Nora. There wasn't any answer so I went to work on the lock. It was a cinch. I lit some more lights.

I stood in an immaculate kitchen. Everything was neat and clean as a pin. Fresh towels hung on a rack. Little blue cans of flour, sugar, coffee, and spices stood in an orderly row on the drainboard—like soldiers ready for inspection.

I had a hollow feeling in my stomach. Nora's hands had done this. I'd always known she'd keep a kitchen that way. Once I thought it would be my kitchen; our house—Nora's and mine. It hadn't worked out that way. The house had become Nora's and Bill's. I wished to hell I could forget it. I couldn't. Eight years ago Bill had won her. She had gotten the man she wanted and Bill was my own brother. I was a heel to be jealous.

I walked through the dining-room to the living-room punching light switches as I went. I halted so sharply in the living-room that I almost lost my balance. All my insides seemed to bunch up, petrify.

I had almost stepped on Nora. She lay sprawled on her back on the floor, arms flung out, her legs crumpled under her. She had been shot in the face. She was dead.

For a while, I don't know how long, I lost track of time, place, everything. When I snapped out of it I was slouched in a chair still staring at Nora. Sweat ran

down my hot face. The bunching sensation of my insides remained.

I began to make an inspection of the house. My brain was foggy and I hardly knew what I was doing. I found the bedroom a mess. Dresser drawers were yanked out, clothes strewn around—a man's clothes, my brother's. The whole thing looked as though Bill had made a hasty departure. His car wasn't in the garage and Nora was dead on the floor, killed. It looked—

But it couldn't be that.

I pulled open a drawer in a nightstand by the bed. The big revolver was brand new, a Smith and Wesson 38/44. I broke out the loaded cylinder, backed the barrel with a piece of white paper and inspected it under the light. The rifling shone silver—like a circular mirror. I was pretty sure the gun had never been fired.

In the same drawer I found a box of S.&W. special cartridges. Only six of them had been removed from the carton—the six, probably, that had been placed in the cylinder. I also found a concealed weapon license made out to my brother by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office. The date was only three days ago.

I TOOK the gun and the shells, went back into the living-room. My eyes kept straying back to Nora on the floor. I had to fight to keep them away. Bill's Nora—but now she would be my Nora—mine till I found her killer, till I could stand before him with a gun in my hand and empty it into his face.

I discovered myself in front of a little telephone stand and my eyes lit on a voluminous Los Angeles directory. I saw the ends of note paper sticking out from between the pages of the heavy book.

Both notes were written in Nora's hand. One paper was headed—*Classified Ad Departments, Personal Columns*. Then there was a long list of telephone numbers with the names of every important newspaper

in the state. On the second sheet Nora had penned—

SWIVEL-HIPS: Please come home. All is forgiven. We need your desperately.
N. & B.

That note, for the personal columns of the papers, was intended for me. Years ago when I played football for Pacific, Nora had dubbed me Swivel-hips. Evidently, reading of my escape from prison, they had sent out the message. They had feared something. Bill had purchased a new revolver; after promising me in 1927 that he'd never carry another gun as long as he lived. His promise had been sincere. Only danger to Nora would make him break it. I knew my brother well enough for that.

I stuffed the notes in my pocket with the gun and shells, stared around the living-room. A door jamb beyond Nora's head showed a splintered place. With a potato knife from the kitchen I dug at the ragged hole in the wood till I had worked out the small, flattened pellet of lead. Looking at it, I was sure it had been fired from a .22-caliber gun.

Nora, then, had been murdered with a .22. Bill's revolver, unfired, was a 38/44. My brother hadn't killed his wife—I was certain of it. But it appeared that way. He was gone, his bedroom showing all signs of sudden departure.

I returned to the bedroom and straightened it up, put everything in order. Now that Nora was gone, Bill was all I had left. I'd protect him if I could.

I found myself in the living-room again, kneeling beside Nora. The face I had loved, now battered from bullets, was in my hands. I spoke aloud, and my voice sounded strange, like somebody else's voice.

"I came, Nora. I got an offer to break Folsom and I took it—I didn't know why. But now I do. I heard you, Nora—and

I came. I'll get him—I swear I'll get everybody who had anything to do with it."

I backed away from her, not seeing very well. I blinked my eyes.

I don't know how I got out, but I did. Then I was driving down the dirt road, Bill's gun in my pocket, as dawn grayed the cool sky.

MOST of the next day I spent in an auto camp. I drank too much, smoked too much. And I couldn't sleep.

During the five-o'clock rush I drove through heavy traffic to Pasadena. I pulled in the driveway of 993 Lake Street and walked to the front door. The hawk-faced man I had seen at the gate the night before wasn't around.

"Yes?" the butler inquired politely.

I poked Bill's revolver into his belly. "Take me to Rittenhouse," I ordered. "Keep your hands down."

Halfway along the big hall I stopped the butler. I had seen the phone alcove. There was a switchboard with a row of buttons beside the instrument.

"Is this the only main line?" I asked.

He nodded, wide-eyed, watching the gun. "The rest are extensions—"

I broke the bell box from the wall and tore out the wires. "I hope you're not lying," I warned him.

We passed an archway to the dining-room where the table was partially set for dinner. The butler opened a pair of tall walnut doors and we walked into a library.

Rittenhouse, a stout, thick-waisted man, propped himself forward in a red leather chair. He set down his cocktail glass.

"Enright!" he said tensely.

I closed the doors and stood with my back to them. The blond girl, sitting in a throne-like chair, spilled some of her Martini in her lap. She didn't speak. She was the girl who had worn red, who had

come to my room at midnight, and who had driven off with the wrong man.

I gestured with the gun. "Talk," I commanded the millionaire. "I think you're the man who smuggled me out of Folsom. I don't know why. This young lady came to meet me at midnight yesterday and she drove off with a guy who was posing as me. But it wasn't me."

Rittenhouse relaxed in the soft leather. "Put down the gun, Tricky. You have nothing to fear from us. Alfred, get him some Scotch."

The butler started to move. I checked him with the gun.

Rittenhouse said: "It's all right, Tricky. He doesn't have to leave the room."

I nodded. The butler opened a carved cabinet at the corner. There was a complete cellarette, even to an electric refrigerator that made ice cubes. He took down a bottle of Black Label. "Ice?" he inquired. His tone was as cold as the word.

I shook my head with my eyes on Rittenhouse. "I don't want to drink. I just want to listen while you talk."

Rittenhouse smiled over at the blonde. "This young lady, Tricky, is my daughter—Evelyn. She went to meet you last night. The man she brought back was an imposter. She sensed it; I knew it. Prison can change a man, but not that much. It can't make him forget the day he carried a football seventy yards through the California line. It can't make him forget that Tiny Matthews was Stanford's coach, not Pacific's. No, Enright, the imposter didn't fool me. I let him think he did. But I didn't tell him anything. I told him to come back tomorrow."

He eyed me shrewdly. "Let's have a drink and put all our cards on the table."

"Let's," I agreed. I kept the gun in my right hand while I sat down. I took the drink the butler offered in my left.

Rittenhouse said: "I've always been fond of you, Tricky. Evelyn here can tell

you how much. She was just in high-school when I took her to games and shouted my lungs out for a halfback named Tricky Enright. We didn't have a player like that when I went to Pacific. In my day we just punched each other around the field, and Pacific was just a little fly-by-night school that was damned lucky to play season openers with California and Stanford. But I knew Pacific would have a man some day—and I hoped—"

HE BROKE off. Evelyn smiled, wrinkling up her nose. "He thought I would be Pacific's saviour, but I fooled him and got born a girl."

"Nonsense," Rittenhouse clipped sternly. "I always wanted a girl. But Pacific needed a man. You were that man, Enright. You put the old college on the map. Then you crucified us by confessing to being an accomplice in one of the most brutal crimes the Coast has known. The Pullmans of my crack train cut loose in the snowsheds of the Sierra Nevadas. Air lines cut, hand brakes failing, and every life lost when the wild coaches crashed off the trestle. A quarter of a million dollars taken from the mail cars; the train hands murdered."

He kept looking at me, not sternly but with a slow, wise smile. "A little gold football emblem," he said, "from the Class of Twenty-five led the investigation to Tricky Enright, ex-football star. Tricky went to trial and he confessed. He even led the police to the hiding place of his share of the loot. Good-bye, Pacific U. The man who had given us our best reputation, Tricky Enright, had now given us the worst."

I sipped my Scotch. "Cut the ancient history," I told him. "I don't give a damn about Pacific."

He kept those calmly wise eyes on me. "That's what you said in court. But there

was one man there who didn't believe you. I was that man. But it took nearly seven years to collect actual proof that your confession was a lie."

I got to my feet, snapped: "You're just an old foggy with an undergraduate brain! What proof could there be when—"

"I said we'd put our cards on the table, Tricky," he interrupted, smiling all the time. "Let's not try to fool each other. You had a kid brother named Bill. He grew up in bad company but he worshiped you. He was just a weak sister and you knew it—but you'd kill the man who said so. You got him out of scrapes only to see him get married to Nora Wilson, the only girl you cared about. Bill Enright—not Tricky Enright—was the accomplice in that train tragedy. Bill, worshiping his big brother, always wore Tricky's football emblem. He dropped it in the snowshed—"

I smashed my glass in the fireplace. "You're bats!"

"No, Tricky." He shook his head slowly. "I merely know the truth. Pacific scratched you off the bronze honor roll. I'm the only alumnus who knows your name should have been on an honor roll all to itself. Pacific threw out, as a black-guard, and a scoundrel, the best man it ever had."

I stood close to him with the gun pointing at his middle. "You're wrong, Rittenhouse! But a story like that might prejudice the police. It might hurt my brother. So I'm warning you—if Bill ever gets into trouble on that train robbery I swear to God I'll put bullets in you!"

He grinned from ear to ear, looking at his daughter. "What have I been telling you for seven years, Evelyn? Do I know how to pick my men, or don't I?"

I tossed the gun into his lap. "You've got me," I admitted. "You've learned something I didn't want anybody to learn. You've colored it up with a lot of phony

heroics, but you've got the general idea. I've given up seven years of my life—a lot more—to this thing and you have the power to make it all useless. What, exactly, do you want?"

"I want something you can give easily," he said. "For all these years your brother has shown how he could live up to the start you gave him. I don't intend to make your sacrifice useless. I'll keep your secret." He handed the gun back to me, waved to a chair.

"How did you find out about it and who else knows?" I asked.

"The people in this room know, obviously. Bert Perlman, the private investigator who managed to trace down the proof for me, knows. The governor of the state knows."

"The governor?"

RITTENHOUSE nodded. "I presented him with all the facts a few days ago. He's ready to grant you a complete pardon. However, I told him of my other plans for you. He allowed me to smuggle you out of prison in that rather melodramatic way. The warden and the guards were ordered to aid you. My investigator, Bert Perlman, made the other arrangements—the note of instructions in the prison library, the clothes concealed outside for you, the railroad ticket, and the orders for you to go to that Spring Street rooming house. In the event that you were followed I didn't want you to come directly here. You weren't followed. But someone tried to trick me in another way—by sending that man who looked like you."

"What's it all about?"

He lit a cigar. "The American business executive," he said, "goes through three stages. His first goal is the accumulation of wealth. Gaining that, he seeks to use some of it for personal power, influence, political importance in his com-

munity, the state, and even the nation. When he's passed those two goals he usually turns to charity, philanthropy, public works. I am now in the last stage."

"Yes, but I still don't see—"

"You will, Tricky—in a moment. I intend to use my money, power, everything at my command, to benefit my state. But my plan is not donating libraries, giving buildings to colleges, and organizing charitable institutions. That's the obvious thing, and I detest the obvious."

He leaned forward in his chair. His eyes, fixed on me, had a hard determination. "I want," he said emphatically, "to wage war against crime. I don't seek glory from the battle; I only want victory. I intend to have my private Department of Justice with you, Enright, as my first G-man."

"Me?"

He smiled but the determination didn't leave his eyes. "Exactly. One good man is worth a hundred mediocre ones. The United States Department of Justice, in the last year, has done more work with six hundred men than combined local and county police have done with thousands. You will be my field man, a spy in the underworld. We will trap the criminal, aid the police. But the police won't know where the aid is coming from because all police, unfortunately, can't be trusted. The criminal will not know who is striking him down."

"I see now," I said. "You arranged my fake prison break, with the governor's sanction, in order that I'd fool the underworld into thinking I was a tough guy, a fugitive. With that reputation I'm supposed to work into crime circles. You sure get wild ideas."

"You can call them wild." He smiled. "But no idea is wild if a man has the determination and the power to execute it successfully. Everything I've accomplished has been through turning the so-

called wild idea to a successful, different idea."

He got to his feet and began to pace the room with short nervous steps. "You may work for me for a period of five years. During that time I will pay you anything you need for living expenses. I'm prepared to pay you a thousand dollars cash for every criminal you bring to justice. And for that five-year period I will deposit, each month, five hundred dollars to your credit in a trust fund. I promise you that at the end of your five years you will be granted a complete pardon from the governor on the train robbery and on any other crimes in which you are forced to take part in order to spy on the criminal. At the end of five years you'll be a free and independent man with a nice monthly income for life. I'll back up every promise with a written contract. If you lose your life in the course of duty with me, I'll double the amount of the trust fund and switch it over to any relative you name."

I MOVED to the doors. If circumstances had been different I might have shown enthusiasm for his offer. Now I couldn't. "I came here," I said, "because I had to know why I was smuggled from prison, and, after trailing that imposter here last night, I thought you could tell me. You have. I can't laugh at your plans because I know enough about you to realize a man in your position has done and can do any damned thing he wants. Maybe I'll be back."

I stood by the doors, looking at him. "Before dawn this morning I found the dead body of someone who's meant more to me than anyone in the world. My brother and his wife were in trouble; they tried to send for me. Nora Wilson—I mean Nora Enright—was killed. I don't know where my brother is. As sure as I'm standing here I'll find the person

that killed Nora. I'll shoot down any man that stands in my way. I'll find that killer and"—I showed him my brother's gun—"this is the weapon I'll use."

He had followed me to the door. There was a funny look on his face as he stared at me. His daughter, Evelyn, had gotten from her chair. Even the butler stared at me.

"You mean — Nora?" Rittenhouse asked.

I nodded, reaching for the door handle. He put both hands on my shoulders, said: "Good God, man, don't you see what this means? Your escape—I didn't foresee anything like that. But if Nora is —dead. If someone sent a man here posing as you to learn from me what I had in mind—don't you see what that means? The railroad crime, never solved except for your false confession, has broken open again. Somebody fears what you might do, what I might do. Did your brother ever tell you who else worked and planned that train affair?"

I shook my head, eyes on him. Things were beginning to fit together, connect. My escape from prison threw dynamite into somebody. My brother, the man who had complete knowledge of the crime, had disappeared. Nora, his wife, who might have learned certain features of it from Bill, was dead, brutally murdered.

I walked back, sat down. "I'm staying," I said. "I accept your offer, or I don't accept—I don't know. But a lot of things seem to begin here. That's where I begin. There was a leak when you broke me out of Folsom. Where did it come from?"

Evelyn put a loose-leaf folder in my hands, said: "We've kept a record of everything on that train robbery. It's in here—newspaper clippings, Perlman's reports, everything."

"Perlman?" I asked.

"He was a special agent for the Pioneer Lines in Nineteen Twenty-seven," Rit-

tenhouse said. "He handled our end of the investigation."

I thumbed through the folder. There was a yellowed newspaper picture showing three men standing by the smashed Pullman cars which had gone off the trestle. One of the men was Rittenhouse.

The printed caption read—

RAILROAD MEN AT SCENE
OF TRAGEDY

(Left to right) F. Howard Rittenhouse, President of the Pioneer Lines, A. Perlman, Railroad Detective, and Mark J. Walters, General Manager Pioneer Lines.

My eyes remained on the middle man in the photograph—A. Perlman with a hawk-like face and prominent nose. Those features were familiar. He was the man who had been at the gate to this estate when Evelyn drove in with the guy who'd posed as me.

"How long have you known Perlman?" I asked.

"Years," Rittenhouse told me. "He's a shrewd man. He handled all the details of your escape."

"I'll bet he did," I said slowly.

SOMETHING in my voice brought Rittenhouse across the room to peer over my shoulder at the scrap book. "The tall man in the picture is Walters," he told me. "I sold my controlling interest in the Pioneer Line shortly after that photo was taken. Walters bought me out. I had quite a bit of money and I wanted to try stock-juggling with my capital. I was tired of railroading."

I fixed him with a look, said: "It was always believed some official, either bank, Nevada Mines, or railroad, gave a tip-off that the quarter-of-a-million-dollar payroll was aboard that particular train. In other words there was a big shot behind those four masked men."

Rittenhouse went to the liquor cabinet, nudged the butler aside, and began to make himself another cocktail. Over his shoulder he said to me: "Yes, Tricky. We officials were dragged into the investigation for a time. But, of course, the tip-off on the payroll could have come from any of several employees."

"Of course," I agreed.

I handed the book back to Evelyn and walked to the doors. "Everything goes back to this train robbery, even the terrible thing that happened to Nora. I'm sure of it. The persons who lured me out of the way and sent a guy who looked like me here must know plenty about this thing."

Rittenhouse watched me with a curious expression on his face. "Naturally," he said in a dead voice.

"Their trick to find out what you were going to do with me failed. They'll try something else. You'd better keep your daughter close to you at all times. Keep a guard on her."

Evelyn studied me. Rittenhouse asked: "You mean—"

"I mean they'll try anything to checkmate you. They'll be looking for an idea. I intend to go around and give them a crack at an idea—bait."

His face showed that he didn't know what I implied. "The offer I made," he said, "starts right now." He reached into his pocket and fingered a fat roll of money. Evelyn kept watching me.

"We'll let that ride," I told him. "Right now money doesn't mean much. I'm only after one thing."

He knew what I meant—Nora's killer. Evelyn came over and squeezed my hand. Rittenhouse offered to shake, but I didn't wait. I walked from the library and down the hall.

CHAPTER THREE

Living Bait

DINNER and early theater traffic crowded the Los Angeles streets. I parked the coupé at the corner below the Southland Hotel. It was right next to a fire-alarm box but I didn't see any *No Parking* zone mark.

I walked back to the Southland and crossed the narrow lobby with my hat yanked low over my eyes and a package under my arm. A pimply faced clerk back of the desk took one look at me and turned away, arranging some letters in the mail pigeon holes. I guess he saw by my attitude that I didn't want close scrutiny. His job in a place like the Southland probably depended on tact. His life probably depended on it, too.

Nobody else went up in the elevator with me. The operator was a half-caste Mexican with pock-marked skin. He looked me over for a moment in a little mirror by his controls.

"Sometimes the police come here, *señor*," he said casually. "We have guests and visitors sometimes who don't like to be bothered. We pull a switch that makes much noise in the elevator machinery. We make the noise as soon as the police come in the lobby."

"Thanks," I said.

"There is"—he smiled smoothly—"a ten-dollar charge."

He put my ten-spot in his pocket. I had ordered him to take me to the fourth floor, intending to walk down. I hadn't wanted to advertise my location. It was O.K. now.

"As long as we understand each other," I told him, "you can take me back down to the second."

I slipped him another ten as I left the car.

"*Muchas gracias, señor*," he grinned.

I strode down the empty hall to 206

and rapped on the door. Footsteps sounded in the room.

"It's the guy you're expecting, Rita," I called.

She opened the door. "You!" she exploded in surprise. She wore a bright silk dressing gown and practically nothing else. Her hair was shiny black with a white flower ornamenting it. She had too much rouge on her cheeks.

I pushed into the room and dropped my package on the bed. "There's the bottle of Scotch," I told her.

She shut the door, saying: "After all this time—you're a funny man. I thought you wouldn't come back."

"I didn't like the set-up," I explained. "I had a hunch you planned to walk me into a trap. I've been watching you most of that time and you didn't seem to have any cops around so I decided to come back. Now you can tell me how I can pick up more dough like that grand you slipped me."

She was undoing the package I had tossed on the bed. She held the bottle up and laughed. "After all that time, you brought the whiskey. What a funny one!"

She poured Scotch into two water tumblers, drank hers down in one long thirsty pull as she went to the phone. I memorized the number she called. I didn't know what I'd use it for but I wasn't passing up anything.

"Joe," she said into the telephone, "push the button. I want to talk to Frank."

I sipped my drink like a liqueur, watching her over the rim of the glass. "Frank Rendon, eh?"

She didn't answer me. But an answer wasn't necessary—I knew it.

"Listen, Frank," her voice speaking into the phone was low. "The college guy came back. He's got the bull horrors and he was scared I'd call copper on him. He's been watching me and now he's satisfied. Shall I bring him?"

The earpiece squawked and rasped with the other voice.

"He'll come here," she told me over the mouthpiece.

"Nix," I said, "I'd rather go there. I don't like this place. Maybe somebody'll get the cops."

I wrestled the phone from Rita's hands. "Listen, Frank," I said, "our meeting depends on a mutual trust. I know you don't want to chance letting me know where you hang out, but I'm taking as much risk on this blind meeting as you are. I don't like this dump—"

"Pipe down, Footballs," he cut in harshly. "I'm paying for this party so we'll play my way. You already collected a nice slice of spinach. Now you stay there with Rita till I get over. And like I just told her—don't try to call me back—this call nearly put me on the spot. A couple of harness bulls are camped in a place that keeps me tied up till they shove off. It'll be about half an hour. Then I'm coming over. You be there!"

HE RANG off. I put the phone down and eyed Rita. My attempt to get taken to Rendon so I could learn the location of his hide-out had failed. But I wasn't licked yet. If information didn't come to me, I'd force it.

"I still think this is a mistake," I said to Rita. "Frank Rendon can't afford trouble any more than I can. A lot of muggs downstairs saw me walk into this joint."

"Frank's coming here," she reminded me sourly. "Sit down and rest yourself. I got to get dressed."

She stood before the dressing-table, dropped off her silk covering. There wasn't much else. She began to slap powder on her bare shoulders with an oversized puff.

I moved to the door. "I'll wait outside, Rita."

Her dark eyes, framed in spike-like

lashes, saw me in the mirror. "Sit down and have another drink."

I winked as I turned the doorknob. "You seem to forget," I reminded her, with a nod toward her shapely and thinly clad figure, "that I've been dead for seven years."

She was still laughing, a low, mischievous laugh, when I closed the door from the outside. But it hadn't been modesty that sent me out of that room. I had a plan.

I walked down the hall and punched the elevator button. When the Mexican held the sliding door open, I shook my head and didn't enter the car.

"Want to make fifty bucks?" I asked. His grin showed deep interest. I handed him a pair of tens, explained: "All you have to do is walk to the corner. There's a fire-alarm box there. Break the glass and ring an alarm."

"Fire?" he asked.

I nodded. "Do it *pronto*. As soon as I hear the engines I'll put the rest of the fifty in this sand box."

I pointed to a box that had been put there for cigarette butts. "*Si, señor*," he nodded, "*pronto*."

As soon as he had taken the car down I stuffed thirty dollars in the sand. He wouldn't fail me. He had probably run many strange errands in this hotel, and the guests at the Southland weren't the kind to take up matters of inefficient service with the management—they'd have their own method, more direct, for dealing with inefficient employees.

I waited in the hall for five minutes. Then I rushed to Rita's room and strode in without knocking. Her dark eyes flashed at me, startled. She was just pulling a satin dress over her hips.

"Listen, baby," I snapped nervously, "we've got to scam. A guy got a load of me in the hall. I trailed him downstairs and saw him go into a phone booth."

Her too-red lips compressed into an exasperated line. She gave an annoyed sigh. "You've got the John Law jitters so bad you're giving 'em to me. For cripes' sake, sit down and cool off. Take a drink. Or I can give you a little shot of joy powder. Maybe that's what you need."

I strode over and took her by both shoulders, glared into her face. "Maybe," I snapped, "you don't give a damn what happens to me! O.K. But you don't want to put Frank Rendon in a spot. I tell you some guy called copper on me. What'll happen to your boy-friend when he walks into a hotel full of cops?"

She patted my cheek with cool fingers. "You've got 'em bad. Sometimes I get sorry—"

She didn't finish. The evening outside was filled with sound, the wailing of sirens, high-pitched, official, screaming echoes from buildings. A police whistle shrilled. I knew what it was—just a traffic cop clearing an intersection for the fire engines. But Rita didn't know that. Her red mouth hung open.

"Geez!" she rapped out, "we've got to scam quick! We'll have to get to Frank before he leaves that pool parlor!"

She snatched a coat from the bed, grabbed up a little .32 revolver. I took the gun from her. "I can handle that better than you," I said.

I ran her down the hall, down the steps. It was no fake hurry. I wanted to get going before she saw it was only fire trucks creating all that noise. We raced out a side door and through an alley to the sidewalk.

The sirens came from uptown. I kicked the starter on my car and drove away fast—downtown, away from the sirens.

WE PULLED up across the street from a pool hall on Central Avenue. We could see into the lighted interior. A cou-

ple of police officers were playing pool at a green table.

Rita Alvarado muttered a prayer in Spanish. "We're in time," she sighed. "Frank can't come out while the bulls are there. I'll go in as soon as they leave."

We didn't have a long wait. The cops got into their squad car and drove off. Rita swung from the coupé. I got out, too. "You wait," she said. "I'll get Frank."

But I kept right with her. My trick of ringing in a false fire alarm had worked swell so far. It had forced Rita to take me this close to the Rendon hide-out. I wouldn't give up now.

"You're all wet," I told her, "if you think you can push me around in the open any longer. Either you take me in out of the night air, or the whole deal's off."

I took her arm and piloted her across to the pool parlor. Just a few men hung around inside. Rita looked them all over. They all nodded slightly, their faces wooden.

Rita led the way to the back, stopped before a row of slot machines and nickel marble games. An automatic gum machine was screwed to the wall beside a door. It was a square metal box with a mirror in the center of it.

She put a penny in the slot and worked the lever. Then she stood primping her hair in the mirror. She whispered softly: "The lever turns on a red light inside. They come and look through the back end of the mirror. It's a trick mirror that you can see through from the other side."

I knew what she meant, a diaphanous mirror, ordinary from one side, except for a slightly silvered cast. From the rear completely clear and transparent.

Rita opened the door and led me into a closet, shutting us in. It was bare with solid brick walls on the three sides. There was a row of steel coat hooks on the back wall. Rita took a triangular wire coat

hanger from the side wall and held it up so that each end touched a metal hook. She held the hanger by a wooden cross-piece.

Immediately an electrical contact was completed and the rear brick wall opened back ponderously like a door to a vault.

We walked into a room with a few dirty cots and some kitchen equipment. The door swung closed behind us.

Frank Rendon pushed Rita Alvarado aside and stood before me with his hard face close to mine, his head slightly bent because he was taller. Small muscles at his temples throbbed with tense rage. His eyes bored fiercely.

"All right, punk," he clipped, "what the hell's the idea? I told you I was giving this party! You damned fool—"

Rita took hold of his arm and refused to be shaken off. "Cut it, Frank, we saved your neck by coming here. He got spotted at the hotel. Somebody turned in a riot call. This guy tore through a bunch of cop cars—we could hear 'em all around us—and burned up the streets to get here and warn you. You'd have walked right into it."

Rendon eyed her curiously, then looked at me. I said to him: "You just called me a damned fool. I was. I should've scrambled alone and let you walk into the cops. I'm used to playing ball with men who play back."

"Aw, cut the sermon," he put in. "Maybe I talked fast, but I was sore. I wanted to meet you at the hotel."

I LOOKED around the room. There were two other men. I knew them from photographs in the papers—the rest of the Rendons, Frank's brothers. These three had been terrorizing banks for a year. They were wanted for several killings and as suspects in two kidnaping cases. The newspapers, with a flare for titles, called them the Red Rendons. The

brothers kept hard eyes on me but didn't say anything.

"Naturally," I said to Frank, "you didn't want me to come here. You've got a neat little set-up. But if I'm playing anything with you guys, I'm playing everything. I can use a hide-out like this myself. Seven years in stir was enough—I don't figure on going back."

Frank Rendon walked over and sat in a chair, his long legs sprawled out before him and his eyes never leaving my face. "You don't fool us any," he said evenly. "You talk like a tough guy that did something to get into stir and then did something to get out. You didn't. You went in by spilling a false confession to protect your brother and you got out on a phony break."

I didn't say a word. I tried not to show anything.

He went on: "You're willing to stay crooked as long as your brother goes free. I got an offer to make you. It may mean a little dough. But the main thing in taking it is you can keep your brother out of stir. If you buck us or double-cross us, we turn him in to take his rap, and we fix it with the right copper to knock you off and collect the reward on your head."

I met his eyes. "So you've got my brother, eh?"

Frank Rendon laughed. "Sure we got your brother—we never go off half-cocked. We got your brother and that means we got you." He lifted a claw-like hand and slowly closed his fingers in a tight grip. "We got you," he grinned smartly, "just like that, Footballs!"

I shrugged. "All right," I told him. "I guess it's your party. But I'm tired of being the goat in 'Blind Man's Bluff'. Let's play a game where I can see what I'm doing."

Rendon tipped the back of his wooden chair against the wall, sat there relaxed and smirking. "Sure," he said, "you'll

see a lot of things right now. I just wanted to make sure you knew how you stood."

I said: "I know when I'm licked."

He smirked some more. Rita Alvarado stood by him, running her fingers through his hair. He paid no attention to her.

"A man named Rittenhouse greased you out of stir," he told me. I put on a puzzled expression as though the name didn't mean much to me, and he continued: "F. Howard Rittenhouse—got so much money he stinks with it. Can make everybody from the governor down jump through hoops. He greased you out in that screwy way and we got a tip on it. Somebody we know wants to get the inside dope, wants to find out just what this rich bird is up to."

He leaned forward. The front legs of the chair thumped on the floor. "Hey, Checks!" he called. "Come out."

A door opened. It led to a washroom. The gaunt man who looked like me slunk into the room. I pretended to show a lot of surprise—as though I'd never seen him before. Rendon had called him "Checks". That was a name used in the papers in reference to an unknown forger, a mystery paper-hanger who plastered the country with bogus checks. The cops never caught up with him because they didn't know who to look for. He was the artist but he didn't pass his work. He let others do the passing.

I noticed that he held some papers in his hands; not checks, just plain papers with a lot of scrawling on them. He dropped the papers on a table and began to put on gloves.

One of the Rendons said: "He's like the old lady with her piano—always practicing."

I watched the gaunt man, Checks, pull on his gloves, said to Rendon: "This guy looks like me—in a bad dream."

ALL the Rendons laughed. The gaunt man snarled an oath and sat down in the corner at the table. He picked up a worn, greasy deck of cards and began to play solitaire. He was obviously sullen and moody.

"We got an inside on Rittenhouse's plans to contact you," Frank Rendon said. "A dame in red was to pick you up at that rooming place. We sent Rita there to get you out of the way and this hungry-looking guy slipped in to take your place, really to pose as you. We figured Rittenhouse would be fooled—you'd change after seven years in stir. But Checks spoiled the play. The dame who called was Rittenhouse's daughter. She's a nifty little twist and Checks tried to date her up."

"Cut that stuff!" the gaunt man snarled. "The old man asked me a lot of college baloney, and how in hell could I put over the bluff? It was a lousy idea, anyway."

He went back to his sullen game of solitaire and Rendon said: "The idea went blooey. So we figured to get to Rittenhouse through you. That's the idea now. You find out what Rittenhouse wants and tip us. Like I said, we got your brother and you better play ball. You go see Rittenhouse."

"Sure," I said, "but I'm not supposed to know he was the guy that sprung me."

"Give him a stall," Rendon suggested. "Tell him you trailed the blonde and the mugg that looked like you. You saw where they went and you began to fit two and two together."

I nodded. Rendon didn't know how close he was to the thing I had actually done. "I think I see the set-up," I told him. "It all goes back to that train robbery. You guys might be the three that worked it with my brother. The case is blowing open again. You think Rittenhouse is going after an answer and you're trying to cover up."

He watched me through smoky eyes. "Don't try to figure things," he warned. "You just do what we say."

"O.K.," I agreed, "but even if you Rendons did pull the job I can't see why you want to cover it. You guys're wanted on so many charges right now a little train robbery that far back won't add much to your records. Somebody else must be implicated—the guy that tipped you that the payroll was on the train. He must be the kind of guy who can't afford to be found out."

Frank Rendon jumped to his feet. The chair crashed to the floor. His left hand swiped me a blow on the face and his right dropped into his vest pocket, lifted a gun half out. "You talk too much and you think too much!" he snapped savagely. "I can jug your no-good brother and I can rub you out!"

"You can't rub me till I play stool-pigeon for you and find out what Rittenhouse knows," I told him. "I'm not afraid of you but you've got me in a corner. I told you I'd play it your way, and I will. What the hell have I got to lose? You know I didn't really work on that train job and I didn't really lam out of Folsom. But the cops want me just as bad as if I did both; they think I did. They'll go on thinking it as long as I can protect my brother and save those seven years. I'll play it as square as you do, Frank. But if one thing happens to my brother, I'll put the finger on you."

It was quite a speech; it got over. I could see that by Frank Rendon's face. He glanced around at the other Rendons. Even Checks turned away from his sullen card game to look me over. Rita Alvarado watched me with spiked eyelashes nearly closed.

"It's your move, Frank," I suggested quietly.

He made no answer, just turned his back and walked loose-legged to a wall

telephone. He punched a button beside the instrument as he took down the receiver. "Joe," he ordered crisply, "dial me Hillside Four-three-seven-seven."

It was an easy number to remember.

CHAPTER FOUR

Checks' Mate

FRANK RENDON'S voice on the phone was hurried. He said: "This is F. R. The college guy came back—by himself. He was scared out for a while, that's all. I told him the idea and he's set to play. If this goes over, you got nothing to worry about. I'll handle anything that comes up, even if somebody has to be bumped for silence. But I want that dough of yours doubled. I like this racket and I want it to pay me good."

By the droning of the receiver I knew the other party was giving Rendon a lot of pleading objections. Rendon held the squawling receiver away from his ear, held it out for his brothers to hear. He grinned, winked, and broke the connection.

One of the Rendon boys said thoughtfully: "We better not try to milk too much out of the guy. He might turn the job over to that stooge dick."

"Don't kid yourself he will," Frank Rendon smirked. "We got the fat punk over a barrel. One funny trick out of him and I'll write a little note to the cops telling 'em just where they can find the guy that gave the tip-off in Twenty-seven. I'll even tell 'em the guy paid for a couple of murders."

He shrugged. "A few more charges won't hurt us none. We can only hang once, and the ropes have been waiting for years."

He slapped a felt hat on his head, moved to the wall and peered through the back of the diaphanous mirror into the pool parlor. The coast was clear. He patted Rita's cheek and handed her a stamped, addressed envelope.

"A letter to my old lady," he explained. "Don't mail it near the city—I don't want to make the town hot. Take a train to San Diego, if you want."

He gave her a handful of money, greenbacks, which she put in her purse with the letter.

The three Rendons stood by the hinged brick door with their hats on. Frank leveled a long finger at me and said: "You can go to work on Rittenhouse now. We'll get in touch with you through McGuire here." McGuire, evidently, was the name of the gaunt man who was known to newspapers and police as Checks. "You stumbled into this hide-out, Enright. I'll let that pass. Only you better not stumble into the next one."

They pulled a switch. The heavy secret door swung back. Each man dropped a right hand into a pocket. Frank's hand didn't stay there. It came out with a gun. He glared at it, frowning. It was a tiny revolver, so small it looked ridiculous in his long paw.

He tossed the gun on one of the cots. "Take that cap pistol out and bury it, McGuire."

The thin man glanced over as it plumped on the bed. Then he went back to his sullen game of solitaire. "What's the matter with it?"

"It can be traced to me. Had it since I was a brat. It's got the kind of heat on it I don't like. I don't mind cop heat and G-heat but when you blow up a stink that gets the citizens sore, you're in a spot. Any guy on the street might put the finger on you."

"I'll bury it, Frank," Checks McGuire assured him casually. He concentrated on the cards, working them with gloved hands.

"Bury it good," Frank Rendon finished, and the three Rendons went out the brick door.

"You can drop me somewhere near the

Southland," Rita Alvarado suggested to me. "I'll touch up my face."

SHE went into the washroom, shutting the door after her. I edged over to the cot where Frank Rendon had tossed the gun and sat down by it pretending to watch Checks McGuire play his solitaire. I glanced at the gun. It was a .22 all right. My stomach got tense as I realized how it had been made a hot gun. Nora—lying dead on the floor of the cot-tage.

I got a handkerchief from my pocket, casually dropped it over the murder gun. When I pocketed the handkerchief again the gun went with it. Checks McGuire didn't even glance at me. I got out the .32 revolver I had taken from Rita at the Southland and put it on the cot where the other weapon had been. Rita's gun was nickel-finished, too. McGuire had had only a swift glimpse of the revolver and Frank hadn't named the caliber. I figured my substitution would work. McGuire would unknowingly ditch the wrong gun. I would smuggle out the weapon which had killed Nora.

When Rita came out of the washroom I stood between her and the cot. I didn't want her to recognize her gun and spoil my play. She didn't. I hustled her through the secret door.

I drove Rita to within three blocks of the Southland where I parked on a side street in the dark. She caressed my hand as she told me good-bye. I knew her type—flirtatious, the kind that changes men as often as a society girl changes dresses. Easy to flatter. I decided to play her for type.

My right arm went across her shoulders. I reached my left arm around her waist. She didn't try to pull away.

"It's against my principles," I told her quietly, "to monkey with another fellow's

girl, but you're so swell-looking it hurts. Too bad you belong to Frank."

She fell for it. Her type always will. "I like you," she whispered. "Play ball with Frank and you won't get hurt."

Her purse was on the seat near the door. My plan was to get a hand into it, lift out that letter Frank Rendon had given her to mail. I figured it might be a letter which would provide evidence against people connected with the Rendons. I didn't believe Frank's stall that it was a letter to his old lady.

I started to kiss her and she fought a little. She didn't mean it; the struggle was weak, a come-on. Distracting her attention, I got the purse open with my left hand, slipped the letter out. She didn't notice it. The letter went into my pocket; the purse was closed.

I put both my hands to my head, rumbled my hair. "I'm sorry, Rita. I'm a heel. You're beautiful but you belong to Frank. Let's forget this."

She looked sore for a second but she believed the whole gag. She got out of the car, saying in hard, seductive tones: "I won't forget it, good-looking. One of these days—"

I jammed the coupé in gear and drove off. I didn't feel any regret for tricking her that way. She was just a cheap little two-timer with no codes. Anybody who treated her as a lady was a sap.

LIGHTS from the poolroom still burned when I got back. It was over an hour after I had dropped Rita. In the meantime I had paid a call to Edward J. Kevan. He was the criminal lawyer who'd prepared my battle in the courts in 1927 when I broke down and confessed to the train robbery for Bill's sake—for Nora's sake.

Kevan's face had turned a green color when I walked into his apartment. I was hot and the law had a campaign on against

citizens, particularly criminal lawyers, who harbored fugitives. I had only wanted one thing from Kevan—I wanted him to trace the phone number, Hillside 4377.

He did it by his inside drag with a night employee at the telephone company. The number was private and it didn't surprise me to learn whose it was. I'd offered Kevan a hundred dollars by way of fee. He wouldn't take it. He was too glad to get me out of his apartment.

I parked my coupé a little above the pool hall and walked down. While I stood by the trick gum machine on the back wall, a couple of guys lounging in chairs gave me the nod.

I stuck a penny in the machine and stood by the mirror long enough to be recognized by McGuire, if he was still there. He was. He stood inside the brick hinged door as I came through, just slipping out of an overcoat. The door to the washroom stood open. McGuire and I were alone.

"Just got back from ditching the hot rod, huh?" I said.

He nodded sullenly, throwing his overcoat across a cot. I walked to the table where he had been playing cards. The papers on which he'd been practicing forgery were still there. I picked them up and stuffed them in my pocket.

"Put those down!" he ordered shrilly. His hand ducked for his armpit but I already had the 38/44 revolver on him, pointed at his cough-racked chest.

"Sit down at the table, Checks. Keep your mitts on top."

He sat, his gloved hands resting lightly on the table.

"Let's understand each other," I suggested. "We'll be alone for a while. The Rendons won't come back here and anybody who uses the gum machine while we talk will just get—gun."

"You're nuts if you don't play ball with Frank," he snapped.

I laughed. "You're nuts," I answered, "if you don't play ball with me."

"What the hell do you want?" he demanded angrily.

"First I want to tell you why you wear gloves."

His deep-set eyes searched my face, studied me. He feared me already. "I wear 'em to protect my hands, dope!"

Grinning, I shook my head. "I've got a better guess. You wear them to protect your fingerprints. The cops only know you as a mystery man. You hang bum checks all over the country and you never leave fingerprints."

"So what?" he snarled.

"If your prints weren't on file somewhere you wouldn't be so damned careful about hiding them. My guess is that you've got a previous record. As long as you don't leave new prints on checks, the police can't connect you with the guy that once had a record, and they don't know who to look for." I leaned over the table.

"The practice paper I just swiped," I went on, "have your prints because I saw you putting on the gloves afterwards."

"You're wet behind the ears." He laughed throatily. "Your guess is so rotten it stinks!" His eyes had a worried look.

O. K., McGuire, then I'll mail these practice sheets to the police, tell them to test for fingerprints and send the classifications to Washington. I'll tip them that the guy who made the prints is their Mystery Forger. Washington will go through their files. If they haven't anything on record, like you say, then the cops still won't know who to look for. And you're still safe."

I backed toward the door. He rose from the table, his pasty face sagging. "You got me," he admitted wearily.

I laughed. "You can save yourself by playing with me."

"What do you want?" he asked in sullen defeat.

My gun poked into his chest; my face went close to his. "Where's my brother?" I demanded.

He sat down at the table again, staring at me and wagging his head. "You think I want to get knocked off? You think I'll double-cross the Rendons?"

"The Rendons won't know you double-crossed them," I assured him. "I won't spill it. But if you don't answer my question and go all the way with me, I'll sure as hell spill over to the cops. With a previous record and the rap on all this wall paper you've been hanging on the country, it's my guess you'll have a nice long stretch."

HE studied me for a time. The skin got tight around his mouth, twitched nervously. His thin chest must have gotten tight too—he started coughing. When he had controlled it, he said dully: "Your brother's in the other Rendon hide-away. It's a bungalow all by itself in the sand dunes back of Manhattan Beach. You have to go over Ocean Lane, a hell of a rough road from the town. Fifteen Fifty is the house number. If you double-cross me after this, I'll get you. Even if I'm in stir, I'll get you."

I ignored his lame threats, asked: "Is my brother alive?"

He looked away from me, shuffling the deck of cards in his gloved fingers. "Sure," he responded, "why the hell not?"

"If you're lying," I said, "I'll find out pretty soon and these papers and my story go to the cops. If you tip the Rendons to me they may get me. But that's too bad for you because I'm leaving this evidence against you with a friend of mine. If anything happens to me, he takes it to the cops, and you're licked just the same."

I had him where I wanted him. He spoke right back. "Your brother's dead. They bumped him and don't want you to know because they can only make you play while you think you're protecting him."

I wasn't shocked to hear Bill was dead. I had felt it. Only I had wanted proof before I struck. I was going to drag a lot of people down and I didn't want Bill, if he had been alive, to go down in the crash.

I said: "Frank Rendon and his boys killed Bill. They killed Nora, his wife, too. They did it because a certain party ordered them to. That party was afraid Bill and Nora would know too much about the train job. He was afraid, now I was free, that I meant to get the low-down from my relatives. Rendon shot Nora and took Bill away so it would look to the cops as though her own husband had done it and blown. Rendon didn't need to cover himself—he's as hot as he can get already. But he had to cover up for the other party, the guy who engineered the train job. That party didn't fire the murder gun at Nora and Bill but he's as guilty as if he did. I'll smash him."

Checks McGuire kept absently shuffling the deck of cards. "I told you all I know," he said. "I stooled for you because you got me in a spot. Now scam."

"Not yet," I said slowly. "I want something else."

"I'm through," he snapped. "I done enough already."

"You've started, McGuire. It's too late to pull out now. I want you to do something that's right up your alley—a forgery."

He eyed me in a puzzled way. "Want me to draw up a bogus check for you?"

I shook my head. "No, McGuire, I want you to draw up a bogus confession in Frank Rendon's handwriting. It's go-

ing to implicate everybody involved on that train job and the murder of my brother and his wife. I'll tell you what to write."

He couldn't speak. He stared at me as though he thought I'd blown my top. I took from my pocket the letter I had snatched from Rita Alvarado's purse.

"I got hold of this," I told McGuire, "because I thought it might have some evidence I could use. But Frank didn't stall. It really is a letter to his mother in Nebraska."

I tossed the opened letter on the table, went on: "We can use it, Checks. You can model the forgery job from it—make the handwriting exactly like it in the confession and we'll sign it *Frank Rendon*. If the police don't have a record of Frank's writing they can compare this with samples his mother must have in Nebraska."

I sat down at the table opposite Checks McGuire. His gaunt, hollow eyes never left me. Amazement remained frozen on his face.

"Get your pen and ink, McGuire," I ordered.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Red Rendons

ALONG about noon of the following day I parked my car on a tree-shaded side street in the town of San Fernando. Things would be popping fast now. The county sheriff's office would have my "Frank Rendon" confession in the afternoon mail. They'd lose no time acting on it because the confession, as I had dictated it to Checks, the forger, packed dynamite.

Yet the only false thing about the confession was that Frank Rendon hadn't written it. I had been sure of my ground. My ears and eyes had been open from the moment I left Folsom. I had pieced facts

together—things Rittenhouse had said or showed me, things the Rendons had said, telephone conversations, photographs, and a private phone number. It all fitted.

You had to drive through San Fernando to get to my brother's farm. But I didn't go to the farm. Morning papers screamed headlines about the discovery of Nora's body by a neighbor. The county was outraged at the brutal murder of a lovely young housewife. My brother, according to the papers, was being sought as the chief suspect.

That's the way the Rendon ring had wanted it, a perfect crime. But it wouldn't be perfect when I got through with it.

Checks McGuire, after serving his purpose to me, was out of the way. I had been fairly certain he wouldn't risk tipping the Rendons to what I was up to, but I didn't want to take any chances. So I had taken him out beyond the little town of Roscoe. I had tied him up securely and left him in a huge, dry storm-drain. And I'd told him if he wasn't there when I came back for him I'd play my ace card against him with the cops. He'd stay put all right.

In San Fernando, where I parked the coupé, some kids were playing baseball in an empty lot. I strolled down the sidewalk till I saw an iron grate in the gutter. The grate covered a hole that carried off water during rains.

Nobody seemed to be watching me but I pretended to drop a package of cigarettes. When I stooped to pick it up the handkerchief in my right hand concealed the small shiny gun with which Nora had been killed.

I let it slip through the bars of the gutter grate. Then I stepped back on the sidewalk and watched the kids at bat knocking practice flies.

"Hey, fellows!" I called. "Fifty cents to the Babe Ruth that knocks me a high one!"

They jumped at the chance. A little Japanese boy swung the bat low at the ball, connected. The ball soared high and came close to me.

I fumbled it, intentionally, juggling it to the gutter. I let it fall and roll through the grating into the water drain. "Tough luck, kids," I told them. "The ball went down the hole. You'll never get it."

"Sure we'll get it. We fished one out last Saturday."

"Hey!" a freckle-faced boy shouted. "Look! A gun!"

We all crowded over the grate peering down. "You boys better call the police," I suggested.

While three of them hot-footed it away on an exciting mission, I got in the car and drove toward Los Angeles. It wouldn't be long now. The cops had been looking for the murder gun. The county ballistics bureau would identify it. And it could be traced, I knew, to Frank Rendon.

TOWARD evening I pulled into Manhattan Beach. I had loafed along, waiting for dark. Extra papers, just out, told about kids finding the gun that killed Nora Enright.

Police admitted to reporters that the discovery of the gun meant a lot in the case.

Police also mentioned they were investigating a "strange piece of evidence" that had been mailed to the sheriff's office. They refused to say more. That piece of evidence, I knew, was Frank Rendon's forged confession.

It was getting dark when I located Ocean Lane. I left the car at the side of a very bad, sandy road and walked. The road was more like a trail. It led up and down the bleak sand dunes. For a while there were a few summer shacks. Then even those petered out. It was all quiet,

dead with a wind blowing streamers of fog over the dunes.

When I saw a light I left the road and plodded over the sand. Nobody was outside the house. I heard radio music.

A tin mailbox on a post near the road drew me. I had to go close to make out the number 1550. This was it.

All the shades were down. I waded cautiously through the weeds of a neglected garden. I had gone around two and a half sides before I found an open window. The shade wasn't quite down. I put my face close to the screen and peered into a cheap dining-room.

The three Rendon brothers, in shirt sleeves, sat at the table playing cards. They'd been drinking a lot of beer. Nobody spoke. Then Frank Rendon, losing a poker pot, stood up, kicking back his chair and tucking the slack of his shirt into his belt.

"Nuts," he snapped impatiently, glaring around the room. "This joint gives me the creeps."

"You're going stale," the youngest Rendon said. "What say we case a nice juicy bank?"

I left. The fact that they were there was all I'd wanted to pick up. Thirty minutes later I stood in a phone booth in Manhattan Beach giving the cops an anonymous tip. Twenty minutes after that I sat on a sand dune keeping a watch on the Rendon hide-out.

My car was ditched where it wouldn't attract attention and where I could get to it in a hurry. The ocean wind scattered the overhead fog in long wisps, now and then letting a full moon shine on the hill-like dunes.

I SAW men, lots of them. They were dim shadows moving silently in the ravines, circling the house. They kept to the gullies, so I was safe on the top of my dune. Flashlights winked signals to

each other. Immediately a man's voice came from a ditch on the opposite side of the road from the house.

"You in there!" the voice called. "Come out with your hands in the air! We're officers!"

The radio music snapped off; all the house lights went out. There was no sound till the man in the ditch called again. "Come out quickly and quietly and we won't have trouble here."

From the house one of the Rendons shouted: "You got trouble copper—plenty of it!"

A sub-machine gun thundered a staccato roar. More guns than I could count joined in. Streaks of flame whipped from dark places between the dunes. A police machine gun, firing tracer bullets, sent a weirdly luminous arrow into a side window.

I was several dunes away from the fighting but I ducked down, and I kept watching because there weren't as many cops here as the job called for. It might be possible for a man to slip the net—

I was thinking of that—I don't know how long after the shooting started—when the moon shone through the fog and showed me a dark form in the ravine below me. He'd already slipped the net.

I moved down the back side of the dune with Bill's 38/44 in my hand, stood in a ravine, waiting.

Frank Rendon came plodding through the sand. He had a sub-machine gun in his hands. I saw it all clearly in the moonlight—Rendon, the heavy gun swinging up, Rendon's teeth. I thumbed the hammer back.

My first shot got him. I didn't know how or why. He stumbled to his knees but he had the machine gun going. I shot three times more, fast, while he lifted that shuddering, hell-spitting weapon. It seemed heavy in his hands. Sand spouted

in a stream before me as Rendon's bullets kicked wild.

My next one sent him over backwards and he lay still. That one, I thought, was for Nora. The others had been for Bill. I walked over to him with my gun held ready. I still had another unfired shell.

I didn't need it. He was plenty dead.

BRIGHT sun flooded the Rittenhouse garden, came through open French doors to the breakfast room where I sat over a table gleaming with silver and pottery. I had the morning paper propped up back of my coffee. Evelyn and her father sat and watched me.

I glanced at the headlines. *RED RENDONS KILLED IN POLICE RAID—Three Public Enemies Die in Battle with Officers at Manhattan Beach.*

Further down on the page it said: "The courageous officer who faced the notorious Frank Rendon in the dark sand dunes and shot him down will remain unknown. Police officials refused to name him. Possible gang vengeance is believed to be the motive for secrecy."

I felt like laughing. The cops had thought up a swell motive. I glanced at the double column to the right.

SAN FRANCISCO FARMHOUSE MURDER SOLVED

FRANK RENDON SENDS STRANGE
WRITTEN CONFESSION TO POLICE
BEFORE BEING HUNTED
DOWN AND KILLED.

"What did you say in that confession?" Rittenhouse inquired.

"I handled it," I told him, "as though Frank Rendon wanted to squeal to the police because he was tired of fronting for the big boss in that train robbery. Actually, the boss wanted Nora and Bill killed because he was afraid they'd tip me, or you, to the 'accomplices before the fact;' but I didn't handle it that way in

the confession I dictated to McGuire. I made it look as though they were afraid I'd tip my relatives."

Evelyn said: "Because you wanted to protect your brother even after his death."

"Not entirely," I admitted. "I want the police to go on thinking I was one of the four masked men because I intend to accept your father's offer. It's not the money. Crime dragged down my brother and killed him. It dragged down Nora, the most innocent creature that ever lived. And it shoved me into Folsom for seven years. Right now I can't think of anything better than to fight crime."

"You won't regret this step," Rittenhouse said. He came over and looked at the paper. Again he read the article that said: *Mark Walters, President Pioneer Lines, Revealed As Tip-off Man in 1927 Train Robbery. Kills Self When Faced With Arrest. Frank Rendon Squeals.*

"I still don't see," the millionaire remarked, "how in the world you became suspicious of Walters."

"I got suspicious of Perlman first," I explained. "Somebody on the inside with you, I knew, had to be the person who blocked your plan to bring me straight here from Folsom. You said Bert Perlman had handled the details of getting me out of stir, so I knew Perlman was in a swell position to double-cross you. I had seen Perlman at the gate out there when Evelyn came in with the wrong Tricky Enright. The way he acted got me curious."

"You showed me," I went on, "a news photo taken at the time of the train hold-up. You, Perlman, and Walters were in the picture. You said Walters bought out your interest right after the robbery but I didn't suspect Walters then. Later I knew that Walters' share of the loot helped him buy you out. In one of the Rendon hide-outs I heard things that implicated Perlman and I picked up a telephone num-

ber that Rendon called when he contacted the big shot. I traced the number to Walters. I could see the whole thing then."

RITTENHOUSE nodded slowly. "Walters was general manager in Twenty-seven. He knew the silver-mine payroll was on the train. I always thought him a shrewd man. I didn't think he had that kind of shrewdness."

"Perlman," I said, "was then special agent for the railroad. My guess is that he worked with Walters, was the go-between who arranged the hold-up with the Rendons. The Rendons persuaded my brother to go in with them. The kid was going straight but at the same time he wanted a little money to get started in married life with Nora. He tried one last job—"

"And you took the blame for him," Evelyn added slowly.

"I trusted Perlman," Rittenhouse said thoughtfully, "and all the time he was tipping Walters to everything I did. It took him years to bring me the proof that your brother, not you, took part in the train job. Perlman was stalling. He didn't want me to get the proof. He and Walters were afraid that if Bill got in a spot he might squeal on them. A few months ago my patience snapped and I told Perlman I planned hiring some new investigators. Unconsciously, I forced his hand, compelled him to bring me the informa-

tion he could have given me from the start. I had never told Perlman what I intended to use you for when I got you out. He didn't know what I'd do. He had to find out because he must have had a damned good hunch I was going to fight that train mystery to the finish—he and Walters had to protect their secret. They had to order Frank Rendon to kill Bill and Nora Enright. Well, the double-crosser got what he deserved."

What Perlman had gotten was death. When the police went to him last night on the tip I had given them in the fake Rendon "confession", Perlman, trapped, had resisted arrest. Police bullets cut him down. Walters, faced with exposure after all those years, chose suicide for an out.

The whole gang that had engineered the train robbery and that had killed Bill and Nora, was wiped out. I, Tricky Enright, still held a criminal record. I had kept it of my own accord, had left myself, in the eyes of the law, a marked man. My life was cut out for me. There was work to be done.

"Tricky," Evelyn asked anxiously, "where are you going?"

I had started into the garden.

"Out in the sticks near Roscoe," I told her. "I have to release a consumptive forger that I left all tied up in a storm-drain. He's been there twenty-four hours and must be awful bored by this time."

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It was smaller than a penny—that crawling guide to the grave. But it carried its own hour-glass to measure each murder moment and taught Varney the folly of even trying to borrow the—

Black Widow's Might

By Leo Stalnaker



He tipped the spiders onto the sick man's chest.

UNTIL Varney saw the two black widow spiders he had been undecided just how to kill Coakley.

Now as Varney bent over Coakley's bed, the sick man furtively studied Varney's tight-lipped mouth, his long face and the glittering eyes that peeped through narrow slits. But Varney was unmindful of this scrutiny—his hard gaze was fixed upon the small glass-topped box Coakley clutched. The way Coakley carefully tilted the box gave Varney a clear view of the two black widow spiders within.

Varney's narrowed gaze rested in queer fascination upon those glossy black things with bodies orange-marked in the shape of an hour glass, long, sprawling legs and enlarged joints—two orange-black specimens of creeping death. A swift-dawning thought had come to Varney and was being nursed behind those glittering eyes.

"Male or female?" inquired Varney, carefully nonchalant.

"Female—poisonous," answered Coak-

ley, with seeming listlessness. "The most poisonous specie known. About one chance in a hundred of a fellow living after one of them bites him."

"Yeah?" grunted Varney, casually. But he was breathing faster now. Varney was familiar with the deadly black widow. "What ye gonna do with 'em?"

Coakley's head turned on the pillow. "Nothing. I just like to watch them." The sick man carefully placed the box on a table beside the bed.

Varney straightened abruptly, nodded carelessly. "They're—odd."

Coakley, with shaking fingers, lifted a glass of milk from the table to his lips, drank slowly. He always took sleeping powders in the evening. It was the only way he could get any rest.

Varney watched with curious fascination. That drugged milk would soon take effect. Coakley drained the glass.

Then Varney turned, sauntered to the door. He paused to let his fingers strum idly upon the strings of a guitar leaning against the wall.

Staring absently, he picked up the instrument, strode out on the porch. Still picking the strings he descended the steps hesitantly, strolled down the gravel walk.

SOMEHOW Varney sensed that Coakley had guessed his sinister design. But Coakley would not be guessing long. That drugged milk would soon give Varney the chance he sought. This strumming on the guitar must be managed carefully now.

He pushed through a clump of thick shrubbery, seated himself upon a bench. With satisfaction he noted that Doctor Pogue—the only other person within a mile of this place—was sprawled comfortably upon a rustic seat across the yard, idly observing him. For several minutes Varney's nervous fingers tuned the strings, strumming slowly. His keen, scheming brain was busy upon the death plan with

the spiders. Coakley's passing would leave to the surviving partner, Varney, the entire ownership of the desert mine they operated.

Strum! strum! strum! came the musical notes from the lush foliage where Varney, tense and hard-eyed, waited impatiently for the darkness.

He rested the guitar in his lap, thumped the strings with his right hand, drew from his pocket a small ball of twine with his left. One end of this cord he looped around a guitar string and made fast.

Varney waited until the desert night was inky black. Then still picking the guitar strings he rose, propped the instrument upright in the fork of a limb, where the foliage was open toward the house. He backed away from the guitar. The night was tar black—Doctor Pogue would not see him.

Varney, as he went, played out the twine from the ball in his left hand, kept it taut, plucked on the tightened cord with the thumb and forefinger of his right.

With each pluck the guitar responded musically. *Strum! strum! strum!* floated the mellow notes, though the one who caused the string to vibrate was twenty—thirty—now forty feet away, approaching the black hulk of the house.

Varney mounted the steps on tiptoe. He was breathing rapidly now. His body was damp with sweat. *Strum! strum!* went the guitar, sixty feet away—proclaiming to Doctor Pogue that Varney was still seated on the yard bench in the shrubbery.

Varney entered. The house was deathly silent. Varney heard only the sharp rasp of his own quick breath and Coakley's soft, slow respiration. Varney, careful of his direction in the dark, held the string away from obstructions, letting it run straight through the open door to the guitar in the yard. The strumming continued.

With a quick flick of his right hand Varney flipped back the bed cover. Then

he hastily plucked the string again. *Strum! strum!* Once more his right hand shot out, felt for the table, found the box, placed it on the bed.

Again the guitar strummed. Then Varney opened the box, turned it upside down on Coakley's stomach.

Varney knew the deadly spiders were now upon Coakley's warm body. Varney was immediately conscious that he was sweating profusely. He padded swiftly out, slithered across the porch, down the gravel walk. He felt a chill sweep along his spine. With nervous haste he took up the string, kept it taut, and strummed.

He reached the guitar, sank limply to the bench. He wadded up the twine, thrust it in his pocket. Then, as he gathered courage, a strain of soft melody floated into the hot, thick night.

AN HOUR later Coakley was still alive, but writhing in pain. Varney stood beside the bed, gaping at him dumbly.

"I phoned you as quick as I could, Sheriff," Doctor Pogue was saying to Sheriff Bruton. "Coakley had been sleeping since dark. I was out in the yard. Ran in as soon as I heard him groaning. It was several minutes before I could learn about the spider bite. He seemed in a daze. I've done everything there is to do—treated the wound—gave an antidote, but—"

"Any chance?" broke in Sheriff Bruton abruptly. The doctor's lips puckered.

Coakley brought his head up with a jerk, red eyes staring. "I'm not gonna die! But Varney tried to murder me!"

"Why do you accuse Varney?" demanded the sheriff.

Coakley's protruding eyes blinked. His gray face was distorted. "I know he did it—but I didn't see him. I intended to catch him—but went to sleep. I didn't know he'd try it so soon."

Sheriff Bruton flicked an inquiring

glance to Doctor Pogue. Varney felt himself growing numb.

Pogue slowly shook his head. "Varney was out in the corner of the yard all the time, playing on his guitar. He went out there before dark. Still out there when I called him to help with Coakley. I heard him all the while."

The sheriff frowned. "And nobody around Coakley's house but you two." His gray eyes studied the empty spider box he held. "It was your spider—in this box, Coakley?"

Coakley's thin, white lips writhed in pain. He jerked his head affirmatively. "Yes—my spider," he moaned. "But there were two spiders. You killed only one."

The sheriff darted a quick gaze about the bed, over the floor. He knelt, looked under the bed, searchingly.

Coakley's body twisted. A shrewd gleam came into his hot eyes. "I knew Varney was planning to kill me. I wanted him to decide to kill me with the spiders." He groaned, then cackled shrilly.

Sheriff Bruton rose, shot another inquiring gaze to Doctor Pogue, shifted it abruptly to Coakley. "Gone nuts, eh?"

Coakley laughed insanely again. "I know what I'm talking about. I put the idea in Varney's head. I showed him the spiders."

Varney wiped his wet forehead. More than an hour had elapsed since the spider had bitten Coakley. His entire body seemed inflamed and swollen. Only a few more minutes now, and Coakley would cease making accusations.

The puzzled frown deepened on Sheriff Bruton's brow. "Coakley, Doctor Pogue says he was in the yard, and that Varney was out there too, all evening, playing his guitar. You probably knocked this box over in your sleep."

"No!" shrieked Coakley. His eyes blazed. "No! Varney did it, I tell you." He lifted a lean, shaking forefinger, leveled

it at Pogue. "Did you see Varney out there?"

"I saw him come out of the house with his guitar," said the doctor slowly, patiently. "Of course I couldn't see after it got dark. But I heard him over there in the corner of the yard strumming all the time on his guitar. No one came in this house. Mr. Coakley, you accidentally turned over that box—"

Coakley pulled himself up on one elbow, fury in every line of his twisted, knotted face. "There—there! You didn't see him—only heard him strumming on the guitar. That's it. I taught Varney a trick once with a guitar—and a string!"

Varney's heart leaped near his mouth. He had forgotten that Coakley had showed him the trick. Anyway he had not anticipated that Coakley would remain conscious or talk rationally very long after that spider bite. How Coakley could stay alive with all that poison in his system was a mystery to Varney. Uncanny.

Was Coakley going to tell how a piece of string could— Suddenly Varney's hands became fists. But just as quickly he relaxed. He thrust one hand into the pocket where he had concealed the twine. If they searched him they would find it. His face became pasty. He stood numb with terror.

Coakley writhed and groaned, mouthed inarticulately.

"Only one thing can save him," muttered Doctor Pogue. "A transfusion of blood from someone who has been bitten by a black widow."

THEN a dread suspicion was born in Varney's mind and rapidly grew to a certainty. In his pocket he felt a slight movement against his fingers. His blood

froze. The other black widow spider was in his pocket!

Instantly he knew how it got there. When he had stood over the bed, opened the box, the twine had dangled down from his left hand. One of the black widows with its sprawling legs and enlarged joints, had become entangled in the string. He had thrust the spider into his pocket with the wad of twine.

In a split second a sharp, darting pain shot through the back of his hand. And in his panic he heard Coakley babbling on.

"Varney did it—but I'm not gonna die. And I don't need a transfusion of blood from anybody. Do you know why? I've been bitten before by a black widow!"

Varney wanted to shriek aloud. Here was a man who could save him. A transfusion! The inflammation was spreading—his hand was swelling. Blood from the man he had tried to kill would save him. But he dared not ask for it! How could he explain that spider entangled in his pocket! The poison was shooting through his veins. Vaguely he heard Coakley again.

"I knew he was planning to kill me. I wanted him to decide to kill me with the spiders. I knew I'd live through it, and I'd get him for attempted murder."

The deadly poison seemed spurting into Varney's brain. He reeled. Through his blurred vision he saw Sheriff Bruton plucking at a bit of thread tied on the guitar string. Poison blood was pouring into Varney's heart. Things grew hazy, shapeless. He must have a transfusion from Coakley. He would confess. He tried—but his lips refused to move—the words stuck in his mouth. Too late. His knees became rubber and he sank to the floor.

In **DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE** for **FEBRUARY** Out on January 3rd

BRIDE OF THE BEAST

Murder under the Big Top in a Thrill-packed Circus Mystery by T. T. FLYNN

She covered there against the table.



THE CASE OF THE CRAZY WITNESS

Compiled from the Case Book of Carter Cole, M. D.

by Frederick C. Davis

Author of "The Case of the Skinned Men," etc.

When Linda Barclay swore her aunt's murderer had worn a polka-dot derby, a bright red shirt, a green suit and shoes to match the hat, even Carter Cole, eminent psychiatrist and investigator of crime, thought she was crazy. But her testimony couldn't be shaken—so it was up to Cole to find the killer or else send her to a padded cell.

CHAPTER ONE

Six Miles to Murder

DOCTOR CARTER COLE, psychiatrist and director of the famed Cole Sanitarium, turned his mas-

sive Duesenberg off Long Island's Rainbow Parkway just as the dash clock indicated two A. M. The winding drive of the Gerard estate led him to an enormous house, the windows of which shafted curtained light across elaborately landscaped

grounds. Accompanied by his pretty and efficient nurse-secretary, he went up to the entrance and knocked.

Waiting, he remarked: "A summons from Julia Gerard—one of the richest women in the country, and one of the most eccentric—is almost a royal command. She wears whalebone collars, severe black dresses harking back to the Nineties, and knots her white hair on the top of her head. Her violent temper is legend. Time means nothing to her. She expects to be implicitly obeyed at any hour of the day or night, and woe betide anyone who delays—so here we are. An amazing character, Jane."

"Yes, Doctor," said Miss Day. "But I'm June."

"You always are." Cole smiled as he lifted the knocker again. "You're invariably your twin sister, and she is invariably you. Long ago I despaired of ever being able to tell you apart." He frowned impatiently. "For one who telephoned so imperatively, Mrs. Gerard is uncommonly slow in having us admitted."

"Yes, Doctor."

COLE observed his companion with renewed wonder. He knew nothing concerning the girl and her twin sister except that they were perfect secretaries, perfect duplicates of each other, and invariably composed in the face of any emergency. In response to the Gerard command to appear at this house at once, he had summoned one of them from bed, not knowing which twin she might be, and hustled her away without explanation. Now, calm, quite undisturbed by the bizarre situation, she listened attentively as Cole went on.

"An amazing character, and an amazing request. I am here, June, to examine the lady mentally—at two in the morning! I am to test her sanity, and furnish her with a sworn statement that she is completely

rational. The matter is connected with a new will she is drawing up, and she wants to make certain it will not be contested, after her death, on the ground she didn't know what she was about. Fact is, I'm willing right now, on the strength of a slight personal acquaintance, to swear the Gerard mind knows absolutely what it's doing. Still, her precaution is as wise as it is strange, considering the vast fortune involved."

"Yes, Doctor," once again was the only comment June Day offered.

Cole's hand touched the knocker once more—but he did not rap, for at that moment a scream issued from the house. It began as a moan of despair, shrilled up to a pitch of stark terror, ended in a sob of anguish. Cole stood, hand poised, as a girl's voice screamed, "Willard, Willard!" Somewhere inside a door slammed. Then the cry came again and Cole gripped the knob, turned it.

"Go in, June!" he snapped and whirled to peer across the dark grounds. Someone was running across the grass at the side of the big house. Cole sprang to the corner, but saw no one. His hand eased to his 9 m/m Luger, holstered under his left arm, as he looked back to see Miss Day thrusting into the house. Suddenly he sprinted. He had glimpsed a shadowy figure scurrying along the hedge.

His run carried him past gardens, out the gate at the entrance of the drive. As he went along an angle of it, the hedge fluttered somewhere beyond the corner of the grounds. Long springy strides took Cole around the curve of the broad cement highway. Seeing nothing stirring in the gloom, he turned back, only to stop abruptly again. This time he saw a face.

Limned vaguely, it appeared, then vanished. Cole's photographic mind registered it with the speed of a clicking shutter. It was a man's face, tapering to a pointed chin, the eyes widened, the upper

lip bearing a dark, dainty mustache. Its resemblance to a rabbit's struck Cole as he peered into the shadows where it had been. He strode to the spot, parted the hedge, looked through, but saw nothing.

"Hello? Who are you?" he called to the darkness. And the answer was silence.

Another cry from the house hurried him to the door. He strode along a tapestried hall, stepped into a luxurious library, stopped short. Miss June Day, with the firm assurance of a trained nurse, was tightening her arms around a young girl who was struggling in terror to free herself. Linda Barclay—Cole recognized her as the granddaughter of the woman who had called him to the house—ceased her efforts when Cole appeared and gazed at him in speechless entreaty. He strode at once to the third woman in the room—Julia Gerard.

The white-haired lady—clad, as Cole knew she would be, in a severe black dress with a whalebone collar, and with a pair of rimless eyeglasses pinched to her thin nose—was lying on the floor beside the table. His expert fingers sought her pulse, raised an eyelid. She was dead.

"Willard killed her!" the girl blurted. "Willard! I saw him kill her!"

COLE'S keen eyes detected no signs of violence on the corpse, but he sensed an unusual pungency in the air as he turned to a perfume atomizer on the table. While he covered his hand with a handkerchief and took it up, Linda Barclay frantically resumed her attempts to break away from June Day.

Her voice rose almost to a scream. "Don't touch it! That's what he used to kill her! I saw Willard kill her with that!"

Cole looked at her in amazement. He saw nothing dangerous in the little atomizer, with its decorated bulb and sparkling liquid content, but he could not doubt the

sincerity of the girl's warning. Eminent psychiatrist that he was, he knew that to defy her terror by examining the device now might, in her hysterical condition, momentarily unbalance her mind.

Replacing the atomizer, he said firmly: "Miss Barclay's all right, June. You may release her. Telephone Chief Wellsmore at once."

Linda Barclay stood trembling, backed against the wall, staring at the dead woman on the floor, as June Day went coolly to the telephone to call the local police. Cole, studying her with his humorously piercing eyes, his large head bent forward, waited for the girl to regain control of herself. Her fists clenched with the effort, but she repeated with terrified vehemence: "Willard killed her! I saw him kill her!"

Cole went to the girl quietly. "You are speaking of your uncle, Willard Gerard? You are accusing him of murdering his mother. You realize it's a gravely serious charge. Are you quite sure—"

"I saw him do it!"

Cole turned to the telephone as June Day put it down. She said, "Chief Wellsmore is coming, Doctor," as he thumbed through the local directory. The number he called was that of the home of Willard Gerard, the dead woman's son, which he knew was located a few miles farther along the Rainbow Parkway. "Mr. Gerard?" he inquired when a man's voice answered.

"No, my name's Mackler. Mr. Gerard's in the dark-room, developing some films, and can't come out. Is there any message?"

"Yes," succinctly. "Doctor Cole is going to pay Mr. Gerard a visit in a very few minutes." He turned from the telephone to direct Miss Day. "Take Miss Barclay into the next room, June."

As the door closed, he took up the costly atomizer and admired the design of its Lalique glass. Disturbed by the girl's

charge, he chanced a slight squeeze of the bulb. Very cautiously, he drew a slow breath—and smiled. "Lovely," he breathed into the rich, flowery fragrance.

Again he intently examined the dead woman, and baffled, scanned the library for any indication of what might have caused her death. A folded paper lying on the desk attracted him. One clipped page was thrown back as though the dead woman had been interrupted while reading it. He saw, printed on the first sheet, *RELIANCE DETECTIVE AGENCY* and, under this heading, *Report*. The signature on the last page widened Cole's eyes—*Louis Mackler*.

Cole skimmed through the paper. Louis Mackler's report to Mrs. Julia Gerard, on behalf of the Reliance Detective Agency, was of no benefit to Willard Gerard's reputation. It mentioned several women, times and places. It spoke of heavy betting at Belmont Track and considerable sums lost in floating crap-games. The old lady's son was painted as irresponsible and undeserving. "We trust," the report ended ironically, "this information is satisfactory to you. Please rest assured our continued investigation will disclose further pertinent facts."

COLE was striding down the front hall when a rap sounded at the door. His tug on the knob transformed the shadow on the curtained pane into a man standing uneasily beyond the sill. Cole's breath stopped as he gazed at a pointed face. The sharp-chinned caller, obviously trying to control a grueling anxiety, smoothed his dainty mustache and attempted a smile.

"This is Doctor Cole? Mrs. Gerard told me on the telephone she was calling you tonight, too. It's an odd time to go about such a matter, don't you think, but—we expect unconventional actions of the good lady. I got out of bed to—"

"Haven't we," Cole asked, "met somewhere before—recently?"

The rabbit-faced man in the doorway paled. "I—I don't recall. My name is Leon Fendrick. I'm Mrs. Gerard's attorney, you know. This is unusual, isn't it? It's something about disinheriting her son, bequeathing his share of her fortune to charity. Perhaps I shouldn't divulge that, but I feel an explanation is due you—this hour of the night and all that. Is the good lady—"

"You will find the good lady in the library, Mr. Fendrick," Cole said tartly. "Dead."

Fendrick emitted a strangled exclamation as, ghost-faced, he stared at Cole. Cole had deliberately flung the information at the attorney, without warning, in order to observe the reaction. Now, abruptly, he strode past with no word of explanation, leaving Fendrick staring after him in palsied torment as he slipped behind the wheel of his Duesenberg.

Carter Cole watched the odometer as he sped along the smooth, straight cement lane. It stretched empty before him in the shafts of the headlamps. The sixth mile was clicking off when he turned into another driveway. Willard Gerard's home, though much less pretentious than his mother's, had cost a small fortune. Cole's knock brought a smallish, sharp-eyed man to the door.

When Cole introduced himself, the little man said: "My name's Mackler. Mr. Gerard's still in the dark-room. Step in." He was chewing with relish on something as he led Cole along a hall, into the kitchen. There he took up the remains of a sandwich and gestured to a closed door. "He's coming right out."

"It does my heart good," Cole said cryptically, "to see a private detective bear so little malice toward a man he's investigating unfavorably."

Mackler stared amazed as an opening

door disclosed Willard Gerard. He stepped into the kitchen smiling, stripping a pair of rubber gloves from his hands—a massive man, blunt-chinned, endowed with an almost offensive degree of natural charm. Cole saw, behind him, a room with black-painted walls, shelves loaded with photographic paraphernalia, an enlarging projector, a discolored sink, and a tank in which negatives were being washed. The pungency from an acid fixing-bath followed Gerard into the room but it was not, Cole noted, the same acidity he had observed hovering in the air about the dead woman.

Gerard, greeting Cole with a chuckle, said: "I've heard of you, of course, Doctor. Are you here on behalf of my mother, perhaps to prove I'm out of my mind and, being insane, can't hold property? She's determined to cut me off with the proverbial shilling, you know—even less. I shall regret that, very much."

"You need worry no longer," Carter Cole said dryly. "You have a good many more shillings at the moment than you've ever had before. Only a few minutes ago Mrs. Gerard died. You shan't keep the money long, though, if Miss Linda Barclay's charge is true—that you murdered the old lady." Then abruptly, intently studying Willard Gerard's staring eyes, "How did the pictures come out?"

Without answering Willard Gerard flung the rubber gloves into the dark-room. While Louis Mackler stood with a bite of sandwich half swallowed, Cole followed Gerard into the next room. He stood by while Gerard snapped a number into the receiver, spoke to a Doctor Hildreth, and begged: "Please get to my mother's place as fast as you can!" He stared at Cole again and asked breathlessly: "Are you quite sure she's dead?"

"Quite. My car," Cole suggested quietly, "is at your disposal."

He went out and sat, fingers drum-

ming the wheel, while Gerard got into a topcoat and hat. He was remembering Linda Barclay's anguished accusation, the vehement certainty behind her charge, when Gerard and Mackler climbed in. Again, as he drove without speaking, he noted the slow revolving of the odometer. It registered a distance of exactly six miles between the two dwellings. Cole's watch told him he had made it in nine minutes when he turned into the drive.

CHAPTER TWO

The Polka-Dot Derby

GERARD rushed into the house, Mackler loping at his side. Cole noted another car near the gate. It told him June Day's call to the local police had brought quick results. Chief Wellmore, speaking gravely, was confronting Linda Barclay when Cole quietly went into the room adjoining that in which the dead woman lay. He signaled his secretary into the hallway.

"June, I'm enmeshed in a very peculiar situation. Gerard is sure to use me as an alibi witness in case the girl sticks to her charge. Certain things about this matter are making me cautious. Phone the sanitarium at once."

"Yes, Doctor."

"Ask your twin sister to get all pertinent information possible on the Gerard family. I want, also, information concerning Leon Fendrick, the old lady's attorney. Then ask Brick Kelly to get over here in a hurry."

"Yes, Doctor."

Cole reentered the living-room. Gerard and Mackler were standing at one side, apparently stunned by the unexpected situation they faced. Leon Fendrick, nervously fingering his well kept mustache, jerked guilty eyes from Cole's scrutiny.

Cole watched Linda Barclay's wan face

as Chief Wellsmore asked her: "Now tell us exactly what you saw happen."

The girl hesitated anxiously. Her eyes turned imploringly to Cole and she said, in a vibrant whisper: "You—you'll think I'm crazy."

"Don't be afraid," Wellsmore urged her. "Tell us just what you saw."

Linda Barclay's fingers twined together. "I was in my studio, painting. I came downstairs to say good-night to Demmy—Mrs. Gerard. I stopped on the landing in the library, just staring—because it was so strange."

"Yes?"

"They were standing near the table—Demmy and Willard. His back was turned—neither of them noticed me. He was opening a box, and taking out a little atomizer. He said, 'Don't be angry, Julia—it's a peace offering.' She answered, 'You're no longer a son of mine, Willard.' He laughed and said, 'Oh, come, now, Julia. The perfume is very appropriate—it's called Night Sin. Take just one little whiff.' And he laughed again, and shot a bit of spray into her face."

"Yes?"

"She dropped dead."

Chief Wellsmore blinked at the girl. She looked beseechingly again at Cole, as though begging him, if no one else would, to believe her. She nodded frantically, fighting back her tears, as Chief Wellsmore asked incredulously: "You saw Willard Gerard squeeze this atomizer in Mrs. Gerard's face, and she instantly fell to the floor, dead?"

"I swear it's exactly what happened! I saw it just as I'm telling you. I can hardly believe it myself, but—oh, don't!"

Chief Wellsmore had taken up the atomizer. He smelled of it then, in spite of the girl's frantic gesture, squeezed the bulb. There was uneasy silence in the room while the scent dissipated through

the air—rich, sweet, obviously harmless. The pleading in the girl's eyes was even stronger when Wellsmore asked: "And what else did you see?"

"Willard stood by the table, his back still turned to me, a moment after Demmy fell. Then, suddenly, he ran out of the room. I saw his face clearly, and he saw me. I can't be mistaken! It's all so strange—the way he was dressed—but I—"

"The way he was dressed?"

The girl forced out each word. "He was wearing a derby hat—a blue derby hat, with large yellow polka-dots." She paused as Chief Wellsmore straightened incredulously, as every person in the room stared—including Carter Cole. Defying their disbelief, she rushed on. "He had on a bright red shirt. His tie was green with yellow stripes. The suit was a bright orange. And his shoes were blue, with yellow polka-dots, to match his hat."

WELLSMORE looked around as though doubting his ears. Willard Gerard wagged his head in sympathetic dismay. June Day, having come quietly into the room, looked quickly, with professional understanding, at Carter Cole. Cole, drawn by the girl's pleading eyes, went quietly toward her.

"Will you repeat that?" he asked softly. "Will you tell us again exactly what you saw Willard Gerard wearing?"

She rushed it out. "A blue derby with yellow dots. A red shirt. A green-and-yellow-striped tie. A bright orange suit. Blue, yellow-dotted shoes to match the derby. I did see it! I tell you I did!"

There was a hush as every eye turned to Willard Gerard. Mackler, at his side, had half raised his hand, as though to speak, but he swallowed inarticulately. Carter Cole, with the quiet firmness June Day had so often seen him use toward violent inmates of his sanitarium, asked

the girl: "Will you please describe the clothing Willard Gerard is wearing now?"

Scorn flashed in the girl's eyes. "Of course. He has on a white shirt, a plain blue tie, a grey herringbone suit, and black oxfords. That doesn't matter. I saw him here—I know I saw him—and he was wearing exactly what I said!"

The accused man murmured: "That's obviously impossible. I'm afraid you're overwrought, Linda."

The girl shook her head in protest and sank into a chair. Cole watched her intently as a knock sounded on the door. A man wearing tortoise-shell glasses, smelling faintly of medicaments, ventured into the room. Willard Gerard greeted him as Doctor Hildreth—Cole knew him to be the family physician. With Chief Wellsmore's permission he withdrew to examine the dead woman. As he went out, muttering his regrets, Linda Barclay sobbed quietly.

Perplexed, Chief Wellsmore ventured: "I think you'd better rest before we ask you any more questions. The shock has been too much for you. Tomorrow, perhaps—"

"I'm quite all right." The girl's eyes were a shining defiance. "Do you think I'm mad? No matter how impossible you think it is, I—I saw what I saw." Then, incongruously, "I've telephoned Mother. She's coming, and—I'll be all right."

Shrugging at Gerard, Chief Wellsmore asked: "As a matter of routine, I've got to ask you if what your niece says is true."

"Hardly," Gerard answered.

"But it is!" Linda Barclay insisted. "I tell you it is! Why should I lie? I know it's impossible—I know it couldn't have happened. But I didn't imagine it. It's true—every word is true!"

June Day took the girl in her comfortingly arms. Carter Cole looked speculatively at Louis Mackler. "You've been trying to say something. What is it?" he asked.

"Sure. If Mr. Gerard needs an alibi, I can give it to him. I know he couldn't have done it."

"Preliminary to that," Cole suggested wryly, "perhaps you'd better explain why you happen to be so friendly with Mr. Gerard—considering that his mother hired you to investigate his actions."

"Sure." Mackler blinked. "I was watching him for Mrs. Gerard, all right. I've been on the job for a week. I learned plenty, and he knows it. Tonight I turned the latest report in to Mrs. Gerard, and then went to his place to watch him some more."

"Your report," Cole deduced, "prompted Mrs. Gerard to telephone me and Mr. Fendrick at this unholy hour, for the purpose of attesting her sanity and drawing up a new will."

"I don't know anything about that," Mackler answered. "Well, I'm there, on Mr. Gerard's place, watching the house. First thing I know, he comes right out to where I'm standing beside the garage. He says, 'Rather uncomfortable out here, isn't it? Why not come in and have some sandwiches and coffee?' That's what he says. It's the first time any man I was trailing treated me like that. All I could think of was the boss would give me hell."

WILLARD Gerard explained. "You see, it was no secret Julia was having me watched. She told me herself. I thought it was amusing to invite Mackler in and treat him like a guest."

"Sure," Mackler resumed. "So I go in. We talk a while, then Mr. Gerard steps into the dark-room to develop some films. He says things to me through the door every once in a while. I remember, pretty soon he asks, 'What time is it, Mackler?' and I say, 'It's eight minutes of two.'"

Cole remarked: "You develop films by the factorial method, I suppose, Mr. Ger-

ard—but you didn't have a watch or a clock in the dark-room?"

"A special clock for timing paper and film," Gerard answered, "with a large hand making one complete revolution of the dial per minute—but no regular clock."

Mackler continued eagerly: "Sure. I say, 'It's eight minutes of two,' and go on eating, and reading the evening paper. Pretty soon he asks me again, 'What time is it, Mackler?' and this time I say, 'It's just eleven minutes after two.' That's by my watch, and it's always right. He's there all the time. Sure."

Chief Wellmore asked: "It isn't possible Mr. Gerard could have left the dark-room and gone back without your having seen him, Mackler?"

Gerard answered for the private detective. "There's only one door, and Mackler, I believe, was sitting in plain sight of it. Even to have opened the door would have fogged the negatives. You may see them if you wish."

"When Mr. Gerard went into the dark-room, and when he came out, he was wearing the same clothing he's wearing now?"

Mackler said: "Sure."

To Wellmore, Cole observed: "I arrived at the front door of this house at perhaps one minute past two. I heard Miss Barclay scream approximately one minute later. That, of course, marks the moment when she saw her grandmother fall dead to the floor."

"Two minutes past two, until eleven past—nine minutes," Wellmore calculated. "Even if Mr. Gerard had been here, he couldn't have gotten from this house to his in that time unless he drove very rapidly."

"The distance, Cole said, "is exactly six miles. No automobile left these grounds after I heard the scream, Chief, nor any spot nearby. I'm absolutely certain of

it. That, added to what Mackler says about the time element, appears to provide Mr. Gerard with an iron-clad alibi. But"—and Cole's humorously piercing eyes grew keener—"I'm curious to know why he happened to ask Mackler the time just when he did."

Gerard smiled. "I'd promised to telephone a lady who is busy in the floor show of a night club until shortly after two."

Wellmore shrugged. "We've got to believe Miss Barclay didn't see what she says she saw. She's evidently suffering from delusions, brought on by the shock of her grandmother's death. Under the circumstances—"

The official paused, and Cole turned, as Doctor Hildreth reappeared in the doorway. The physician said quietly: "It's very sad, but it was bound to come sooner or later. Any unusual excitement would have done it. High blood-pressure, heart complications, angina particularly—I expected it. With her temper it's a wonder she lived as long as she did."

"Your opinion is that Mrs. Gerard's death was due to cardiac failure?" Cole asked.

Doctor Hildreth looked surprised. "Of course," he said, as though any other conclusion were untenable. "Of course."

"Could Miss Barclay have imagined it all? Here is one tangible detail of what she tells us—something we can't doubt—the atomizer." Cole turned to Gerard. "You didn't present this to your mother, as she says?"

"I did," Gerard admitted. "The conversation between my mother and me, which Linda has reported, actually took place—but about twelve hours sooner than she believes. I gave the atomizer to Julia, in Linda's presence, at about two o'clock this afternoon."

"Perhaps," Cole said, "an aberration of memory, under violent emotional shock—not at all unusual."

"Under the circumstances," Chief Wellsmore went on, "we must disregard Miss Barclay's charge. First of all, Mr. Gerard couldn't possibly have killed the old lady and, second, it's not murder after all, but natural death. I shall probably ask Doctor Morse's advice, but under the circumstances I am satisfied there is nothing further to be done by the police."

Linda Barclay had remained silent. Her face had become even paler, the frantic light in her eyes stronger. Suddenly she twisted out of June Day's arms and went to the door, one arm outstretched, as though groping through darkness. Her face pictured fear when she glanced back—fear, Cole knew, that she had lost her sanity. Then, quickly, she ran up the stairs, out of sight.

Cole said quietly: "Come, June."

AS Carter Cole crossed the porch with his secretary, the headlamps of a car swept across the rolling grounds. A coupé stopped quickly near the porch, and a woman alighted, her face anxious. She was, Cole knew, Mrs. Barclay, the girl's mother. She hurried into the house as Cole went on to a roadster standing near the Duesenberg.

"Brick," he said.

"O. K., Doc," came eagerly from the car.

The stocky, bull-necked, rusty-haired young man at the wheel was Cole's versatile assistant. He had been variously a dock-walloper, an able-bodied seaman, a truck driver, a sculptor's model. His winning way with balky drains, recalcitrant typewriters, cranky alarm clocks and mulish automobile motors made him invaluable at the Cole Sanitarium; his special pride was keeping the Duesenberg in perfect tune. June Day's telephone call had brought him uncomplainingly out of bed to do Carter Cole service.

"A special job of watching, Brick. Wil-

lard Gerard is the man, and the house is just six miles down the road. Bear two things in mind. I want Gerard to know you're watching him—but, in case he invites you in for coffee and sandwiches, you're to refuse. Also, pay special attention to the chimneys of the house and if you see smoke, flash me an alarm."

Brick Kelly's eyes widened. "Listen, Doc," he said earnestly. "All you have to do is ask me. Anything you say goes. If there's anybody you want knocked on the skull, I'm the guy who'll do it for you. But if you keep mixing into these screwy cases—"

"I want Gerard to know you're watching him," Cole cut in, "so he won't attempt to get away with anything that might otherwise go unobserved. Smoke from the chimneys may mean he's burning up a polka-dot derby and an orange suit, besides other weird garments. That's all, Brick."

Kelly stared, said "Geez!" and started off, head wagging, as Cole went with June Day to the Duesenberg. He swung it onto the parkway, but instead of turning to the left, in which direction lay the Cole Sanitarium, he swung right. Six miles later he wove for the second time that night into the driveway of Willard Gerard's home.

His finger beckoned June Day as he stepped into the garage, where a sedan stood in its place. Cole pressed his hand to the radiator and murmured, "Cold." Turning, he observed a strange device made of tin, standing in one rear corner. It was shaped like the prow of a small boat, and contained an inset, rectangular section of glass and had two stout braces affixed inside. On his way out Cole observed a bicycle equipped with variable gear and low-slung handlebars leaning against the wall.

He returned thoughtfully to the Duesenberg with the Day twin. The alert look

on June's face told him that in a moment she would say something pertinent. She did.

"Linda Barclay may be deranged, Doctor, but she's right about one thing. It was Night Sia."

"It was more than that, June," Cole observed laconically as he started off. "It was murder."

CHAPTER THREE

Doctor's Dilemma

THE Cole Sanitarium sat behind a high spiked fence with a formidable locked gate. It was a retreat housing more than a thousand patients suffering from every conceivable mental abnormality. Within this kingdom, set apart from the workaday world, Carter Cole wielded over staff and inmates the power of a monarch.

Day and night its walls resounded with the woeful lamentations and joyful hysterics of manic-depressives. Cole considered it a sad commentary on the clergy that many of his charges were constantly preaching. Others attended the gardens and rolled the walks. The sprawling buildings were a maze of halls in which placid-faced men and women pushed huge wooden blocks based with felt, the task easing their tortured minds while it polished the floors to mirror brightness. Deep among the labyrinthine corridors, in the remotest wing, were the offices of Carter Cole.

At his desk this morning, fresh and alert, he dispatched the routine affairs of the institution with easy briskness—but his mind was haunted by the strange circumstances surrounding the death of Mrs. Gerard. He read terse reports left on his blotter by the efficient Misses Day, added notes of his own. He was absorbed and troubled when one of his twin secretaries appeared with more neatly typed slips to announce: "Mrs. Clara Barclay

to see you, Doctor, with Miss Linda Barclay."

"I rather expected the call. Has Brick phoned, June?"

"Yes, Doctor. A moment ago, to say he's still watching Mr. Gerard's place. He reports no smoke and nothing suspicious—but I'm Jane."

Cole sighed. "Sooner or later, you and your sister are going to make me an inmate in my own institution. You're always the other one! Ask my callers to please wait a few minutes. I will want to see Mrs. Barclay alone first."

"Yes, Doctor."

Intently Cole re-read the reports. The first—

Concerning the Gerards:

The alienation of Willard Gerard from his mother, Julia Gerard, began six months ago. The old lady had become extremely fond of the admirable girl her son married. Their divorce, obtained by the daughter-in-law on the only grounds possible in New York State, turned Julia Gerard against her son. He continued to occupy the house on Rainbow Parkway and, in spite of his mother's warnings, became more of a profligate than ever. His only occupation, besides unbridled pleasure-seeking, is to bicycle about the country with his camera. His efforts in creative photography are apparently wasted due to lack of artistic talent.

Miss Linda Barclay, on the contrary, is said to possess genuine ability as an artist. Her grandmother provided her with a studio in the big Gerard house, where she spends most of her time in serious artistic endeavor. She has yet to make a name for herself, but she is extremely ambitious, and her career is promising.

Miss Barclay, her mother, and Willard Gerard, besides Willard's former wife, are all beneficiaries under Julia Gerard's present will. The fortune is estimated at several millions.

JD

The second report—

I have been unable to reach Mr. Leon Fendrick. His office reports they do not expect him in today. His manservant says

he has many engagements in New York and will not return to his home until after midnight.

Fendrick is a reputable lawyer, though not clever enough to establish himself as an outstanding one. Almost his only client was Julia Gerard. Her retaining him for the past ten years is an example of her eccentricity, the reason probably being that she could dominate him completely. She obliged him to live near her and called on him at all hours. Her fees maintain Fendrick handsomely. He is not mentioned in the Gerard will.

JD

"Reasonable to conclude," Cole murmured, "that Fendrick is scrambling for new clients, now the old lady has paid him her last fee."

COLE'S touch on a button brought a Miss Day into the office—which one he did not attempt to determine—followed by Mrs. Barclay. Linda Barclay's mother was a comely woman betrayed by a tendency to *avoir du pois*. She took a chair facing Cole, fingering her handbag, her lips nervously pursed.

"It—it hurts me to bring Linda here," she blurted, "but there's nothing else I can do, Doctor Cole, in all fairness to her—to everyone. Her accusing Willard is so—fantastic. Her own career is at stake. Will you help her? Will you do everything possible to—to clear her mind?"

"You believe, too, her mind is clouded?" Cole asked.

"What else can I believe?" It was a tearful question. "I've been worried about Linda since last summer—an unfortunate infatuation at Provincetown. Then her failing to have any of her pictures accepted by the National Academy. It was a terrific disappointment—she brooded. We tried to cheer her up, but—please do all you can to help her!"

"I am not yet ready to believe Miss Barclay's mind is affected," Cole murmured.

The girl's mother dismissed that as routine reassurance. Perhaps I can explain last night. Undoubtedly Linda overheard Julia telephoning you and Mr. Fendrick. In her disturbed state she may have thought she was going to be examined mentally and confined. Being so sensitive—overwrought—perhaps she pled with her grandmother—argued desperately, and it was too much for them both. The strain overtaxed Julia's heart and something snapped in Linda's brain. Do you think that's it, Doctor Cole?"

"In all my experience," Cole said gravely, "I have never yet discovered anything in anyone's mind that can snap. Perhaps, I'd best talk to Linda alone. I'll telephone you my report."

Mrs. Barclay wiped her eyes, sobbed a sincere, "Thank you so much!" and left the office hurriedly. Cole waited thoughtfully, watching the door. It opened, after a moment, quietly. Linda Barclay, her eyes clear in a face white as alabaster, came to the chair beside Cole's desk. She sat erect, studied him as intently as he scrutinized her, finally spoke first, with disarming directness.

"Do you think I'm mad?"

"No." Cole smiled. "Not in the slightest. You never 'saw things' before last night, did you? You haven't 'seen things' since, I'm sure. I hesitate to believe that in one particular instance, and not in a million others, you had a grotesque delusion. The very fact that you're so sure of what you saw leads me to believe you saw it."

The girl asked breathlessly: "Incredible, impossible as it is?"

"Why not?" Cole's smile grew. "Eye-witnesses are unreliable agents, young lady. A belief has grown in the lay mind that eye-witnesses present the most conclusive testimony from the witness stand. Exactly the opposite is true. Scientific

research, conducted by Binet, Gross, Stein, Lysmann, Gorphe, Locard, Dupré and others, all prove how defective eye-witnesses are in perception, observation and mind fixation.* I might question you in the light of their findings, but not otherwise. Suppose you tell me again exactly what happened last night."

"Of course." The girl spoke clearly. "I came down the stairs, from the studio, to the landing. Demmy and Willard were by the table, but neither noticed me. He opened a box and took out the atomizer. He said, 'Don't be angry, Julia—it's a peace offering'. Demmy answered, 'You're no longer a son of mine, Willard.' He said, laughing, 'Oh, come now, Julia. The perfume is very appropriate—it's called Night Sin. Just take one whiff.' No—he said, 'one little whiff'. Then he shot the spray into Demmy's face and—she dropped."

STEADYING her voice, the girl went on: "Willard was strangely dressed. His derby hat was blue, with large yellow dots. His shirt bright red. The tie was green-and-yellow-striped. His suit was bright orange, and his shoes matched his hat—blue, with yellow polka-dots. I'm so sure of it, because in my painting I feel color more than line. To me the whole world is completely color."

"One important question," Cole asked. "Your grandmother, confronted by this man in the weird garb, didn't mention it or apparently notice it?"

"She didn't at all," Linda Barclay answered. "I could strengthen my own story by saying she did, Doctor Cole, but she didn't. Demmy was a strange woman, generous and warm-hearted, though she pretended to be so cold. She often deliberately disregarded things because she knew she was expected to notice them. Frequently she came to my studio to see a painting I'd just finished—bright colors that thrilled me—but she'd only glance at it and say, 'It looks very much like the others,' or something like that—and go out. Perhaps she ignored Willard's strange dress because she thought he'd worn it to make her comment on it."

Cole's eyes sharpened. "There's got to be a better reason than that for Mrs. Gerard's saying nothing about that weird get-up! Assuming you saw someone wearing an orange suit, how could it have been Willard Gerard?"

The girl insisted firmly: "It was Willard."

"Mackler said Gerard was in the dark-room all the time. He asked Mackler the time at eight minutes of two, then again at eleven after. Your grandmother died at two minutes past two, about midway in that period. How *could* it have been Willard Gerard?"

Again, flatly—"It was Willard."

Cole persisted. "You say you recognized him immediately, in spite of his strange dress, though his back was turned."

"I recognized him at once." Linda

*Modern witness psychology has proved again and again that the most reliable witnesses are extremely apt to make serious errors of perception in good faith. An instance is a test made by Dauber in 1913. He showed to a group of school children a picture of a small boy with brown hair, wearing blue trousers and brown coat. The subjects were asked, a few minutes later, after the removal of the picture, to identify the colors, with the following amazing results:

Only fifteen reported the blue trousers as blue, while 72 named another color. Not one recalled the coat as brown, but 151 gave it other colors. Concerning the brown hair, 47 recalled it as black and four called it "light". Further, eighteen described the brown shoes in the picture as black, and a number declared the boy was barefoot!

Research shows that the average person, describing an individual from memory, over-estimates the height by about five inches and the age by more than eight years. Eighty-three per cent are totally wrong concerning the color of the hair. The description of the shape of the face generally is very misleading. Indeed, the appalling fallibility of eye-witnesses discovered by these experiments leads criminologists to believe circumstantial evidence is far more trustworthy.—F. C. D.

Barclay's voice was now faint; she had yielded to the strain of nervous shock and a sleepless night. "I know Willard killed Demmy—by squirting the perfume in her face—I know it!"

Cole rose, touched a button. "Look here—is there anything else—no matter how unbelievable—that has any bearing whatever on the death of your grandmother?"

"I've tried to think—tried so hard. There's only one thing. Some time ago—a week perhaps—I missed certain tubes from my paint box. They were yellow, green and blue."

Cole's eyes glittered as the door opened. The young woman who entered was poised, lithely slender, strikingly pretty, obviously of high intelligence. Doctor Mary Grafton, brilliant young woman physician, now Cole's first assistant, could look upon Linda Barclay and remember herself in a similar desperate plight. Only a short while past she had been within the shadow of the electric chair, saved from it only by the astuteness of Carter Cole.* She came at once, warmly sympathetic, to the girl.

"Mary, Miss Barclay is to have every comfort," Cole instructed. "She will be subjected to no restraint whatever. Please provide her with artists' materials." And to the girl, "Please don't worry. You're absolutely all right—and I'm going to prove it."

He touched another button as Doctor Grafton escorted the girl away. When one of his twin secretaries appeared, he continued as though she knew the whole story: "I've got to prove it, Jane, because if I don't, that estimable young woman will spend the rest of her life in an asylum for the insane. In my experience I've found very little difference between sanity and insanity. Proving one

or the other is a ticklish job, but that girl's entire life depends on it. Do you understand me, Jane?"

"Yes, Doctor," Miss Day said. "But I'm June."

"Of course you are! Get busy, June. Locate the late Mrs. Gerard's eye-specialist. I want to know of any peculiarity, however slight, in the old lady's eyesight."

"Yes, Doctor," said June Day as she hurried from the office. Almost immediately she appeared to return. This was Jane Day, however, answering Cole's touch on another button. She remained as unperturbed as her sister had been while Cole rushed on.

"I've got to prove that that girl actually saw a man wearing a polka-dot derby and an orange suit and all the rest. I've got to establish, beyond all doubt, that she saw a man in one house when all sane reason and logic says he was in another house six miles away. I've got to show that Julia Gerard died of having an expensive, delightful perfume, called, Night Sin, squirted in her face. I tell you, Linda Barclay's happiness, her career, her fortune, her whole future rests upon that."

"Yes, Doctor," said Jane Day. "Mr. Kelly has just reported again that Mr. Gerard is still in the house. No smoke—nothing suspicious. Is there something else?"

"If I become violent," Cole said grimly, "your instructions are to throw me into a padded room—because I believe implicitly every incredible thing that girl has said!"

"Yes, Doctor."

CARTER Cole sank thoughtfully into his chair. Unaware of the passing time, he remained almost immobile while

**The Case of the Skinned Men*, taken from the case book of Carter Cole, M.D., published in the November, 1935 issue of DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, relates the amazing story of Doctor Mary Grafton.—F. C. D.

he tried to make the impossible true and the fantastic credible. Darkness flooded his office before he realized it. He looked up, startled when light shafted over him from an opened door, silhouetting the trim figure of a Day twin.

"We are still trying to locate Mrs. Gerard's eye-specialist," she announced, "and Mr. Kelly is on the phone."

Brick Kelly sounded mournful. "Doc, you're welcome to kick me in the pants. You owe me a sock on the jaw. I've been watching Gerard's place ever since dark, but he's flown the coop, Doc—and I didn't know it until now. Geez, how he got out—"

"O. K., Brick," Cole snapped. "Next best to keeping an eye on him is a chance to search that house. Get into it somehow, and wait for me. I'm on my way. I'll be very happy if, by the time I've arrived, you've found a polka-dot derby."

Breaking the connection, Cole started for the door. He was getting into his top-coat when one of the Day twins proffered another telephone and said: "Doctor Morse calling."

The famed medical examiner of New York City chuckled in Cole's ear. "You'll be glad Chief Wellsmore asked me to drop over for a look at the old lady, Cole. Interesting news. It's not heart failure at all, old boy. The traces are very faint, but Schonbein's test says it's hydrocyanic acid."

"You please me immensely!" Cole said. "A squirt of hydrocyanic acid in the face would drop the old lady instantly, wouldn't it? What's more, hydrocyanic acid can be made easily by one who knows how, from potassium cyanide—and po-

tassium cyanide is used frequently in compounding photographic toning baths!"*

"Right, Morse chuckled. "But that doesn't give you a murderer, does it? Not unless you can prove a man was where he couldn't possibly have been."

Cole hung up and left the office. He was striding rapidly along a polished hallway when quick, light footfalls sounded behind him. A Miss Day—which, he did not know—caught his arm breathlessly, stopped him.

She said, immediately recovering her cool aplomb: "We have just reached Doctor Jacoby, Mrs. Gerard's oculist. He says, although the old lady tried to conceal it, and not even her children knew of it, she was color-blind. He—"

"Color blind!" Cole's teeth clicked. "That explains why she would make no comment on a polka-dot derby and an orange suit—the whole rig would look gray! It explains her vague comments on Linda Barclay's paintings. Jane, our witness isn't crazy, but the case certainly is!"

Miss Day said, unperturbed, "I'm June, Doctor"—but Cole was already slamming out the door.

CHAPTER FOUR

Carter Cole—Safe Robber

COLE rolled the Duesenberg past the Willard Gerard place, slid off the pavement, clicked off headlamps and ignition before he walked back. The house was silent, but lights were burning beyond the drawn window drapes. Cole circled to the rear door, found it unfastened, stepped into the kitchen. His call brought

*Hydrocyanic acid and its alkali salts, sodium and potassium cyanide, are used extensively in the arts. Free hydrocyanic acid is liberated by the action of strong acids on the alkali salts. It takes third or fourth place in the frequency with which death is caused by poisons. It volatilizes quite rapidly and for that reason, when death is due to inhaling the vapor, is sometimes impossible to identify. Hunt and Gettler, authorities on toxicology, have declared: "There have been undoubted cases of poisoning with hydrocyanic acid where competent chemists have been unable to detect the substance a few hours after use." Its lethal action is extremely rapid.—F. C. D.

Brick Kelly stealthily down the stairs.

"Am I wrong, Doc," the handy man asked anxiously, "or is this breakin' the law?"

"You're not wrong, Brick. We could both get several years for this. Did you find the polka-dot derby?"

Compassion shone in Kelly's eyes. "No polka-dot derby here, Doc."

"No orange suit?"

"Geez, Doc!" Kelly gasped. "I hate to see this happen to you!"

Cole opened the dark-room adjoining the kitchen. His touch on a switch lighted a ruby bulb, another snapped on an ordinary white globe. He stood in acrid air, his keen eyes searching the black-painted room for a bottle of cyanide on the shelf of chemicals. There was none.

He turned to a corner where a small but very strong safe stood. "Strange it should be here," Cole murmured and tugged at the handle. It was locked. Stooping, he fingered an iron ring set flush with the floor. He pulled at it and raised a large trap. Cool, damp air gusted into his face as he gazed at a flight of wooden stairs angling downward.

Eyes glittering, he told Kelly: "This dark-room was once an ordinary pantry. Gerard must have converted it after his mother bought the house for him. That's the basement. Keep with me, Brick."

Halfway down the flight, Cole clicked another switch. A cobwebbed bulb spread a yellow glow through the cement-walled cellar. Pipes reached from a furnace like the tentacles of an octopus. Cole went alertly to a door set in the side wall. It opened into a bulkhead. Raising the outer slanting doors, Cole looked into darkness. Across the driveway sat the garage. One of its doors was standing ajar, and the sedan was visible in its stall. He lowered the doors, crossed the basement, climbed the stairs into the dark-room, lowered the trap once more.

Kelly, looking startled, blurted: "He could've slipped out this way, Doc, and come back without Mackler knowin' it!"

Cole's eyes showed dangerous glints. "Last night Gerard, in here, asked Mackler the time at eight minutes of two, again at eleven after. That's an interval of nineteen minutes. Question: could Gerard have gotten out of this place, to his mother's and back again, a distance of twelve miles, in nineteen minutes?"

"And in a polka-dot derby," Kelly prompted.

"Allow him one minute for getting out via the trap and the bulkhead. Estimate five minutes while he was at his mother's place, if he was. Then another minute for getting from the outside of this house back into the dark-room. That's seven minutes to subtract from nineteen, leaving twelve. Twelve minutes, Brick, in which to travel twelve miles."

"That's fast goin'," Kelly opined skeptically.

"He didn't use a car. If he had, Mackler would have heard it. I would have spotted it also, leaving Julia Gerard's place. Besides, I made sure last night, by feeling the radiator of Gerard's sedan, that it hadn't been used—it was cold. Brick, Gerard didn't cover those twelve miles in twelve minutes in an automobile. Nor, I may add, in an airplane."

"I agree with you there, Doc," Kelly said sadly.

"He uses a bicycle to flutter about the countryside on his picture-taking tours. How fast, Brick, do you suppose a man can travel on a bicycle?"

"Twenty, twenty-five miles an hour, at a good clip," Kelly guessed. "That ain't anywhere near a mile a minute."

THE thoughtful light in Cole's eyes deepened. "Right. New doubt is cast upon Linda Barclay's testimony. If she's wrong about Gerard's being at his moth-

er's place, she may be wrong about the whole episode. That brings up the subject of the polka-dot derby. What about it, Brick?"

"Doc," Kelly pled, "don't you think if you got some sleep you'd feel better?"

"When Gerard stepped into this dark-room," Cole grimly persisted, "he was wearing ordinary clothing. I saw him come out, dressed conventionally. If he actually wore a blue derby with yellow dots while at his mother's home, he had to take time to get into the rig and out again. That might take only a few seconds if it were designed for quick changing—the suit large enough to pull over another, the shirt a dickie, for instance. Next question: at what point did he put on the outfit, then change back?"

"Maybe," Kelly suggested pathetically, "you'd like an aspirin, Doc?"

"Answer: probably right here in this dark-room," Cole went on.

He peered at the safe in the corner. While Kelly stared, he strode into the living-room, took up the telephone, called the Cole Sanitarium. Kelly's eyes widened in alarm as he heard Cole's orders.

"June, Jane, whichever you are, get busy on the telephone and find the best locksmith in New York. I want him to be there when I get back. He must be prepared to open a small and very tough-looking safe."

"Yes, Doctor," Miss Day answered.

Cole disconnected and directed: "Spit on your hands, Brick." He led the amazed handy-man into the dark-room and snapped crisp orders. Together they slid the safe from the corner. Its weight strained their muscles as they tottered out of the dark-room. They staggered from the house, maneuvered along the drive.

"Speakin' of breakin' laws, Doc," Kelly panted, "this ain't doin' us any good!"

"We're committing a felony, Brick. To the car!"

They tottered along the edge of the parkway to the Duesenberg. With an exhausting effort they heaved the safe into the rear section. Kelly ruefully examined his barked knuckles as Cole slid behind the wheel.

When their breathing returned to normal, Cole observed: "Scientific research into the fallibility of eye-witnesses tends to show that, though Linda Barclay may be right about the polka-dot derby, she might be wrong about other details. About seeing Willard Gerard squirting lethal perfume into her grandmother's face, for instance. I deem it wise, Brick, to play two gambles at once."

He started the car while Kelly nodded in inarticulate dismay.

"Assume it was not the profligate son she saw. There is only one other possibility. His name is Leon Fendrick. Fendrick was slinking about the Gerard grounds just after the old lady's strange death. He might have been wearing an orange suit—I got a glimpse of his face only. He had ample time to change back to ordinary clothes. In that case, Brick, there may be a will in existence of which we know nothing—one bequeathing Mr. Fendrick a considerable sum."

Kelly asked hopefully: "Are we goin' back home?"

"We are not," Cole said decisively. "We're paying a visit to Fendrick."

Cole had U-turned the car. As he passed Willard Gerard's place he glanced at his watch, jammed the gas-pedal down hard. The Duesenberg leaped. In new alarm, Brick Kelly held onto his hat and watched the speedometer needle swing higher and higher. Five and a half miles clicked off in rapid succession. Near Julia Gerard's estate Cole pressed the brakes.

Again referring to his watch he observed: "We hit seventy-five. Allowing for acceleration and deceleration, we certainly averaged sixty. Six minutes. A

mile a minute. Willard Gerard, if he killed the old lady last night, had to equal that speed, both ways, with no means of locomotion evident."

"All God's chillun got wings, Doc!" Kelly moaned.

"But observe," Cole continued as the car hummed, "the home of Leon Fendrick directly ahead." As he turned into a driveway he added: "In fact, it's just about one mile from his late client's home. In his case there is no time limit for the mile. Do you suppose, Brick, he owns a polka-dot derby?"

"If he does," Kelly protested hopelessly, "it wouldn't be in Gerard's safe, would it?"

COLE'S headlights swung across a garage which sat behind Fendrick's house. Its doors were open disclosing two cars sitting in their stalls. Braking at the front entrance, Cole scanned the quiet grounds. Kelly was at his side when his knock brought a sleepy manservant to the door.

"Mr. Fendrick has returned, but he is busy at the moment. If you'll come in, he'll be with you shortly, Doctor Cole."

The manservant conducted Cole and Kelly into a tastefully furnished living-room and withdrew. Cole listened alertly to the voices of two men in the next room. They stopped when the manservant knocked to announce Cole's presence, then resumed. One sharply insistent, Cole identified as Fendrick's. The other, edged with anger, might be Willard Gerard's. He turned speculative eyes on Kelly.

"Having fractured the Penal Code," he said quietly, "I will now violate the dictates of social nicety."

He strode directly to the closed door. No voices were speaking behind it now. Without a knock, without a word, Cole thrust it open. As he strode into the tobacco-flavored library, Leon Fendrick

turned in surprise. Astonishment was mirrored in Cole's eyes, for Fendrick was alone. He went quickly past the attorney to a pair of French doors that were standing open, sending a yellow shaft across the garden. Outside he saw no movement and heard no sound.

"Your visitor," he remarked dryly, "made a rather precipitate departure, didn't he?"

Fendrick, fingering his dainty mustache, asked nervously: "What can I do for you, Doctor Cole?"

"You can tell me the truth about your movements last night," Cole answered promptly. "You know I saw you on the Gerard grounds just after the old lady dropped dead. I haven't yet reported it to the police. Now that they know Julia Gerard was poisoned by hydrocyanic acid, they'll be interested, I'm sure."

Fendrick's face became ashen. He blurted: "You've come here to blackmail me—is that it?"

The humorous light in Cole's piercing eyes became a scornful shine. "My only interest," he said coldly, "is to keep a charming and talented young woman out of an insane asylum for the rest of her life. Perhaps I can begin your story for you, Mr. Fendrick. After Mrs. Gerard telephoned you last night, you went to her home—walking, because it is only a short distance. Now, after you entered the house—"

"I didn't go in until you saw me!" Fendrick protested wildly. "I didn't know Mrs. Gerard was dead until you said so! Good God, I'm not a murderer!"

"Can you prove that," Cole asked implacably, "to the satisfaction of the police?"

Fendrick's face became beet red, then white. He stepped forward, leaning across the table tensely, to blurt: "I'll tell you the truth of what happened!"

"I came here to hear it," Cole said wryly.

"Yes—I walked to the good lady's place last night after she phoned me. I saw your car. You were standing with your secretary at the door, knocking. I was just entering the drive when I heard the first scream. Not knowing what had happened, I stopped at the gate."

"And," Cole prompted, "you saw—"

"Somebody ran out of the house, through a side door. He crossed the grounds, then went along the hedge. He was heading directly for the spot where I was standing, but he saw me, turned back and disappeared. I heard him go through the hedge at the side of the grounds."

"Did you recognize him?" Cole asked.

Fendrick rushed on, unhearing: "I spent perhaps a minute trying to locate him, but he was gone. I was searching through the hedge when you saw me. I was too upset to know exactly what I was doing, so I kept out of sight. Then, when I had my wits about me again, I went to the door—and you opened it."

Cole persisted: "Did you recognize that man? Did you notice his clothing? Was he wearing an orange suit and a polka-dot derby?"

Fendrick gasped: "I've told you enough to prove I didn't have a hand in—"

Cole's voice rasped: "Did you see enough to verify Linda Barclay's fantastic story? As a lawyer, you know that's vital testimony. Coming from two persons, independently, every incredible detail becomes convincing. You and the girl couldn't have had the same hallucination at the same time. Good God, Fendrick, are you going to let that girl stay in an asylum?"

"Haven't I told you enough?" Fendrick protested. "What reason could I have for killing the old lady, or for—"

"For shielding a murderer? Money,

is an excellent reason in your case. The old lady's fat fees are at an end. You have no other practise. The first thought in your mind when I came into this room was blackmail—and you're committing it. Last night you recognized the murderer. You're demanding money from him for your silence. He was here a moment ago. How much did Willard Gerard give you to keep quiet?"

Fendrick licked dry lips, staring.

"It was Gerard you saw escaping the grounds last night," Cole pressed inexorably. "He was wearing an orange suit and a blue derby with yellow dots. You can prove Linda Barclay is telling the truth, can't you, Fendrick?"

AT the moment Fendrick opened his parched lips to speak, a shattering report crashed into the room. A flash of flame in the darkness spun Carter Cole to the French windows. Brick Kelly gasped "Geez!" as Cole sprang toward them, darted into the night. In the light from another window, he glimpsed the face of a man running.

"Gerard!"

The fleeing figure scurried into black shadows, vanished as Cole sprinted. The black maze of the garden baffled him as he groped along winding paths. Reaching clear lawn, he found the darkness empty. Staring back, he saw, through the open doors, Leon Fendrick sagging against the library table. He raced into the light, snapping at Kelly: "Brick! Call Gerard's home!"

He gasped the number as the astounded Kelly wheeled to the telephone. Cole was hurrying toward Fendrick as the lawyer slumped down. He whipped the man over and saw a black hole, streaming red, in the side of Fendrick's head. Cole took no time to feel the attorney's pulse; he knew at once there would be none.

He reached into Fendrick's inner coat pocket, pulled out a fat wallet and opened

it to find a sheaf of bills. He thumbed through ten hundreds and exclaimed: "Blood money—from Gerard!"

Cole peered at his watch, as Kelly blurted from the telephone: "No answer yet, Doc!"

"Drop that and stick with me!"

Carter Cole shouldered a dismayed manservant out of the library door and ordered grimly: "Call the police at once!" He hurried through the entrance with Kelly loping at his heels, slid behind the Duesenberg's wheel, kicked the motor into action and sent the tires crunching over the gravel drive. Swinging into the parkway, he glanced at his watch and pressed the accelerator to the floor-boards.

A cyclone rose around the Duesenberg. Its headlights probed far along the smooth cement and with the speedometer trembling near sixty, Cole stormed past the Julia Gerard estate. The needle was quivering past eighty during the next five miles. It dropped abruptly when, near the gate of Willard Gerard's place, Cole pressed the brakes. He swerved to the house, stopped, bounded out.

Peering at shadows moving on the front windows, Kelly blurted: "I heard you holler Gerard's name, Doc, but it couldn't have been him. He's here now!"

Cole snapped: "Seven miles—we made it in less than six minutes. The man who killed Fendrick had almost two minutes headway. Almost two minutes for seven miles. What're you talking about, Brick? I saw Gerard there!"

"No car beat it away from that place, Doc. You're beginnin' to see things yourself. I told you you ought to take an aspirin and go to bed!"

Grimly Cole knocked. Footfalls sounded at once inside the house. The entrance opened and Willard Gerard stood silhouetted in the light. He smiled slowly into Cole's level gaze and said: "Hello! Won't you step in?"

"Thank you, no," Cole answered tightly. "I am here to ask one simple question, Mr. Gerard. Exactly how long is it since you returned to this house tonight?"

"I'd say ten or fifteen minutes," Gerard answered. "I just came back from a stroll through the woods. I often go out with a camera and flash-bulbs—night effects are quite pictorial. If you won't come in—is there anything else?"

"Yes!" Cole snapped. "How did you cultivate your uncanny ability to be in two places at the same time?" He strode away, while Gerard stared, without waiting for an answer. Kelly climbed with him into the Duesenberg.

CHAPTER FIVE

80 M.P.H. Murder

CARTER Cole, M.D., had callers. In his outer office in the Cole Sanitarium Chief Wellsmore of the local police, and Louis Mackler of the Reliance Detective Agency shifted uneasily in their chairs and eyed the clock. The time lacked a few minutes of one A.M.

Cole had had a trying day. Obligated to tell and retell his story of the death of Leon Fendrick, he had found himself in the uncomfortable position of flatly contradicting Willard Gerard's testimony while unassailable facts supported Gerard's stand. The reiterated questions of Chief Wellsmore still rankled in Cole's mind.

"You saw Gerard fleeing from Fendrick's place?"

"I did."

"There is no possibility that you are mistaken?"

"There is not."

"You reached Gerard's home in your car about seven and one half minutes after the shot was fired?"

"I did."

"You found Willard Gerard there?"

"He was there."

"You are saying in effect that Willard Gerard, after killing Fendrick, traversed a distance of seven miles in some seven minutes and thirty seconds?"

"It amounts to that."

"You drove to Gerard's place as fast as possible, but you saw no automobile leaving Fendrick's place, and saw none along the way, so it is certain, assuming the rest of your story to be true, that Mr. Gerard made no use of a car?"

"He did not use a car."

"But you realize that for him to transfer himself otherwise over that distance in that time is impossible?"

"Impossible or not," Cole had retorted, "I assure you he did exactly that."

No one in the chief's office had actually tapped finger to temple, but Cole had seen in their eyes that eloquent incredulity which said, "This man is mad!" In cold anger he had returned to the sanitarium, remembering the taunt of Willard Gerard's scornful smile. He had busied himself with the telephone and made many notes. Now, touching a button, he said to the Day twin who responded: "Jane, get Willard Gerard on the wire, June."

"Yes, Doctor."

The call went through promptly. "Mr. Gerard," Cole said over the wire, "this is your accuser speaking. I hope the little matter of two murders has aroused no hard feelings between us. Perhaps we'd better talk it over—amicably, of course."

"Come along right now if you wish," Gerard answered. "I can't talk long, though, because I want to develop some films. The flashes I took in the woods last night, you know."

"I'll see you soon." Cole disconnected, strode into the outer office. "Gentlemen," he addressed Chief Wellsmore and Mackler, "I am in the most uncomfortable position of my career. You doubt my sanity and think Linda Barclay insane. It re-

volves upon me to demonstrate that the impossible is true. If I fail, my reputation is irreparably injured, and Miss Barclay's life is wrecked. If I succeed, we'll have a murderer. May I depend on your cooperation?"

The two men looked at each other uncertainly.

"There's no doubt someone killed Julia Gerard and Leon Fendrick, is there?" Cole persisted. "There is only one suspect—Willard Gerard. The circumstantial case against him is conclusive, except for the one vital detail that he has an iron-clad, water-tight, witness-supported alibi. The only way I can establish his guilt is to prove Linda Barclay's incredible story is true down to the last detail, and to substantiate my own. I am determined to make the attempt tonight. Your assistance, gentlemen?"

Chief Wellsmore ventured: "I'll do what I can, Doctor."

Mackler sighed. "You need help for a sweet job like that."

"Wait here, please."

COLE climbed stairs. At the end of a polished corridor he entered a room where a man was squatting intently in front of a small safe. He was not an inmate of the institution, but the cleverest locksmith in New York undertaking Cole's orders. He looked up wearily to say: "She's still got me buffaloed."

Cole followed another shining hallway and in another remote room found Linda Barclay sitting at an easel, under a daylight bulb, touching vivid color to a canvas.

The girl said, as Cole studied the painting: "You see, color is everything in my work. I love to experiment with it. It's in my mind constantly. So I couldn't be mistaken about what I saw that night."

"I most sincerely hope not," Cole said

wryly. "Miss Barclay, a question. You have insisted from the beginning that you recognized Willard Gerard in spite of his weird garb and the fact that his back was turned. Why are you so sure?"

The girl answered calmly: "His ears. Have you noticed them? They are peculiarly formed. At the top there is a little blunt point. Perhaps it may seem queer, but I did know him immediately because of that."

Cole was staring. "Queer? Not a particle! Ears, next to fingerprints, are the most characteristic part of the body. No two ears are exactly alike. They remain unaltered from birth until after death. Furthermore, the little tip at the upper helix, which you mention, is a distinctive type known as the Darwinian tubercle."*

He drew the girl from the easel. "Listen carefully. I want you to come with me. I'm determined to set a trap for a murderer, and I must use you as bait. You may well look startled—it's a serious risk. It will endanger your life. I wouldn't ask it of you if there were any other way. Will you take the chance?"

"Of course."

"Good girl. Come along." They went along the gleaming hall, down the stairs, into Cole's office. He stepped to his desk, selected a few notes from a sheaf, tucked them into his pocket. Then he asked the Miss Day who came at his gesture: "Did you make the inquiry? Has Gerard complained to the police that his home was burglarized last night?"

*Alphonse Bertillon, inventor of anthropometry (the identification of individuals by means of anatomical measurements, which preceded our present fingerprint system) recognized the value of the human ear as a means of identification. The facts stated here by Carter Cole are well known to criminologists.

An actual and interesting case along these lines concerns a woman who, after an attempt at suicide in Berlin, shortly following the World War, declared herself to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia, daughter of the murdered Czar Nicholas of Russia. Her story was that she had escaped the execution of the Czar's family in Ekaterinburg, Siberia, had suffered a loss of memory as a result of a blow on the head, and had reached Berlin after many trying adventures. She closely resembled Anastasia, but the head of the Scientific Police Institute of Lausanne, Switzerland, Professor Marc Bischoff, proved her to be an impostor. A comparison of profile photographs of this woman and of the real Anastasia disclosed that the ear types of the two were distinctly different.—F. C. D.

"No, Doctor."

"Excellent!" He went out to Chief Wellsmore and Louis Mackler. "It is now past one. By the time we get set, it will be about two. I've chosen this time so that conditions tonight may duplicate those the night Mrs. Gerard died. Are you ready, gentlemen?"

He maintained a cryptic silence as the girl and the two men followed him out to the Duesenberg. A light roadster was standing behind it, Brick Kelly at the wheel, and it trailed the massive sedan through the gate. Turning onto Rainbow Parkway, Cole drove without speaking. He swung into the Gerard grounds, signaled the girl and Chief Wellsmore, and went to the entrance with them carrying a small suitcase.

When the door opened he directed the decrepit Gerard butler: "Go to your room at once and remain there. The police are in charge."

The butler gulped: "Very good, sir!" Cole conducted the wondering girl into the room where Julia Gerard had died. Linda Barclay looked in anguish at the spot where the old lady had fallen, and shrank back. Cole strode to the French windows at the side of the room—through which the girl claimed to have seen a murderer flee—and partly drew the drapes. He lighted the table lamp, turned out all others, led the girl with gentle firmness to a chair sitting in its glow.

"You are, as I said, the bait in a trap set for a murderer. Chief Wellsmore is here to keep a protective eye on you. In

case of a miscarriage of plans, your life will be endangered. That is my responsibility. But it's vital that you stay right here—with this."

COLE opened the overnight case. Calmly he lifted from it a blue derby with yellow polka-dots. He removed also a bright red shirt, a brilliant orange suit, and a pair of blue, yellow-dotted shoes to match the hat. Chief Wellsmore, staring from the door, uttered a startled exclamation. Linda Barclay gazed wide-eyed.

Cole reassured her. "No murderer ever wore these garments. They are all mine. With the help of my secretaries, I dyed and painted these things this afternoon. They, like you, Miss Barclay, are bait. They must remain on this table, in plain sight. Watch the clock. In fifteen minutes, call the number of Willard Gerard's home on the telephone. Ask for me. If you hear me saying strange things, pay no attention. You won't forget?"

"No," the girl breathed.

Cole left her peering fascinated at the grotesque raiment as he conducted the amazed Wellsmore out of the house. Making sure the French windows were unfastened, he went with the chief to the nearby garage. He flashed his fountain-pen torch to compare his watch with Wellsmore's.

"Yours is a bit faster than mine. Our watches must be synchronized." And when the adjustment was made, "Watch the windows carefully, Chief. If anyone approaches them, note the exact time. The girl's safety is important, but the time is even more vital. I realize you think you're humoring a madman, but please do exactly as I've said."

He left Wellsmore stationed in the shadow of the garage and circled the mansion to the waiting cars. He directed Brick Kelly: "Leave your car outside Gerard's drive and walk in quietly. Take a position where you can watch both the

bulkhead and the garage. If you spot Gerard doing strange things, don't try to hinder him. Note the exact time on your watch and let him go."

Cole set Kelly's dollar timepiece to coincide with his own, then climbed into the Duesenberg. Mackler sat at his side as he drove with Kelly trailing in the roadster. As he turned into Willard Gerard's drive, Kelly eased back. Cole stopped, went with Mackler to the entrance, knocked. While they waited, Kelly slipped into the grounds and vanished.

Inside the house a muffled, far-away voice called: "Come in! Come in!"

Cole and Mackler entered curiously. Another distant, "Come in!" led them toward the lighted kitchen. Mackler said with a grin: "He's in that dark-room again." Cole smiled with satisfaction and rapped on the door. "In there, Gerard?"

Gerard's voice came through the panels: "You were so long, Doctor, I thought you'd decided not to come. I've gone ahead with my films. They're in the developer now and I can't open the door. That needn't keep us from talking."

Cole answered: "I've put myself into a ticklish position, Gerard. The police don't believe I saw you at Fendrick's place last night, you know. They didn't say so, but it's obvious they not only question my sanity but suspect me of the murder."

"That's absurd."

"Nevertheless," Cole insisted, "being suspected of murder, no matter how illogically, is not pleasant. Mr. Kelly can vouch for me, but after all I pay him regularly every week. Fendrick's manservant saw me rushing from the room where his master lay dead. The police consider that my accusing you is a flimsy way of shielding myself. It's an ugly mess, Gerard."

"I'm afraid," Gerard answered, "you've put yourself into it, Doctor, and I can't help you out."

"But perhaps you know a possible reason for Fendrick's murder, or suspect—"

THE telephone rang. Gerard called through the door: "Answer that for me, will you, Cole?"

"Gladly!" Cole said, and went to the instrument in the living-room. His "Hello?" was answered by Linda Barclay's voice.

"Doctor Cole," the girl said uneasily, "I don't understand what you're doing. It's so strange here—so quiet. I've—"

"Excellent!" Cole interrupted. He knew Willard Gerard, in the dark-room, was listening. "All of it—indeed? You did perfectly right to telephone Chief Wellsmore. Certainly—it's conclusive evidence. Yes, under the circumstances we will."

The girl was plaintively protesting: "But Doctor Cole, I don't understand—" when he hung up.

He strode at once to the door of the dark-room, declared through the panels: "Extraordinary girl, that niece of yours, Gerard! Imagine what she's done. She's actually found the clothing she described—the polka-dot derby and the orange suit and all the rest. It substantiates her story perfectly. She's alone at the other place with it, but she's called Chief Wellsmore, and he's on his way now."

Gerard's voice came tightly. "Where did she find it?"

"She didn't tell me that—but wherever it was, the fact is vitally important. Moreover, there are ways of proving the ownership of the clothing. Microscopic examination—dust, for example. It's going to send the murderer to the chair, Gerard. What do you think of that? Plucky girl! I say, Gerard, what do you think of it?"

Silence in the dark-room. Cole turned tensely. He thrust his watch before the eyes of the startled Mackler and snapped: "Look at that! Note the time exactly! Don't forget it!" Mackler stared bewil-

dered while Cole turned back to the door. He continued to talk—until, suddenly, a quick step sounded on the rear porch.

Brick Kelly thrust his red head in. "Doc! Gerard came out of the bulkhead a minute ago! He's gone out of here like a bat out of hell! Left at ten and a half after! God's sake, I never thought—"

"Pipe down, Brick! Wait!"

Kelly and Mackler stood frozen while Cole stared at his watch. Its ticking became audible in the hush. Four times a second the tiny clicks came, for an eternity. Only a bit more than a minute had passed when Cole whipped about. "Stay here, Brick, in case he comes back! If he does, grab him!" And to Mackler, "You're coming with me!" He thrust the private detective along the hall, out the entrance, to the Duesenberg. Its motor roared.

Cole wheeled into the cement with only the parking lights shining. His thrust at the gas pedal opened the motor wide. Cyclonic wind whipped over Mackler. He grabbed his hat and struggled for breath while Cole peered at the smooth lane of concrete ahead. Miles whizzed past with dizzy speed. At last they skidded on loose gravel into the Gerard drive. Near the house Cole slammed to a stop.

He gripped Mackler's collar, again thrust his watch before the detective's eyes and snapped: "Now look at that!" Chief Wellsmore's name was on his lips as he left the wheel and sped along a garden. A glimpse of a prone figure near the French doors kept him silent. He stopped abruptly, desperately gesturing Mackler back, staring at the man lying sprawled in the grass. It was Wellsmore, scalp gashed, unconscious.

A stifled, fearful cry turned Cole quickly to the open doors. He reached to his arm-pit holster, leveled his Luger. Shifting into the lane of light, he peered narrow-eyed into the Gerard library. He saw

Linda Barclay backed to the table on which the fantastic garments lay, one hand raised in terror to her mouth. A man—a towering black shadow—was advancing, shoulders hunched, toward her. She wailed again, went limp in a faint, fell.

The shadow man sprang toward her. She lay helpless as Cole glimpsed a bottle of sparkling amber in the hand of the man who bent over her. Cole sprang forward at the moment a trickle licked to the neck of the open bottle. He snapped: "Get back!" and sent a bullet snapping across the room. Willard Gerard, jerking up, whirled from the girl. With one swift movement he hurled the bottle at Cole. Flashing drops sprayed from it as it spun.

"Look out!" Cole gasped. "Hydrocyanic acid! One breath will kill you!"

FLAME seared from the gun in Gerard's hand. He leaped across the room. On the stair landing he paused to blast out another shot. Cole, holding his breath, reached to the unconscious girl. His Luger spat into the report of Gerard's gun. A numbing shock in his arm jolted him as Gerard sprang higher. Cole felt hot blood flowing to his fingers as he commanded Mackler: "Help get the girl out!"

He lifted her, stumbled into the living-room. Mackler slammed the door shut on air that was growing pungent. Cole pushed into the hall, sprang toward the base of the stairs. Quick footfalls were sounding on the upper floor as he bounded up, three steps at a time. He glimpsed blood spots on the landing, knew his bullet had gone home. He sped to the top of the stairs—and into a storm of combat.

A wild leap hurled Gerard on Cole. An automatic beat at Cole's head as his up-thrown arms parried the blows. He twisted desperately, seizing the gun. On the top landing they writhed in struggle, Gerard's thumbs digging into Cole's throat. Cole's jab brought a gasp from

Gerard. Gerard's eyes rolled as he toppled backward. He sprawled down the stairs, slumped into the hall, lay limp.

Cole's left arm trailed blood as he went down. In the living-room he slapped the casement windows open. As clean air breezed over Linda Barclay he ordered Mackler tersely: "In the hall, Mr. Detective. He's our murderer." Mackler went out, gun glittering, while Cole raised the girl's feet on a pillow. He hurried out the front entrance and angled to the open French windows to find Chief Wellsmore tottering up. Then he tugged Wellsmore away, to the front entrance. Blearily, the chief stared at Gerard, Mackler's gun leveled at him. Cole hurried into the kitchen, came back with a basin of water, returned to the girl. His wet handkerchief was cooling on her forehead when he asked: "At what time, Chief, did Gerard arrive at this place?"

"Eighteen minutes past two!"

"At what time, Mackler," Cole went on, "did Brick Kelly announce Gerard's departure from the other house?"

"Ten and a half minutes past two!"

"Interval," Cole calculated, "seven and a half minutes. Distance, six miles. Average speed, approximately sixty miles per hour. In a moment you'll understand."

Linda Barclay's eyelids were fluttering. Cole helped her up.

Wellsmore, stooping over Gerard, clicked a pair of handcuffs in place and declared: "No matter how he got here, he did it—that's enough for me!" Cole led him out the front entrance, and Mackler followed. The beam of Cole's fountain-pen torch probed the shadows. He said "Ah!" as the shaft stopped. "There we are!"

Mackler, staring, asked: "Sure—but it's only a bicycle—with a big windshield attached. You're not trying to say Gerard got here that fast on a bicycle!"

It was leaning against the ivy-covered garden wall. And the tin deflector, shaped like the prow of a small boat, which Cole had seen in Gerard's garage, was affixed to the bicycle by its braces. Cole, smiling happily, spoke with a chuckle.

"You probably believe, Chief, like most people, that twenty or twenty-five miles an hour is a good speed for a man on a bicycle. You underestimate the possibilities. The bicycle is one of the most efficient engineering achievements of the ages. This one, besides being equipped with a streamlined windshield, is provided with variable gears. Willard Gerard actually, on three separate occasions, on the last three nights, traveled on that machine at a speed greater than sixty miles an hour." Wellsmore gasped.

"And that," Cole continued, "is well under the speed record established by bicycles. Looking into the matter this afternoon, I found that the latest official bicycle speed record is no less than eighty and a half miles an hour. It was made recently at Los Angeles by Frank Bartell and is attested by the A.A.A. I undertook this murder trap tonight to prove, beyond all doubt, that Willard Gerard could do almost as well on his wheel—and I have."*

WHEN, almost an hour later, Carter Cole entered the Cole Sanitarium with the girl and the bewildered Brick Kelly, one of his twin secretaries hurried from his office. She announced: "The locksmith has just opened the safe, Doctor!" In the upper room Cole found an-

other Day twin looking into the steel box while a mystified locksmith stood by.

He removed a blue, yellow-dotted derby from the safe. He drew out also an orange suit, a weirdly striped tie, a brilliant red shirt, and a pair of shoes to match the hat. Lastly he took up a small decorated atomizer in which an amber fluid twinkled.

"Small wonder Gerard didn't report the theft of this safe. Brick's watching him kept him from destroying these things. He used paints stolen from your box, Miss Barclay, to decorate the derby and the shoes. His purpose was to make the story of any possible eye-witness seem so fantastic as to be downright incredible—and he almost succeeded. Part of his devilish scheme made use of two identical atomizers—very easy to obtain. While you watched him, his back turned to you, he switched one for the other. The one he left beside the dead woman contained perfume. That he used as an instrument of murder—this one—contains hydrocyanic acid. Keep hands off!"

His gesture cleared the room. He pressed a large banknote into the befuddled locksmith's hand while Linda Barclay gazed profound gratitude at him. Smiling, he directed a Day twin: "Telephone Chief Wellsmore that the case is cracked, complete with polka-dot derby. In the meantime, see that no one enters this room, June."

Miss Day answered: "Yes, Doctor."

Cole stared. "What!" he said. "What! You actually are June and not Jane?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Wonders," said Carter Cole with a sigh, "will never cease."

*Until recently the bicycle speed record was held by William Peden, Canadian—76 miles per hour. It was broken by Frank Bartell, 33 years old, a bearded Czech-born six-day bicycle racer, in a test on a concrete boulevard outside Los Angeles. Bartell's record was certified by an A.A.A. official at 80.5 m.p.h. He rode behind an Auburn speedster, which served as a wind-breaker. Two motorcycle policemen, racing behind him, were outdistanced when Bartell hit 85 m.p.h. The bicyclist shot over the finish line at 90 m.p.h. and was hitting 100 before he stopped.—F. C. D.

THE TATTOOED COP—A Needle Mike Story by WILLIAM E. BARRETT
in DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE for FEBRUARY—Out JANUARY 3rd!

Ready for the Rackets

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 to thwart them, guard against them, is a foreknowledge of their schemes and methods of operation. Write in telling us your own personal experiences with chisellers and con men of various sorts. It is our intention to publicize—withholding your names, if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all communications to The Racket Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y.

A friend of mine who lives in a large city, was a victim of the following racket.

Shortly after his father died a nice appearing young man appeared at the door. He asked for Mr. Brown Sr. Upon being informed of his death he appeared surprised and commented that it was very unfortunate for both Mr. Brown and himself. Upon being asked to explain himself he said that Mr. Brown Sr. had ordered a Bible from him and had his name put on it in gold letters. He produced the Bible and showed it to my friend. He said that Mr. Brown had placed a dollar deposit with the order and that the balance was four dollars.

He suggested that my friend accept the Bible. It would make a nice keepsake and reminder of the deceased. My friend accepted the Bible and paid the four dollars.

Sometime later when mentioning the incident to an acquaintance he was startled to hear that the acquaintance had been approached by the same young fellow after his aunt's death. Obviously it was a racket and a very clever way of disposing of cheap Bibles at a large profit.

Very truly yours,

V. B.

This racket has many variations. Sometimes the article "contracted for just before death" is, instead of a Bible, a fountain pen with the deceased's initials stamped on it, a bill fold or other personal trinket. Almost invariably the racket is successful because of the sentimental feeling evoked in its application.

* * *

N. B. We have received scores of letters explaining the various approaches of racketeers who aim at the unemployed by offering jobs to obtain which a cash bond of some kind must be posted. These all work in much the same way, the only difference lying in the type of job offered. The general formula was revealed in the letter published in this department in the November issue and we feel that that particular form of petty chiseling has been covered now. Let's hear of some new swindle you've encountered. They crop up daily.

EDITOR.



SURE FIRE STORIES

3

BIG NOVELETTES

by

Ared White W. E. Barrett
Theodore Roscoe

Short Stories and Serials

by

Gordon Young Clyde Wantland
Anthony Rud

In the
January

Adventure
15c

Out
Dec. 10



WHY NOT CHRISTMAS 12 TIMES A YEAR WITH SUCH CHARACTERS AS RACE WILLIAMS, CARDIGAN, NEEDLE MIKE, CARTER COLE, THE RAMBLER, VEE BROWN, AND LONERGAN OF FRISCO BRINGING PLEASURE TO THOSE DETECTIVE-FICTION FANS YOU WANT TO REMEMBER WITH A GIFT WHOSE THRILL WON'T WEAR OFF TILL 1937?

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10 DIME
DETECTIVE
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The Story of 2 MEN who NEEDED CASH



THIS MAN DOUBTED:

He said: "Yes, I am broke. I am really terribly hard up. I haven't a cent of extra money for anything. I wish I knew where to get some. I haven't a bit of faith in anything. I am a failure and my luck is terrible."

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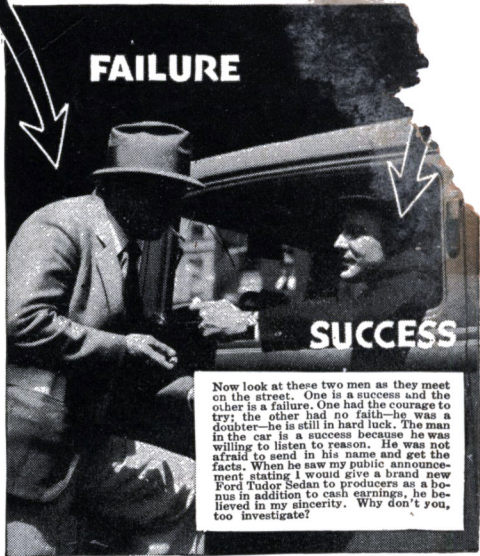
I'll help you start at once and back you up to the limit. Here's a bona fide cash-getting idea you may never have heard of before—a unique and utterly different way of getting the cash you need. With my plans I have "saved the day" for hundreds who were at their

DO YOU need money to pay the rent—to meet nagging bills—or to clothe and feed the family? Are you hard up for ready cash and obliged to deny yourself many comforts or even necessities? Are you working for such small wages that you can't make ends meet? Then you will be interested in the experiences of these two men.

THIS MAN

He said: "Yes, I am tired of penny pinching. Your generous offer is good to me. It costs nothing to investigate—I have everything to gain. I am going to send name and find out just what you have to offer me."

A FEW WEEKS LATER



Have Big Weekly Cash Earnings

If you are tired of slaving for small pay, here's your chance to break away and make big money. You can even start in your spare time—see the business grow—have cash in your pocket—be independent. Think of the joy of being a successful business person in your own locality with big, year 'round earnings of your own. You don't have the

usual money risks of a business man. There is no limit to your possibilities. Earnings begin at once, the very first day.

LOOK AT THESE UNUSUAL EARNINGS

I have a flood of glowing letters from prosperous, successful men and women telling of unusual earnings they have made with my plans. L. P. Boyne, La., made \$67.20 in a week. Mrs. H. H. Hosiack, Nebr., made \$41.75 the first week. Steve Witt, Mo., made \$21.59 in a day. Paul T. Krider, Pa., \$81.00 in a week. Albert Becker, Mich., \$100.00 in a week. George W. Creed, Ohio, \$95.00 in a week. Exceptional earnings like these are positive proof of the amazing earning possibilities of my offer.

SEND NO MONEY—SEND NAME

I send everything you need. You positively don't risk a penny of your money. There is nothing complicated or puzzling about my money-making methods. You will be the judge and decide for yourself if the earning possibilities are satisfactory. Just give me a chance to explain the facts. It costs you nothing to find out. Send name on coupon or penny postcard.

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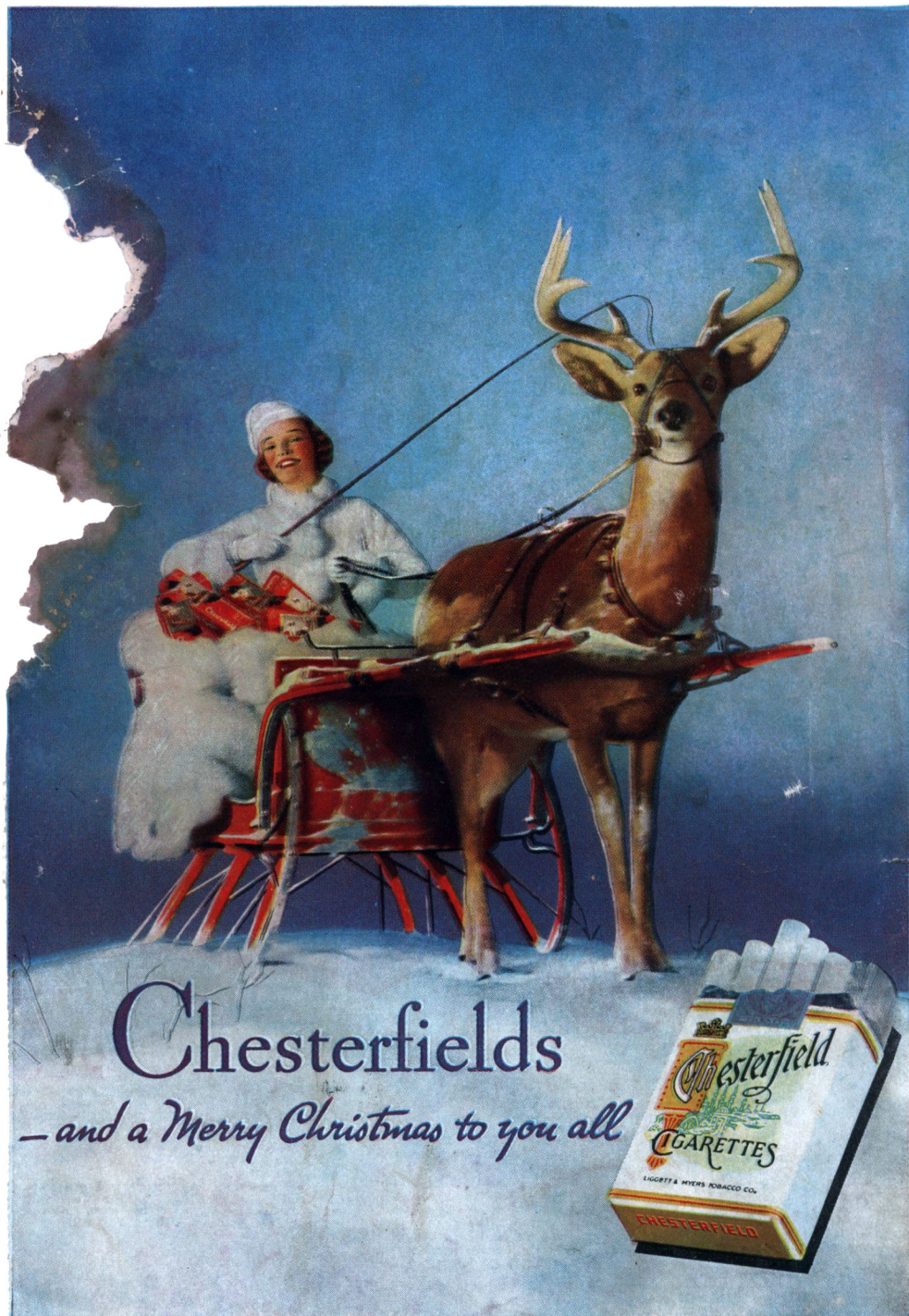
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— and a Merry Christmas to you all