ALL STORIES COMPLETE

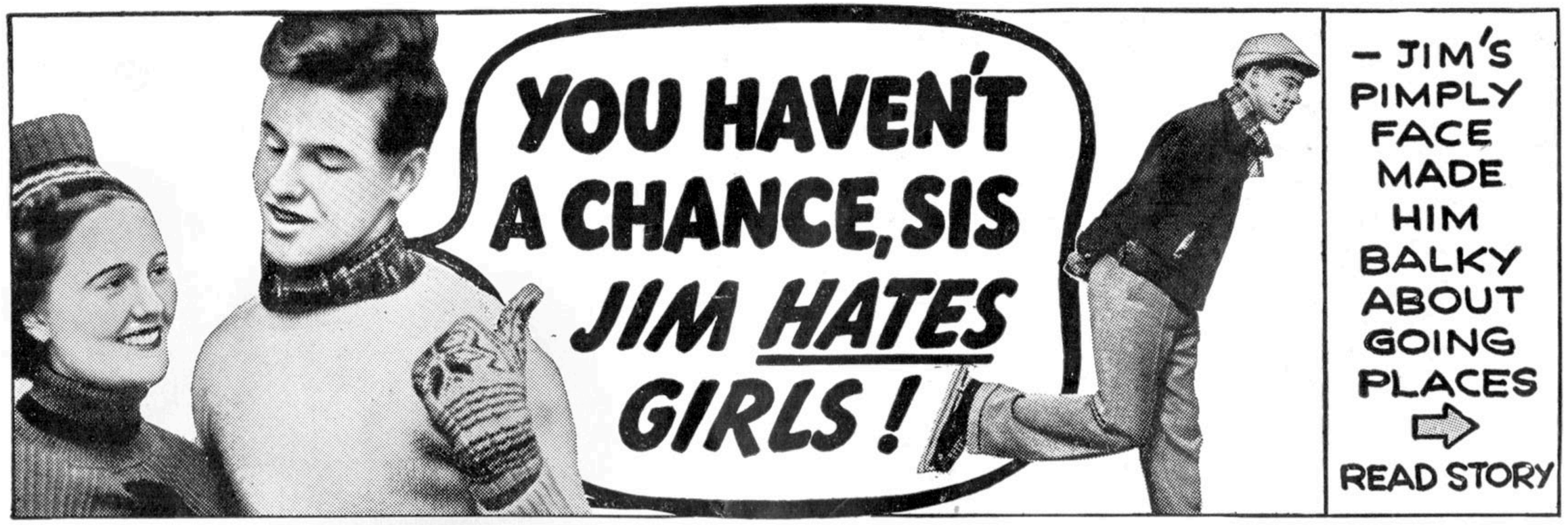
FEBRUARY

10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

RACE WILLIAMS WRITES HIS MONOGRAM IN LEAD by CARROLL JOHN DALY

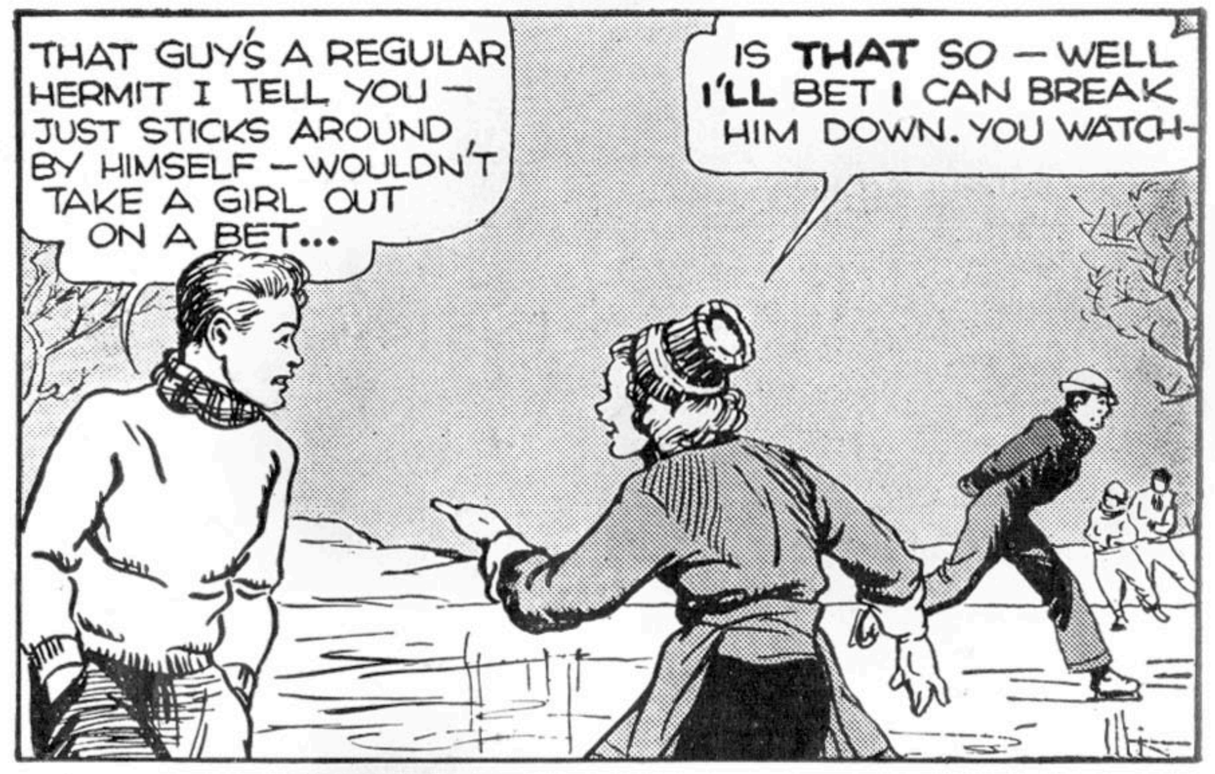
A LONERGAN OF FRISCO STORY by JOHN K. BUTLER

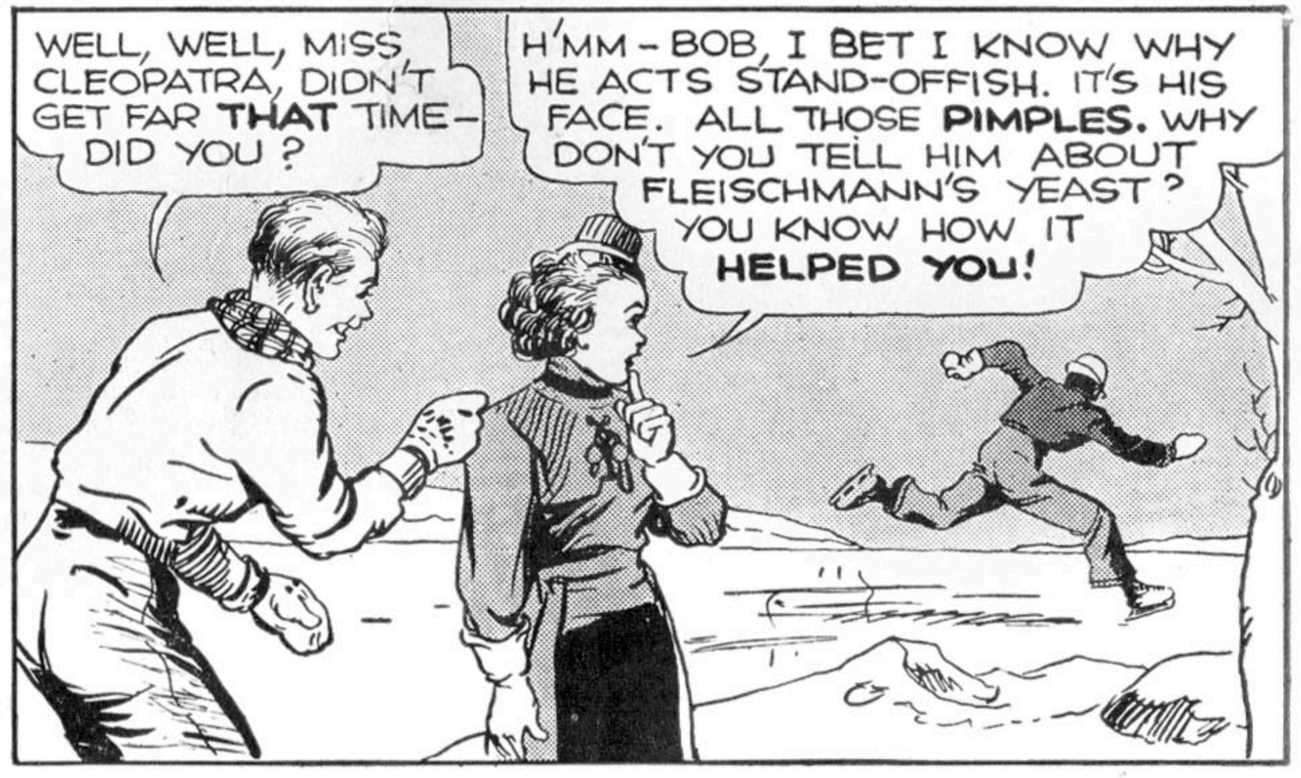
T. T. FLYNN AND OTHERS



— JIM'S PIMPLY FACE MADE HIM BALKY ABOUT GOING PLACES

READ STORY





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IT takes brain to earn money—trained brain! The man without training is usually the man without cash. You can train your brain! Thousands of men have done it through spare-time study of I. C. S. Courses. Be a cash man—be a trained man—mail this coupon!

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10c DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

A POPULAR PUBLICATION

EVERY STORY COMPLETE — EVERY STORY NEW

Vol. 23 — CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY, 1937 — No. 3

A THRILL-CRAMMED COMPLETE DETECTIVE NOVEL

Watch Race Williams write his

Monogram in Lead.....Carroll John Daly 8

To blot out the crayoned portrait, crossed by knife-gashed lines, which leered at him from the bare back of the woman who'd saved his life.

2—SPLIT-SECOND MIDNIGHT MURDER NOVELETTES—2

Keep

A Date at the Morgue.....T. T. Flynn 43

With Flash Cordovan, fall-guy for three smart dicks who were too lazy to pull their own murder chestnuts out of the fire.

Stalk

The Walking Dead—A Rex Lonergan Story.....John K. Butler 92

Through the fog-shrouded alleyways of Frisco's Chinatown, and learn what brought a footloose corpse wandering from its grave.

2—GRIPPING SHORT MYSTERY STORIES—2

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The Man Who Was Two—A Kip Lacey Story....R. Sidney Bowen 65

And managed to double-cross himself and his murderer even after death.

Inoculate yourself against the

Broadway Malady.....John Lawrence 76

Which infects the Big Stem's smart-money boys with itching palms, then carries them off with severe spasms of murder-migraine.

We want to know if you are

Ready for the Rackets.....A Department 4

In this revealing series giving the low-down on currently popular swindle-schemes. Here's a chance to test your ability as a reporter and win $5.00 at the same time.

Here's a preview of

The March Thrill Docket..... 115

Some of the sure-fire hits scheduled for production in the next issue of DIME DETECTIVE.

There's been an accumulation of

Bones to Pick.....Editor 122

Gathering on our desk, and this is the first time we've had a chance to let readers, authors and editor let fly in a three-cornered fracas. Everybody duck—or get socked!

Cover—"He Thrust the Blade at Her Throat".....Tom Lovell

From *The Walking Dead.*

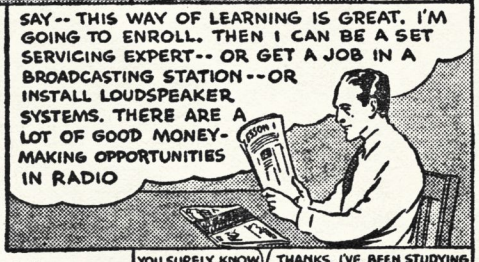
Watch for the March Issue — On the Newsstands February 5th

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 29, 1935, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. 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.

HOW A FREE LESSON STARTED BILL ON THE WAY TO A GOOD RADIO JOB

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute

Yes, I will send my First Lesson FREE to show how easy it is to TRAIN AT HOME FOR A GOOD RADIO JOB



Do you want to make more money? I'm so sure that I can train you at home in your spare time for a good Radio Job that I'll send you a sample lesson absolutely FREE. Examine it, read it, see for yourself how easy it is to understand even if you've never had any technical experience or training.

Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as $200 to $500 a year. Full time Radio servicing jobs pay as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts own and operate their own full time or part time Radio sales and service businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen paying up to $6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay and see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I have trained are holding good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

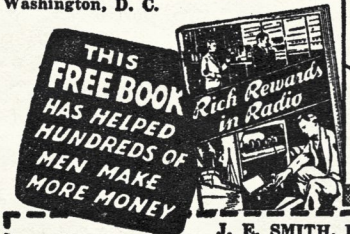
Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Practically every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets. They show you how to do Radio repair jobs that you can cash in on quickly. Throughout your training I send you plans and ideas that have made good spare time money—from $200 to $500 a year—for hundreds of fellows. I send you special Radio equipment and show you how to conduct experiments and build circuits which illustrate important Radio principles. My Training gives you practical Radio experience while learning.

Get My Lesson and 64-Page Book FREE. Mail Coupon

In addition to my Sample Lesson, I will send you my 64-Page Book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." Both are free to any fellow over 16 years old. My book describes Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Training in Radio and Television; tells about my Money Back Agreement; shows you actual letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope, or paste it on a penny postcard —NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 7BS9
Washington, D. C.



MAIL THIS NOW

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7BS9
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send the sample lesson and your book which tells about the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE..... 2FR

Ready for the Rackets

A Department

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 chiselers 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.

IT has been pointed out time and again that if the energy and cleverness which racketeers and crooks display in outwitting the law were directed into honest channels, equally, or even more profitable results would be reaped. This is particularly true in the pettier type of swindle—such as the one outlined below—where considerable staging, the complication of working in partnership with another person, and the consequent added risk involved hardly seem to warrant the small return. An equal amount of planning and subsequent activity devoted to some legitimate enterprise, should net returns even more satisfactory than those involved here. However—try and convince the confirmed chiseler that such is the case!

Brooklyn, N. Y.,
October 28.

Dear Sir:

I am hereby relating what I consider a clever racket, displaying the means by which an honest business man is preyed upon by racketeers.

One after the other, two well dressed men enter a restaurant and seek opposite tables.

The first orders a large, expensive meal. The second a meager, inexpensive one.

After both have finished, the checks are presented. The first rises and nonchalantly strolls past his accomplice, who deftly exchanges checks.

The first, who has heartily eaten, presents his check to the cashier. He pays the small amount which the check indicates and leaves the immediate vicinity of the restaurant.

The second employs a bit of clever acting by raising a commotion. The manager of the restaurant is brought to the outwardly dissatisfied diner.

Displaying the empty plates he has eaten from and bawling out the waiter who has served him, the racketeer demands the reason for receiving such a high check.

The manager decides it was the error of an employee in distributing the checks, apologizes, and the racketeer leaves, usually paying nothing at all.

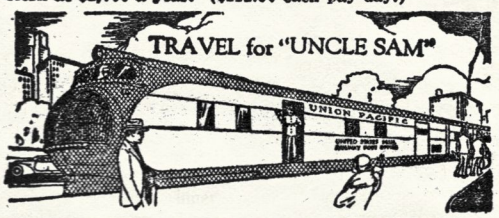
Start $1260 to $2100 a Year

MANY 1937 APPOINTMENTS

MEN, WOMEN

Railway Postal Clerks

Railway Postal Clerks get $1,900 the first year regular, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. ($79.17 each pay day.) Their pay is automatically increased yearly to $2,450. Advance may be had to Chief Clerk at $2,700 a year. ($112.50 each pay day.)



3 Days On—3 Days Off—Full Pay

Railway Postal Clerks on long runs usually work 3 days and have 3 days off duty or in the same proportion. During this off duty their pay continues just as though they were working. They travel on a pass when on business. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension.

City Mail Carriers, Post Office Clerks

Clerks and Carriers now get $1,700 the first year on regular and automatically increase $100 a year to $2,100 and $2,300.

Customs Inspector

Salary $2,100 to start. Men 23 to 45. Work connected with examining baggage and merchandise entering the country from foreign parts covering boats, trains, roads, automobiles, etc.

Many Other Positions

Many other positions are obtainable. Those wishing these positions should qualify at once.

Get Free List of Positions

Fill out the following coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—now, at once.

This investment may result in your getting a big-paid government job.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. T-174, Rochester, N. Y.

Rush to me, entirely free of charge (1) a full description of U. S. Government Jobs; (2) Free copy of illustrated 32-page book, "U. S. Government Positions and How to Get Them"; (3) List of U. S. Government Jobs; (4) Tell me what to do to get a U. S. Government Job.

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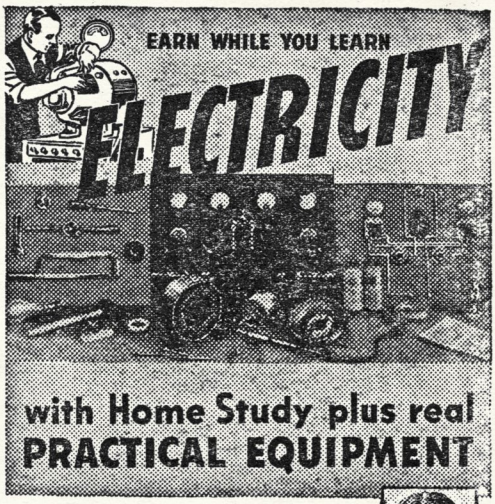
Address.....

Use This Coupon Before You Mislay It. Write or Print Plainly.



with Home Study plus real PRACTICAL EQUIPMENT

H.W. Petersen
President

Don't waste another day! The man who said he never had a chance never took a chance! Send this coupon and we will send you all the facts of our home study, plus Practical home shop training. Then read the fascinating facts about the largest, richest industry in the world—ELECTRICITY—which pays out millions in salaries every week. Electricity offers countless opportunities to the man who prepares. With our training you can prepare for these opportunities right in your home town.

A good home, car, fine radio, happy family—these things make life worthwhile. Get your share of them—by getting ready for the real opportunities waiting for trained men in the giant, profitable branches of ELECTRICITY.

So send along this coupon—NOW! There's a better place for you in ELECTRICITY. We'll help you find it.

OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE $5, $10 AND MORE A WEEK WHILE TRAINING

Let us tell you how many of our students in their home workshops make $5—$10 a week—just in spare time. We send you, with your course, job sheets and instructions on how to do these jobs as you proceed with your training.

You Get Real Shop Equipment

Electric Institute training is home study combined with real Electrical Equipment including a genuine ¼ H.P. A.C. motor. You get dozens of other electrical items you use in doing spare-time jobs. We show you how to get these jobs, how to do them, and how much money you should charge for them. All equipment is furnished you without extra cost, and is yours to keep.

Prepare for a Better Job or a Business of Your Own

We don't know of another great field you could get into more easily. You don't leave home or friends. You train in spare time without quitting your present job. You don't need previous experience or a lot of book learning to get our training. Prepare now for many branches of Electrical work or a business of your own.

DIESEL POWER...RADIO...REFRIGERATION... AIR CONDITIONING

Included with your course of training you get valuable instruction in Diesel, Radio, Refrigeration, Air Conditioning.

GET THIS FREE BOOK-NOW!

Send Coupon Today!

Fill in the coupon today—clip it and mail it to me. When I get it, I'll send you my big illustrated catalog and all details of our combination Home Study and Practical Home Shop training. This places you under no obligation and no salesman will call on you.

H. W. Petersen, Pres., Electric Institute, Inc.
Dept. 197B, Hinsdale, Ill.

Send full details on "Why I should get into ELECTRICITY", and the best way I can get real shop method training at home.

Name.....*Age*.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

The two racketeers then meet at a chosen spot and reverse places, working their racket on another unsuspecting victim.

S. J. Elberg.

The switch-check racket just described has also been used with variations in places other than eating establishments, such as cash-and-carry groceries, drug stores and five-and-dime stores where two "customers" working together exchange checks and packages before approaching the cashier's desk to pay before leaving the store.

And here's another one that's flourishing, to the sorrow of tailors and pressing establishments as well as shoe-repair shops. Watch out for it!

Toledo, Ohio,
Nov. 13, 1936.

Dear Sir:

Here is an account of a smooth racket which I hope will be acceptable for your Rackets corner.

Into a tailor shop comes Jack Doe. Will the tailor sew a button on his vest? While the tailor obliges, Jack Doe glances at the rack containing clothes ready for the customer. He memorizes the information supplied on the attached bill form; the customer's name and address and the amount of the charge. Jack Doe pays for the button and walks out. He then contacts John Henry and relays his information.

John Henry takes over. He phones the tailor, pretending to be the customer. He needs his suit at once. Is it ready? The answer, of course, is yes. Very well, John Henry will send a friend to pick up the suit. To make it more convincing John Henry inquires about the charge, although he already has the information. A short time later John Henry appears, informs the tailor Mr. Blank sent him to pick up the suit. And wasn't the charge $1.50? Yes. Then John Henry walks out with a suit of clothes which he and his pal Jack Doe have obtained for the price of a button and the nominal charge for work done on the suit. The racketeers don't stop at the suit or overcoat trick. Sometimes a woman takes the rôle of John Henry and a fur coat or an expensive evening gown is obtained.

Since the racket is being worked extensively, and obviously the persons directly involved can't wear all the clothes obtained by this trickery, it is logical to assume that the racket has ramifications. This implies an organization which knows where to dispose of the clothes.

Respectfully submitted,
Mae Verne Boothe.

Train at Home ... Under Factory Engineers for GOOD PAY Spare-Time and Full-Time Jobs in RADIO

LEARN TO EARN UP TO $75 A WEEK

APPOINTED BY RADIO MANUFACTURERS TO SUPERVISE R-T-I TRAINING

(MANY R-T-I TRAINED MEN EARN MORE)

MAIL COUPON BELOW

This is the R-T-I Advisory Board—Engineers and Executives of large Radio firms—appointed by these firms to supervise and direct R-T-I Training. Put your future in their hands. 50 great radio manufacturers now endorse this Training.

RAY D. SMITH
President R-T-I, who has directed training of 100,000 men. Read what a few students say.

"Made my first spare time money after finishing four lessons. Over $500 spare time money in 10 months. R-T-I is O.K."
Delmer Grote, Route 5, Greenville, Ohio

* * *

"I made $14.25 in first 11 days of my training following your instructions."
C. E. Head, 431 Third St., Alexandria, La.

* * *

"Before finishing my training I was made Manager of a Department Store's radio section."
Howard N. Lentz, 123 W. Alexander St., Buchanan, Mich.

* * *

"My job paid me $18 a week before taking your training. Shortly after starting was averaging $60 a week. Have made as high as $250 in single week."
Wm. T. Ridd, 3452 Evelyn St., Verdun, P.Q., Canada

Trained Men Needed in All Branches

If you're dissatisfied with small pay—lay-offs and an uncertain future—here's an opportunity that's too good to miss. At the cost of only the time it takes you to mail the coupon, you can get my big FREE book, "RADIO'S FUTURE AND YOUR OPPORTUNITY." This book tells how you can learn at home under the supervision of factory engineers, to make more money almost at once in Radio—whether you want to make Radio your life's work, or use it to pick up an extra $5 to $20 a week in your spare time.

More Opportunities Than Ever Before

Radio is still forging ahead. 1936 beats all other years. Over 6 million new sets sold. Over 30 million dollars paid for service alone this year. Where only a few hundred men were employed a short time ago, thousands are employed today. And where a hundred jobs paid up to $75 a week—there are thousands of such jobs today—many paying even more. And new jobs are being created all the time—full time jobs and spare time jobs. Get my book and see how easy it is to learn at home for this good-pay work.

"Shop Training" for the Home

R-T-I Training is different than any training you ever heard about. It comes to you right from the heart of the Radio Industry—right out of the factories where Radio sets and other vacuum-tube devices are made. It was planned and prepared and is supervised by big radio engineers IN these factories—by men appointed for the purpose. This means that trained the R-T-I way, you'll be trained as the Radio Industry wants you trained—just as the Radio Industry, itself, would train you if it was doing the job.

Television, Photo Electric Cells Public Address Systems Included

Radio service work is only the starting point in R-T-I Training. From there it will take you through the whole field of Radio and Electronics. You will learn about every new development, including Television so you'll be ready when Television breaks. You'll also learn the big money subjects such as Aviation and Auto Radio; Public Address Systems; how to handle Photo Cells; Sound Picture Recording, Etc.

4 Working Outfits Furnished

Start almost at once doing part time radio work. I furnish 4 outfits of apparatus that you build into test equipment with which you can do actual jobs and earn extra money. My Training pays its own way and you get your money back if not satisfied.

Age or Lack of Experience No Handicap

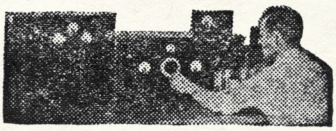
You don't have to be a high school graduate, nor even have finished the grades. My Training is so simple, easy, and practical, that the average man, regardless of age, education, or previous experience can master it. It offers the chance you have wanted to get out of a small-pay, no-future job, into good pay work with a future, in Radio and all its branches.

Get My Free Book

INVESTIGATE! Learn why R-T-I Training is different. Find out why R-T-I Trained men get "Quick Results" and "Big Results." Send for your copy of "Radio's Future and Your Opportunity" today. It tells you about Radio's amazing opportunities. It describes my approved training. It tells what R.T.I students are doing and making. It gives the names of my Advisory Board and 50 endorsing manufacturers. It's FREE. Clip, sign and mail coupon RIGHT NOW!

Big Money in Auto and Police Radio Work

W. H. Carr, 402 N. 16th St., Kansas City, Kansas, an R.T.I. student, has charge of 35 radio equipped cars for the Kansas City Police and Fire Departments. His salary is $230.00 a month and he is furnished with an automobile, gas, oil, etc. He says, "If I had not taken your course I would not be able to hold this job."



Makes $600 in One Month

Herbert B. Thomson, Gorman, Texas, formerly an oil well driller, borrowed $170.00 to start a spare time radio business after completing 12 R-T-I lessons. He made money from the start. In two years his shop was worth $3500. He says, "Because of my R-T-I Training I made $450 in September and over $600 in October, 1935. It pays to be R-T-I Trained."

MAIL FOR FREE BOOK

Ray D. Smith, President,
RADIO AND TELEVISION INSTITUTE (R-T-I),
2150 Lawrence Ave., Dept. 252, Chicago, Ill.

Without obligation, send me a copy of "Radio's Future and Your Opportunity." I am interested in your training and the opportunities in the great field of Radio for the R-T-I Trained Men.

Name.....

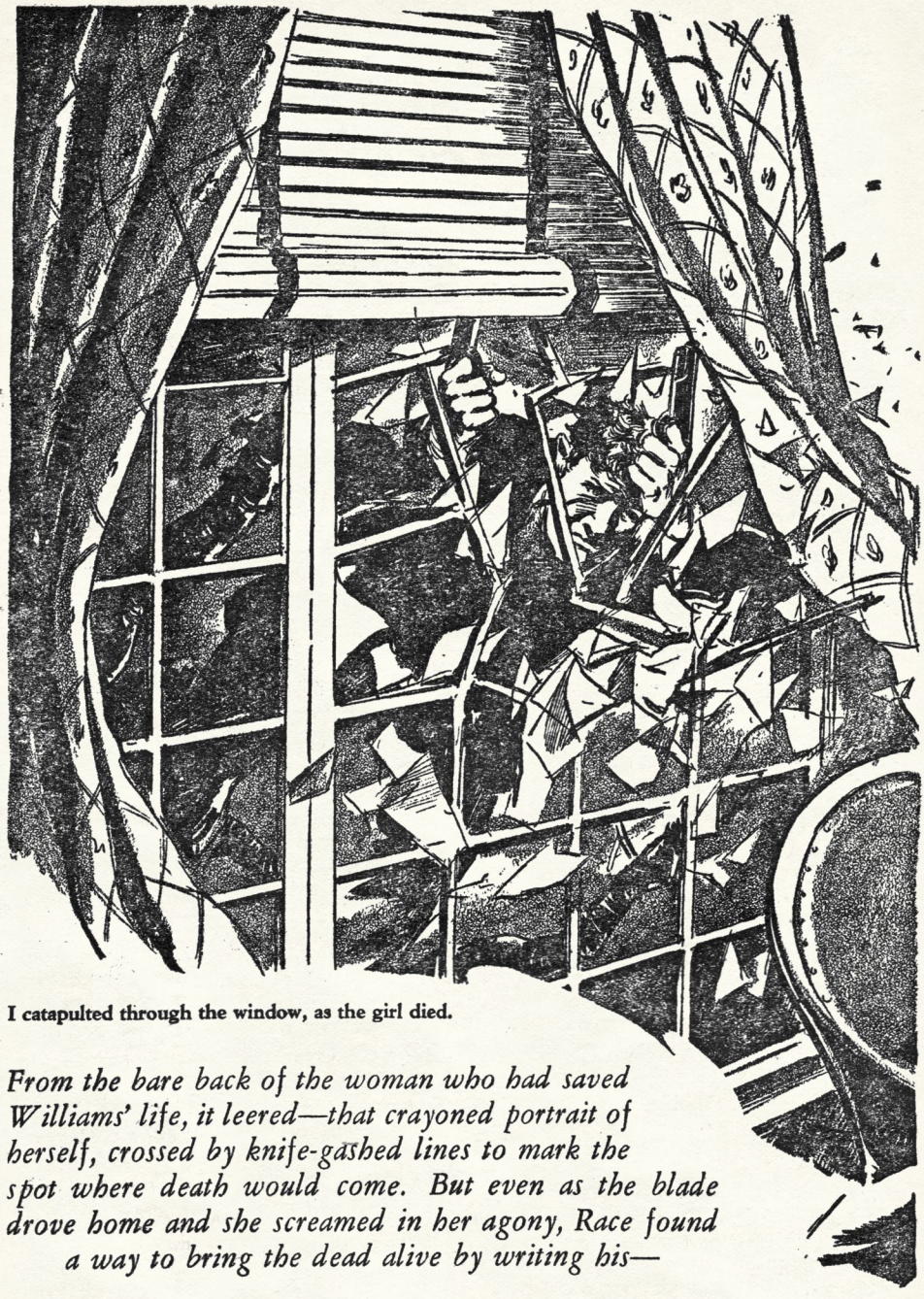
Address.....

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

RAY D. SMITH, President

RADIO AND TELEVISION INSTITUTE
PRACTICAL SHOP TRAINING FOR THE HOME

Dept. 252 • 2150 Lawrence Avenue • CHICAGO



I catapulted through the window, as the girl died.

From the bare back of the woman who had saved Williams' life, it leered—that crayoned portrait of herself, crossed by knife-gashed lines to mark the spot where death would come. But even as the blade drove home and she screamed in her agony, Race found a way to bring the dead alive by writing his—

MONOGRAM IN LEAD

A Race Williams Novel

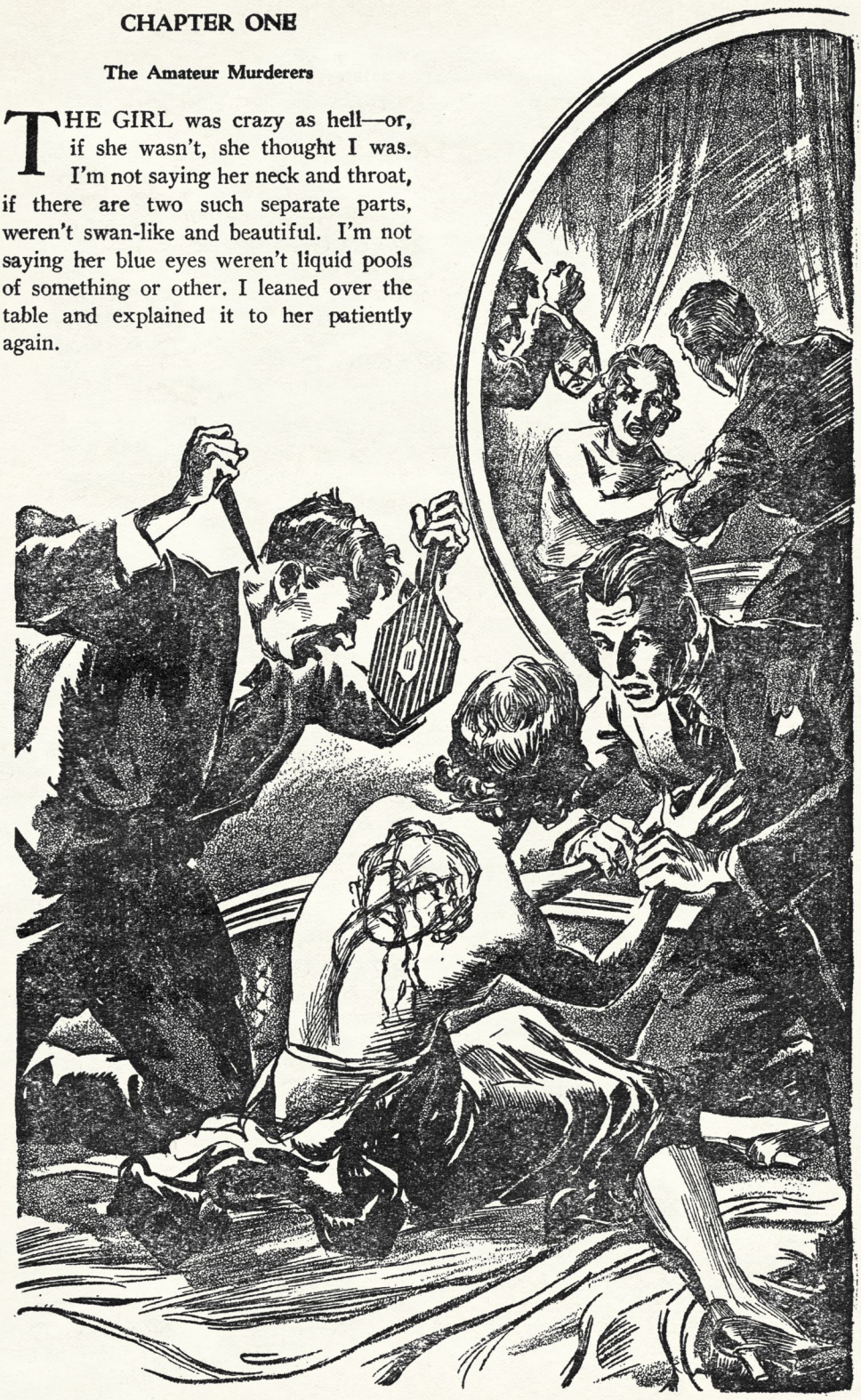
by Carroll John Daly

Author of "The Morgue's Our Home," etc.

CHAPTER ONE

The Amateur Murderers

THE GIRL was crazy as hell—or, if she wasn't, she thought I was. I'm not saying her neck and throat, if there are two such separate parts, weren't swan-like and beautiful. I'm not saying her blue eyes weren't liquid pools of something or other. I leaned over the table and explained it to her patiently again.



"Listen—and learn," I said. "It's only in books that detectives run into mysterious adventures on their vacations—beautiful women and that sort of stuff. If a guy is bothering you, go tell the headwaiter. If he's a heavy spender in the joint, slip the headwaiter a twenty."

She slid into the booth seat across from me and let me have it straight. "You like money, don't you? Well, you're facing some real cash."

"Not this time." I shook my head, looked at her a bit closer. She was pretty young to lay a proposition right smack on the line like that. "No, I came to Silver Sea for a vacation. I won't be drawn into any barroom brawl."

Her eyes widened; her mouth opened. She sort of spread her hands so as to take in the classy dance floor, the high-priced orchestra and the so-called idle rich—rich, perhaps, but idle, no. Some of them were politicians, figuring new ways to get their hands in the taxpayers' pockets. Others were criminals. They might be wealthy bankers and brokers to hotel clerks. But, to me, hoods are hoods —no matter how you dress them.

Of course, there were some playboys there, and a touch of society, and mostly what is known as "smart people." Topping them all was Freddy Stevens. Yep, Freddy—big spender, big influence. Playboy? I suppose you could call him that. Freddy had played around with murder in his day. But Freddy was leaving the room, so let's get back to the girl. She squawked all over her face, as I dug the sharp steel knife into a steak.

"Barroom brawl?" she repeated my words. "Why, this is the highest-class place in the whole resort."

"Sure, if by class you mean money," I said. "But white shirts and low-cut gowns are all the same, once the brawl starts. The liquor, kid, goes inside of you, not out."

"I'm no kid," she told me. "I thought you were a gentleman, and I asked for protection."

"Hell." I spun a nickel across the table to her. "Give police headquarters a buzz, and they'll land here with an escort." Then I shook my head. "I don't know the town very well. Maybe you'd know a cop by name who'd be safe to ride home with."

She didn't like the heavy sarcasm. She said, and there was a bitter sort of twist to her lips: "I thought you'd play the real man. But I'll sit here, anyway, and see what happens."

"Sure." I dragged the knife across the steak. "Sit there and see what happens." I leaned back for a chew and used my brain a little. Not much, you understand—just a little.

THE truth was that I had lied to the girl. I wasn't there on any vacation. I simply didn't want any special attention called to myself. Now—what was the dope? If I called the captain and asked him to remove her, why she might throw hysterics and put me in the spotlight. Good people in New York had paid me good money to be in this beautiful resort town of—well, that's private, but we'll call it Silver Sea, after the name of the hotel. It sounds romantic, but that's the ticket I'll hang on it, anyway.

I was to meet my client after I got there. He, she, or it was to turn up and declare the game open. Also, I was to make my face familiar around town. Familiar, understand—not obnoxious nor pugnacious.

Yep, I'd call the waiter and get rid of this kid, for although she was painted up like a water-lily gone mad, she was just a kid.

She saw the evening paper on the white cloth beside me, looked across the top. I read the headlines, too—

GOVERNOR GIVES THIRTY-DAY STAY TO KILLER

"See that," I told the girl. "The governor's pretty generous. Maybe, he'd give me a medal if I leaned over and wrung your neck."

"I'm going, I'm going." She half started to her feet, then sat down again. A figure cast a shadow over the table. There was a thick brown hand on her wrist. Hairy? Well, a few hairs if you like local color.

My look followed that hand up to the wrist, jumped over the dinner-jacket to the bull neck, and finally I got a good look at the man's face. No, I didn't like it—and I'm not hard to please.

"Mister," the standing, threatening wrist-grabber said to me—and he had a way of saying it that made it sound like a dirty word, "you want to be careful who you take up with. This girl has her own gent. O. K., kid, beat it along."

She didn't move. She just looked at me, neither fear nor horror in her eyes—just a disappointed kind of wonder. And then I saw her terror, as the man spoke.

"Come on. This is the night the boss dines alone with you—in his rooms." The man sneered—a trained sneer.

I spoke for the first time. I said: "You forget yourself. The young lady is my guest. I think you'd better talk to me." It was a pretty nice speech, when you think of it—a damn fine gentlemanly speech, even for the Silver Sea Hotel.

The man laughed. "If you feel that way about it, maybe I will later." He tightened his grip on the girl's wrist, for I saw his knuckles stand out. "Guys I talk to don't listen to anyone else for hours." He leaned forward a bit. "Sometimes they never listen again."

So he was tough. He wanted it that way. I shrugged my shoulders, said: "O. K.—take your hand off—"

His fingers bit into her wrist, twisted it. The girl's mouth came open. She didn't scream. The lad cut in on my half-finished sentence with: "I'd like to see you make me take—"

I suppose he was going to say, "take my hand off her wrist," or some such elegant remark. But he never reached it. It wasn't the girl now. It was me. I don't like lip. Never took it from the best of them, never would—and certainly I wouldn't take it from a lad like him.

He turned the girl's wrist viciously, and my right hand moved fast—too fast for anyone else in the room to see, for he was leaning over the edge of the booth between the girl and myself. But, as I say, my right hand moved fast, and it had a knife in it. Yep, that's right. I damned near chopped the back of his hand in half. He gave a single scream, and his hand went to his mouth. Blood ran down his shirt front. As he straightened, his jacket fell back into place and the heavy gun, I had seen in his shoulder-holster, disappeared.

The music was playing. A captain of waiters was there, and two other lads who sort of crowded the captain. They were asking questions, while the guy who had fancied himself as hard was winding a handkerchief around his hand, muttering for whisky—and looking as if he might faint.

Another lad walked quickly up and passed. But, when he passed, he took the weeping lily with him. In the meantime, the girl had folded her tent and taken a run-out powder.

THE two newcomers slid into the seat opposite me. They were pretty smooth and oily. One of them said to the captain: "All right, Tom—he simply grabbed the wrong end of the knife and—"

"But it was the back of his hand—deep into the bone," the captain objected.

"Sure." I helped the man directly across from me with his friendly act. "He used to be a contortionist in vaudeville—got the habit so bad that he always grabs knives by the back of his hand."

The stockier of the two men, who was in the far corner of the booth across from me, jerked his thumb at the captain. "Beat it along, Tom."

"Yes, sir—Mr. Trout." The captain hesitated and then said: "I don't think it's like before, sir. He never spoke to the young lady. She just sat down and—Yes, sir." The captain moved hurriedly on, and the twisted puss and jerk of the stocky man's head was enough to make him move.

Then Mr. Trout and his companion went to work like a long-experienced vaudeville team. They both threw open their jackets, showed me their artillery, snapped their jackets closed and stared hard at me. Now, imagine that! Oh, not only with me, but with any lad worth his salt. From their own disclosure, we were even up on the guns. I had two, but I wasn't showing them—not yet. When they saw mine, they'd be surprised.

The smaller baloney, who wasn't called after a fish—through some error at the time of his birth—started to speak.

"You're in for trouble, fellow," he said. "Any way you look at it, you got a bit of a ride coming. The best you can hope for is a good beating. That girl is to be laid off. Maybe she simply approached you as a stranger. But you turn out your inside pockets and your identifications—auto license, business, any letters of any kind that will identify you and save your life. We got to know who you are."

I took a grin—I couldn't help it. I said: "So at last I've fallen into the hands of the Rover Boys. I got a license that might identify me, but it's a New York license—private detective."

Both their hands shot beneath their left lapels; both their necks stretched; both their eyes popped. The big one said: "Get up and get going. It's the one-way ride for you."

I did get up and I did get going. Me, Race Williams—taking lip all over the place! I just stood on my feet and said: "Why, damn it to hell! Who do you two yellow rats think you are? Who have you been playing with? And what is the Silver Sea Hotel—a dump run for cheap hoods? The name on that license is Williams—Race Williams." This last, as I chucked out my right hand and damned near knocked the fish-named gent's head through the back of the partition.

Tough guys? Why, the other lad was trying for an out! Yet, he had his hand on his gun when I cracked him. His skull opened up in the back of his head. The face in front of that head hit the floor, and he skidded toward the dance floor.

My guns were back in twin holsters, but I was still on my feet. I was damn good and mad. A dame sits down at my table and back-room gunmen come into the front room and tell me what's what. I was ready now, if there was any more. This time I'd blast the roof off the place. I'm an easy-going lad, but too much is plenty.

This time things were not entirely hidden from the other guests. The one lad, who slipped under the table, was hidden all right, but the other guy had slid on his face between two tables and was out near the edge of the dance.

CHAPTER TWO

A High-Class Rat

I'LL give the management credit for efficient work. It was almost as if they had been ready and waiting. Waiters, near the door, moved quickly. The

man on the floor was grabbed up, carted back through the service entrance. The man under the table was dragged erect and escorted to the same door. Escorted was right. His feet were on the floor, but he wasn't using them.

A soft voice spoke in my ear. "Efficient service—eh, what, sir? That's right, Race. Joe Fitzgerald." Before I could question the former New York cop, he went on: "Left the force six years ago, been with this outfit ever since. I don't mean the Silver Sea Hotel—that's only been open a few months. I'm with the chain that runs it back in Chicago." When I just looked at him, he asked: "You're not going to proffer charges are you? That doesn't sound like you."

"House dick, eh?" I looked at Fitz—big, good-natured, tough as nails. "Could you make an arrest here in this town?"

He took my arm, and we started to the door. "I could arrest you. But, instead, we'll have a little talk in my private office. Thanks for the break, Race."

"What break?"

"Why, your kind and gentlemanly behavior. Up in the big town, you used to shoot them full of holes."

"Not that kind." I squeezed Fitz' arm and pretended not to notice him wince—nor did I crack wise about his limp. I might have guessed there was some good reason for Fitz leaving the old city at his age.

Fitz put his feet on the desk, much like the precinct captain he might have been if he had stayed on the force, lit himself a cigar while I killed a butt, read the short note on his desk and turned to me. "O. K., Race. Let's have it."

I shrugged my shoulders. "A row over a woman. She sat down at my table. I'm on a vacation, and didn't like it. Others didn't like it. And then"—yes, I laughed now when I thought of it—"the Rover Boys came over and talked about taking me for a ride."

"Are you actually down here on a vacation?"

"Up until a few minutes ago." I didn't exactly lie to him.

"Fine." He let his feet come off the desk—rather slowly, easily. "Can I tell that to anyone I wish?"

"Sure." I nodded. "You can put it on the front pages. Then you can read it to those two guys I put to sleep."

"One of them—the man you crashed across the floor—may sleep forever." He frowned.

"It's a good town." I shrugged. "I'll pay for my fun, if I have to."

He nodded, squinted, leaned forward, and his voice was very serious. "I heard there was trouble, saw it was you, planned to break up the party—then you did it for me. Now, who was the woman—the girl who sat down with you?"

The seriousness of his voice impressed me. But I told him the truth this time. "I never saw her before in my life. I don't know who she was."

He leaned heavily on the desk. "Can I tell that to anyone I wish?"

"Fitz, you can have posters made and pasted up all over town," I said. "I don't understand, and—"

"Fine, fine." He rubbed his hands together. "I thought, Race, that maybe you were in for a mess of trouble. Sure, it was easy for you to handle those hoods. But that girl is a friend—or maybe under the protection of—or maybe—"

"Threatened by—" I yawned.

"Maybe." He was very grave. "But the man is Freddy Stevens, and even you wouldn't want to step on his toes."

I WAS surprised, but I don't think I showed it. No, this wasn't the time to get mixed up with Freddy Stevens, nor any other time—that is, for any other guy but me.

When I didn't answer, Fitz showed his store-teeth. "So there's the story, Race. I had a phone call just before you came in. It was from Stevens' room. He wants to see you right away—and *wants* is orders with him."

"With him—not me. Remember, stepping on a guy's toes and emptying a gun in his belly are two different things. At least, the medical-examiner always says so."

Fitz laughed. It wasn't unpleasant, maybe not uneasy—at least not too uneasy.

"Same old Race," he said. "Always sticking your face into trouble—inviting some guy to shoot it off for you. So far, lots of luck. Freddy's not a bad boy—not in this town in winter. It won't cost you a cent to see him. He'll remember you. On your way up, I'll buzz him that you're in the clear. He'll take my word." As I nodded and started to leave, he invited: "Why not stop at this hotel, Race? It's the best place in town." He picked up the phone. "You'll have about the best rooms in the house—and not a nickel more than a single room. How about the Princess Suite?"

"Now, ain't that just too nice," I said sarcastically—thought of the no extra charge and changed my tune. "The Princess Suite it is, and you can write Race Williams all over your register."

"Race Williams it is." He nodded at me, by the door. "Freddy Stevens has Suite B over by the ocean end. And, Race, you won't find your name in the papers about the little fun in the main ballroom."

"Main brawlroom is right." I let the door do its stuff behind me.

I went into the bar, did myself a quick one, pocketed a flask, and, sauntering leisurely out, nailed an elevator and spun up to see Freddy Stevens.

FREDDY was smooth, well-kept physically, alert mentally. He was well past thirty, which, if a long time in the fight game, is a ripe old age in the racket. Doctors hadn't dug more than half a dozen slugs out of his body. Freddy had had luck. Friendships lasted just so long in the racket, and he knew it. He knew it well enough to shoot a friend in the back first—before that friend became his enemy.

Freddy had come through a hard school—a political school. He not only could use a gun fast, but he did not hesitate about using it. Greed and Death were the lords of his world—the desire and fear of crooked politicians. Freddy satisfied both. He paid his debts quickly. Money and Murder put him where he was today.

He didn't get up, when I came into the room. He half started to, then decided against it. He jerked a thumb toward an over-stuffed chair, spoke to his valet who opened the door.

"Bring us a couple more tall ones." He looked at me. "Both rye." When the man left the room, he said: "It's a long time since we met, Race. I went too high for your kind."

"That's right," I agreed with him. "The last time we met, you came into a dive in downtown Manhattan. You were looking for me with a gun." As he jerked his foot off the chair and placed it on the floor, I said: "Remember? They dug a couple of bullets out of your chest."

"Yeah." He nodded. "I remember. The man with me was dead."

"Sure—dead. I often wondered why your boys never bothered me."

He took another jump at that one. I had knocked over one of his boys within a week, and, within a month after he was out of the hospital, sent three others into it. After that, Freddy took a leap up the ladder and left me alone.

The man brought the whisky, ice with it. He attended to Freddy first, then came to me—ice held in a silver pail, club soda on a tray. I never batted an eye. I just tossed the contents of my glass over in the corner, wiped the glass clean with my handkerchief, lifted my own flask from my hip, used the ice and club soda and mixed myself a hooker.

"Thanks, buddy." I shoved the tray away. "Never drink strange liquor."

When the man left, Freddy said: "I wouldn't think you'd want me for an enemy, Race."

"Neither an enemy nor a friend."

Freddy Stevens was watching me closely now. Freddy wasn't any hood like the lads below, but then I'd rather talk with high-class talent. It keeps a lad alert.

I stifled a yawn. "I've got nothing personal against you, Freddy, but I wouldn't object to watching you roast."

His face set very hard. Then his lips twisted, and his teeth showed. I guess he was smiling. I guess it was meant to be pleasant, but I wasn't certain. He said: "Fitz gave me a good report on you, but I ordered you up here to verify it in person."

I may have reddened slightly, but I didn't change my expression when I answered that one. "No one orders me anyplace—not even a high-class rat like you."

He opened his mouth then, and I think he laughed. Anyway, he said: "You haven't changed much—but remember I have. No, Williams, I guess you're not on my heels. If I thought you were, you'd be dead before you ever left this room."

"Don't tell me those bad boys in the dining-room have come around again."

He frowned, let the wrinkles run in and out of his forehead.

"Local talent, Race. A man has to play along with them," he said. "Now, I sort of believe Fitz, but, in case I'm wrong and you intend to bring unpleasant odors into this little town, I'm going to warn you." He held out his hand, cupped it. "I've got the police like that. Even this local criminal talent wouldn't mind putting a shot in your back. But, if the thing comes to the worst, my business here is important enough to kill you, myself." His right hand ran suggestively toward his left armpit.

"There isn't one cent in this thing for me," I said. "I never killed a man for fun before. I know you well enough to know you make good on threats. One more threat—and I do a killing under the head of pleasure. I know exactly how fast you are with a gun. Move that right hand of yours a fraction of an inch further beneath your jacket—and I'll blow a hole in your face that will positively amaze you."

FREDDY wasn't a hard guy to talk to. He had heard what I said. He knew what I meant—that I spoke the truth. His hand dropped. And Freddy was right—he was listening to gospel. He looked at me a long moment, before he spoke.

"So that's the way you feel about it? O. K., I'll put it this way." He stood flat-footed, hands on hips, eyes straight on mine. "I'm making it orders. If you're here after breakfast—say, after ten tomorrow morning—your number goes up. You'll be shot at the first opportunity that presents itself before darkness falls."

"And if no opportunity presents itself before darkness?"

"Then you'll be killed, anyway—opportunity or no opportunity," he said very slowly.

I gave him straight talk now. "If I believed you, Freddy, I'd shoot you dead now—right here in this room." When his eyebrows went up, I added: "I could think up a hundred reasons for doing it, before the cops reached the door."

"You won't leave town?" he said.

"No, I won't leave town."

"Forget it, then." He put a hand on my shoulder. "What Fitz says goes. I make no threats—nothing against you. I just wanted to be sure you had nothing on your mind about me. There's the kid, of course—the girl. You'll lay off her."

"In a big way," I told him. "She's rather young, Freddy."

"They grow up fast." He pinched my arm.

"Isn't she a little on the classy side for you?"

"Not me—now." He wasn't sure of my crack. "But I'll have to have your word not to see her again."

I looked at him very seriously. I was thinking of all the trouble she had caused me. I said: "She's adorable—but for you, Freddy." At the door, in pretended puzzlement, I added: "Of course, there must be something in her, for you to like her. If I should fall heavy for her, I'll give you a buzz."

"Fine, fine. I won't bother you, Race—but remember about the girl. She'd be bad for your health, if you were ever even seen talking to her."

"For my health?"

"Sure—dead guys aren't healthy." He laughed over that crack, as if it would go down in history. No, Freddy didn't have much sense of humor. But he could enjoy his own jokes, anyway.

I left him, went downstairs, hit the grill this time and ordered up another steak. They certainly could turn out steaks in the Silver Sea Hotel, and I certainly could eat them. One thing I was sure of. Any guys across from me this time, and I'd shoot them right through the head—and finish my meal. The French-fried potatoes weren't bad, either, and I've tasted worse ale.

CHAPTER THREE

A Guy in Brass Buttons

I HAD a good meal—all but for the hard-pussed gent who kept looking at me. Well, he was not hard—just weather-beaten, maybe. He wasn't so old, but he had stuck his face in the Southern sun for too long.

I went upstairs, bummed around the lobby a bit, then, hopping an elevator and dangling my key, shot above. The key worked, the lock turned, and I found the light-button. A narrow hall, a larger sort of outer hall, and there was my living room. Princess Suite was right—all but the princess.

I trusted Fitz, but I'm a careful man. I looked behind the couch, sort of peeked through the curtains at the fire-escape, then, eying the entire room, passed into my bedroom. I saw the closet. I nearly

tripped over my baggage as I walked toward it. Then I stopped—just stopped—but didn't listen. This suite had a bell on the entrance door. It went off with what might be called a refined buzz.

Don't ask me now—don't ask me later—but there was something that got me about that closet. It was shut tight, the key hanging as if it had been slammed shut. I opened that door, started to close it, decided that wouldn't do, and, stepping back, caught the man as he fell out. I balanced him, so, a minute, saw that his skull had been cracked in from the back of his head, and, lifting his chin, saw his face. There was no mistake about it at all. He was one of the Rover Boys—the lad who had done his nose-dive across the dance floor.

I was holding him like that, trying to think it out, when the bell rang again. Also, this time, someone made monkeys out of that thick door with his knuckles.

One thing was certain. That dead body didn't belong in my room. It could make a lot of trouble. It would be easy to shove it back into the closet again, but hard to explain or look surprised about when he bounced himself out in somebody else's arms.

The man was dead, all right. That it wasn't from the wallop I gave him was certain. What to do now?

I simply dragged the corpse to the window, looked down at the darkness some seventeen stories below, and then—oh, it may be brutal and all that, but why beat around a stiff? I just lifted him up and chucked him out.

There was no blood on the floor or in the closet. I turned back through the bedroom, and heard the main door to my apartment open, just as I entered the living-room.

I saw the frightened face of a bell-hop who must have brought the key—and yes, by God, the corrugated face of the sun-kissed South that had been in the grill. It was a little harder now, a little more determined as he waved away the bell-hop and laid his glowering glims on me. There was another difference in him. He was dressed in blue—gold buttons and braid—and he wasn't a conductor, either.

"Mister, I'm Raymond Hatter, chief of police of Silver Sea," he said, holding a hunk of bright tin in his hand. And when I let that slip off, he added: "I've come to search this—these rooms. What are you hiding in that bedroom?"

I stuck broad shoulders into that bedroom entrance and said calmly: "Nothing much, Chief—just a dead man in my closet."

DID it throw him! I thought he'd do a back handspring—and, what's more, I had his number. He knew what he was looking for, but didn't know that I did, too. He was just going to open that closet door and holler, "Surprise!" and hand me a little present of a pair of handcuffs.

I didn't give him a chance to recover; I talked first. "Chief of police, eh? Where's your warrant to search my rooms? Come, you know you can't come in here without a piece of paper. And listen, brother, the name is Williams—Race Williams." As he struggled desperately at a hip pocket, I went on: "You need a search warrant for these rooms. You evidently need another search warrant to find your gun. Furthermore"—I was walking close to him now—"if you drag out that toy cannon, I'll lay a bunch of lead bullets into your pretty blue uniform that will rattle like poker dice every time you hiccough. Oh, hello, Fitz."

The house dick, Fitzgerald, walked into the room, while the chief puffed. Then the chief let himself go. But he took it all out on Fitz—the body in the closet and everything. "Why he even says the body is there—ask him his own self."

Fitz shook his head at me. "Well," was all he said, but I didn't like it over much.

"Ask him what he was looking for, in the beginning. The body was my own idea." I watched the chief closely.

"I had an anonymous note about it—the fight in the dining-room, everything." The chief began to toss out his chest now. "I know of this man, Williams. His reputation back in New York City is none too good—indeed, bad."

Things didn't seem so funny under Fitz' hard eyes, so I eased him down. I said: "My corpse story was just a gag."

"You'll never grow up, Race," Fitz said without much humor. "The chief may search the place—the law provides that the landlord, or the landlord's agents—" He looked suddenly at me. "You don't object?" It was as if he sensed something was wrong.

"Not at all, if it's legal." I moved from before the door. "And you might tell the chief, Fitz, that anything he finds he must leave in the custody of the hotel. Then, if it isn't claimed in thirty days—" I turned toward the now open closet door. "By God," I said. "Look at him Fitz. He's lost something—not found it."

The chief closed the closet, coughed, pulled his pan into queer shapes, spent a couple of minutes trying to get it back in shape—which wasn't really worth the effort—and, finally, as we passed into the living-room again, turned on me.

"Very well, Williams," he said. "You've made a nasty name for yourself right here in this hotel, almost from the moment you arrived. Things are never kept quiet from me. One of the men you struck may die. This time I don't need Fitz. I'm taking you along—quietly, I hope—for attempted murder."

"Hell," I told him, "those lads threatened me, pulled guns." I leaned forward. "Chief, I come from the big city. They play politics just as dirty there. This is nothing new to me." I walked straight up to him and maybe twisted my pan a bit. "I'm not going with you—so what?"

He seemed surprised again, and Fitz a little annoyed. I went on talking. I know my way about and I know that the law is only as good as the men who are paid to enforce it.

"Now, you don't know what to do. You want to make an arrest but you can't." My finger pounded his chest. "The boys would have trouble explaining your attempted arrest of me and your death. A crooked cop has privileges and can get away with things a crooked crook can't. But don't forget—they bury them both just as deep."

"God, Race." Fitz was in on the show now. "You don't know what you're saying."

"I know—and the chief knows." I gave it to Fitz straight. "Look at his face. He—"

Then I stopped. A boy ran into the room, eyes wide, ablaze. He stuttered, when he spoke to Fitz. "Mr. Fitzgerald, it's—it's terrible. A man jumped from one of the windows and is—I think they tossed a sheet over him."

Fitz' eyes widened; his lips moved as he cursed. Big hotels don't like window-jumpers, and managers have an idea that a house detective should know everything—even to being under the window to catch them in his hat.

"The Silver Sea Hotel," Fitz said to the chief. "Remember, its influence, the bad impression this will make, coming from the largest and best in town— All right, son—I'm coming." Fitz followed the boy from the room.

THE chief coughed from behind his hand, said: "Williams, my man, we can't afford notorious characters and riff-raff in this winter resort. But, as Fitz

said, the hotel and the taxpayers can't afford scandal, either. You've got until ten o'clock tomorrow morning to leave town."

"The time sounds familiar," I said.

"It should, to you. Let me assure you. Mr. Williams, that you will be surprised at the efficiency of our little force—and with what dispatch we handle undesirable characters."

We were getting somewhere. The chief was full of his own baloney before and now someone else's baloney. I know real talk when I hear it. The chief meant what he said, or hoped that he did. I pulled a letter from my pocket, walked over to the phone, motioned the chief to wait.

"Get me Mr. Bertman Simonds at his home," I said to the girl. "Yes, I'll hold the wire. Tell him Mr. Williams is calling. Of course, I mean the lawyer."

"Bert Simonds—you know him?" The chief didn't sound so cocky. I know his type of grafter—do crooked work for too many different people, and, if they run together, gets himself in a jam.

I raised my hand for silence, waited and then spoke to the voice I had never heard before.

"Race Williams, Bert," I said easily. "Oh, I've been in town a day or two. No business—not a thing . . . But the chief of police wants to run me out of town . . . That's right—nothing to do with me. I guess he's got his hand in the city strongbox and thinks I've come down here to pry it out empty . . . No, I just want to know how I stand, and if you can find enough in his past to get me an acquittal, if I—"

The excited interruption by Mr. Simonds didn't bother me. The chief had grabbed the phone. Sometimes he talked, but most of the time he listened. He simply added, "But, Mr. Simonds," and, "Why, I had no such idea," and later, "I didn't know he was a client of yours."

He put down the phone and turned to me. "You make some preparation when you go on a vacation."

"You said it," I told him. "I'll be seeing you after ten tomorrow."

"Of course—of course. Any friend of Simonds' is a friend of mine." He looked puzzled and, yes—he looked frightened, too.

I laughed, patted the chief on the back. "You and the boys—at least, one boy—have got me wrong. I'm not down here to correct the city evils. But if temptation grips your noble heart, Simonds could rake up enough in your past to fill a couple of ledgers. But take what's coming to you, Chief. I won't even want a ten-percent cut."

He clowned around a bit on that one, but was coming to when I led him to the hall. I said: "There's a dice game in Room Three-forty-seven. Three-forty-seven. It should be good for a couple of hundred. That's your stuff, Chief—stick to it."

He said something about running the town, and either swung his hand against his chest by mistake or meant it. But just before he left, he asked me: "Room Three-forty-seven, did you say?"

CHAPTER FOUR

Louey Loiters too Long

THE door had closed, and I was turning back to the living-room—when I stopped dead. I had been through that whole suite, except the bathroom. This man must have been behind the curtain in the foyer hall. He must have trotted in behind the excited bell-boy, or when Fitz, the house dick, left—or had he come with the chief?

When I first felt the gun against my back it was in my mind to drop, twist and fire. It seemed a cinch against this local talent. Then the man with the gun spoke.

"Reach," was all he said. No threats of

sudden death, no curses. I wasn't dealing with the Rover Boys now. I was dealing with big stuff—big killing. This lad came off the avenues back in New York. What's more, he was class. I know the boys. I know when they mean it and when they are playing at being gunmen. From this lad, "Reach," meant one of two things—reach or die.

I reached.

"O.K., Race," the voice said, and it had a familiar ring, but, then, I must have known every tough baby from the big town. "Now, turn and take a look at me—Louis Prince."

I turned and took a look at the guy. It was Louey Prinaci, but he had taken the name of Louis Prince. A skunk by any other name would smell as bad. I had to admit that Louey didn't look too awful in his evening clothes. He was facing sure death if he made a wrong move, and he knew it. Louey had a gun in his hand that could smack lead right through my middle and tear a hole in the wall beyond. In one way, Louey was like me. He had a gun and was willing to use it.

I faced him, hands high, said: "I've just had a talk with Freddy. Things are Jake."

"Yeah." He nodded his round head. "Jake for Freddy—not for you. Oh, I guess we don't care much about your chucking the stiff out the window. I guess no one will know where he came from or what killed him. It was hard rock below, and he parked himself almost directly under your window . . . Don't move a hand, or I'll blow a hole in your stomach."

"Listen, Louey," I told him. "You know I won't take it lying down. I'll go for a gun—maybe use it."

"Not use it." He shook his head. "Practically soundproof, this shack—built for killing. If you talk nice—and the truth—why I'll back out. There'll be no more trouble."

My lips curled. "You'd never stick that rod on me, unless you were on the kill. You haven't got the guts to walk the streets, afterward. A little bar, Louey—a little argument. You reach for a rod—and 'bing', like that, you go out. Guys don't threaten my life and then walk around natural."

Louey paled slightly. The gun stiffened in his hand. He said: "O.K., Williams, you're right."

I believed that, but I watched him carefully. "O.K., to you," I mimicked him. "What's the trouble?"

"You lied to Freddy about the girl. She's in that bedroom now." He jerked his chin toward the empty bedroom behind me, and, when I started to shake my head, said: "It's no use, Williams—I saw her come in."

"She's not here. I never met her before in my life. I told Freddy the truth." I saw it coming—the glare in his eyes, the slight raise of his gun.

"Right smack in the belly, Race. Guys, with lead—"

And the thing came—a flying bundle of arms, legs and body. Stockinged feet crossed the room from the bathroom, though neither of us saw her nor heard her. Then she was on me, both her arms about my neck.

"Don't, Louis," she cried out. "Freddy won't—"

That's as far as she got. Louey was quite evidently no ladies' man. His mouth set, finger tightened, and his gun roared.

But the girl had done the trick. Her hurtling body had thrown me off balance. Wood split someplace to my left, plaster crashed to the floor. I dug with my right hand and almost broke the little lady's neck with my left.

THERE are few people who get two shots at me, but Louey did. He didn't care if he killed the girl or not, and it isn't my code to crouch behind a

woman for protection—at least, a girl who was there for the purpose of protecting me.

I don't know what came over Louey. He was a good shot, yet seemed to stumble over his own feet, and his eyes weren't bright anymore. They had the hope to kill in them—not the lust. He had a shot coming. He knew that, but he knew something else. My gun was crossing over the girl's head, and it was crossing fast. There was fear in Louey's eyes—and in his hand, too, for I saw it waver.

Sure, Louey had a shot—at least he had the chance to press the trigger once more—and opportunities seldom come to guys like Louey to take an extra shot at me.

The shot came. The girl crashed to the floor. He had killed the girl—the girl who saved my life.

He didn't shoot again—not Louey. I pounded a hunk of lead into his chest that sent him dancing like a marionette. Sure, Louey fired again—wildly, blindly. I hadn't given the kid a break downstairs in the grill, when she asked for it. That was what bit deep.

Now, I was standing flat-footed, a gun in each hand. I claim I never get mad. I'll claim I wasn't mad, then. But I didn't like Louey, and I didn't like him any better when he was dead than when he was alive. Yes, he was dead. I know, because I've seen a lot of dead men. But I don't remember seeing many deader than Louey. I knew I might as well finish things up and get out of that hotel. I wouldn't be much good to my mysterious client now. But as long as I had started things rolling, I'd go all the way with it.

I DIDN'T look at the girl—couldn't. I had just seen and heard her body pound to the ground. She was lying there, a pitiful little heap now. I almost had to step over her body when I picked up the phone. I was surprised at the sound of my own voice, the tremor in it. I'd have been dead, if it wasn't for that kid.

I got Freddy Stevens' number and I got Freddy. I gave it to him straight. "We had a talk, Freddy—and you tried to double-cross me. You sent Louey here to get me."

For once, Freddy wanted time to think. If I was calling up, he'd wonder what had happened to Louey, and what's more he'd make a damn good guess. When I didn't answer his "Well," because the words choked in my throat, he said: "You didn't play fair with me, Race. What happened?"

"Louey killed the girl—" I began.

He cut in: "He wouldn't dare—not yet, anyway."

I didn't get the "not yet," then. I wasn't interested in it. I gave Freddy the truth. "Louey killed the girl," I repeated. "I killed Louey." I set my teeth tightly. "The girl saved my life. I'm going to play fair now, Freddy. If you're man enough to stick in your rooms, I'm coming down and empty the rest of two guns in your chest." Then I banged up the receiver.

I heard him holler, "Listen, Race!" but I didn't listen. Did I mean what I said? The answer is 'yes'. Hot-headed or foolish? No, I didn't see it that way. You could go back over Freddy's record and make up a good story with a good lawyer—I mean a bad lawyer who was good.

The girl was dead. That showed murder. I had a bullet-crash along the fleshy part of my body. It wasn't bad, but it was evidence of intent to kill. The association of the two wouldn't be hard to prove. Besides the debt I owed the kid on the floor there, I'd have to count on Freddy hiring every gunman back in the city to knock me over. No, it might not be a nice parlor-room argument. But Freddy certainly needed a bit of killing.

The phone rang. I hesitated, lifted it.

I froze there, my hand on the receiver—froze there because I nearly shot someone to death. No one slips up on me like that and— Soft feet, they were—shoeless feet. Yep, it was the girl who gripped my hand, held hers over the mouthpiece, whispered to me: "I wasn't hit at all, Race. I just dropped there—like that. I wanted to see what you'd do."

CHAPTER FIVE

Girl on the Spot

A DOOR opened and closed—my main door. I dropped back the phone, stuck a gun in a jacket pocket and pushed it forward. So what? Soundproof, eh? That lad's feet echoed down the hall, as if he might be on pleasure bent. Then he turned and entered the living-room. Both his hands hung by his sides, with both palms facing front. Freddy Stevens spoke the moment he entered the room.

"The death of that girl will cost me a fortune and—" He stopped. His eyes goggled, his mouth hung open—then he smiled, rubbed his hands together, said: "Wanted me to run out with that lie about the girl's death? Nice work, boy—nice work. The little lady lives on. I'm so glad nothing happened to Charlotte."

I pulled the gun out of my pocket, tapped it against my left palm, looked him in the eye, squinted a bit and said: "You've come to get it—in a soundproof room."

"Not me, Race—Not me. I'm no Louey Prince. The chief of police, an assistant manager, and your old friend, Sergeant Fitzgerald, searched me before I came in. They're in the hall now. It will be murder—and honest witnesses—even if you eliminate the chief." Ignoring my gun and looking down at the floor, he said: "So that's how Louis got it." He turned the body over. "Got it plenty, too." He prodded the dead Louey in the side, with his foot. "The stupid young rascal." He made clicking sounds with his tongue. "You killed him almost the very way he said you'd die."

I jerked a thumb toward the outer hall. "Boys wise?"

"No, no." He slapped his hands together. "There's no reason why they should be. You were never one to play with the cops, Race—nor me, either. You can't just keep throwing bodies out the window. Yes, I know. I had that other one planted in your closet just to mix things up for you and get the chief to arrest you. Had no idea then you'd get so deep into this thing." He stuck his foot against his dead friend again. "Suppose you let me take care of this body." He looked at the girl. "Hers, too. Both the dead and the living go out of your life tonight."

"You can get rid of him—in this hotel?"

Freddy nodded. "Sure. He'll never be missed, and the hotel will be pleased to have your hurtling body a suicide. Fitzgerald, your friend, won't have any reason to say otherwise. As for the coroner, well—I didn't get a look at the body, but they tell me it's a mess."

"And the girl—Charlotte?" I looked at her. The name didn't seem to fit that pert little intelligent face. "What of her?"

"Mrs. Whitlock is going to marry a very dear friend of mine," he said slowly. "You understand, Williams. I'm not a marrying man, myself." He turned hard eyes on the girl now. "There is no reason you shouldn't have a lot of fun out of life, Charlotte. The first time I saw you, I was agreeably surprised—so, be sure that I continue to appreciate you. Come." He stepped forward and took her arm, then he let go that arm as I rocked him back on his heels with a sweep of my left arm.

"You attend to the dead, Mr. Freddy

Stevens," I said. "I'll take care of the living."

FREDDY put a thumb beneath his collar, as his face grew red, then he straightened his tie, tried, or perhaps actually did succeed in hiding his anger. "Still from the gutter, eh Williams? Well, I've stepped onto the curb. Suppose we let the dear little lady decide for herself." He said to the girl: "Come—or stay. Stay—and I'm through, and you're finished."

There was fear in the girl's eyes. She said in a very low voice: "What must I do now?"

He grinned evilly. "Nothing that a nice girl, who has killed in cold blood, wouldn't do for the man who is keeping that fact a secret—who has even prepared every bit of evidence to prove that she didn't do it. Confused, eh? Well, well, child. Come along, and I'll explain it all to you."

"You don't have to go with him, kid," I said. "You—"

She pushed by me and took the arm he extended toward her. The look in her eyes was terrible—and I mean terrible. Stark terror. I even saw it on her forehead—cold beads of perspiration.

"I want to go," she said. When I stepped forward and Stevens gripped her arm and started toward the door, she added: "I have to go."

"That's right," Freddy smiled at me. "She has to go. So long, Race. Just give me a buzz, say things are O. K., and before Christmas you'll find plenty money in your pocket." Losing some of the softness of his speech, he said to the girl: "Get going! I ought to slam all your teeth down your throat."

The powerful and dignified Freddy Stevens did a top-spinning act. That's right. I grabbed him and twirled him. He wound up against a chair, would have sat down in it, only he hit the back of it. He thudded to a sitting position on the floor, right beside the dead Louey.

"You're taking orders from me, kid," I told her, as I walked quickly to the door and opened it. Then I shut it kind of tight, as I saw the lads down the hall. I whispered the rest to the girl, as Fitzgerald started along the hall toward me: "You beat it, Charlotte. Stay right in the lobby. I'll stick around there, rather than upstairs. We'll have to talk."

"But you're on a vacation and—"

"You're my vacation, from now on." I left out her name. Charlotte didn't fit her at all. "Women don't often save my life."

She skipped down to the other end of the hall, as Fitz came over.

"Hi, Race," he said, but there was a nervousness in his voice. He went on, while I blocked the doorway: "Freddy Stevens was nervous about going into your apartment. I'd like—"

"Oh, that's all right." Freddy stepped out into the hall. "I'll be seeing you some more, Race. After all, we're both on vacation." He laughed heartily. "John Law and John Lawless." He added suddenly: "Oh, there was one thing I wanted to ask you about." He pushed me back into my apartment, said huskily: "No matter how we work out together—do you want that body off your hands?"

I didn't give much thought to that. It seemed a good idea. Bodies are, to say the least, unpleasant to explain.

"It's yours for the asking, Freddy. Help yourself, any time." I let my voice raise, as Fitzgerald stuck his head in at us. Then I slipped the key into Freddy's hand, and we both stepped out into the hall.

"I want to talk to you, Race," Fitz said, and half pushed me back again.

"That's the ticket, Fitz—we'll use your office." I led him toward the elevators. "Things are kind of busy for me tonight."

"That's right." He nodded. "So you still don't know who the woman is?"

I punched him in the ribs, as an elevator door opened. "Sure, Freddy introduced us."

"I see." Fitz smiled. But he didn't say any more.

That was the first time I noticed that Freddy Stevens was right with us. But he didn't enter our car.

WHEN we two were in Fitz' office, his good-natured face took on a worried expression. "I'm for you, Race—all the way. You know that. But—" He walked to the window, pulled the shade down, sat with his back to it. "I'm nearly tops in the hotel business. Got an offer from the biggest hotel back in New York. So, I'm a cop first and a friend afterward—maybe both. That girl you were with has a name outside on the register. It's the name of a lady who was once suspected of murder. Haughty, proud, cold—from the best family in Chicago. I was head house dick at the Fulton there at the time. She married, because her family were socially big, economically low. Do I interest you?"

"Sure," I nodded. "She seems a little young for a bad break."

"Young or old—the break was bad," Fitz smiled. "It was open scandal that her wealthy broker husband beat her, humiliated her before the servants, and even brought his repulsive secretary into the house to—well, he left him there days to watch her—and even to make love to her. He was determined to break her spirit, force her into a divorce—or perhaps insanity."

"What the hell did he marry her for—just to abuse her?"

"Perhaps." Fitz was very serious. "The warped reasons of men are hard to understand. I believe the agreement of marriage was that she was only to be a window-dressing. His courtship was perfect, to the outside world. Her name, her people helped his business. It seemed a most satisfactory arrangement. I guess they are made every day in our great financial life. But it was openly known around the clubs that he had married an iceberg. He didn't like it. He couldn't melt her, so he decided to destroy her. I used to see her at the fashionable gatherings at the Fulton Hotel. Sometimes, I knew that he had shortly before abused her. But she was the winner—head high, carriage proud, erect, eyes direct and cold."

"And she killed him?"

"Wait," Fitz said. "He was shot to death, all right. Shot with a gun she had bought. Shot at a time when the servants declared they heard her voice raised loudly in that library. Shot within three days after a servant had heard her say, 'That's the last time, Cornelius. The next time you lay a hand on me before this man—I'll kill you.'

"Now, the man in the room was the secretary. The servants saw him leave the house, but they didn't see the wife either enter or leave. They didn't hear the shot because they went below when they heard the voices in the library. They used to hear her moaning in the library after his brutal beatings. They went below because they didn't—couldn't—stand it."

"It looks as if he deserved to get it."

"I suppose so," Fitz agreed. "But he was shot twice—right through the head. He had no weapon and no chance. The wife could not be found the next morning, when the murder was discovered. And here's the trick. She admitted she bought the gun, but said she kept it only to frighten the annoying secretary who seemed to have the husband's consent at least to compromise the wife."

"And she beat the trial?"

"There was no trial. A politician, a

man-about-town, a very wealthy, very society woman, and a city official swore to being with her in New York at the time of the murder. Before those alibis could even be checked, the secretary jumped out a window of the Fulton Hotel, smashed himself up on the sidewalk. In his pocket was found a letter. It was simple and direct. It said that, from the purpose of tormenting the woman, he had started to pity—then love her. So he freed her from the 'monster,' killed her husband."

"Then he jumped out a window."

"Yeah—jumped out a window," Fitz repeated my words. "He jumped maybe like your man tonight—thrown from the window. Fortunately, in your case, the dead man had a room three floors below you. But, in the secretary's case, the secretary wasn't even registered at the Fulton Hotel in Chicago. But the authorities agreed, after finding his suicide note, that he must have jumped from a vacant room. Yet, if you traced the course of his body upward, he might have jumped from the room of Adolf Muir. That's right. Muir—Freddy Stevens' associate. But there was nothing to connect him with the murder of Cornelius Whitlock, at the time. Now, Adolf Muir has just arrived at this hotel. Is that your case?"

"On the level, Fitz, it isn't," I said. "Or it wasn't when I first met you."

FITZ wound up now: "There was just one more thing. Freddy Stevens was in Chicago, shortly after the murder, but before it was discovered. I don't think he ever met the wife, or the husband who was killed. But I saw him meet the secretary in the hotel lobby. Not greet each other, understand. But they both leaned over the rail and looked at the scale model of the *Queen Mary*. They looked for half an hour—and their lips moved. Now, he's down here."

"You think it's blackmail of some kind?"

Fitz set his lips firmly, said: "That will was probated. The courts are slow, but I believe the widow gets her money next week—or has it now. I believe that Freddy wants all of it."

"Hell," I said. "The thing is open and shut, and—"

"Open—not shut. I took a little trouble, Race. The society woman, and the prominent honest men, who alibied the woman, all have done Freddy Stevens a turn now and then—probably all had to. The frailties and the morals of the rich are the living of some racketeers."

"How about the secretary of the high jump? He loved the wife that much?"

"I knew him. Love wouldn't fit in with him. His face, his life—everything about him was greed. He was—well, maybe he was tossed from that window."

"But the confession. They identified the handwriting all right?"

"Yes, it was his writing. A short note—distorted, perhaps—which the experts put down to excitement. But all the experts agreed that he wrote and signed the note."

"Then how could Freddy Stevens profit now?"

"I don't know." He shrugged his shoulders. "I never gave the case a thought again—until I saw Freddy Stevens here, and you on the job."

"Why think I was in it? I told you I wasn't."

"But"—and he looked steadily at me—"you telephoned the shrewdest and most influential lawyer in the city from your room tonight. A short time ago, Mrs.—er, the widow—engaged him. Don't frown. The chief told me about the call."

"Listen, Fitz." I gave him the truth. "Be a good boy. Someone dumped a load of jack in my lap up in the city. It came through this lawyer, Simonds. I was told

to wait here until I was needed, but, if anything went wrong, I was to call Mr. Simonds and he'd fix it. So, believe me—I haven't any client yet, except that girl who—"

Fitz cut in: "You'd be surprised if you knew the name of the woman you were with tonight—the woman who sought your protection."

"Not me." I laughed. "I told you Freddy Stevens introduced me. So I know."

"No." He grinned. "You don't know. But I'll tell you. She is—"

If he said more, I didn't hear it, then. I saw the shade move behind his back. A gun showed, steadied, aimed. A roar—in fact, three roars—sounded as I shot from either side of Fitz's head.

Then came silence. Two tiny holes showed in the shade, about the width apart of a normal-sized man's head. I stared into the glassy eyes of Fitz, who had an offer to take over one of the biggest hotels in New York—Fitz, who toppled suddenly forward and fell to the floor.

CHAPTER SIX

A Man to Rub Out

I OPENED the door, as they tried to crash it—a youngish man who was Fitz' assistant, two bell-hops behind him. "I'm Williams—Race Williams," I told the wide-eyed young dick. "The shots that got Fitz came through that shaded window."

The young lad cursed, said: "I know, I know. It's Freddy Stevens. I don't know what it was, but he was afraid Fitz heard something." He ran to the window, flung up the shade, cried: "He must have got clean away."

"What do you mean 'clean away'?" I could have slapped him across the room for that crack. What did he think I was—a comic-strip manhunter? Why, that gun had been steadied at the window. That gun had been aimed. No, just sticking a gun up and trusting to luck. When a guy aims, his mugg is behind the rod.

Someone used a flashlight. Someone spoke, and I felt better. The man lay flat on his back in the narrow court. He was so dead he was practically embalmed. Just one shot in front of his right ear—smashed into that chuck of meat they call the brain. Of course, I hadn't hit him with both bullets. I'd have been a fool to try that. I fired so I'd catch him either way he dodged—and I'd caught him all right.

I looked down at the dead face, whistled. It wasn't Freddy Stevens, but I knew the stiff. Aaron Passario, from New York.

I started out of the room, nearly knocked the chief over. He was talking, ordering me back. His voice was loud, boisterous—and just a bit doubtful as he looked out the window.

"You, Williams!" He turned to me. "Threatened me, too, and—"

I pointed at Fitz, and the chief stopped talking and walked over and knelt by the body.

"Williams got the murderer—right through the shade," the young dick said.

The chief came to his feet and walked over to me. His face went white, yellow—then a pasty sort of cream color in between. He half stretched out his hand and set it back at his side again. I didn't mind. I didn't want any part of his kind. But he broke.

"Fitz was my friend," he said. "Helped me a pile—many times." He rubbed a hand across his mouth. "You, now—that closet—I guess someone was just trying to make trouble for you. I got a call to look in it."

I looked at the chief a long time, and

I got the answer to my question in his face. He was just graft. He catered to those who paid. Freddy Stevens would pay well. Hell, the chief just didn't understand or know what it was all about. All sorts of confidence-men gave him dough, and he just took it. But I had his number. I had him nervous, so I gave him the works.

"You've mixed yourself up in murder." I put both hands on his shoulders. "I told Mr. Simonds that would be the outcome of it. Now, you—" I stopped.

"Fitz and me used to smoke of a night," he said, as if in a daze. "Fitz used to tell me how to work things, and, if I wasn't careful, I'd be"—he looked down at the body— "just like he is now."

Which was some kind of a moral, from the way the chief spoke. But it was a moral with a backfire, for the chief was alive and Fitz was dead.

"O. K., Chief." I walked straight to the door. "I'll get the lad who directed the finger that pressed that gun. I'm pretty sure who it is."

"I can't believe it—I can't believe it," the chief said.

But I guess he did believe it, for the chief and me must have been thinking about the same lad—Freddy Stevens. Funny how things work out. Now, I was sorry I hadn't plugged Freddy, upstairs. Yep, after another look at the chief, I figured it was a nice town to lay stiffs out in. No one seemed to mind—at least, overmuch they didn't.

But the manager was there now. He had the chief's ear, as I walked out. The manager looked at me—halfway between killing me with a glance, and half wondering if he could work the fix.

I GRINNED, but not much of a grin. I liked Fitz. But I know politics and crime, and I know newspapers. Too many guys were in on the show. It was a double-killing. "Murder will out," is an old saying, but, this time, it would be a true one. It would be screeching headlines by morning.

The girl was not in the lobby—not in any part of it. Did Freddy Stevens have her?

I walked right to the elevators, hopped a car and went to Stevens' floor. Hell, Freddy had engineered the whole show. He had practically threatened the girl's life. I should have killed him long ago. Now, while I was in the mood, and they were sort of used to corpses around the hotel, one or two others wouldn't make much difference.

I reached the floor, walked straight down the hall to Freddy's room, knocked, then leaned against the buzzer. No answer, no sound. I gave the doorknob a half-hearted spin, straightened and slowly opened the door.

A dim light shone in the hall, a brighter light down the hall. A voice said, "Come on in, Race," and, when I did, "Hell, you look sort of down in the mouth."

The man sat behind a desk. I knew him, of course—chief fixer for Freddy Stevens. Adolf Muir was big stuff. Like Freddy, he had graduated from the gutters of the lower East Side to the gutters of the upper East Side. Just as much dirt, but more pay-dirt. As I stood in the doorway, he spoke again.

"Come to see Freddy? He's out—but what's on your chest? Maybe I can attend to it."

"You could," I said, "but you wouldn't want to. I came to kill Freddy."

The cigar stopped running around his mouth, just caught up suddenly at one end of his thick lips. He looked at me a moment, then his glance wandered aimlessly about the room. It was considered impossible to throw Adolf Muir off balance, but he was off now.

"Well, do you want to attend to it?" I said when he didn't speak.

"Not me." His laugh was dry, lacked mirth. He moved his hands so both of them showed white and empty on the desk. "He ain't here," he finally gulped. "Besides, you couldn't just kill a man in cold blood."

"No?" I stepped into the living-room. "Cold or hot won't make much difference to me, tonight. I know Freddy can talk, pay, alibi, or prove his way out of any kind of crime. But he hasn't got money enough to take even one forty-five bullet out of his skull—and leave that skull of his the same. Where is he?"

Adolf shrugged his shoulders. "Left a bit back—said you might be calling on him." His hand slipped slowly into an open drawer of the desk, let me watch it, then he flipped a tightly bound parcel of bills toward me. "Ten thousand," he said. "That's a lot of money—besides, he took care of the guy in your room."

"Where is Freddy Stevens?" I put my right arm beneath my left armpit. "Tell me, Adolf, or there'll be another body for Freddy to handle."

Adolf watched me closely, but he was recovering somewhat—at least, he seemed to gain courage.

"Only come in a few hours ago, myself. Flew down from the city. I don't know." He waved his hand. Then he threw his head and shoulders hard down on the desk, and I swung and plugged the guy in the bedroom doorway. No, he never got a shot at me and he never would. He crashed forward, a gun in either hand, struck the floor directly on his face.

I didn't know he was there, in the sense that I had seen him. But here was careful, shrewd and cruel Adolf Muir willing to sit there and take his chance with my guns. Of course, I knew he had protection. And I knew about where it would come from, for I had seen his shifty eyes and his final waving hand—and, besides, I'd been ready to plug that doorway any moment.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Dark Angel Still Waits

I JUST looked down at the man's back and his head. I didn't look at his face. But I drew back, with my gun low, ready for Adolf when he sprang from that desk. What's more, I nearly gave it to him. But he wasn't threatening me. He simply slipped from behind that desk and grabbed at the bills on the floor. The blood was almost touching them.

"Well?" I looked at Adolf. "That didn't work—what's next?"

"That was Stan Stevens. How do you think Freddy will like that?" he pointed at the body as he sat down.

I took a laugh—a real one. "How do you think Stan likes it?" After a pause, I asked: "How would you like it?"

He was silent, as he dropped into his old seat.

I drew up a chair and sat to his left, my back against the wall. "Aren't you going to search the apartment?" he asked.

"Why?" I let my eyes widen. "If Freddy, or any other guy, wants to take pot-shots at me, tonight, I won't spoil their fun. As a matter of fact, Adolf, I'm rather in the mood for a bit of killing. Fitz, my friend, was knocked over and"—I leaned forward close to him—"the girl who saved my life is gone."

"So you needed a girl to save your life—you, the great Race Williams? I wonder how that makes you feel—what it makes you think."

I told him the truth, as I juggled the gun in my hand. "It makes me feel sort of good that I've killed Freddy's brother, and it makes me think that you're Freddy's friend, and it wouldn't be such a bad idea if—"

"Not me—not me." He tried to come to his feet, but dropped back, as I shot the gun out at him.

"If you had any information, I'd beat it out of you," I gave it to him straight. "But since you haven't got any—why, what good are you to me alive?"

"What good am I to you dead?" His voice shook.

"No good," I told him. "But you aren't any harm, either. What's one or two more, in this play for Mrs. Charlotte Whitlock's money? Hell, man, don't you see? It'll be tied up with the courts. There'll be nothing in it for you or Freddy."

His mouth twisted. "She got a load of that money in cash. Had a real-estate deal ready. She hired you to protect her, so she could flee the country. Don't kid me. "Sure," Adolf went on. "I was the only one who saw her right after the killing of her husband. I fixed things for her, made arrangements for her to follow Freddy's instructions. Freddy didn't want to see her until after the show was over. If you're here to help her, tell her to fork over the dough—or she'll take a murder rap. If she has the cash we think she has, then she'll commit suicide after she has told us where the money is hidden. She could write a suicide note, just like the secretary did."

"But would she?"

"He did. And when they found him on the street there wasn't a mark on his body to indicate torture. The papers reported that about every bone in his body was broken—but they didn't report that some of those bones were broken before he hit the street—when he didn't fancy writing the suicide note, and the confession, that it was he, not the woman, who shot Cornelius Whitlock. So you see how things stand, Race.

"We simply took this secretary to the hotel room in Chicago. We told him we were cops and that if he didn't write us a description of what actually happened in the Whitlock home that night, we'd stick the murder on him. And he wrote it—the truth. Charlotte Whitlock simply raised her gun and shot her husband to death. That note, Freddy Stevens has now. Hell, it's no secret to Charlotte Whitlock. Ask her. That note will roast her. She can have it at a price."

"She pays," I said. "And later a dozen others pop up with the story and try to make a shakedown."

"Only me and Freddy know the truth," he grinned. "You get your pay, we get ours—and she won't have enough left to tempt others."

"But this marriage of hers. Stevens' hint that—"

Adolf Muir laughed, and his laugh was real. "That's a joke on Freddy. I tell you, Freddy don't want any part of this Charlotte Whitlock who shot her husband to death."

"So only you and Freddy know." I was thinking—not nice thoughts. Well, maybe not—I mean not nice for Freddy and Adolf, the only two who knew.

THE phone rang. I pushed Adolf Muir back and took the call. It was Freddy Stevens. Funny, he recognized my voice at once. He was saying in a jocular mood: "Well, well—dear old friend, Race Williams. I knew you'd trot up as soon as— Well, Fitz wanted to tell you too much." A pause and a laugh. "Hope you weren't unpleasant to Adolf. He's like a herd of elephants—never forgets and tramples those who haven't been kind to him."

"Yeah, he'll have a chance to do some trampling in a minute." I swung my gun toward Adolf. He was sitting straight, stiff—and very white.

"Sure." And Freddy's voice was growing hard. "Don't turn, Race. That thing

in your back is a gun. It's just my brother, Stan, who was to step into the living-room when I distracted your attention on the phone. Are you ready, Stan?" He raised his voice.

And that was the first time I knew we didn't have a bum connection. Freddy's voice had sounded like two voices. Now, I noticed the small transmitter hung on the wall. So that was the other voice. Freddy Stevens was not only talking to me, but he was talking to Stan—at least he thought he was talking to Stan.

"That's the stuff, Stan," Freddy chuckled, just as if he saw his brother standing behind me with the gun there. "Just close the trigger—no one outside will hear—and put enough bullets in Race's back. One moment, Stan. Race, we simply want dead. But the girl in the bedroom will need a little persuasion to make her talk. Let Adolf handle her. Now, what was that, Stan?"

I took a laugh. "That," I said, "was Adolf slipping his hand into a drawer. I tapped him with a gun. He looks funny as hell."

"And Stan"— Freddy hardly breathed the words—"he's—"

"He looks even funnier than Adolf. Maybe that's because he can't see how funny Adolf looks."

"You mean— Why, he couldn't have missed."

"I mean I knocked him off," I said brutally. "Yeah, he couldn't have missed, but he never got a chance to fire. Too many smart guys around—"

And I didn't get any further.

Freddy Stevens climbed back into the gutter he had left so many years before, and he didn't miss a foul word he had left there.

When he finished, I told him: "Stan never said a word. No parting message of love to his dear brother. He just folded up like a beach-chair—kicked over."

But this time Freddy had calmed down. At least, he had washed his mouth out, got rid of some of the dirt and now gone to work as a ham actor.

"Williams, I will kill you for this—slowly, cruelly," he said. "And I will kill Mrs. Charlotte Whitlock just as slowly and cruelly, after she has talked. There is no money for you now—nothing but death."

"Freddy, when you make a threat, you mean it. Every guy along the Avenue knows that," I told him. "This threat will cost you your life. So grab a rattler and get going. Next time we meet—comes it lead right smack in your kisser."

He wanted to talk, but I was through. Did I mean it? Of course, I meant it. Anyone who shot Freddy's face off would be doing Freddy a good turn—to say nothing of the entire American public.

ADOLF was lying there, his face forward on the desk. I wanted to talk to him. I lifted my foot and straightened him up. Adolf was a disappointment to me. I had knocked him cockeyed.

There was the girl in the bedroom. I damned near fell over Freddy's brother, as I went toward the bedroom door. Did I search Adolf for weapons first? I did not.

Wasn't it possible that he'd come after me with a gun? Sure, it was. Adolf was a torture-killer. Oh, I suppose it's weakness on my part, but I just couldn't shoot him dead while he was unconscious there in the chair. But if he wanted to come hunting me down with a gun, Adolf was welcome. There was no better time for him to be found dead with a gun in his hand.

I snapped on the light, and the girl was there, bound and gagged on the bed. I cut her loose and dragged her to her feet. Her eyes blazed slightly. Her hand raised. Then she threw both arms around my neck.

"No more of that, kid," I told her. "We might have a visitor. Now, I want the story—flat. You shot your husband to death." When she gasped for breath, and sort of shook the cobwebs from her head, I asked: "Was it because his name was Cornelius?"

"No," she said. "No, it wasn't that."

I laughed, and she laughed, and things were better. "So you don't like the game you're playing? Killing guys is only fun at the time."

"You oughta know," she said and damned near floored me. She was coming back with a bang. Well, perhaps this wasn't any place to tell her that she was sitting on the edge of the electric chair. Sure, I know she should have been hysterical and all that, but she wasn't. She put both her hands on my shoulders and I had to shove her into a chair so I could keep facing the door.

"Now, suppose you tell me the whole story exactly as it happened," I said. "The shooting—and everything."

She looked straight at me. She said very slowly: "Exactly whom do you think I am?"

I could answer that one, and did. I said: "I know, and you know that I know. You're Charlotte Whitlock, Cornelius Whitlock's widow. You gave him the dose. Oh, I'm not criticizing your action—just that you let the secretary be there when you did it."

"He isn't here anymore." She nodded. "That's right, I shot Cornelius. I shot him twice straight through the head." She looked off in space now, and I followed her look and watched the door. She spoke as if she had gone into a trance, recited her piece as if she had gone over and over it—which I suppose she had.

"He beat me, and I warned him. I needed the money for my mother, and I stuck. I either had to have his secretary arrested or be trapped for a divorce. He hated me from the night—well, within a week after we were married. I hated him long before the marriage. I guess there are many such marriages, today.

"I shot him, and he stood looking at me—and I shot him again. Then he fell forward on his face. The secretary said he'd say he was beating me. Then he said he'd say Cornelius was alive when he left him. He walked out the front door—and I dropped from the window. A man who had come to me before, and said he was a lawyer, stopped me at the gate. He is the man who is outside now. It was very dark. I don't think he had a real good look at me then, but he did later. He took me downtown, did a lot of telephoning. Then I left Chicago and flew to New York.

"I was given a key to a room in a fashionable hotel. A bag was there, the bed mussed, as if I had slept in it. Then came the telegram from Aster Drake, my college roommate—my only friend. My husband was dead, and I was to come back home. I flew back to Chicago. The papers already had the story. I lied to the police—lied just as I was told—and named the people I was with. But it didn't matter. My husband's secretary had jumped from a hotel window, left a note behind that he shot Cornelius. It was all very hazy—everyone was nice to me."

SHE paused, moved rapidly toward the living-room. Adolf was bracing himself by the wall, as he passed toward the main door. Plainly, I saw the gun in his hand. Plainly, too, I saw my chance—his fingers clutching it when he died. I sucked in my lips, raised my gun, opened my mouth to call his name. I like guys to face me when they take it. I like them to see it coming, make a stab at preventing it. Adolf, the torturer, the man Freddy Stevens used when his own stomach

wouldn't stand the acts he contemplated. Killing Adolf would be like shooting clay-pigeons—only better sport. But he had a gun in his hand, and I had opened my mouth.

The girl shot a hand across my face. It wasn't big enough to clamp down on my yap if I wanted to yap. But I figured she was paying the freight and wanted it that way. Surely, it couldn't be just her timidness at the sight of death.

"No—not now. Please, Race, not now," she whispered. "The thing will have to be settled with money."

"But he knows—"

"And Freddy Stevens knows—more tonight than he ever knew."

I shrugged, said: "But there'll be one less."

"But Stevens has the true statement of the killing that the secretary wrote, which will deny his suicide note." She shuddered. I could feel her fingers tremble on my arm.

"Let's go." She was shaking violently now. "Let's get out of this hotel. It will have to be settled with money. Any man should take half a million cash."

"Not when he can get a million," But the argument was over; Adolf Muir was gone.

I led her to the hall, felt the coldness of her wrist, and decided on the stairs—changed my mind when I saw a couple of trunks and a single man at the freight elevator.

I don't waste time. I don't stutter wild stories. I told him the truth, but not the whole truth. I said simply: "Twenty bucks says you can't slip us out the rear entrance without anybody knowing it." Putting an arm about the girl, and shielding her face, I added: "Twenty more says that you won't be able to recognize either one of us later."

He answered, as they all answer: "Forty bucks says I haven't even seen you now—and no one will see you leave."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Ten Seconds to Live

SO we were on our way. She had a car parked a few blocks up from the beach. We climbed into it, and I took the wheel. "This is terrible." She gripped my arm. "But Simonds will help you." She was pretty worried.

"Just where does Simonds fit?" I never fancied lawyers.

"It was Bertman Simonds who suggested you."

I had a more kindly feeling toward Simonds, right then. I said: "Simonds will charge a good price for his work, so he's entitled to take a part in it. Do you know where he lives?"

She hesitated a long time, finally said: "Yes, but he's not just a small-town lawyer. He won't like it."

I smiled. "We'll paint a rosy picture to him—make him like it."

"He won't be home yet—never leaves his club before twelve. That's over an hour and—"

I took things in hand. She didn't want me to see Simonds, or she didn't want to see him, herself. I gave her orders. She would have to hide out in a small hotel, take another name, and give me Simonds' address.

She jumped at it, named the Fenimore Hotel. She would call herself Gertrude Hamilton. "I have been at the hotel before—they'll know me. I won't need baggage."

A few minutes later, we crossed the bridge and I left her at the Fenimore Hotel. Then I picked a small lunchroom, had some coffee and a couple of hamburgers, and read the evening papers. There was nothing in it about me or the shootings—nor did any of the customers—both

drunk—speak about the shootings. So I killed time and loaded my stomach.

I'd have driven right to the door of the lawyer's house—Bertman J. Simonds—but it was the girl's car, and might be recognized if anyone was watching the house. So I did a couple of walks up and down the block, spotted the house and number—and the complete blackness inside.

That didn't bother me. Simonds might not be home yet, or he might have gone to bed. But what I liked was the little vestibule entrance with one of the doors open. The third time around, I dashed right up the steps, leaned on the doorbell, heard the distant buzzer and waited for the footsteps. Yep, waited a hell of a long time, but no steps. I tapped, shook the door a bit, then tried to peer into the darkness.

The glass was dirty or it wasn't made to see through or— But there was a dash of Florida moonlight, or maybe just Florida streetlight, and the black shadow that seemed to struggle in it. But shadows don't count in my business. Too many turn out to be just that—shadows.

I CLOSED the outside door, took my small, squat electric-flash from my hip pocket and pushed it close to that glass. Trouble? Sure there was trouble—try working a spotlight that way, sometime. Why, I couldn't see a— Then I saw it. A figure squirmed upon the floor, rolled and twisted in agonized motions. The figure stopped squirming, merged with the darkness, then my pencil of light lit on the red. I know blood when I see it. I did tricks with that front door, discovered that the latch was not one given to my kind of lock picking. As for the door itself, it was heavy, thick. I went out on the wide porch, walked around to the side of it, found myself a window, wrapped my hand up in my coat, and stuck a hole in the glass.

I waited for something to follow the falling glass. Nothing did. I stuck in a finger, snapped back the heavy window-catch, thrust up the window and stepped over the sill, a gun in each hand.

Still a dead quiet. I tucked my left-hand rod under my right armpit, pulled down the shades, then, parking one gun, let my flash loose.

It was a reception-room of some kind, but empty of life. I followed my light through the door and into the hall. The figure was there, all right, one hand stretched toward a telephone. The man was dead—shot three times through the back and once through the back of the neck.

But he wasn't Simonds. The black trousers, the white coat were those of his servant. No, Simonds wasn't dead there on the hall floor, but was he dead some other place in that house? I let my flash do its stuff, spotted the open door, walked toward it. Surely, an enemy couldn't be lurking in that darkness of the room beyond. Yep, darkness, for, when I entered that room, my flash was out.

I stepped inside, moved quickly to the right and stood waiting. Not a sound. I clicked on the flash, held my left hand far out, inviting a shot that wouldn't be near my body. My right hand was raised, ready to squeeze a finger and snuff out the body behind the yellow-blue flame, the roar of the gun. There was no flame or roar of a gun.

I let the flash wander. Books, tables, a desk—rug beneath my feet that I sank into, as if it were a sponge. Comfortable chairs, one high-backed chair with—

I found the wall-switch, flooded the room with light. A stout, florid man was bound there. Florid, blue-black, he was. But he wasn't dead yet. Minutes, seconds even, would finish him.

The gag in his mouth was slowly choking him to death.

I took two quick jumps forward and damned near tore his big head off his bigger neck. His eyes were popping—little brilliant green cherries.

I CUT the ropes and watched his chins run up and down as if he had an invisible masseur working on him. He was Bertman Simonds. Even a look on, and into, his desk told me that. When I turned back to him, he spoke.

"You're a thorough man, Mr. Williams." He licked at his lips, nodded toward the hall.

"Yes, he's dead," I said. "What's the lay, Mr. Simonds?"

"That damned call of yours to my office, I guess. They suspected you of being here to protect the woman—Mrs. Charlotte Whitlock. I shouldn't have mixed myself up in it, in the beginning. My better judgment warned me. But I didn't think they'd even connect me with the woman—just connect you, later."

"Maybe you got paid a little, too, eh?" I didn't like his high and mighty regrets.

"Yes." He came to his feet, gripped at the table, steadied himself, finally opened a long, half-hidden drawer, scooped out a bottle—and did himself proud.

"Not me." I shook my head at his invitation. "Not until I know what's on the program. I never shoot anyone through the neck of a bottle."

"No, you don't. By God, you don't!" He felt better now. "The news I've heard makes me believe that." He took another drink. "It's tough, but I guess Charlotte's got to pay them cash. Freddy Stevens was here, himself—a bad chap, real bad. Adolf Muir was with him. You see, Charlotte Whitmore is clever. She got a half million in cold cash and sank it away. Fifteen minutes ago, they threatened me with torture." Simonds looked at me a long time. "Adolf stood there by the mantel, the knife in his hand, and a look of actual pleasure in his eyes. Freddy Stevens gave the orders. The knife would run first down one side of my face and then the other. Freddy Stevens never bluffs."

"And you told them where the money was?"

"No." His smile was not pleasant. "They might have butchered me. I tell you Charlotte Whitlock is a cold, calculating woman who trusts no one. I didn't know where the money was."

"It was lucky they believed you. So what?"

He sat down, lit a cigar and crossed his legs. "It's like this, Mr. Williams. We might make a deal for a couple of hundred thousand for the return of the secretary's confession that he saw Charlotte Whitlock shoot her husband to death. Yes, yes, I know all about it. She shot him between the eyes. She sat straight and stiff in my office and told me so. Then she turned the gun on the secretary—that's why he left the place so quietly."

He stretched the taut muscles of his arms and legs. "Hell, man! That secretary was in the house—sent there by her husband, Cornelius Whitlock, to annoy, compromise, and frighten her." His laugh was a tiny gurgle. "She could have killed him anytime—would if he had placed a hand on her. Don't look so surprised. She came straight to me, more than a week before the shooting, and she was as cold about it as an open grave. She was determined to kill him."

"Now, now," I said. "You can't tell me that about Charlotte."

"No? But here are her very words—'My husband has beaten me; his secretary is in the house. It seems impossible that within the week I shall not have shot to death one, or both, of them. I'll want you to defend me.' Then she turned and walked out of the office."

"And you never tried to stop her?"

"Me?" He looked surprised. "How? Tell her husband? Warn the secretary? No. Either one of them had it coming to him. The killing wasn't so bad. It was the premeditation, the cold-blooded way she—well, perhaps not planned it, but certainly decided on it."

"She must have been mad—out of her head at the time. She's not built that way. She had gone through hell." And, getting back to business, I asked: "What's the good of paying for that paper that would condemn her, if Freddy Stevens would simply explode her alibi afterward —make those eminent friends of his say they were mistaken and Mrs. Whitlock was not in New York?"

"I was coming to that, Race." He grew a little more familiar as he turned his back to me and leaned against the bookcase. "I was thinking that Freddy Stevens wouldn't be around to talk, wouldn't be able to talk, at all—two minutes after we had that paper."

I WALKED to the bookcase, after a minute, placed a hand on his shoulder said: "You mean—I'm to shoot him to death? You—" I swung him around, but he beat me to the words.

"Well, why not? Don't look indignant. You've killed some of the small fry. What good did that do? What's the matter with your plugging Freddy Stevens? The whole town will know some feud's on between you two, by morning. Suppose we claim he brought a gang here for the sole purpose of attacking you? You defended yourself. You're known to be on the side of law, and—well, maybe not order, but at least law. He's known to be a criminal. I've got enough on the chief of police to make him jump through a hoop. The editor of our only paper panned the type of people who come here, and did everything but mention Freddy Stevens by name. Everything will be in your favor. The chief, the judge who isn't much interested as long as he keeps his job, and my defending you free of charge for the good of the community."

"Free of charge—absolutely free of charge?"

He showed his great even teeth, fine teeth—the best teeth that money could buy. "Absolutely free, as far as you are concerned. The only trouble is that Freddy may find out where that half million is tonight. He'll torture Charlotte for it. She's a cold, cruel woman, Race. She'll go through hell before she talks. They'll have to cut her to ribbons."

"But they don't know where she is. How could they find out?"

"Because I told them." He sipped his drink this time. "If she's sensible, she'll talk a little, make a deal for the true statement the secretary made, and then you can give Freddy the dose on his way back."

"You told Stevens where she was. Why?"

"Torture." He nodded, and I looked straight at him. There wasn't a mark on him except for the dried bit of blood where I had torn the gag from his mouth. He said: "Don't be a fool. I was paid to advise this woman. I was not paid to be knifed to pieces. They'd have forced me to talk, or killed me in the long run. I didn't know they were going to leave me like this—but you came in time."

"And they never even laid a knife on you?"

"Not the edge of one." He looked straight at me. "You're a man of emotions, Race. I'm a practical man."

"And a small-time lawyer. Here all year around?" There was a real question in my voice.

"Here all year around." He nodded. "Came here when I was thirty, nearly thirteen years ago. Health, my boy—

health. Two bullets in my left lung. I had lived to gather a few pennies defending criminals in New York. Things didn't pay as well then. But here—it was surprising the big shots who came—was easy money. I'd been through the mill."

I BELIEVED that. I started to speak, changed my mind, called up the Fenimore Hotel. The girl, Charlotte— Simonds moved quickly forward, grabbed at my wrist, and, when I shoved out my arm and knocked him back, I saw him open a desk drawer. I said: "Lift that hand out of there. If it isn't empty, I'll drive it straight into your stomach, gun and all . . . Hotel Fenimore? Miss Hamilton please—Miss Gertrude Hamilton . . . She did? Are you sure?" I waited for the clerk to buzz her room.

Then I dropped the phone and turned to him. "She's gone," I said. "Left with a couple of men."

His shoulders moved. "I didn't even know she went there tonight. She was a fool to go. She's supposed to be holed up in that bungalow hidden away far back from the water."

I looked at my watch, said: "There's time yet. Where is that bungalow?"

"I wouldn't tell you that. You'd be useless, alone. We can't bring the police, and you'd drag me with you. But we can telephone that bungalow, offer to make a deal."

"Nix," I told Simonds. "The phone idea won't work. They'll take her someplace else, as soon as they know you're alive—and they'll know if I telephone that you told me where she is."

"But you can threaten them personally over the phone and—"

"That's all right for the local talent or small-city gunmen they've imported, but it won't work with Freddy." And, as I thought of the cool, heartless, thin-lipped Stevens, and of the fiendish Adolf he'd give orders to, I said: "I'll have to be there to make my threats real. You don't have to go with me. I'll go, alone. Now, tell me the exact situation of the bungalow." I was thinking of the girl, of her spunk, of her—well, I was thinking of the girl.

"Sorry, Race." He shook his head. "This is one time you can't make a fool out of yourself. They'd kill you, know I told you and kill me later."

"You'd believe any threat that Freddy Stevens made, eh?"

"Of course. I know Freddy never bluffs."

"Do you think I bluff?" I said calmly.

"No, hardly." His laugh gurgled back in his throat.

"Good." I flashed out with my right arm, caught him on the chest, staggered him back until he crashed into a chair. I stuck a gun in his stomach, said: "You'll take my word, won't you, Simonds?"

"Yes, of course. Put that gun away. Damn it, what do you mean? Your word's good with me. What—"

"That girl saved my life," I said very slowly. "Few women have that distinction. But she saved it. If there wasn't a cent in it, I'd give my life for hers."

"You must be mad. She's cold, heartless, carved stone. She's—"

"We're speaking of two different women, Simonds. You, of a client, me of a woman of flesh and blood—a woman who put her arms about my neck and saved my life." I stuck my face close to his, dug my gun deeper and said the words clearly: "You have ten seconds to tell me exactly where she is. At the end of ten seconds, I give you my word that I'll empty my gun into your stomach." I grinned evilly. "I never go in for torture."

Simonds' eyes sought mine, as I started to count, studied them. Fear, terror, then cold calculations came into his eyes. I was only at six, when he raised his right hand and said easily: "So you'd go to

murder—cold-blooded murder. I read the truth in your face, Race. Don't try to lie to yourself afterward and say you bluffed me. You were set to kill."

When I didn't move the gun, he went on.

"Come, come. I'll go most of the way with you now. And I'm not going only because I know you'd tie me up again to make sure, but since I have got to be in it, I'll be in at your death."

CHAPTER NINE

Knife in the Back

HE TOOK another drink, lit the light as we stepped into the hall. He avoided the body, though he muttered something about his return, and we were out the door and into the girl's car. He said: "You're a very interesting chap, Race. Better step on the gas. They are working this thing in a hurry—only Adolf and Stevens. It will take time to gather the local lads they will send for to surround the house. Yes, I know how they work."

I busted the car wide open. I was thinking of the girl.

So was he, for he said: "She's a hard woman—honest, but a woman of stone. Now, in a way, I'm not averse to the finer charms of a client so wealthy. But this Charlotte Whitlock? Huh!" He shivered. "She'd freeze the blood in your veins."

"That wouldn't be my opinion—directly the opposite."

"Is that so?" He seemed genuinely interested. "She must have her moments, then—or perhaps she felt that money was not sufficient with you. Of course, her face is full of character—finely chiseled. Arms and throat like marble, yet a body that—" He went on for a few minutes in a way I didn't like.

"You are talking of the woman who saved my life," I said stiffly.

He wasn't offended. He said cheerfully enough: "And the woman who will take it tonight. But it will be a pleasure—from a distance, I mean—to watch you work. I suppose you will creep up very carefully through the thick grass on your stomach."

"Simonds, this woman is to be tortured. There is no time to waste," I told him. "There will be no finesse in my work tonight. Tonight, it's a blast-out—nothing nice and refined about it. Every man for himself. Death by violence—just a blast-out."

He patted a hand on my back, as he gave me directions so clear and concise that not a minute was lost. He was talking, and I was thinking about the girl.

"I'll stick to you, of course, Race," he said. "The gunmen from the city upstate are not much to bother about—that is, alone. They don't know what they are being paid to do, and will hold the bag at the end. They're not afraid of the police, but they are of Freddy and Adolf. If you can clean up those two— Turn left here, now, right. That's good. Now, if you clean up the big shots, and we get there before the little ones can arrive, I think you'll have a chance. But they are bad men—none worse in the city—and under Freddy Stevens' guidance. But stop here."

Stop we did. I pulled the car off the road beneath the trees, backed it around for a quick out. No special reason, except I always do that.

DISTANT, between the trees, was the Florida ocean. Nearer, yet far between the trees, was the stretch of beach with the thick grass at the edge of it, and, nearer still, the heavy trees themselves, twisted and gnarled. Those trees surrounded the house. It was not just a black patch of blackness, but twin lights in twin

windows—large French windows with many small panes of glass.

"Second story?" I asked Simonds.

"Well—yes. You see it's a bungalow type. From the living-room, you go up stone steps to the balcony, swing around it to the two bedrooms. The light is in the back bedroom—a large room. But if you go up by the stairs, watch that wrought-iron railing. It nearly gave way under my weight, once."

But I was looking at those lighted windows of that single room. Brown shades let some light through, but most of the light came from above those shades. And I was looking, too, at the tree that stood some distance from the windows at its base. Yet the tree crept toward the house, as it went higher. It was some eight feet from the windows on its level. Then the tree made a direct shoot toward those French windows, as it climbed above them.

"That"—I pointed at the window—"would be a nice entrance."

"Sure, sure," Simonds sort of gurgled. "If a man wanted to toss himself against the glass and wood."

"He would have enough force to go through," I thought aloud.

"Oh, he'd go through all right—but I'd hate to be that man."

I set my lips grimly, said: "Maybe you'd hate more to be the men inside. Good-by, Simonds—get from under. I don't like the shaky railing of those stairs. I think I'll try the leap."

Yep, I took the hand he held out to me. The grip seemed really sincere, as he whispered hoarsely that haste meant everything, that certainly a full carload of gunmen would come from town.

I shook my head. "Just one worry—if I can see inside that room before I take the jump. Everything depends on how I land."

"Happy landing," he said, and I didn't know if he was wise-cracking or serious.

NOW, I didn't act like a man going straight to his death, and I didn't feel like one, either. Why should I? I had experience, strength. I also had heavy revolvers, one under each arm, and a pocket full of cartridges.

No, it would all depend on the element of surprise. I mean, if I'd be more surprised than the lads inside would be when I crashed through that window.

I can damn near climb up the side of a house, so that tree was nothing to me. I made monkeys of it, with hardly a sound. Not only that, I got well above the window where I knew I could look. But what I didn't know was that I could hear, too. The shades were too short at the top, which gave me a clear vision, and a couple of panes were broken, which gave me a chance to listen. Sure, I could lean down and get an earful of conversation—maybe an earful of lead, too—but, anyway, I leaned down.

There was no coincidence about that window-pane—or several of them being broken. Personally, I would say the glass was broken by bottles hurled at them or perhaps the leg of a chair.

The room, itself, was not overmussed up. Twin beds, a comfortable chair and a few not so comfortable. There was a light from the ceiling.

I set my lips. You didn't need dim lights to set off the horror of that room. Oh, I don't mean dead bodies around the room. The horror was a single and a dreadful one. A girl was stretched across one of the beds, her bare back plainly visible. In the center of that back, a face had been drawn with crayon. And, across that crayoned face, a huge *X* had been made.

The horror of it was that the X was not drawn in crayon, but by a knife that had cut deeply. That knife that was still held in the hand of a man who, having mopped up the blood with a towel, was

tossing the towel into the corner when I saw his face.

It was the face of Adolf Muir—fiendish, a cruel sort of brightness in his eyes, a peculiar twist of pleasure to his lips.

I nearly gave him the dose, then. My finger almost tightened on the trigger.

A VOICE spoke in that room beyond my vision. It was Stevens' voice, and there was nothing fiendish nor unpleasant in it. It was just Freddy's natural voice—all business.

"That's a very clean job, Adolf—a very clean job, indeed. She's fainted, I suppose —and she didn't cry out."

"I made her squeal, though. No, she ain't unconscious." Adolf turned, jerked her head back, twisted it slightly, but I could not see her face. "You see, I aim to give her a minute or two to come around enough. We'll sit her up, facing the mirror on the dressing-table there. Then we'll put that hand-mirror behind her back. That's the reason I drew the face, Freddy. It'll show her exactly how her face will look, if she don't tell us where that money is. No woman would want to look like that."

"No, no, indeed not," Freddy Stevens said. Adolf Muir moved from sight, and Freddy Stevens presented himself. Hell, if they were both within my vision at the same time, I could have finished my business off-stage. One thing was certain. They weren't going to work on her face.

Freddy ran his hand across that mutilated back, said: "There, my dear Charlotte. You are a clever woman—you even fooled me." He pretended to shiver, as he leaned closer. "Imagine my playing around with you. Imagine the silly idea I had that— But, then, Aster will do very nicely if you're dead. Come, the money—where is it?" He hesitated, listened.

I, too, heard the faint whisper, but caught no words. Yet Freddy heard her words, for he thrust her head down on the bed.

"You shot your husband to death in cold blood," he stormed. "You'd have shot his secretary, too, if the gun hadn't jammed. I helped you beat the rap. Now, you'll be disfigured for life. Your face will look like your back—even if you talk. For you will talk. Adolf, here, will cut you to pieces. Where is that five hundred thousand dollars? Even if you died without speaking, we'd tear the place apart, search every inch of the grounds for miles around, if necessary. What?"

She muttered something louder. It did not sound like a human voice. Maybe she was dying, but the words were there. "Not a penny—not another cent. If I—"

Freddy Stevens jerked her erect on the bed, faced her toward the mirror above the dresser. I could not see her face—only her bare, torn back and the hand-mirror Adolf Muir held close to it.

"There are your eyes, and your nose, and your lips—each partly slit, except for the nose—and that slit twice," Freddy Stevens said. "Now, will you—" She shook her head, and Freddy nodded to Adolf. Me, I raised my gun.

The girl was going through hell, of course. And, if she hadn't saved my life, I don't suppose I'd have played the fool, then. My surprise entrance must be a surprise to both of them. If I shot Adolf, then Freddy would be ready and emptying his guns at me, as I came through that window.

Freddy knew his stuff with a gun and was the logical man to kill, or at least cripple, for the angle was bad—damned bad. But I didn't shoot at Freddy. Not because of the angle, but because of the girl—and Adolf. Yes, that's right. Adolf had drawn his knife straight down the open wound in her back.

A scream—a terrifying shriek in the

night, and my finger closed. Adolf spun, and— God in Heaven! He drove his long knife straight into the middle of the girl's bare back.

CHAPTER TEN

Monogram in Lead

I KNOW death when I see it and hear it. I knew it then, as the scream died. I couldn't save the girl's life now, but I could and would avenge it. I just threw myself forward, gained force, as I pressed my feet hard against the branch, and shot head first through the small panes of that window. Then it came—panes, cracking wood and spouting guns.

They were surprised, all right, and so was I. Of course, I was cut, but I didn't know it, then. The wood of that window had given way, as if it were papier-mâché. But I was a guy with one single purpose. I wanted in, and I got in.

I think a couple of guns exploded in my face, but my face had hit the chest of the man who owned those guns, before he pressed the triggers of them—so the shots tore by my ears. It was Freddy Stevens, and, though, after my shot at Adolf, he expected someone to crash through that window, he didn't expect a face—and a bloody face—actually to catapult through it like I did.

Freddy didn't need to trip over the dead girl, to be knocked off his feet. I had attended to that. A gun blazed twice from across the room, as my head struck the side of the light wooden bed. It collapsed as if it had been part of a doll's house.

Adolf stood there, trying to lift his gun again, forcing his right hand up with his left, I stretched out my own right hand, pressed the trigger twice before he got his shot in. He seemed to stumble around a lot, but finally went down hard, sort of crawled a moment and then lay still—very still. I nodded stupidly, but I knew that Adolf would never lie any stiller.

We got to our feet together, Freddy and I—faced each other squarely. We were both a little stupid, both confused, but both knowing exactly what to do. We raised our guns slowly, deliberately. I don't know how Freddy saw me, but I saw him through a fog. I know that he fired first, for I heard the piece of glass fall and was surprised that there was any glass left in the window to fall.

Then both our heads cleared, together. I know mine did, and I knew Freddy's did, for I saw it in his eyes, heard it in his mouth as he held his gun and didn't fire—couldn't fire. I watched his trigger-finger.

"It's murder, Race." The rat was in him now. "Lower your gun, and I'll lower mine. God, it will be murder! I promise—"

Maybe he fired, then; maybe he didn't. They told me afterward that he did—from the bullet in the wall. But me—I just twisted my gun-barrel slightly, closed a finger and put a hunk of lead right into his lying mouth.

"Promise?" I said. "How do you like my promise?"

I stepped back a bit, to let him fall. In life, he had the breaks; in death, he didn't. He smashed straight downward on his face.

His body was between me and the girl. Maybe I kicked him as I went to the girl or maybe I just tripped over his head. Take your choice—I'm not making any statements.

She was dead, all right. That knife must have gone clean through her body and pinned her to the floor. I just looked down at her and mumbled inanely: "I didn't think you had that color hair."

Maybe, I said more than that. Maybe, I just thought more. It isn't much good for a guy to think that he did his best when his client lies dead at his feet.

I STOOD very still, listened. My lips twisted. I dropped the empty shells of both guns into my pocket, filled those empty holes with fresh slugs. Then I went toward the door and opened it, closed it tightly behind me and crept slowly along that balcony with the shaky wrought-iron railing. The battering on the door below was getting louder.

I smiled grimly, as I sat down on the balcony, felt the distance of the lattice railing, curled up comfortably and waited.

Finally the door gave. I came to one knee, lifted both guns.

The first shadow came, the first face struck the splash of light, and my gun went up—and down again. I didn't press the trigger.

"Don't move," I said, and my voice was hard. "There's plenty death in that bedroom behind me. Which side of the fence are you on now, Simonds?"

The lawyer's chalk-like face began to gain some of its lost color.

"Race!" he cried. "You—alive! They haven't come—didn't come. Quick, we can get away."

"Why get away?" I asked him and meant it. Having sharp ears, I asked: "Who's that with you? It's not a time to fool. Let him step forward into the light."

The moving feet stepped forward. A slim little figure stood clearly in the moonlight. Then I was up and running down those stone steps—damn near broke my neck as the railing came off in my hand. The next minute, the girl's arms were around my neck. Yes, the girl who had saved my life was there in my arms.

She was protesting, as we ran to our parked car. "But I'm not Charlotte. I'm Aster Drake. We went to school together, and I—I—" She was still sputtering when I tossed her into the front seat beside me, and Simonds climbed into the rear.

I KNOW Simonds said something about finding her staked out in a little pit, hardly fifty feet from where I had passed. I heard him say something about Stevens liking her, or perhaps Stevens' intention of bringing the real Mrs. Charlotte Whitlock down to see her friend die horribly. But Simonds did say one thing.

"She was a cold, heartless woman, Race. She would have seen the girl die before she gave up that money."

Maybe she would. I didn't know about that. The live girl was a nice armful.

Drake was her right moniker. She explained it to me, as we sped toward town.

"Charlotte shot her husband to death; then went through with the alibi," she said. "Later, she received a half million dollars while down here at her winter home in Silver Sea. Then Freddy Stevens came to town. She knew he was the head of the gang that was holding the secretary's confession over her head, and the man who had fixed her alibi. She sent for me. No one of Freddy Stevens' crowd knew her by sight but Adolf Muir. So I posed as Charlotte to Freddy Stevens and the others. It was a business proposition. Charlotte knew I needed money. She paid me cash. Even Mr. Simonds didn't know—he thought you were to protect Charlotte. I just told him the truth, when he found me a few minutes ago. Charlotte intended to flee to Europe, and was about to go."

The Aster girl hesitated, said: "Freddy Stevens got in touch with me at the Silver Sea Hotel, where I was openly registered as Mrs. Charlotte Whitlock. He—he liked me—in his way. He meant to marry me to a friend of his and—"

I cut in: "And Adolf Muir came to Silver Sea and told Freddy you were not the real Charlotte Whitlock." That was what Adolf meant when he said Freddy wanted no part of Charlotte.

"Yes, Charlotte and I planned well. We

had an agreement with Stevens that Adolf Muir was not to come here, claiming that he mistreated Charlotte before. But he came—and he talked."

"I see," I said slowly. "That's why Fitz was killed. Freddy didn't want me to know the real truth. Hell, Fitz was about to tell me who you were, and I thought it was just that you were Charlotte Whitlock, which I already knew—"

Simonds leaned over the seat, gripped my shoulder. "We know that Charlotte Whitlock is dead, or you would not have left that bungalow. But about the others—Muir and Stevens? There, drive to my home. I'll have to straighten things out with the police—not an impossible job."

"I wouldn't have left the bungalow with them alive, either. I hate like hell to lose a client. I've got a rep that—"

"Your client, Williams, was Miss Aster Drake here," Simonds said. "It seems now that you were hired to protect her, and only to protect her. She's doing very well, as you see—since those men forced her from the Fenimore Hotel and brought her to Stevens."

Simonds did do the impossible that morning, and most of the day while I slept. The chief had turned a back handspring. He even went so far as to say that he had sent to New York for me.

THE girl stood back, as I talked to Simonds at the railroad station. "You're a good guy, Simonds," I said. "And no charge for your legal service? You must be forgetting the big-city days." I added suddenly: "This five hundred thousand dollars, in that house, buried outside someplace! Why, I'd—"

"I don't think you need worry about that money being found," Simonds said stiffly. He took a document from his pocket. "Mrs. Charlotte Whitlock's will. Every penny of it goes to charity—in any way I wish to distribute it, without an order or even permission of the court. It was in a safety-deposit box."

"Yeah. Charity begins at home."

"Certainly." He huddled close to me, while I counted the fifty thousand dollars he shoved into my hand. "And double that amount for the courageous little lady—who will probably live longer to spend it. You see, it was unnecessary for you to mention it. I had it ready for you."

I doubted that crack, but I figured fast. "One hundred and fifty for us, eh? What becomes of the three hundred and fifty thousand more in cash?"

"I shall hold that until another worthy charity appears." He smiled at me. "Don't forget that I jeopardized the whole life I built up in Silver Sea."

Aster Drake threw her arms about my neck. "I'll be coming to New York—"

"Sure, kid," I said, as I swung aboard. What the hell! She was a nice kid—and New York was a long ways off.

A DATE AT THE MORGUE

by

T. T. Flynn

Author of "Tonight See Death," etc.

His knees went rubbery as I hooked my right to his jaw.

Out of Flash Cordovan's crooked past, to menace the dignity of the successful life he had built up, descended three smart dicks looking for a fall-guy. It was a simple proposition they offered him—trap the killer they'd failed to catch or go back to the pen.

CHAPTER ONE

The Past is a Monster

I SUSPECTED trouble when Hollister entered the room. The fear, which never quite left me, sharpened in that moment. Six of us—my guests and I

—were talking before the sea-coal fire: Judge Bennett and Mrs. Bennett; Dan Van Stone, of the Second National, and Dolly, his wife—and, at my right, Sandra Bennett.

Sandra, slim, young, happy—and beautiful. So lovely was Sandra that my heart turned over when I watched her. And, often when I watched her, the sick warning of disaster hollowed out my middle. I had done the unforgivable thing. I had brought fear, dread and the chance of hurt to the girl I loved. The shadow of it was always between us—and yet we were happy, too.

Tonight, we had dined well. The talk had been stimulating. Judge Bennett and Mrs. Bennett clearly approved of me. Dan Van Stone was a man after my own heart. Dolly Van Stone had gone to college with Sandra.

We had enjoyed the evening—and now Hollister was bending at my shoulder, murmuring: "Three gentlemen to see you, Mr. Cordovan." His thin face showed faint disapproval.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"They refuse to give their names, sir."

The talk died away, without intentional discourtesy. I stood up, smiling, asking: "Will you pardon me?"

I was smiling—but Sandra's look was suddenly intent. Her dark-gray eyes questioned. The faintest shadow of apprehension was in her glance.

"Show your mother those etchings I bought last week," I suggested. "They're in that folder. I've been wondering, Mrs. Bennett, how they'll strike you."

Sandra's mother, smartly fifty, with the auburn fire still in her hair, smiled. "As if it mattered. Your judgment, Bradley, is so much better than mine, that I shan't even risk an opinion."

"Then I'll demand one," I chuckled, and turned to the door.

Sandra's mother liked me. So did the Judge. And I liked them. They were part of Sandra and they'd been more than decent.

Now, wondering, I stepped into the reception hall. I looked once at my visitors and closed the door.

Spider Morgan was the nearest. He was Detective Timothy Morgan back East—Spider Morgan to those who knew him. The lines of his web lay over the eastern underworld, and he hunted like a spider. The other two were local dicks. I knew it instantly. I can spot a dick by his shadow. I can smell a copper against the wind.

Spider Morgan's flat, meaty face was split by a nasty grin. "Hello, Flash. Ain't this a nice surprise? It's been years, ain't it?"

"Four," I said. "Not long enough to suit me. What's the idea of crashing in here with all the local flatfeet?"

FOUR years were wiped away. There was little use trying to be Mr. Bradley Cordovan to this trio—not with Spider Morgan here. The fear that had stabbed briefly in the other room struck hard and brutally—the threat that had haunted like a nightmare. I had to meet it, not as Mr. Bradley Cordovan, of the Chelton Arms, but as Flash Cordovan, gay blade of the underworld.

They'd called me Flash because I thought faster, acted faster than those around me—because I dressed like a gentleman, acted like a gentleman and lived like a gentleman. They thought it my flash, my front.

And now, in this paneled reception-hall, I was again Flash Cordovan.

Spider Morgan's meaty grin was half a sneer. "That's a hell of a welcome—'flatfeet'!" Morgan told me. He wasn't aggrieved, but merely enjoying himself.

The man at his right—the small, thin, sour-looking one with reddish eyebrows

and a crafty twist to his lips—was a dick, sure of his ground. There's nothing nastier—not when you're a Flash Cordovan, on the wrong side of the law. In those moments, I was. I could tell by looking at them.

"What the hell does it matter? We're here, ain't we?" the small dick said.

"This"—Spider Morgan jerked his head at the speaker—"is Red Sanderson. Detective Sergeant Sanderson, Flash. He's put away more crooks than you ever knew." Spider pushed a thick palm over the knuckles of his other hand, grinned. "Red showed me a new trick with a rubber hose this afternoon, Flash. It's a honey."

"So you came up to tell about it," I guessed.

"Yeah—it's something for you to remember." Morgan grinned. "This other gentleman is Bill Hannigan. We were rookies back in New York, before Bill got curious about the other side of the Palisades and came out this way to live."

"If he's a gentleman, he's no friend of yours," I suggested.

"Yeah?" said Hannigan. "Well, never mind the cracks. We ain't here for any lip."

Hannigan was a lean, morose fellow with narrow eyes, big ears and a close-lidded, unfriendly stare.

I was smiling, but the palms of my hands were damp with cold sweat. I'd known this must happen some day. It wouldn't have mattered much, if I hadn't met Sandra. No city, from Frisco to New York, could put a charge against Flash Cordovan. But, beyond the door, Bradley Cordovan's guests were waiting. Judge Bennett and Mrs. Bennett; Dan Van Stone and his wife—and Sandra.

Sandra knew about Flash Cordovan. The others didn't. Friends of theirs and of Bradley Cordovan did not. Spider Morgan had brought worse than a warrant for Flash Cordovan. He had brought disgrace for Bradley Cordovan.

I grinned at them—Flash Cordovan grinned at them—and said: "Let's have it. What's the rowdy-de-dow?"

"As I live and breathe," said Spider Morgan, "this mugg is high-hating us. Get a load of it boys. I told you you'd never met a crook like him."

"Crook?" I said, lifting my eyebrows. "My lawyer—if you insist on meeting him—will set you right on that."

"I bet you got a good lawyer, too," said Spider, grinning. "You always did have." He took a quick step forward. His hands slapped to my arms. "Stand still," he growled. "This is a frisk."

SANDERSON and Hannigan closed in on each side. Hannigan's hand was in his pocket. He had a gun in his pocket, covering me. I stood still. The underworld had done that to me. Three dicks and a ready gun spell 'trouble.' They had something up their sleeve. I didn't know what it was. But they were too certain of themselves to be bluffing.

So I smiled thinly and lifted my arms slightly. "Go right ahead," I invited, "and then see what my lawyer says about it."

Inwardly, I was thinking of Sandra and her father and mother. It wasn't Hannigan's gun that held me quiet. It was Sandra, and the faith her friends and family had in Bradley Cordovan.

Morgan gave me a quick, careless frisk—hands patting under my arms, along my sides, inside my coat, and in my coat pockets. He grunted with satisfaction.

"What's this?" he said.

Out of my left coat pocket, his thumb and thick forefinger brought a ring. It was a lady's dinner-ring, band and setting of platinum, stone green, with the rich, unmistakable beauty of a fine emerald.

One look at that ring, and my throat

tightened. I should have known, have been watching. That emerald was rare, fine, costly. Stones, not so good, had passed through my hands in the past. An emerald of this size would easily make newspaper headlines. And it had been found in my pocket.

Morgan ignored me. He was grinning in delighted surprise at the ring. "So you ain't a crook, Flash? And you've got a swell mouthpiece? Well, he won't even have to be good to tell you about this thing. Where'd you buy it?" Morgan squinted slyly at me. "Maybe you borrowed it from a lady friend?"

They'd planted it, of course. They'd framed me. Raw? It was the rawest play I'd ever seen. But they were three dicks in good standing—and I was Flash Cordovan.

Sanderson craned his head to see the ring. "Pinch me!" he said. "That looks like one of the rings from the Clinton job last year. Remember, Hannigan? Old lady Clinton—the bird who got her jewels laid her out with a black-jack. She died next day. Never came out of it after they found her on the bedroom floor."

Hannigan looked at me coldly. "So you're the bum who did that? By God, I've got a notion to sap you right here. Ain't he resisting an officer, boys?"

They must have rehearsed. They got it off like stooges. And I? I was sweating ice inside. They were framing me for murder.

I might alibi myself for that night a year ago, but probably not. Try it yourself. What chance did Flash Cordovan have with a lady's emerald ring in his pocket, and three dicks to swear to it?

You're right—not a chance.

Spider Morgan looked sorrowful. "Flash, I never figured you'd get down in the gutter on a job like that. Sapping an old lady. Why didn't you throw a pillow in her face an' roll her under the bed?"

"You dirty bum," I gave him. "Are you trying to railroad me for that job? Are the coppers so dumb around town you've got to pick a fall guy who's been going straight for years?"

"Get your hat," Hannigan ordered gruffly.

"Is this a pinch?"

"Call it a buggy ride," Sanderson put in smoothly. "If you're looking for trouble, start something."

THEY had me cold—more so, perhaps, than they knew. They didn't know what those guests in the next room meant to me. "I'll come," I decided. "Wait until I tell my guests I'm leaving."

"While you take a powder out the back way?" Sanderson jeered. "Nix. I'll stick with you."

"I told you I'd come along." I told him.

"Nix."

"You're asking for it—and you'll get it," I warned him. "I go out of here my own way or I'll give the three of you more hell than you'll ever see again."

"Flash always kept his word, boys," Spider Morgan said. "He's smart. He won't lam on us. He knows we'll pick him up before he gets very far—and then he will be on a spot."

"He's already on one," Sanderson snapped. But he motioned me to go on alone.

I stopped at the door, took a breath, put a smile on my face and walked in to Sandra and the others.

"I'm sorry, I'm going to have to leave you," I told them. "I wasn't expecting this. I find it tremendously important."

"Run along, my boy," Judge Bennett said heartily. "It's time we were going, anyway."

Dolly Van Stone laughed. "Really,

Brad, it sounds mysterious. If I were Sandra, I'd insist on going with you."

I chuckled. "You're not Sandra, and I wouldn't let you if you were. I'll probably be out most of the night."

Sandra's look questioned me. She was smiling, but her eyes were troubled. She was asking silently what was wrong. I couldn't tell her, in front of the others. I didn't want her to know, anyway. But Sandra guessed at it. She came to me, as Hollister brought my hat and topcoat.

"Brad, is it anything I should know?" she asked under her breath.

I touched her arm. I wanted to kiss her. And all I could do in front of the others was smile. "Not tonight." I left her before she read me any deeper.

CHAPTER TWO

Set a Crook—

THEY had a sedan parked before the apartment house. Hannigan took the wheel. Sanderson and Morgan got in the back, one on each side of me. I spoke to Spider Morgan bitterly. "How do you horn in on this? You're a thousand miles from home."

"Home is where the pinch is," said Morgan sarcastically. "I've been out here a couple of weeks on a case."

"Maybe you've been here long enough to learn I've been straight for years."

"They never go straight as far as I'm concerned," Morgan said cynically. "When I spotted you on the street the other day, I tagged along. I told Hannigan and Sanderson they'd better keep an eye on you. The same old kid, aren't you, Flash? Lousy with front. Hell, I almost figured you were one of the polo crowd, myself. How you gettin' the dough to keep up a flash like this?"

"I sank my cash in the market four years ago and hung on," I said. "I cleaned up—legitimately. My record's clean. I'm living straight and trying to forget Flash Cordovan. How much is the payoff going to cost me?"

That was a teaser. I wanted to know how I stood. But not a dime to them if it was a shakedown. I'd take my medicine now. I'd fight it out before I'd pay leeches who would bleed me dry and frame me in the end as cheerfully as they were now doing.

Sanderson surprised me. "Damn you," he blurted. "This ain't a shakedown. Another crack like that, and I'll slug you."

He sounded like a straight copper. Funny—I believed him.

Thinking back, I couldn't remember when anyone had passed the word that Spider Morgan had tried a shakedown. Morgan knew every dirty trick. He'd double-cross anyone if it would help him make a pinch. His heart was as soft as a stone pavement block.

But Morgan was still a poor copper. They don't stay poor when they're putting on the squeeze.

"Wise me up," I said. "If it isn't a shakedown, what is it?"

"Maybe we're taking you out for the air," said Morgan genially.

"Maybe you're Santa Claus," I said. "And I'm getting the air. It feels hot."

"Wait and see what Santa Claus brings you," Morgan said.

So I waited. There wasn't anything else to do.

Hannigan drove up Bayside Avenue, through the wholesale district, and turned up De Lacy Avenue. This was the heart of Crashtown—a noisy, smelly, crowded street which, for two miles, was an endless line of cheap stores, saloons, poolhalls, third-rate night clubs and dancehalls. De Lacy Avenue was the tawdry, painted face of Crashtown. Lights burned through to dawn. Sidewalks were filled long after midnight. A score of nation-

alities mixed on the sidewalks. It was quite the thing to go slumming on De Lacy Avenue for excitement.

Hannigan turned off De Lacy into one of the dark side streets. He drove to the middle of the next block and parked before an old, two-story brick house.

We got out. The early winter chill struck at me, and I felt like shivering.

The house windows were dark. The place had a lonely, ominous look. Sanderson fitted a key into the front door. It turned inaudibly in a well-oiled lock. Sanderson led the way in using a flashlight. I was curious now. This didn't make sense. Why were there three coppers bringing me to this deserted house in Crashtown?

For the house *was* deserted.

SANDERSON didn't even bother to turn on the lights. He led the way upstairs. The flash beam roved over a worn stair carpet, grimy wallpaper, cobwebs in the ceiling corners. The smell of stale beer hung in the cold, dead air. There was no heat in the house. Windows had not been opened in a long time.

The steps creaked, and so did the second-floor hall, as Sanderson led the way to the back. No one was speaking now. The coppers were solemn.

Sanderson stopped at a door at the back of the hall. The flashlight beam stopped at the bottom of the door. I had to look hard to see the inch-long sliver of pencil lead on which the light focused. The lead leaned delicately against the bottom of the door.

"Still here," grunted Sanderson with satisfaction. "No one's come in."

He opened the door, stepped inside, fumbled a moment, and the light went on.

Sanderson's voice cracked loudly in the still room. "There he is. And, if I do say it again, he's a hell of a sight."

I swore under my breath.

A dead man, nude to the waist, with bare feet, lay spread-eagled on the floor. I knew him very well.

It was white-haired Frisco Johnny Jones, the best all-around safe-man the country had ever seen. Johnny had started cracking safes as a kid, gay-catting with roving gangs of yeggs. He had worked in lock-and-safe factories, had done a stretch or two in prison with expert safe-men, and finally had gone out on his own.

Johnny had kept up with the times, discarding wedges and dynamite for nitroglycerine and drills, and finally perfecting himself in the use of cutting-torches and the finer points of complicated burglar-alarm systems. Johnny always had a new trick up his sleeve, as the safe companies and night-watch organizations tightened their defenses.

Fortunes had passed carelessly through Johnny's hands. He had given away more than he had ever spent. His heart had finally gone bad. He had a little money tucked away. For some years, he had been moving about the country quietly and harmlessly. Old Johnny Jones had been a kindly, cheerful man. He had been my friend. And now Johnny lay there spread-eagled on the floor, wrists and ankles tied to spikes driven into the boards. Johnny had died in horrible pain from burns and cuts and blows.

The blood and bruises were there. Even in death, old Johnny's face still cried of the agony he had met in this cold, shabby room.

"Who did it?" I asked. My voice was unsteady.

Hannigan cleared his throat. He was glowering at the body on the floor. "Don't be a sap," he said, without looking at me. "We don't know, or we wouldn't have left him here while we went for you."

"So I'm the mark?" I said. "You'd like to hang this on me, too."

"Be yourself, Flash," Spider Morgan growled. "They'd have a fat chance of pinning this on you. He's been dead less than a day. You could alibi out of it—since we're all damn sure you didn't have anything to do with it."

"What's the payoff, then?" I asked.

"Morgan says you knew this guy back East," Sanderson said.

"So what?"

"So you're the pretty boy," said Morgan. "I thought of you right away, Flash. You're the bird who's going to find out who did this."

I tumbled quick, stalling. "What about the ring?" I asked.

Morgan caressed his chin with the thick blunt ends of his fingers. "What do you think?" he asked.

"Did you ever break a case without a stool pigeon?"

"Not if I could help it," Morgan grinned. But his eyes were cold, watching me.

"I don't know anything about this," I said.

Spider put the emerald dinner-ring on the tip of his little finger. It would just go on. "You'd better find out something," he suggested slowly.

Sanderson pursed his crafty lips. "You know your way around," he told me. "There are men here in town who know you—Whitey Ellis, for instance. You can pass for a right guy. You can get dope we can't dig up."

"This guy was your friend, wasn't he? Look at him," Hannigan ordered.

I WAS looking, sick inside. Down inside me, a dull, cold anger was growing against the men who had done this. Old Johnny had been a square-shooter. Johnny had been kindly. He hadn't deserved this.

They were watching me. The room was cold, and their stares were colder.

They had me on the spot. I knew Spider Morgan. I knew what to expect. It was either stool pigeon or take the rap for murder. It was move once more in the underworld as Flash Cordovan, or see Flash Cordovan spread in the headlines and piloried in open court.

I thought of Sandra. Then I thought of old Johnny Jones, there on the floor at my feet. The room was cold, but I felt colder. I wanted to get the men who had done this. I wanted them worse than did these coppers who stood watching me.

"It's a deal," I said. "What's the dope? What do you know about it?"

Hannigan drew a breath of relief. Sanderson relaxed. Spider Morgan stood grinning. Damn him, he'd used men like this before.

"It's the Dinehart robbery last night—the big jewelers," Hannigan said. "Four hundred and seventy-six thousand in stones and settings."

"I read about it," I said.

"They worked a new trick on the burglar-alarm system that's got the experts tearing their hair," Hannigan said. "They burned into the Dinehart safe with a torch that must have something new in the way of heat, even if the safe door didn't have copper plates inside."

"I read that, too," I said.

What I didn't say was that my pulses had jumped faster as I read. What a haul! What a bag of tricks! What a smooth job! Half a million dollars—most of it in easily salable stones, and settings that could be melted down for the gold and platinum.

Hannigan must have read my mind, or was thinking the same thing.

"Only a guy like Johnny Jones here could have done that job—or someone Johnny wised up. We've been looking for Jones all day. We knew he was in and out of town. He's seemed a harmless old cluck the last few years."

Hannigan scowled. "Harmless hell! We

got a tip he'd been seen coming out of this house. So we came looking for him." Hannigan looked down at the floor. "We found him."

"Do you think Johnny did the Dinehart job?" I asked them.

"Do you?" Sanderson countered.

"I haven't seen Johnny in five years," I said. "He told me then he was quitting for good."

"They never quit," Morgan sneered.

"You're a liar," I told him. "I did."

"Yeah?"

"Which doesn't mean Johnny didn't do the Dinehart job," I said. "But, if he did, somebody was wise and cleaned him. Or tried to. Maybe Johnny's heart kicked out before they made him talk."

"Maybe it didn't—if he had the Dinehart junk," said Hannigan. "Maybe it's changed hands now."

"Maybe it's on its way to New York, in that case," I said. "They wouldn't keep the stuff around here."

"Maybe they would," said Hannigan. "We've been checking to see who's left town. The wise guys are walking on their toes and sticking around."

"So you figure I can get the Dinehart stuff back for you?" I said. "And you'll get a break at headquarters if I do?"

"We'll get the forty-grand reward the insurance people are offering for the stuff, and no questions asked," said Sanderson coolly.

"And what do I get?" I asked.

"You get nothing," said Sanderson. "But we'll lay off you."

And, by God, he acted like he was offering me a favor.

I KNEW he was lying. We all knew it. If they used me once, they'd use me again. But I was thinking now about Johnny Jones, and what he'd gone through to keep from talking. Johnny had had his code. Squealing wasn't in it.

"Where can I find Whitey Ellis?" I said. "I didn't know Whitey was in town."

"Three years," said Hannigan. "He owns the Kit Kat Klub back down De Lacy Street. He ought to be around there now."

"That's all you can tell me?"

Hannigan looked at Sanderson. Something passed between them. I couldn't catch it. But, suddenly, I had a hunch they were holding out on me. Something was wrong, and they weren't telling me.

"That's all," said Sanderson. "Headquarters hasn't got a thing to work on. We've picked up everybody we can think of, but we're getting nowhere. The papers are making plenty out of it."

I'd read that, too. The papers were riding them.

Hannigan looked at his watch. "We'll give you ten minutes, Cordovan. And then we'll turn this in like we just found it."

"Stay away from me," I said, turning to the door. "Call my apartment—or I'll telephone you at headquarters. And I still think you're three oversized rats."

Spider Morgan's smooth chuckle followed me out.

"Good luck, sweetheart," said Morgan, and I didn't like the way he got it off. Morgan knew something, too. I had a hunch, as I went out, that it was going to make trouble for Flash Cordovan.

CHAPTER THREE

Murder Walks on Tiptoe

THE Kit Kat Klub would have been a speakeasy, a few years back—a joint. It was still a joint. You don't go to De Lacy Street to doze over your beer. Strip-pictures of the floor-show girls were under glass, out front. A uniformed doorman waited for the uptown trade who came slumming. Not a bad place. Whitey Ellis was getting the trade. I wondered,

as I left my hat and topcoat at the cloakroom, why Whitey had left New York, and if he still remembered me.

The headwaiter steered me to a table in a corner.

"Tell Whitey Ellis that Flash Cordovan wants to see him," I said.

"Are you a friend of Whitey's?" His manner changed. "Perhaps you'd like a better table?"

"Get Whitey," I said.

He did.

Whitey had gained ten pounds. His dinner jacket fitted him like an envelope. But he was the same Whitey, with the same glad hand for a friend. "Could I believe my ears! Flash, say this is great. Years, ain't it? How long have you been around?"

"Not long," I said. "Nice joint, Whitey. How'd you happen to hit this town?"

Whitey grinned. "Things got tough, so I sold out and took the air. I'm doing better here than I ever did off Times Square."

Whitey turned to the headwaiter. "What the hell do you mean by parking a friend of mine here?"

"I didn't know. I suggested a better table. There is one by the floor."

"Get a bottle of my private stuff," Whitey ordered. "Anyone with you, Flash?"

"Not tonight," I said, moving with him to the new table.

"Like to meet something nifty?" Whitey offered as he drew out chairs beside the dance floor.

"No dames."

Whitey grinned and slid his cigarettes across the table. "It's a good town, Flash. Stick around and do yourself some good. I can set you right."

"I'll think it over," I said.

The headwaiter brought Scotch and set-ups.

Whitey lifted his glass. "Mud in your eye, Flash."

I looked around. "You've got a good crowd here. Maybe I could do myself some good in this town."

"Why not?" said Whitey. "It's being done."

I chuckled. "It seems so. Someone went to town on a safe last night, I hear."

Whitey gave me a narrow look. "That was a slick job, Flash."

"Plenty slick."

"You might have done it yourself."

"Who did do it?" I asked.

Whitey shrugged. "I should know! Think the dope would be around so quickly?"

"You're on the grapevine, aren't you? You ought to have an idea," I pressed.

"I hear things," Whitey admitted. "They all know I'm regular. Everybody's wondering who pulled this Dinehart job."

"I hear Johnny Jones is in town."

"He's in and out," Whitey said. "Johnny claims he ain't working any more. He could have done it."

"Johnny told me years ago his ticker was on the bum. He was laying off for good. I'd like to see Johnny," I said. "Where does he hang out?"

Whitey shrugged. "Johnny drops in now and then and gets a beer glow on. Maybe he's living with his daughter."

"I didn't know he had a daughter. Is that straight?"

"Johnny got beery one night and opened up. He's nuts about her. She's working somewhere in town. Johnny hangs around to be near her. Swell looker, too. Johnny showed me her picture. He calls her Bea. Her name's Beatrice. Johnny said she was eighteen before she ever learned where his dough came from."

"Tough," I said. "What did she do?"

"She got a job," Whitey chuckled. "Can you tie that? All the money Johnny's

made—and his daughter slamming a typewriter for a living."

Whitey lit a cigarette.

"She ain't so dumb," he assured me. "I recognized her in here a week after Johnny showed me her picture. She was with one of the boys in the policy racket—Jack Bordoni. And when the girls step out with Jack, they're getting wise."

My estimation of Johnny's kid went down. I might have known it. Johnny had never been able to break away from the easy money. His daughter evidently had acquired a taste for it. I said: "Maybe this Bordoni can tell me where to find her, and she can steer me on to Johnny."

"That's an idea," Whitey said. "And you're lucky. Bordoni's across the floor there. Want me to go over and ask him?"

"I'll go with you," I said.

Maybe it was a fool stunt. I'd been around town a long time. But I'd been Bradley Cordovan. I hadn't mixed with anyone that Flash Cordovan would know.

SIX people were at the table. Three of them were girls who knew their way around. Expensive dames. I should know that type. I'd spent enough money on the likes of them, in the past.

"Bordoni, meet Flash Cordovan," Whitey said. "If you don't know him, you ought to. Flash is regular and stands aces back East."

"Yeah?" Bordoni said. "Hello, Cordovan."

He had blond hair, oiled back. He was good looking, and had the smooth, cold, watchful manner that the men in the rackets seemed to get. I'd often thought about it. I'd decided they must be that type or they wouldn't be in the rackets.

"Sit down. Have a drink." Bordoni's eyes were appraising me.

"Thanks," I refused. "I just wanted to say 'hello' to Johnny Jones while I'm in town. Whitey tells me you know his daughter."

I said that to Bordoni. But I was looking at the other two men. They were the same type. Across the table, a stocky, powerful man was toying with a cigar. He wore a blue double-breasted coat. A gold pin held his collar points together. His face was pale, lower lip thick, brows black and heavy. There was nothing about his looks to make him stand out—yet, somehow, he did. In a group of fifty men, I thought, this man across the table would draw a stranger's eye.

The third man was thin, nervous, fidgety. He sat there rolling a cigarette between thin, carefully manicured fingers, raising it to his lips for quick, short puffs, and shooting nervous glances about the table.

Because I was studying them from the corner of my eye, I caught something I'd otherwise have missed. When I mentioned Johnny Jones' daughter, the chunky man took his cigar abruptly from his mouth. His eyes went to the thin, nervous man, then to me. Again I had the feeling something was going on under the surface.

Bordoni didn't introduce me. His face didn't change. "The Jones' girl?" he said. "I've only been out with her once. I dated her up at the office, picked her up there, and she asked me to let her out at a drugstore near her house."

The girl beside him—a brunette with deep-red lips and vividly tinted nails—broke in. "So you've been two-timing me, Jack? Ain't men all alike?"

Bordoni showed narrow white teeth, as he grinned at her. "Dames are all alike," he said. "Shut up before I trade you for something just as good."

She took it smiling. But she shut up. And there was dismay back in her eyes. It was the same old story. She'd fallen for him—was nuts over him. He didn't give a damn about her.

"Where does Johnny's daughter work?" I asked Bordoni. "I'll find her through the office."

The chunky man pulled at his lower lip, and spoke to me in a calm, cold voice. "Maybe Jack can take you to the drugstore where he dropped her. Know where it is, Jack?"

Bordoni looked at him and nodded. "Maple Heights. I didn't notice the corner but I can find it."

"Take him there. The drugstore will have an idea where she lives. We'll go on to Dan's apartment."

"I'll meet you out front in a few minutes, Cordovan," Bordoni said. "Suit you?"

"On the button," I assured him.

When Whitey and I were out of earshot I asked: "Who were those other two muggs?"

"The one who spoke to you is Al Raglan. He's the local big shot. Carries the policy racket in his pocket. His political drag is fierce. The other one is Dan Curry, who handles the pin-balls."

"The Kit Kat must be racketeers' retreat."

"Their dough looks the same in the cash register," Whitey grinned. "And they leave plenty of it."

BORDONI joined me, outside. He had a big, flashy sedan parked a few doors away. It must have cost a lot of dough—a car like that. "Mighty nice of you," I told him.

"Any pal of Whitey's gets a break from me," he answered.

Maybe. But I was wondering about that look between Al Raglan and Curry. Ten to two, Raglan had said things to Bordoni when I left. But what? What was the payoff?

Maple Heights was east of Crashtown. A residential neighborhood. You'd have to know the town well to have any idea where it was.

"Where does Johnny's daughter work?" I asked.

"In my lawyer's office," Bordoni said.

"Who is he? I may need a good mouthpiece."

"Mahoney—Alec Mahoney," Bordoni said. "He charges plenty but he's tops."

Maple Heights was out east—but Bordoni was driving south. He was driving fast, too.

We passed factories, warehouses, grimy streets full of slum houses—brick-and-wood houses that had been built two generations.

"She live around here?" I asked.

"This is a short cut to the Heights," Bordoni replied. He passed me a look out of the corner of his eye.

But I was dumb. He drove faster. We passed more factories, some vacant lots and bumped across railroad tracks.

"Hell, ain't that a flat tire?" Bordoni pulled over to the curb and left the motor running. "Take a look on your side," he said, opening the door.

I got out. I cut around the back of the machine on my toes.

Vacant lots lay lonely across the street. The dark, fenced yard of a factory on our side hemmed us in with solitude. The idling motor purred softly against the quiet.

"This back tire's flat," Bordoni called. "Look at it."

I was there, before he finished speaking.

He hadn't expected me so soon. His hand was still inside his coat. I gave him the knee, doubled him up, slammed him in the jaw, and knocked him spinning to the street.

Bordoni lay there writhing painfully, making queer gurgling sounds in his throat. Under his coat, I found an automatic. His idea had been all right—but he hadn't thought fast enough. Also, he hadn't known I knew Maple Heights.

Headlights turned into the street a

couple of blocks away and came toward us. I shoved Bordoni in the back of the car, got in and closed the door.

He was reviving somewhat. I jerked his belt off, rolled him over on his face, and said: "Listen, you punk, I'll give you the heat if you move a finger."

I strapped his arms behind him. A motor-robe hung over the robe rail. I had a pocketknife. I ripped strips off the robe and finished tying him—arms, legs and ankles. Then I put my feet on him, lit a cigarette, and gouged the automatic in his back.

"Let's have it," I said. "What's Raglan got on his mind?"

He was still groaning from the knee I'd given him. His voice was a venomous gasp. "So help me, you'll take it for this. Al Raglan pays off."

"Where's Raglan now?" I sneered.

Yes, I was Flash Cordovan—tougher than I'd ever been, I guess. But I couldn't get Johnny's spread-eagled body out of my mind.

Bordoni was no punk. I'll give him that. He sneered at me even while I had that gun in his back. "Go on—give me the heat," he dared. "And try to lam far enough so Al won't get you."

Maybe he was right. The country's a small place when a big-time racketeer puts the heat on you. But all I said was: "So you won't talk?"

I gagged him, and did it right. I wadded my handkerchief into a ball, jammed it with the gun-muzzle into his mouth, and tied it in with a strong strip from the the blanket.

When I drove off, I knew Bordoni would be there in the back until someone let him out.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Woman Who Waited

THE Chelton Arms was where I went. Home. Why? Well, I wanted a thousand dollars out of the wall safe in my bedroom. I was going to see Bordoni's lawyer. He would be Al Raglans' lawyer—and Raglan's lawyer wasn't named Mahoney. I'd kept up with the newspapers. He was Clee Bratton, the million-dollar mouthpiece and big trial lawyer.

I believed Bordoni had told the truth. He'd met Johnny Jones' daughter at his lawyer's office. Clee Bratton would know where I could find her.

Hollister opened the door. He looked relieved.

"Bring me a Scotch and soda. I need it."

"Yes, sir," said Hollister. "I don't suppose you know, sir—"

I was already walking into the living-room, and Sandra was standing there by the fireplace. The others were gone. The coal fire was out.

"What's this?" I said, and my heart turned over as I looked at Sandra. I tried to be stern. "You shouldn't have stayed."

"Brad!" said Sandra. She was not smiling. Her dark-gray eyes held a lurking dread. "Was it trouble, Brad?"

I didn't lie. We'd come too far being honest. I couldn't lie—with everything Sandra valued in life bound up in this business. I told her what had happened. She was holding my hand before I finished, and I was holding her hand. We clung to each other like two drowning persons. At the end, Sandra stood on her toes and kissed me on the mouth.

"Well, Brad, we knew it was coming," she said unsteadily. "I—I didn't think it would be this bad. What are we going to do?"

Sandra said 'We'. I think, at that moment, I could have gone on my knees. A woman—the right kind of a woman—can tear the heart out of a man.

Hollister brought my drink, and a glass of sherry.

"I took the liberty, Miss Bennett," Hollister said apologetically. "Knowing how well you like this *amontillado.*"

Sandra smiled at him and took the sherry.

Hollister left with a worshiping look. She was the one person who could reduce him to abject servitude.

Glass in hand, I told her: "You'd better tell your father and mother we've decided to call it off. Announce it publicly tomorrow."

Sandra laughed at me.

"You've got to," I pleaded.

She kissed me again and perched on the chair arm beside me.

"You're wasting time, Brad," she said calmly. "What are you going to do?"

I got the telephone book.

No lawyer by the name of Mahoney was listed. No Beatrice Jones was listed. But Clee Bratton was there, office and house. I tossed the directory aside.

"I'm going to see Clee Bratton, the lawyer," I told her. "I'm certain he can tell me where the Jones girl is. I've got to see her. There's something funny behind all this—Johnny dead, his daughter working for Bratton, and Al Raglan not wanting me to get to her."

"Brad, I'm afraid," Sandra whispered.

The next moment she was in my arms.

"You're going home," I told her huskily. "Leave this to me. I'm Flash Cordovan now. I've been in a corner before."

"If you say so," Sandra promised obediently.

I went into the bedroom. From the wall safe I took out, on second thought, fifteen one-hundred-dollar bills. Then I kissed Sandra again—and Flash Cordovan went down to Bordoni's car.

Bordoni was still on the back floor. I spoke to him, as I drove off. "How do you like it, sweetheart? Can you take it like you give it?"

He made sounds behind his gag. I laughed. Racketeers were in my hair tonight.

CLEE BRATTON lived on Coliseum Drive. The mayor also lived in Coliseum Drive. The houses were mostly stone or brick, fronting closely on the street—all large, costly, and luxurious. Bratton's house was stone, three stories, with a colonnaded doorway on the sidewalk level. There was an iron grillwork gate.

I parked two houses beyond.

A manservant answered my ring. There were lights upstairs. Bratton was probably no stranger to furtive visits.

"Tell Bratton it's necessary I see him," I said.

"The name?" I was asked.

"I'll give it to Bratton."

I was being looked over carefully through the iron grillwork. Bratton's servant was wise—he had that look. Instead of going back for instructions, he unlocked the gate, admitted me to a small, tile-floored reception-room off the entrance-hall.

He had the build of a wrestler. He moved with a cat-like litheness. "I'll tell Mr. Bratton," he said, and left me there.

I wondered about Bratton. It would take something to fool him. I thought I had it—in my pocket.

I got to my feet, as Bratton entered. We eyed one another. I think I was the one most impressed.

Clee Bratton had something. It emanated from him like magnetism. He was neither big nor heavy. He looked suprisingly young, until you noticed the iron-gray over his temples. His build was fair, his face almost aesthetic. His eyes were keen, stabbing, with somewhat the look of a dreamer. I had the feeling that here was the responsive shell of a man into which could be poured, at a moment's notice, the fire of passion and the pathos of despair.

In short, he was capable of rising to those heights of fiery conviction to which moronic juries are so easily susceptible.

Yet, when he spoke to me, Bratton was calm, low-voiced. "I understand you wouldn't give your name."

"I'm Flash Cordovan," I said.

I tried to read him as he stood there. Had Al Raglan gotten in touch with him? Did he know that I wasn't supposed to be here—that Bordoni was supposed to have taken care of me?

His face didn't tell me a thing. Yes, he was an actor! "Well, what is it?" He added: "I've heard of you—years ago."

"That makes it simple," I said. I opened my billfold, handed him the fifteen hundred-dollar bills. "I'm going to be around town. I'd like to know whom to call if I need a lawyer."

Money talks. Bratton riffled the bills, estimating them. "My retainer on a case is five thousand," he informed me without turning a hair.

"You'll get thirty-five hundred more if I have to call you," I told him. "This is just to let you know I'm in town."

He considered me, and nodded slightly. "Fair enough," he agreed. "Where are you staying?"

"I'll know where to get you," I said. "Oh, yes—one thing more. Johnny Jones wrote me his daughter was working in your office. What's her address?"

Bratton looked at the money. I could almost see his mind work. A man meant business when he laid fifteen C's on the line. This must be on the level. I was safe enough. When Bratton didn't immediately deny the girl was working for him, I knew I had him.

"Just a moment," he said. I think I have her address here." He glanced in a small, morocco-bound notebook. "She lives at Sixteen-eleven Coventry Street. Her telephone number is Wainright Three-four-two-six-W."

"Thanks. I'll look her up while I'm here," I said. "You might tell her in the morning that I'm in town."

"Ill do that," he promised.

The fifteen hundred was in his hand as he closed the front door, and I was smiling as I started Bordoni's car. "This will slay you," I said over my shoulder. "Clee Bratton just gave me the Jones girl's address."

Coventry Street was five blocks east of my apartment. I lived in the nineteen-hundred block. The address Bratton had given me was an apartment house, six stories high, an old-timer, growing shabby.

The tiny lobby had no switchboard, no elevator boy. The one elevator was automatic, controlled by buttons.

A mailbox slot carried the girl's name —two names in fact—*Beatrice Jones, Dorothy Wayne, Apartment 4 A.*

The apartment was at the front, on the right. I pushed the button. No one came to the door. I tried again, and the door opened abruptly.

I smiled. Then the smile froze on my face. The man who stood there had an automatic not six inches from my coat front.

"Come in," he said.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Tryst with the Dead

MAYBE you've never heard death speak softly. I have. I heard it now through thin lips that barely moved. I looked into a cold, hard face, close-lidded eyes even colder—then I went inside.

He closed the door, sliding a bolt that hadn't been on before. The other hand kept the gun against my side.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked with the same cold threat.

I was looking into a room at the left.

A girl in there was sitting stiffly in a straight-back chair, watching me.

She was vivid in cerise-silk pajamas, cut low in front and sleeveless. Her hair hung to her shoulders. Night crême glistened on her face. She was young, pretty—and she was tied in that chair.

"Watch that gun," I said, as he prodded me into the room.

It was a cozy-looking living-room with a fireplace and chintz-covered chairs. But now it was not cozy. A chill, malevolent threat hung in the air.

The gun prodded me again.

"Well," he said, "what the hell do you want?"

"Dorothy," I said.

Her eyes widened,

I'd taken a chance. But this girl didn't resemble Johnny Jones. By her startled look, I guessed she wasn't Beatrice Jones. I was right.

The thin-lipped stranger—he was as tall as I—grinned. "There she is," he said, "waiting for you."

"I don't understand."

"Who gives a damn?" he said. "Who's with you?"

I shook my head. "No one." I wondered when he was going to frisk me and find Bordoni's gun in my pocket.

"Turn around," he said.

"This way?" I asked, and turned toward him.

My left hand knocked his gun aside. My right fist hooked up to his jaw. He wasn't expecting it. I couldn't miss. He spun off balance. His knees went rubbery. I grabbed his right wrist, and wrenched the gun away, as I tripped him to the floor.

Once more I'd thought faster than somebody else. But my knees were weak. If he'd been expecting it, he could have blown out my side.

The girl had gasped. She was swallowing now, pale and faint as he rolled to a hand and knee. He stopped there, glowering at the gun. I grinned at him, and hoped it looked as nasty as I felt.

"You asked for it," I told him. "And you got it. Guess what?"

"Listen," he said, watching me. "Don't try to get hard. Put up that rod and let me explain. This is money in your pocket."

"Is it?" I said. "Go ahead."

I lowered the automatic, and turned to the girl. He moved, and I turned back to meet him coming to his feet. His hand was inside his coat. That hand was still inside the coat when I slugged him with the flat side of his automatic. He went down, as if I'd used an ax. In a cleverly tailored pocket inside the coat, I found a double-barreled derringer.

Derringer in one hand, automatic in the other, I grinned at the girl. "Hello, Dorothy," I said.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"Does it matter? I'm a friend of Johnny Jones. Where's Beatrice?"

"She—she's out."

"Where?"

"I d-don't know," she stammered. "He asked me the same thing."

I'd known he was after Johnny's kid. Johnny was gone, and she was next. I didn't know why, but it was so. The man at my feet was proof of it.

"Who came with this?" I asked, looking down at him.

The girl in the chair shook her head. "Am I going to stay in this chair?"

"Just a minute," I said.

I SNAPPED off the light, and went to the windows. They were front windows. I eased one up softly and looked cautiously out. Four floors below, the street lay dim and quiet but not deserted. The back door of Bordoni's car was open. As I watched, a man backed out of the car and helped a second man out to his feet.

My hunch had been right. A lookout had been left here. He must have recognized Bordoni's car. Now, hell was due to pop.

I pulled the curtain down, switched on a floorlamp beside me, and was cutting the girl free a moment later.

"What happened?" I snapped, working fast.

"He rang the doorbell. I thought it was Bea. When I opened the door, he pushed in. I wouldn't tell him where Bea was so he tied me up and said he'd wait for her."

"You wouldn't tell him? Then you know. Where is she?"

"Why?" she countered.

"Stop stalling—she's in trouble. And" —I said it cynically — "she's evidently been asking for it, running around with rats and racketeers!"

Dorothy Wayne stood up. I had to steady her. Color had rushed into her cheeks. She answered me hotly. "Bea's crazy about her boy friend. Since he lost his last job, he's been broke."

"That's fine," I said. "What's his name?"

She shook back her hair, shrugged the shoulder straps of her cerise pajamas into place and eyed me warily. "Dan Taggert," she replied hesitantly.

"Where does he live?"

"I don't know. Dan moved out on the north shore, near the point, where he can live cheaply until he gets a job. A friend of his has got a little house out there."

"Where's Beatrice?" I asked again.

"She drove out to see Dan."

And I swore, then. "I've got to get to that girl."

Dorothy Wayne looked at the man on the floor and shivered slightly. "Bea drove me out to Dan's place once. I think I could find it again."

"Why didn't you say so? Can we get out the back way, without using the elevator?"

"The back stairs, I guess," she said doubtfully. "I've never used them."

"Get some clothes on quick."

I caught up the telephone and called my apartment. Hollister answered.

"Don't ask questions," I rapped. "My car's at the curb. You have a key. Meet me at the alley between Coventry and Beale on Seventeenth Street. Quickly."

"Yes, sir," Hollister promised.

I turned out the light, looked out the window again. An automobile had stopped beside Bordoni's car. Other men had stepped out. Three of them started toward the building entrance.

I whirled from the window, snapping on the light.

"Hurry up," I called. "We've got sixty seconds to get out of here."

I had the receiver off the telephone, as I finished speaking. The operator put me through to police headquarters. The headquarter's switchboard gave me the detective bureau. Sanderson and Morgan were not in.

"Trouble at Sixteen-eleven Coventry Street," I said. "You need a machine gun."

"Hey! What kind of—"

I hung up. The man on the floor was still motionless. His ear was smashed, bleeding, but he was only knocked out.

Dorothy Wayne hurried out of the bedroom with a coat over her arm. Her hair was still down. She was only half dressed.

"I can't leave like this," she protested.

"They're coming up now," I told her, heading out of the room.

SHE WAS behind me, when I stepped out into the empty hall. The elevator was coming up. I ran back along the hall. A swinging door let us into a closed stair shaft. I ran down, ready for trouble, but the way was clear to the basement. Striking matches, I found a door that let us

out into a small areaway—and up steps to the back of the building. There was a small back yard, a back gate, and then the alley leading to Seventeenth Street.

My car wasn't there.

A cold, cutting wind was rising, swirling dead leaves along the street. Dorothy Wayne caught my arm, as gunshots crashed on the night back on Coventry Street.

"The cops," I told her.

She whispered: "This is terrible. What has Bea been doing?"

"Get back!" I dragged her into the shadows beside a hedge.

Headlights had turned into Seventeenth, coming fast. They swerved to the alley mouth and stopped, and it was the long green silhouette of my car.

"O.K.," I said. "We're leaving." I yanked open the back door, boosted her in and spoke sharply to Hollister. "Get over—I'll drive."

We were rolling, before I saw who had relinquished the wheel.

"Sandra."

Hollister spoke despairingly from the back seat: "I tried to stop her, Mr. Cordovan."

"I didn't go home, Brad—I couldn't," Sandra said. "When you telephoned for the car, I knew something was wrong. What is it?"

"This girl rooms with Beatrice Jones. I found men waiting for Johnny's daughter to come home. We're going after her. I'll drop you where you can get a taxi."

"Are they the same men who got her father?" Sandra asked, troubled.

"Obviously."

"They'd treat her the same way?"

"Probably."

"I'm goinng with you," Sandra said, and I knew argument would be wasted.

Raglan's men wouldn't be there. Sandra went.

CHAPTER SIX

Miss Jones

THE north lake shore was low, sandy, covered with reeds, coarse grass, stunted trees. Narrow channels cut haphazardly back from the lake. Small huts, shabby little houses squatted here and there. For miles, the north shore was bleak, cheerless, lonely, and the winter winds off the lake were cold and wild.

We left the highway outside the city and turned toward the lake. Gravel for a mile, fenced farms, and then sand. The houses vanished. The road became sandy ruts.

The wind was still rising. Fine sand was flying before the headlights. Bushes, coarse grass, stunted trees were leaning before the gusts. We could hear the rising whine of the wind.

"Beatrice turned to the left at an old shack," Dorothy Wayne said.

We found the shack, the turn, passed another shack with one dimly lighted window, and went on a full half mile.

We were, I saw, running down a small peninsula. The spotlight found water beyond the whipping reeds on either side—black, dark water tumbling before the wind. And then, ahead, was the house between the road and the water. Two rooms, I judged. A lean-to porch overhung the water. A small motorboat was tied to the lean-to edge. Two automobiles were parked beyond. The door stayed shut after I stopped the car.

"Wait here," I said to the others, and got out.

The wind drove me staggering. My hat vanished. Sand stung my face. The rising whine of the cold wind had an eery, disturbing note, as did the booming growl of the lake waves piling on shore.

Head down, I shouldered to the door and knocked.

"Who's that?" a voice called.

"I'm looking for Miss Jones."

Half a minute passed. The door opened. I saw a girl inside, and entered. Three men were in the room. A thin-faced man held the door and eyed me warily.

"I'm Miss Jones," the girl said.

I knew it, already. She looked like Johnny Jones—thin, poised, with an oval, pleasing face, she stood there with her hands in the pockets of a gray knit sweater.

The young man beside her, I guessed, was Dan Taggert. Twenty-three, perhaps, lean, wiry, clean-cut, he wore khaki trousers and shirt. His arms, below the rolled-up sleeves, were sunburned, muscular. He stood beside Johnny Jones' daughter, and I felt an affinity between them. They matched, belonged—you could feel the bond between them. And both were troubled, uncertain as they looked at me.

The third man was short, stout. He moved, and it was easily, lightly. He had more muscle than fat. His face was broad, flat, unsmiling.

I felt danger in that low-ceilinged, lamplit room. I had the feeling guns might have been quickly hidden before I entered. I was conscious of the rising storm outside as I said: "I'm an old friend of Johnny Jones. My name is Flash Cordovan. Johnny's dead."

You get it that way in the underworld —callous and hard.

But Johnny's daughter was not hard. She was pale, but she went paler. Her hand groped for young Taggert's hand. Her eyes clung to my face. "Dead?" she repeated numbly. "Father's dead?"

"Al Raglan's man got him, I think."

Flat-Face slid his eyelids down like closing curtains as he looked at Thin-Face, standing by the closed door.

But young Dan Taggert looked as if his heart were suddenly laid open and the misery of the world had fallen on him. His hand tightened convulsively on Johnny's daughter's hand.

She jerked away. Grief shook her as the storm was shaking the building. "You did it," she cried to Taggert. "I'll always hate you."

"Please," he pleaded huskily. "I wouldn't have hurt Johnny or you."

She laughed wildly—half a sob.

"You weren't man enough to stay broke. You wouldn't listen. And now he's dead—"

Flat-Face spoke to me harshly. "What did Raglan have against Johnny Jones?"

"Maybe he figured like the cops figured," I said. "Anybody who could do the Dinehart job must have had an in with Johnny. Five hundred G's is a lot of money for Raglan to miss. Johnny wouldn't talk. He's dead. Raglan's men are looking for this girl now. She's here —and you birds must have pulled the Dinehart job."

"Did we? So what?" His eyes were slits now, malevolent, estimating.

THIN-FACE, at the door, had his hand in his pocket. He seemed to be waiting for an order. Johnny's daughter shivered. She was dry-eyed, but I thought again of the storm shaking the house as she cried: "Of course they did it. Dan admitted it to me this evening."

"Forget it. We've got to lam. That's enough out of you, sister." Flat-Face's voice was ugly.

Dan Taggart spoke with cold fury: "Damn you, Brownie. Keep out of this." Taggart turned to me, huskily: "Johnny spoke of you. He said you were a square-shooter. Maybe you can understand. Locks and safes are my trade—when there's work. I was driving a taxi when I fell for Bea. I'd heard of Johnny Jones. When I found out he was Bea's father, I talked shop with Johnny. It's a bad habit—like a jig-saw puzzle. You've got to figure out how to open anything. John-

ny taught me lots. He was kind of proud of me. He used to introduce me to his friends as the one man in the country who knew everything he knew about a safe.

"Brownie and Slim, here, propositioned me to open the Dinehart safe. They had the job all cased. I turned them down and told Johnny. But they kept after me, showed me the plans of the place, and told me I was the only one beside Johnny who could get into the Dinehart safe. Just for fun, I figured how I could. And then I had an accident and lost my driver's license. I was broke when I heard that Bea had gone out with a flashy spender named Bordoni, who's in the policy racket."

"I explained that to you," Johnny's daughter flashed.

Dan Taggart looked at her. His jaw was hard. "Yeah, you told me. Business, you said. But all it meant to me was that you were paying my dinner checks and getting tired of it. Our getting married was just one of those things. Brownie had this place. I came out here to live with him, and told him I'd do the Dinehart job. One job—then I was through."

Dan Taggart laughed. His hurt was raw and open. "I told you tonight I was willing to turn the stuff back, and you heard what Brownie and Slim said when I told them. Now, you're off me for life because of Johnny. I didn't have any idea he'd be dragged into it."

"You should have thought of all that in time," Johnny's daughter said bitterly.

Unspoken words were passing between Flat-Face and Thin-Face.

I spoke to the other two. "You kids are too young to handle this right."

"I'm old enough to know how I feel," she told me.

"But not old enough to know how Johnny felt," I said. "Don't think Johnny didn't know who did the Dinehart job. And what did he do? Tip the coppers? Raise hell with Taggart here? Tell you to lay off Taggart for life?"

With her little chin up she flared: "You don't know what he would have done."

"Johnny had time to do a lot—but he didn't," I said. "Johnny was old enough to know these things can be straightened out. He didn't figure on Al Raglan, though—and Raglan got him. And what did Johnny do—steer them to your Dan?"

She wiped her eyes. "I—I don't know what he did."

"I'll tell you," I said. "Johnny kept his mouth shut. They gave him the works, but still he kept his mouth shut. He shielded your Dan—and only because he thought you two were going on together."

I said that for Johnny, and hoped Johnny approved. The walls shivered under the storm, as I said: "Johnny left you the only wedding present he could. Johnny tried to keep Al Raglan away from you both, and died trying. Now, you fight when you hear about it, instead of pulling together, turning the Dinehart stuff back and trying a new start."

"Yes?" Flat-Face sneered. "And what do we say about that?"

"Where's the stuff?" I asked.

"We took the tanks and tools out in the boat and threw them overboard. The stuff is in a box out in the water."

Flat-Face spoke to me. "You may be Flash Cordovan, but you keep outa this."

He reminded me of something slimy and deadly you might find under a board. But I tried to soap him. "I guess you knew Johnny Jones. Johnny kicked out trying to help his girl. Johnny would appreciate it."

"Don't make me laugh!" he said. "He's dead, ain't he? What the hell? Get wise, Cordovan—scram!"

"And if I don't?" I said, watching him.

He bared his teeth.

CHAPTER SEVEN

You Can't Beat a Woman

THE lamp trembled on the table; the house shook; outside the wind was drumming wilder. Thin-Face jumped, snatched a gun from his pocket, as the door flew open and a blast of cold air rushed in.

Sandra stood there, blinking in the light. Her cheeks were whipped rosy by the wind. She looked utterly lovely and apprehensive.

"Brad," she said, ignoring the others. "A car is coming. I've seen it's headlights twice. Most of the time it's running without lights."

"The cops?" Flat-Face rasped.

"Probably Raglan's men," I said. "Put out that light."

Swearing, he jumped to the lamp. I caught Sandra's hand. I'd let her into this. "I suppose we're trapped out there," I said aloud. "Any way other than the road to leave?"

Dan Taggart answered, in the darkness: "Yes—trapped." His arm had closed around Johnny's girl, as the light went out. His voice was strained, desperate.

"The boat?" I said.

"I forgot," he answered. "There's a little cross-channel, just this side of the beach. It doesn't lead anywhere much, but we could get away from here. There's a guy named Buck Avery, a couple of miles over, who's got an old car."

"That will get the women away," I said with relief. "God knows they'd better be away if Raglan's torpedoes are in that car—and they must be. Get the boat ready."

"Who's running this?" Flat-Face said sourly. "Come on, boys."

"Stand here," I directed Sandra. "I'll be back in a minute."

I ducked out to the car and slid behind the wheel, talking fast. "Both of you get in the house. Hollister, here's a gun. I'm coming in."

Hollister asked no questions. But he was steady. I knew Hollister's record, years back. I'd hired him because I had to be certain of the one man who would be near me intimately.

I was turning the car before they got in the house—without lights. I parked it close alongside the door and left the motor idling. There was too much noise to hear another motor running, but I saw a flashlight beam reach for the road not two hundred yards away, then snap off instantly. They were close, very close.

I dodged in and closed the door. "The car's turned around and the motor's running," I said. "They'll figure we're set to leave. It ought to hold them a little. Let's get in that boat."

The staccato hammer of the boat exhaust broke out behind the house. It moved away, as I broke across the room to the door.

"Where's Taggart?" I yelled. "They're leaving us."

"He was with them," Johnny's daughter said.

I groped for the knob, yanked the door open, jumped out on the lean-to porch—and almost tripped over into the water.

The boat was gone, running toward the beach. I struck a match. The wind whipped out the flame, but there was light enough to show Dan Taggart's pale face at my feet. He was groaning, as I dragged him back inside. In the same moment, a spotlight beam swept the side of the house. It found the dark tumbling water of the channel, and reached on beyond after the staccato exhaust of the boat.

An automobile, racing in low gear, swept past the house, along the hundred feet of rutted road beyond.

Dan Taggart tried to stand up. I helped him to his feet.

"Brownie slugged me," he groaned. "Where are they?"

"Gone in the boat," I said. "They left us here for Raglan's men."

"They got the Dinehart stuff," he moaned. "It was in a tin box on the bottom, with a line tied to a stake under the water. Slim went to get it."

Wild as the wind was, it was not so savage and vicious as the ugly chatter of machine-gun fire that broke out beyond the house, where the automobile had gone.

"It's Raglan's men," I said.

Just then the door was kicked open. There was no time to get to Sandra. Someone had jumped out of the car as it passed.

FOR five full seconds nothing happened. Then, without warning, a flashlight lanced through the blackness and found Dan Taggart. A gun blasted. My own gun was roaring at the doorway, as young Taggart staggered. Hollister's gun joined in.

The flashlight fell and glared from the floor inside the doorway, like an evil eye. One lean hand flopped through the light and knocked the flash aside with a convulsive gesture.

Hollister, nearer the door, was dragging the man in, as I got there and caught up the light. It was the thin-lipped fellow I had left in Dorothy Wayne's apartment.

"So you got here, too?" I said, leaning over him.

He glared into the light. Blood was already bubbling on his lips, but he gasped: "You would gab where you were going, with me lying there on the floor! And Al's lawyer calling him about you! The boys'll take you for this!"

Then the storm brought another burst of machine-gun fire.

He had dropped his gun. I stepped over him and looked beyond the house. Sand whipped at my face. The wind felt bitter, and an icy feeling crawled along my back.

The automobile had raced on beyond the road and, where the coarse grass grew scanty on the loose sand. A hundred and fifty yard away, it's headlights and spotlight glared against the boat, which had swerved over to the bank. Men were moving in the light, clambering on the boat.

"Get in the car," I called back to the others.

Taggart made it without help. The gale was at our back, at I opened the reeling, skidding car wide toward the city. They tried to follow. I saw their headlights turn, and stop as the car stuck in the sand. One bullet struck the top of the car. That was all. There was nothing behind us when I reached the highway and turned to town.

Nothing was behind us at the lunch-stand where I stopped and got out.

"Take the ladies to the apartment," I ordered Hollister. "I'll be along."

"Brad, you're sure?" Sandra said.

"How could I help it, if you're there?" I asked her, and left them for the telephone inside.

MORGAN and Sanderson were at headquarters. I spoke to Sanderson. "Don't ask questions," I said. "Get these directions." I told him where the beach road was. "Throw every patrol car you can toward it," I said. "It's the stuff you want. You've got time to get it, if you're quick. The state men and the sheriff can back you up later. Never mind the rules."

"Is this on the level?" Sanderson rasped.

"You heard me."

"Who's got it?"

"Go find out," I told him.

"Where will you be?" he wanted to know.

"Home," I said. "I'm through. The

rest is up to you. It's your baby now. Good-night!"

I hung up. Three customers, and the squint-eyed counterman, were staring at me.

"Something wrong?" the counterman asked, gabby as they often are.

"Should there be?" I said. "Make it coffee." Then I called a taxi.

Hollister had bound up Dan Taggart's arm by the time I reached the apartment. They were edgy, nervous, waiting for me.

"Don't ask me," I said. "I don't know. Drinks around, Hollister. We need them."

Bea Jones was pale, but her chin was up. She held young Taggart's good hand as she spoke to me. "If Dan goes to prison, I'll marry him first."

"Good girl," I said. "Johnny would have wanted you to feel like that."

They were sitting close together, holding hands, when the telephone rang. It was Sanderson. His voice was crackling with satisfaction.

"Great stuff, Cordovan. The first cars managed to block the road. They knocked over two of our men, but we got 'em. The Dinehart stuff was all there in a tin box. I don't see how you did it so quick. Al Raglan was one of them. It's the first thing we've ever been able to hang on him. Two others were killed, and we've got a fellow named Bordoni who's all shot up. How in the hell did you spot 'em there cold for us with the Dinehart jewelry in the car? We had an idea Raglan might know, but he was air-tight."

"Johnny Jones did it," I said. "Figure that out—and be damned to you. You're still a dirty louse." I hooked the receiver.

Young Taggart and Johnny's girl hung taut, pale on my words as I spoke to them.

"Al Raglan's bunch were caught with the Dinehart take. They killed a couple of coppers, so the whole thing will be hung on them. You're in the clear, I guess, Taggart. I'll get you a job. The rest is up to you."

He swallowed. He said, "Why—why—" and then he kissed Johnny's girl. "Tomorrow, I'll get the license," he told her with a gulp. "I'll work for every dime I ever earn."

And I thought, as I looked at them, that Johnny must be feeling pretty good, after all.

THE MAN WHO WAS TWO

A Kip Lacey Story

by

Robert Sidney Bowen

Author of "A Ticket to Terror," etc.

The feds picked him up at a bar in Columbus.

Central Airway's ace trouble-shooter knew murder had struck on No. 19 as the great skyship roared through the night. But there was more to the case than just finding the killer. Lacey had to figure out how the corpse had managed to double-cross its maker even after death.

I USED to think that all this stuff about a lad's life checking with the Zodiac sign, under which he was born, was just so much succotash. But, truth is truth, and I've got to admit that maybe there is something in it, after all. I mean, just for the hell of it, I compared my birth date, and all the rest of it, with one of these trick zodiac charts, and darned if I didn't find out that I was

born under a sign that indicated I would get into lots of mix-ups and trouble that was not of my doing.

Right now, I forget the name of the sign. It had one of those ten-dollar names, but it sure hit the nail on the head, as regards my progress through life. I mean, ever since I quit flying for Central Airways, and took over the job as trouble-shooter and all-around house dick for the company, I've been spending my days and nights running smack into trouble that was not of my own doing. Maybe, though, it's just the other way around. In short, I've been nice and peaceable while trouble ran smack into me!

Take that business on Number 19 for example. The French would call it, *L'affaire*. But, me, I called it one hell of a mess, that made me look like six cents' worth of Ethiopian airplanes before I got all the loose ends tucked in, and the lid clamped down for keeps. And, believe me—before I get under steam with the sad, sad story—the thing wasn't done with mirrors, or anything like that. It all happened, and you'll find all the sworn statements, and so forth, in the case-book of that world-famous air gumshoe, Kip Lacey.

Yeah, I'm Kip Lacey, or did you guess it?

ANYWAY, it was a swell day for flying, so I was parked in my comfortable office at the Newark end of our system, checking over my records, and letting the hired help do all the flying. For maybe eleven minutes everything had been nice and quiet. None of the pilots were trying to date up the hostesses, and getting a straight-from-the-shoulder turndown, same being against rules—the dating, I mean! And no Mrs. Anthony J. X. Public, from anywhere, was out in the passenger-room burping a high C about losing a handkerchief or an overnight bag on one of our planes yesterday, or the day before, or maybe last week.

No, sir, everything was all quiet-like, and nice. And then, pow! He came steaming in through the main waiting-room door. He was about five foot, seven, I'd say. He wasn't dressed half bad, except that maybe his clothes touched him too tight here and there, he was that chunky. But it was his voice that got me first, and his face second. My office door was open so I only had to turn my head to get a good look at him.

Ever see a face going somewhere to fall apart in pieces? Well, that's what his map looked like—only worse. His brows were so shaggy, they almost hid his eyes. He had a nose that should have been on a lad of about Man Mountain Dean's build, instead of on him. The cheeks were puffed out like a couple of toy balloons, making his mouth look like it wasn't there. And his hair, sort of a chestnut brown, was well down over his collar in back.

But, the lad could move fast. He tore up to Wilkins, at the ticket window, shooting out words a mile a minute, and twice as loud.

"When's the very next plane west?" he demanded. "I want a ticket on the next plane west!"

He emphasized the last by hauling a roll of bills from his pocket and slapping them down on the desk. Wilkins came out of his trance, put on one of his the-customer-is-always-right smiles, and reached for the passenger sheet of Number 19 bound for Kansas City.

"There's a plane leaving for Kansas City in twenty minutes, sir," he said. "I can give you a seat on it."

The fat lad bobbed his head up and down, shoved the money toward Wilkins. "Good! Give me—" He cut it off with a shake of his head. "No, wait!" he cried, and grabbed at the passenger

sheet. "You haven't got a Peter Smith on that plane have you? No, I see you haven't. Thank the Lord for that! Here, give me a ticket, quickly!"

By then, the bird was getting under my skin. I had moved out to the desk. He didn't notice me at first, but, when he did, he whirled around, eyes popping, and mouth sagging open. Then, just as quickly, he straightened up and gave me a beady glare.

"Who are you?" he snapped.

I gave him a rough idea, and it seemed to meet with his approval. But he still glared some.

"I see," he grunted. "But please don't ever sneak up on me that way again. I don't like it."

"Sorry, sir," I grinned. Then, because I'm just naturally a curious sort of gink, "Is something wrong? You look just a bit excited."

He didn't answer. He turned back to the desk, and took another gander at the passenger sheet. Then he turned around again and fixed his pop-eyes on me.

"If a man by the name of Peter Smith asks for a ticket on this next plane, don't sell him one!" he said.

"Why not?" I shrugged.

"Because I don't want him on the same plane, that's why!" he snapped back. "I —well, I don't want him on that plane."

Just like that?

"I'm afraid you'll have to give me some good reason, sir," I said, using my polite tone. "If it's privacy you want, why not charter a ship? That can be done, you know."

"Too expensive!" he yipped. "And—well, my reasons are my own. You'll recognize him when you see him—about my height, thin face, and blue eyes. He's light-haired, too. I don't know what kind of clothes he'll be wearing. You can tell him the plane's full. Tell him anything! But, I don't want him on that plane!"

"That can't be done!" I told him bluntly. "This is an airline operated for the public. Now, unless you can give me some good reason why we should refuse—"

I cut it off as he started to open his mouth. He just left it open, like a lad about to say something, but giving it a last-second check-over before he did say it. Then he gave another of those quick shakes of his head.

"No," he said. "I—I'll just have to hope for the best."

With that, he spun on his heel, beat it across the waiting-room, and ducked into the men's lounge.

I BLINKED after him a couple of times, then took a look at the passenger sheet. Wilkins had him down as a George Parker, of an uptown N. Y. C. address.

"Unusual type of passenger isn't he, Mr. Lacey?" Wilkins opined. "What do you think the trouble is, huh?"

That was like Wilkins. He always liked the answers before the questions. I just gave him a grunt to think over, and ankled back to my office to do some thinking, myself. As general trouble-shooter for the outfit, I've always got to keep my eyes and ears open for any screwy business that might be pulled off on the company's property. At the same time, I've got to use my head and not lose any cash customers just because I think their faces aren't on straight. I mean, it's my job to prevent trouble, not make it when there are no grounds for getting tough.

That's why the cockeyed actions of this George Parker got me a bit worried—at least got me thinking about him plenty. Maybe he had good reasons for keeping this Peter Smith off Number 19, but maybe he didn't. The trouble was, he wouldn't tell me, so what could I do? Rather, what should I do? Keep Smith

off, or, just for safety's sake, keep 'em both off?

I was still trying to think up the answers when Chuck Marvin, pilot of Number 19, and young Burchard, his co-pilot, came through my office on their way out to the ship. We chinned about this and that for a couple of minutes, and then they went on their way, and I went back to my thinking.

Five minutes of thinking, and then the passengers began to show up in taxis, and what have you. Going out to the waiting-room, I gave them all the casual double-O just in case a couple of public enemies might be among them. Sure, I can always do with a reward for work on the side. But there was no cash in sight that day, and I was about to go outside to watch the take-off, when in he comes through the main passenger-room door.

Yup! He was thin, light-haired and he had blue eyes. He fitted George Parker's description to a T—that is, save for his clothes. They were the same color as Parker's, but he must have got them at one of those walk-up-and-save-ten-dollars places. The suit just hung from his shoulders like a blanket.

With a sort of slinking stride, he went up to Wilkins and asked for a ticket to K. C. Wilkins, probably thinking about the heavy date he was to have that night, just nodded and went through all the motions. Only when the lad signed the liability release, and Wilkins started to enter his name on the passenger sheet, did our bright ticket agent pop out of his trance. He gave the bird a bewildered stare, then looked helplessly my way. He didn't have to look far, for I was already leaning over the counter. I read the name before the ink even started drying. It was Peter Smith, also of an uptown N. Y. C. address.

"Any baggage, Mr. Smith?" I asked him.

He looked startled for a second. "No," he grunted. "Must I have some?"

"Oh, no," I grinned. "Just thought you'd better send a porter for it, if it's still in the taxi. The plane takes off in a couple of minutes. By the way, have you a friend named George Parker?"

"Who?" he gasped, and his eyes flew to the passenger sheet.

I repeated the name, and watched him closely. At the time, I would have sworn that he went white around the edges for a split second. But, suddenly, he shook his head.

"No. I know no one of that name," he said. "Why do you ask?"

It was my turn to hesitate. I was tempted to tell him that Parker had asked me to keep him off the plane. But, on second thought, it sounded too damn silly.

"He's a passenger," I said, instead. "I thought he mentioned your name—like he was expecting you."

He started to smile, then let it freeze on his lips. Half turning, he glanced at the passengers going out to the loading-ramp. I knew darn well he was giving each one a good look-see. But he made no comment. He turned back to me and finished the grin.

"You must be mistaken," he said. Then in a low tone, he added: "At least I certainly hope and pray you are."

With that, he pulled a George Parker. I mean, he turned on his heel and walked away without another yip out of him. And, as the saying goes, there I was, or was I?

FOR about thirty seconds, I just stood leaning against the ticket counter, trying to get two and two to click in my head. Some folks tell me I've got a smeller like a hound dog, as well as looking like one. Anyway, I could smell something awfully dizzy stewing on the stove of my daily life, if you get the idea. But I couldn't put a brain finger

on a damn thing. Still, there was somethink coo-coo afoot. I knew it just as well as I knew my own name. So what?

Yeah! That's just what I asked myself, as I stood there with my bare face hanging open. My answer was to try and stick my nose deeper into the mix-up. In other words, I thought up the bright idea of hunting out George Parker and letting him come face to face with this Peter Smith. That Smith damn well knew Parker, I was certain. And I was just curious enough to bring them face to face, to see what would happen. One had asked me—yes, demanded of me—to keep the other off the plane. And the other had lied about knowing the first guy. Why?

It was a great idea I decided to try. The only trouble was that it was no soap. I mean, I couldn't find George Parker, the fat lad. I searched our passenger depot from here to there, and back again, and drew nothing but a handful of blanks. The fat boy had seemingly just up and hauled himself off!

I got to thinking that maybe he had spotted this Smith buying a ticket, and decided not to make the flight. To check up, I went out to the loading-ramp, and climbed into Number 19 for a look around. The fat boy wasn't aboard, but Peter Smith was. He was plunked down in Seat 10, roaming his eyes around like most passengers do just before the take-off.

There was nothing unusual about that, save maybe his eyes. Did I mention them before? They were like a couple of blue marbles ready to pop from their sockets. Anyway, there was nothing unusual in the way he looked around, until his eyes met mine. Instantly, a funny glint came into them. It was as if he actually said, "Well, sap, gotcha sort of balled up, huh?"

Right then and there I got a hunch. It was that I didn't like the guy, and I was going to keep an eye on him as far as K. C. Two seconds after I slipped into an empty seat, Tess Young shut the door, and Chuck Marvin taxied us to the head of the take-off ramp.

Now, it would be perfectly swell if I could say that George Parker suddenly appeared out of nowhere and the two of them started a good old Apache knife-fight. But, nothing like that happened. Marble-eyes Smith didn't look at me again. He gave everybody else a careful stare, then rang Tess Young and got her to bring him a couple of magazines. And I sat parked in that Seat 16 mentally kicking myself for getting ideas about nothing.

HALFWAY to Columbus, our first stop, Tess Young served tea and crackers to all who wanted it. This bird, Smith, sure wanted some. The way he guzzled the tea, and wolfed the crackers, you would have thought he hadn't had a bite in the last week. Maybe I nibbled a cracker or two myself, but I didn't cram them down the way that lad did. Anyway, that was the only thing of interest clear through to Columbus.

Being as how Chuck Marvin is one of our best pilots, we sat down at Columbus right smack on schedule. A couple of seconds later we taxied up to the passenger ramp for the fifteen minute stop-over for plane inspection and a chance for any passengers to get the feel of the ground again, if they wanted to.

All except three or four climbed out, and went into the passenger lounge. Smith was one of those who elected to stay behind. He seemed to be too engrossed with a story he was reading to take the time out. That suited me O. K. I climbed out for a leg stretch, and chewed the fat with Chuck Marvin, and kept my eye on the cabin door in case Smith came out.

But he didn't, and, at the end of four-

teen minutes, Tess Young herded us back on board again and shut the cabin door. I was the last to climb in, being one of the company's hired help, and not entitled to knock cash customers down in a rush to get back to my seat. Therefore, it was maybe twenty seconds, or more, and Chuck was rolling us down to the head of the take-off runway, before I settled myself, and glanced casually forward to Smith's seat.

Jolt one, for me! The seat was there, right enough, but Smith wasn't in it! Nope, and it took me just one quarter of a second to discover that he wasn't in the cabin. I counted noses in nothing flat, then gave Tess Young the hand signal.

"Run up and tell Marvin to hold it!" I ordered. "We're one passenger shy. The man in Seat Ten."

"But, he must be aboard!" she said in a low voice. "I was by the door all the time. He didn't get off!"

"Maybe you're right!" I grunted, and gave her the nod to go up and tell Marvin, anyway. "I'll take a look around."

As Tess went forward, I went aft to the washnook and the baggage compartment. The baggage compartment I took first, and found it empty. The washnook I took next—and rang the bull's-eye. Yeah, he was there, all right—and in bad shape. He was on his side, legs jacknifed up and both arms clamped over his stomach. The veins at his temples and neck looked ready to burst through the skin, and his face was drawn with pain.

DROPPING down, I made an examination. He had been neither shot nor knifed. My best guess was poisoning of some kind. Although he was still breathing, his eyes had already taken on that glassy look that means death isn't so far behind. He didn't even know that I had entered. His lids didn't flicker, and his pop eyes remained transfixed on nothing in particular in front of him.

I'm not a doctor, so I didn't waste any time fussing around with possible diagnoses of the case. Inspead, I hopped right into action. I had Chuck Marvin taxi us back to the ramp in short order, and I had young Burchard come aft and help me carry him off. Tess Young, I had stick in the cabin to make the other passengers keep their seats, and stay there.

In short, in exactly three minutes we had Smith in one of the depot rooms, and Doc Barnes, the company medico at Columbus, doing his stuff. Unfortunately, there wasn't much that Barnes could do. He said that Smith was beyond hope. Maybe he was right. As I said, I'm not a doctor, and Barnes does know his stuff. He tried lots of things, right there and then. But the only reaction was to bring Smith around just a shade. Just once, his eyes focused on my face, and seemed to recognize me. Then his lips started moving. I had almost to put an ear against them to hear what he said. Hold your hats, for here's what it was.

"Baggage compartment—he was there. I saw him! He killed me! Swore he would! That tea—was poisoned. Oh, God—"

His voice trailed off. I came near shaking him, as I snapped the question, "What man in the baggage compartment? Who was he? What's his name?"

I thought for several seconds he wasn't going to answer me, that he was already dead. But, the faint whispered words did come. "Parker—George Parker!" he said.

Just that, and nothing more. I started snapping more questions at him, until Doc Barnes pulled me away, and bent over him. When he straightened up, he shook his head.

"No use, Lacey. This man is dead.

Strychnine, obviously. An autopsy will prove it, however."

THE Doc started to point out one or two of the telltale signs of strychnine. The eyes, tongue, and so forth. But I didn't hang around to learn anything. I'd learned enough. The main item seemed to indicate that one fat-faced George Parker had made a sweet-looking sucker out of Kip Lacey. Throwing my feet into high, I steamed out to the ramp and aboard Number 19. Of course, I was only hoping against hope when I tore into the baggage compartment again, and started slinging stuff this way and that, just in case Parker was hiding at the bottom of the heap.

It was just a hope that went up in smoke when I'd finished. There was nothing but baggage in the compartment. Killing the forty-'leven questions that Tess Young spouted at me from the doorway, I shoved past her and down to Seat 10. For once I'd been lucky. Smith had still been drinking his tea when we landed at Columbus, and the cup, saucer, and spoon were on the floor just under his seat.

Ordinarily, Tess Young rated a telling-off for not having removed the stuff. But I didn't bother about that. I just collected the stuff, and brought it in to Doc Barnes. He took it and started doing tricks. I mean, he sniffed the cup inside and out, stuck his finger into about an eighth of an inch of tea left in the cup, and put his finger to his tongue. That seemed to cinch it for him. He nodded his head emphatically.

"Absolutely!" he said, "Strychnine, and enough to kill half a dozen men, I'd say. This looks bad, Lacey!"

He was telling me?

Well, for a few seconds I just stood there like a stuffed shirt, staring down at the dead man. Then, heaving a sigh, I started doing my stuff as trouble-shooter for the company. First, I had all the passengers taken off Number 19, and parked, protestingly, in one of the smaller waiting-rooms. Next, I put a guard on the ship. Then I called the Columbus cops and gave them a rough outline. Of course, Smith had died about our property, but even so it was my duty to inform the cops.

The phoning was just another bad break for me. Terry K[illegible], of the Columbus dick force, is a special pal of mine. With him on the case, the company would get all the breaks. I mean, Terry would clamp way down on the publicity. But it was Terry's day off, and a lad named Hawkins took the call. Once I beat Hawkins to the punch on a case, and he's never forgiven me. So, you see, I didn't feel so happy when I hung up. Nor did Chuck Marvin add to my joy. He raised merry hell about Number 19 being held up. I had to come this close to firing him before he shut up and went stamping into the pilots'-room.

Of course, I collected every bird at the field when Number 19 landed—I mean the hired help—and questioned them all about seeng a man of Parker's description sneak out of the baggage compartment and drift. No one had, and the lads at the taxi-stand out in front swore that not a single fare had been rolled away since we landed. That meant that Parker must still be at the field, so I set a dozen or so mechanics and flunkies hunting for him.

Once they got started, I went into the dispatcher's office, and teletyped the situation to Newark, and asked them to get all the dope they could at the addresses of both Parker and Smith, from the New York cops, if necessary, and to shoot it back to me, pronto.

Right after that, I went into the passenger-room to do the usual questioning. Before I got started, however, Doc Barnes collared me and gave me a bit

of startling information. It was simply this. The dead man didn't have a thing on him save the Columbus-St. Louis-Kansas City section of his through icket. Yeah, there was just nothing him. No money, no card fold, no 's—nothing but a handkerchief.

oks like our dead friend was also rodl was Doc Barnes' comment.

I JUST thanked him for the information and went back to the passenger-room. While Doc had talked, I'd been staring some more down at the dead man, and, to tell the truth a very, very goofy hunch was beginning to sneak into my brain. Anyway, filing it for future reference, I went into the passenger-room. Of course, they all spoke of what they thought of me, the company and my Aunt Susan. That was their privilege. But, eventually, I got them calmed down and went to work. The net result, you could put in your eye. Not one of them had noticed Smith any more than one notices a fellow passenger who seems to be minding his own business.

One of the three, who had stayed aboard when we landed at Columbus, offered the information that he had seen Smith get up from his seat and hurry aft. But he thought that Smith was just getting off for a local paper, or something, and forgot all about it.

Not getting anywhere with them, I called all bets off, explained to them that we couldn't get under way until the police had checked everything, and then gave Tess Young the eye, and led her out to Number 19.

"Keep your shirt on, Tess," I said gently. "Don't get sore at my questions. It's part of my job to ask them, see?"

She nodded, and managed a shadow of her usual million-dollar smile.

"I understand, Mr. Lacey," she replied. "I could very easily have dropped that poison in his tea, couldn't I? But, I didn't!"

"Easy!" I soothed. "I'm not putting the beady eye on you, youngster. Just checking back, that's all. Show me just how you served the tea. How many cups did he take, for instance?"

"Three," she replied. "I thought I was going to have to make a new brew. He—"

"A fresh cup each time?" I stuck in.

"No, the same one. I washed it each time."

"Smell anything strange?" I asked her. "A sort of bitterish-sweet smell?"

She shook her head, then took down some cups and saucers from the racks, and made as though to prepare tea. As she arranged things, I moved back a step or two from her cubbyhole to the door of the baggage compartment. Sure, I wanted to see if a lad hiding in the baggage compartment could ease the door open, and sneak something into one of the cups on the serving-shelf while her back was turned. The answer? It could be done easily. Just to make sure, I took a dime from my pocket and eased it into one of the cups, without Tess spotting me.

That clinched that. Parker had slipped into the baggage compartment at Newark, and waited until tea was served, and then, when Tess made the second and third cup for Smith, Parker could slip the poison into the tea. Sure, it would be a cinch. But just keep that in mind, because I did. You'll see what I mean, later.

Anyway, with the old brain clicking over faster and faster, I thanked the kid for doing her stuff, and moved forward up the aisle to Seat 10. Getting down on my hands and knees, I went carefully over every square inch of the floor underneath, the seat, itself, and the window right beside it. I found a couple of hairpins that really rated a bawling

out for whoever had cleaned Number 19 last. But I also found a few shreds of sticky cloth. They were more threads than anything else.

With the old Hawkshaw gleam in my eye, I stuck the shreds in my pocket and went hot-footing it in to have a talk with Doc Barnes, and another look at our corpse. I didn't see Doc directly, though. His Nibs, and his flatfoot bodyguard, were there to greet me. Yeah, I mean Inspector Hawkins, and the three bull-necked cops he'd dragged along with him. He'd already questioned the passengers, and, from the ugly look in his eyes, I knew that he hadn't reached first base any more than I had, and so was about set to pinch somebody just on general principles. Honest, that guy is the most arresting fool this side of L. A.

NATURALLY, not knowing what it was all about, figuratively speaking, but keen to show his authority, he promptly started to tear into me, and shove me around. For the company's sake, I let him get away with it. Besides, I was too busy trying to add two and two to care much what he did.

"So you let a killer climb into your baggage compartment right before your eyes?" he growled. "And then climb out again and beat it away clean! A sweet airline you birds are running. I must say!"

"Yeah, that's right," I mumbled. "Have you sent out a radio description of this bird, Parker?"

He snorted at me, just like that. "Of course, dope! I know my stuff. Don't worry, we'll pick him up in less than twelve hours. No bird can get away with a killing in this town!"

There was more along the same line. Then, when he ran out of breath, I gave him the results of my questioning, and told him of the report I expected most any moment from the Newark office. Funny thing, I'd no sooner got that off my chest than the dispatcher came pounding in with a couple of feet of teletype tape. He handed it to me with a goofy look on his face.

Hawkins and I, together, read—

> Newark to Lacey, Columbus: New York police report no such persons as Peter Smith or George Parker living at addresses given. Suggest Columbus police take fingerprints of dead man and forward them for possible identification. Also, forward complete description of both parties, if possible.

That tramp, Hawkins, certainly enjoyed his horselaugh.

"And you figured a killer would give you his right name, and address, just like that?" he sneered. "Nuts! Go have a few beers, foul ball, while I get to work!"

Was I mad at him? Nope. You see, I'd a hunch for several minutes that when I heard from Newark I'd get just what I did get. Yeah, I still had plenty of headache, but it was beginning to look as if I might be able to clear the bases, and put our side ahead, eventually. So I just grinned at Master Mind Hawkins.

"That's an idea, pal," I nodded. "Go do your stuff, but don't forget to tell me all about it."

"Don't worry!" he chuckled. "I'm big-hearted that way!"

Giving his playboys the high-sign, he trooped out and left me alone with Doc Barnes. With Doc fixing wide eyes on me, I bent over the corpse and studied it harder than I've ever studied anything in my life. After a while, Doc's curiosity got the better of him.

"What's the idea, Lacey?" he grunted.

"Look at these eyebrows, Doc," I said. Just a line of hair, but the skin's swollen quite a bit, and rough in places."

"I noticed that," Doc nodded. "Women's brows get that way, some-

times, from too much plucking. A type of rash—"

"Maybe," I cut him off. "Now, look at the fingertips."

"I don't have to," he replied wearily. "What do you think I've been doing—sleeping? The fingertips are smeared with bits of gum. The eyebrows are swollen. So are both sides of the nose. Perhaps, he was in some kind of a fight, and got knocked around a bit."

"Perhaps," I said, and straightened up. "Now, all I've got to do is to find out who he is—and a couple of other things."

"Huh?" Doc blinked.

I was feeling good, so I kept my secret to myself, and went over to the dispatcher's office, and sent a long teletype message to Newark, and tacked a great big *urgent* on the end. Then I took Hawkins' suggestion and went into the restaurant taproom and had myself a couple of beers. As I sipped them, I checked and rechecked my hunches a couple of times over. They all clicked. Proof of the pudding would be contained, I hoped, in the reply I received from my teletype message to Newark.

THE message arrived in about three quarters of an hour. Hawkins had poked his nose into this and that, got nowhere, and had joined Doc Barnes, and myself, in the room with the corpse.

The instant the message replied, I leaped on it and read it through to the end, in nothing flat. It read—

> Found brown wig, false nose, clothing pads and false eyebrows in rubbish can outside opened window of men's lounge. Would have been carted away in another half hour. Mistake in last message. New York police checked wrong address numbers. Parker and Smith live at addresses listed. Both have police records. Were numbers-racket partners. Broke up six months ago. Parker known to have threatened Smith for turning state's evidence at Morgan ring trial, this city. Smith known to be incurable consumptive. Given one year to live by doctors after state examination at the time of Morgan ring trial. N.Y.C. police have started search for Parker. Newark.

Without saying a word, I handed it over to Hawkins. I couldn't have said a word, I was that happy. It was twice as much as I had hoped for. The first, I expected—my hunches, you know. But the last part? That was like money from home!

"Say, what the hell? I don't get it!" Gumshoe Hawkins blurted out the words, and I had a good chuckle for myself.

"Of course you don't, sweetheart!" I said. "So, I'll explain. Our stiff, here, was playing two parts—George Parker *and* Peter Smith! As Parker, he bought a ticket on Number Nineteen, and acted screwy about a Peter Smith taking that plane so's I'd be sure to remember his looks, and so forth. Then he ducked into the men's lounge, peeled off his make-up, tossed it into the rubbish can, and came back as Peter Smith—an exact opposite in type—and boarded the plane. When tea was served, he dumped a load of strychnine into it and went back to the washroom to hand in his chips. Doc revived him, and he played his trump card. He said *he'd seen George Parker in the baggage compartment*! Catch on?"

Hawkins gulped around some and scratched his thick head. "It's screwy!" he growled. "How do you know he done himself in? Hell, why should a guy do it that way—like he was somebody else?"

It was too good to pass up. I patted his arm and looked real anxious-like into his scowling mugg.

"May'be it's too much for you to get, pal," I said softly. "But I'll try and put it into small words. That message you've just read, dope! I got the make-up

hunch from looking at him. Take a squint yourself. There's still some adhesive gum on his fingertips. It got there as he pulled off his fake nose, and stuff. The skin swelled up because he didn't have any of that lotion actors use to prevent their skin from smarting after removing trick make-ups. That gave me the hunch to wire Newark, and have them look around. Why did he pass out, and make it look like murder! The last of that message sweetheart! Mr. Smith had only a year to live. He was probably washed up around New York. His old pal, George Parker, was maybe gunning for him. Within a year, he was slated to go —so why not pay off on his enemy, Parker? Get it now, chump?"

Hawkins' eyes brightened.

"Sure!" he nodded. "I was wondering myself. Sure, he's sore at this egg, Parker, and knows he's only got a year to live, anyway. He does himself in and makes it look as if it's Parker who has murdered him, so's the cops will grab Parker and send him to the chair. Yeah, sure! I was figuring maybe it was something like that myself."

MAYBE I should have poked him one, but I didn't. I just hauled my freight out of there to get the next plane back to New York and wait for Parker to be picked up.

Huh? Oh that teacup hunch? Well, that's when I first began to wonder if Smith had fed himself the strychnine. Yeah, as a case of murder it was perfect in every item except the tea-angle. I mean, except the way the murderer would get his man. For example, how did the killer know that his victim was going to order tea? And how did he know his victim was going to have more than one cup, thus giving him more than one chance? How did he know that Tess Young was going to put his victim's cup close enough for him to reach it through the baggage-compartment door?

Figuring the answers to those three questions just started the old hunch-box spinning over. When you've stuck your beak into crime as much as I have, you'll realize that a murderer may lay elaborate plans to cover himself up, but the most important item on his list of plans is a dead-sure way to get his man. He never leaves that angle to chance. Catch on? Any good gumshoe would have figured it out as I did—except Hawkins.

And, is he a cluck! George Parker was picked up in Columbus four days later. He'd been hiding out on another job. But for me, he wouldn't have had a leg to stand on as proof he didn't kill Smith. Not that it made me happy to save a rat like him, however. But he'll get his, in time. The laugh, though, is this. He was picked up in a barroom by federal men and sweetheart Hawkins was having a drink at the bar at the time!

BROADWAY MALADY

by John Lawrence

Author of "Vicious Circle," etc.

The fallen gunman had a death-grip on the running-board.

In which the Marquis of Broadway turns physician and cures the Big Stem's smartest smart-money boy of his murder-migraine, with nothing but a stick of medicated chewing gum.

THE boy lay in the dingy precinct locker-room. His lips were smashed and bloody, and there was a scraped, bluish welt across his right cheek. One of his eyes was swollen closed. There was a wound in his head that had clotted his blond hair. His dinner-coat was ripped down the seam, covered with mud and blood. His stiff shirt and collar were smeared and crushed, and his black tie hung down in two ends. He breathed with difficulty, the injuries to his face and

clotted blood in his throat making it sound like sobbing.

There were half a dozen detectives in the locker-room. Every eye was silently on the Marquis—small, neat, blue-eyed, his black clothes, as always, unobtrusively immaculate, black-gloved hands in his tight overcoat pockets, round, weathered face looking gently down at the boy whom all Broadway knew he had taken under his protection, weeks before. There was sulphurous, expectant silence in the room.

No such slap in the face had been administered to the Marquis, in years. Behind the dark, curious eyes of the precinct-men was awe—awe at the temerity of the someone who had done this, who had thrown the glove directly in the face of the strange man who was, probably, the most powerful single force in the white-light section—Lieutenant Martin Marquis. He was almost a legendary figure, even before this. Not a particularly saintly figure, in all truth, but the only man who had ever proved himself master of the Roaring Forties; the only copper who had ever made his name dominate the theatrical section and made any and every individual on that promenade of pleasure feel the force of his hand.

That anyone would deliberately, defiantly, put this red flag in the Marquis' face was electrifying. Anyone? There was little mystery, as to who the "anyone" in this particular case might be, to the group that watched the tableau in utter silence. They knew, as all Broadway did, that this was the climax in a drama that the Stem's whisperers had been watching rise for two months. They were, they knew, watching Broadway history in the making. Of them all, the Marquis was probably the calmest.

He bent forward and, with one neat, black-gloved hand, rolled back the eyelid of the boy's good eye. It was normal size.

A plainclothesman, hanging a coat in a locker, muttered over his shoulder: "Just a beating, Marquis."

The two uniformed men in the doorway, who had brought the boy in, in the prowl-car, shifted uncomfortably. The Marquis' cobalt-blue, small eyes sought them out. "You picked him up in the Park?"

"Yeah. Central Park, Marquis."

A doctor scurried in. The Marquis waited in silence, the end of his small, round jaw moving slowly, almost imperceptibly, from side to side. When the doctor straightened up finally, to say there was nothing broken, the Marquis nodded to the plainclothesman. "Let him clean up here and get his clothes fixed. Doctor, paint out that goog so he can go to work. Give him anything he wants. I'll pay."

He went out of the back room, through the musty, creaking deskroom of the precinct, to the street. Three blocks over, Broadway glowed, multicolored, in the darkness. He walked silently, unhurriedly.

FRANKIE MAY'S gambling-house was a short distance above Longacre Square, on the third floor of a three-story building, above a popular cabaret. Entry was by long stair-climbing. That did not deter the crowds. In the heart of the white-light section, it was, beyond doubt, the richest place of its kind in Manhattan.

No one thought of stopping the Marquis—neither the man at the foot of the boxed stairs, or the man on the door at the top—and he strolled into the immense, low-ceilinged room. Green-shaded droplights, hazed with smoke, hung down over billiard tables and circular wooden tables, as far as the eye seemed able to reach. The low hum of croupiers, of stickmen spieling, of the thick crowds at play, the restless shuffling of five hundred pairs of nervous feet, made a din that beat in

waves on the Marquis' ears, as he stood just inside the door, for seconds, before turning toward the two doors set in the same wall as the door from the stairs through which he had come.

Before he could cover the twenty feet to the nearest of the two doors—the office of Frankie May—Ginger, the red-headed man-of-all-work, Frankie May's right hand, materialized out of thin air and stopped him, beckoning to a white-coated porter.

The red-headed assistant grinned widely. "Doggone snow takes all the press out of your clothes, if you let it melt," he explained, as the porter arrived with the whisk.

With delicate touch, the Negro feathered the Marquis' tight black-silk scarf, his neat black Chesterfield overcoat, the bottoms of his carefully pressed dark trousers and, with a rag, unclouded the high polish on his small black shoes.

The Marquis gravely removed the hard hat from his rubbly, salted black hair, tendered it in his gloved hand. Easy on it, John. Twenty-four dollars."

Ginger looked down quickly, a still wider grin on his loose, white face. "Times must be good."

The Marquis pursed his lips. "Well, I've got to be sure no one mistakes me for a cop."

Ginger's big, slack mouth opened in a guffaw. "Not much chance o' that. Ha-ha! Ho-ho!"

THE office was luxurious. The thick black rug dwarfed the Marquis' modest figure, as he strolled in. A huge, soft domelight overhead put shine on his round, weather-ruddied cheeks.

Frankie May rose from behind a vast walnut desk whose top contained nothing but gloss and black desk-fixtures. He was over six feet, lithe, spare, thin-hipped, swarthy.

"The Marquis," he exclaimed, in a tone of pleasure, and waited.

Under oiled curls, his face was too long, as if someone had grasped the point of his chin and pulled it down, then turned it up a little—or, as if he had exhibited his profile too often. His eyes were dark, large, and his teeth a little too prominent. The black crayon-line of mustache failed to do more than give him a wooden aspect. Yet, he was undoubtedly handsome, suave.

The Marquis' eyes went speculatively from the single dark pearl that glowed in his dress-shirt to the star sapphire on one bony brown hand. "Jerry Lyle was beaten up again tonight," the Marquis said.

May's forehead wrinkled. He sat down slowly, his forehead knit, as if in concentration. He stayed crouched over, to fumble a box of cigars from the desk-drawer. "Pshaw, is that so?" He put the box on the blotter in front of him, still frowning deeply at it. He put up one finger. "Wait, now. Jerry Lyle. Lyle . . . Lyle?"

"He's the youngster that's carrying a license around in his pocket to marry Dorinne Wilson. You remember her. She dances at Nick Tarkas' place. Thanks, I don't smoke."

Frankie May kept his eyes on the box, while he selected a cigar slowly. He put the box away. "I seem to remember now." He stared at the end of the cigar in his thin fingers, then leaned back and looked, heavy-lidded, across the desk.

"The Broadway squad must be having it quiet," he observed. "A cheap band-leader in a third-rate taxi-drop—isn't that the boy's line—gets the personal attention of the lieutenant. My, my, Marty."

"One of my hobbies, Frankie. Lots of square youngsters take it on the chin around this part of town, you might say, from tough guys—but not always. Not if we catch on. We kind of seem to have caught on, in this instance."

May locked hands behind his head and looked dull. "So?"

"I left a little message here for you, with Ginger, last week."

"The—" May's chair creaked as he sat up. His eyebrows rose. "You did?" He jabbed under the desk.

The door opened, and the green-eyed, red-haired Ginger came in, buttoning his extreme dinner-coat.

"Marty says he left a message for me last week with you. What the hell's the idea of not delivering it?"

Ginger looked downcast, snapped his fingers. "Gosh. Forgot all about it, chief. I'm sorry, chief—"

"It'll cost you two G's, you fat-head. Go and get it from the safe."

The Marquis shook his head and said: "We ought to be able to eliminate the vaudeville, at this point."

THERE was a second's silence. May turned to Ginger, and Ginger looked at May. Their faces were completely sober. "He says 'no'," May said.

Ginger withdrew.

The Marquis' round jaw moved faintly. "There's a lot of ambitious lads would like to step into your shoes, Frankie."

"I had a feeling. I heard of that."

"You're sitting nice—a nice place, in the heart of the Stem, your tables packed with yokel trade. You get by with this and that, on those tables—percentages and such."

"You think I'm not paying my way? Sit down, will you?"

"I'm just here for a minute. About paying your way—that's all over my head. I wouldn't know. But here's a thought for you. Most of the hot-shots in this town went sour over some dame. You know—they do a little too well, in a business way, and that makes the old head swell up. They forget they're still Avenue A gutter-pups and think they can run their personal affairs as if they amounted to something. I'd hate to see you go like that, Frankie."

Nothing in May's expression changed, but two faint spots of color bloomed on his drawn cheeks. He put his hands again behind his head. "You don't think it's kind of funny—this sort of talk, Marty?" Then he added, "From a lieutenant?"

"Tack 'of the Broadway Squad' after that, and see how it sounds."

"Screwy," May said, after a minute, amiably, "still screwy. But what the hell? We're not going to spoil a friendship over a matter as simple as that?"

"You relieve me, Frankie. A person tried to tell me that you were feverish about this girl—enough so to go looking for trouble. Even—this is very funny—that you offered the boy—this Lyle—a ticket out of town, or else. A hot one, eh?"

They both grinned.

"You've been taking some kidding," May said.

"I'll have to hunt that party up and have Johnny bop him one. He really had me going. You know how I am, Frankie. She's a tough old street and she can't be anything else, I guess. Yet, when a couple of clean kids come along—I like to go along with them. That's me—just a sentimental little Irisher. But don't mistake this—I'm a peace-loving man, Frankie. Maybe, too much so. And I know people do make mistakes. I don't hold it against them, when they reverse the field. You follow me? Sure you do. I see these kids, hungry for each other, and playing it right up to the hilt, and along comes this idea that some hot-shot's turning a business organization loose on them. Hell, I go all mussy, Frankie. I like to see them let alone.

"However, what's in the past is in the past. That's one thing I had to learn, years ago, about running a district like

this. A man's got to compromise all over the place—got to take the will for the deed, as the fellow says, a lot of times."

May looked at his hands. "It's a damn shame you're only a lieutenant, Marty. If you were, now, an inspector—you could run the place right, and you'd have the weight to back up what you said. Instead of, maybe, having that tin yanked off of you, do you get in somebody's hair—somebody say, with the right connections."

The grin did not fade an atom from the Marquis' pleasant round face. "I manage, Frankie—one way or another. An inspector, now—he has to sit at a desk and plan out in advance, send out men to carry out the plans. That wouldn't do me. I find it best to just keep circulating—keep on the spot and use the old head when I can. Too many shrewd lads around here these days to make it sensible to try and outthink them in advance."

He hesitated. "It's a system that seems to work, somehow. I've been getting by here for twenty years, you now. I can usually think up some weight to lay behind what I say. Hell, I have to, with a job like mine. You can imagine."

May looked down at the desk and there were lines in his face. "Yeah, sure." He, in turn, hesitated, a long minute. "You know I can figure where that rumor started, Marty. I took the kid out once or twice."

"I heard—as though that meant anything."

MAY'S face was solid. "Marty, I'm not one of these guys that fancies himself, like. You know that. But I been around a little, and—well, to be frank with you, Marty—that kid may have gone for me more than I suspected. Like you say, she's got talent. If she should come around—I like her enough to give her a break or two. I haven't got harelip, you know, and I'm not an old man—yet. If it should be that she—"

"You're safe there, Frankie. She told me, personally, that she was all out for this young Lyle." He looked at his watch, clucked his tongue. *"Tsk—tsk.* Now I'm late for an appointment. I—"

"Even the jane might be ribbing you about that, you know, Marty. Dames—who can explain them? If—"

With his hand on the knob, the Marquis shook his head. "Not a chance, Frankie. Not at my age. You can depend on what I say—on everything I say."

For a second, May's eyes got hot and restless, but he veiled them. dropped into his swivel chair and reached for his still unlit cigar. "I always used to think so," he growled.

The Marquis shrugged the Chesterfield higher on his shoulders. "I'm telling you," he said softly. "For the last time."

May jumped up suddenly. "So you're telling me. What of it?"

The Marquis blinked slowly. "I see," he said finally. "Well, that's all I wanted to know. You're a sick man, Frankie—with that old Broadway sickness." He shook his head concernedly, seemed about to speak but didn't. He went out slowly, comfortably, regarded the busy tables in the outer room, for a few minutes, made his way slowly downstairs and out again onto Broadway.

HE WALKED slowly south. Packed snow squeaked under his feet. He moved down Broadway, nodding, returning a greeting at every ten paces, till he rounded into Longacre Square. His face was thoughtful.

Coming from Seventh Avenue, big Johnny Berthold nearly collided with him.

The big man jumped back, his six-feet-two of burly, bruising frame ludicrous as he stumbled off balance. His wild mop of

blond hair, surmounted by a gray fedora that curled up all around and seemed too small for him—which any hat did—was shaggy, uncut. He looked incredibly awkward. He was not awkward. He was the most feared strong-arm man on the New York police force.

"Uh—gosh, chief. Sorry. I—"

"Write me a letter," the Marquis said. "I've got a lot on my mind at the moment."

They sought a bench, in the Square.

In silence, the Marquis' china-blue eyes rested softly on the running, blinking toothpaste advertisement above them. Johnny Berthold sat fiddling with his hands, looking from the corner of his eyes at the Marquis, envying the smaller man's neat, poised polish. That polish, of all the qualities of the Marquis, was the least natural. He was a mugg—an Avenue A mugg. He would always be a mugg, far underneath the surface, no matter how fine a polish he might master. He was carefully tailored, erect, quiet, a dapper little man. He had carefully and painfully acquired taste. It was his secret pleasure to be mistaken for one of the graying, vehement little vice-presidents who argued all afternoon behind the tall, plate-glass windows of the Union League Club on Fifth. His bachelor apartment on Central Park West was conservative, done in proper old oak and leather. He was toying with the idea of acquiring a Jap.

He was, by depression standards, comfortably fixed. A widowed mother and two sisters lived in Brooklyn. He supported them and visited them once a month. They hadn't much to say to him. They were in awe of what they thought was his salary, his silent polish, his slightly grim—even when it reached their ears—reputation.

Twenty years on Broadway had curled his soul at the edges. He would ruefully admit the place as cheap, noisy, bawdy, cruel, sordid, counterfeit—but he did not, in his heart of hearts, believe it. After twenty years integrated into it, how could he? His concept of crime was practical, geographical. He fought only viciousness, not lawlessness. If he fought it obscurely, he certainly did so quietly. No scandal of his making had ever bothered the department. If his methods were utterly unfathomable, unofficial, he kept order—a mammoth task.

His prestige, in an unspoken way, was immense. No one knew just how far he would go, now that it had been won, to maintain it. He had always been more than ready to go just as far as was necessary. He had a hatful of department medals—but only Fallon had saved him from facing a murder trial. No superior or subordinate knew more than a tiny fraction of his business—or his power. Perforce, he was uncommunicative—a lonely man, if he thought of it, with a hundred thousand acquaintances. Lieutenant Martin Marquis, of the Broadway Squad—or, the Marquis of Broadway.

Presently he said, "I guess he put it up to me. And it's a terrible time for the district to have trouble."

Berthold broke out: "May—you mean Frankie May? How can you avoid trouble with that lizard? You got no choice now, Marty—you got to cut him down."

"How reach him? His business is here, but his pull is in the river wards. He turned three of them in, solid, the last four elections. He has his finger on the mayor. He's above pinching."

"Let me get him in an alley. Let me—"

"And have us both lose our shields? You're talking nonsense."

"You can't take it lying down."

"I'd be willing to, I think, if he calls 'quits' right now."

"Did he say he would?"

The Marquis looked at his neat, black

gloves. "No. He didn't." He got up, put his hands in the flat, tight pockets of his coat. He looked at the snow on the sidewalk. "Be around, Johnny. I'll call you, one place or another."

"Where you going?"

"I thought I'd see that girl."

TURNING West from Broadway's roaring glow, a few blocks north, he was a trim, neat figure, head bent against the finely sifting snow. The modest marquee of Nikki's glowed orange, a block and a half ahead. Between the street-level door of the club and the canvas walls of the striped marquee, were a few feet of brilliantly lighted space—the sidewalk.

He got as far as fifty yards from it, when a bareheaded girl in a dark, high-collared evening coat, hurried out of the door, turned to take a small overnight bag from someone inside the glass doors, almost ran through the marquee and into a cab. The mournful, roly-poly figure of Nick Tarkas, proprietor of Nikki's, followed out, stood watching, his swart face, with its blob of black mustache, plain in the bath of light.

The Marquis stopped where he was. He moved over to the curb, stood watchful. His blue eyes suddenly became dark, as he reached the end of a chain of thought.

When the cab, getting under way, came abreast of him, he peered sharply into the driver's seat and called: "Wait a minute, Red."

The taxi braked in its own length, backed up. A carrot head, under a peaked cap, protruded from the cab. "I got a fare, Marquis. I—"

"I know," the Marquis said, and opened the rear door. Enough light from the near-by marquee slanted into the back window of the cab to make the girl darkly visible. She was tiny, terribly young. Black, shiny curls were piled on top of her head. Her features were small, delicately rounded. Her eyes were velvet-brown, though there was desperation in them now. She huddled in the corner of the cab, as if trying to draw as far as possible away from the Marquis.

"Sorry to stop you. Just wanted to talk to you for a minute.

"Talking to you hasn't helped us any." Her voice was husky, frantic. "I won't talk to you. Let me go!"

"Where are you going? Don't you work here?"

"It's none of your business. I don't work here—no. I've got—got a better job."

The Marquis blinked, dull-eyed. "At Frankie May's spot?"

"What if it is? It's none of your business, is it?"

The Marquis turned his head over his shoulder toward Tarkas. The Greek was coming across the sidewalk like a cautious tortoise, lapels turned up to protect his stiff shirt.

"When did this girl quit working for you?"

"Huh? Oh, that you, Marty? Well, about ten minutes ago."

"Anything happen—any phone call or anything?"

"Why, yeah. Somebody called her up."

The Marquis asked the girl: "Who?"

"It's none of your business."

"I wish it weren't," the Marquis said regretfully, and turned to look toward Eighth Avenue. He put fingers to his lips and whistled shrilly, shortly.

A uniformed patrolman came around the corner, peering. The Marquis beckoned impatiently. As they waited, Nick Tarkas put in hesitantly: "The inspector phoned here, Marty, asking for you. Said to tell you—to tell you to call him, right away."

The Marquis stopped dead, his eyes

getting suddenly thin. "That makes it interesting. You haven't seen me Nick."

The Greek nodded, as the patrolman arrived on the run.

The Marquis nodded at the cab. "Jug this jane," he told the cop. "Suspicion."

"Suspicion of what, Marty?"

"Good God, haven't you any suspicions you can use?"

The girl cried out: "You can't. You can't arrest me—"

"Take her downtown," the Marquis said.

He hailed another passing cab and left them there. He told his driver: "The precinct station."

THERE was red in his forehead and a blaze far back in his dark-blue eyes, as he trotted up the steps between the twin green globes.

The lieutenant on desk duty looked up. "Oh, Marty! The inspector called and—"

"You haven't seen me yet. I left a kid here unconscious in the locker-room. Is he still back there?"

"Lyle? No. He just went out. Didn't you see him as you came—"

The Marquis swung away, went back outside, stared down the darkish street, not so dark as usual because of the packed snow. Three or four muffled figures were beating against the fine fall of snow, heading away from him along the long block.

The two nearest him were a man and a woman of middle age, apparently together. Fifty yards beyond them, a cripple limped along. Another sixty feet ahead was the dejected, boyish figure of Jerry Lyle, sagging, plodding hopelessly. The Marquis started in pursuit.

A car, parked at the curb, halfway between the Marquis and the boy's unsteady figure, abruptly moved out from the curb, spurted.

The Marquis' eyes jerked. The sedan suddenly swung in beside the boy. Two men jumped out. There was the flash of metal. The boy backed away, hands going up.

As if worked on a spring, the middle-aged man and woman suddenly turned and ran across the street, running away from the vicinity of the car. The cripple, floundering, tried to do likewise. He darted out into the slippery street, fell down. The Marquis pulled a gun from a hip pocket, aimed carefully and shot one of the two gunmen in the head. Even at sixty yards, the force of the Police Special knocked him from his feet as if hit with a baseball bat.

The second gunman whirled. Flame winked in his hand.

The Marquis moved swiftly to tighten himself against a building, fired again. He called, "Down Jerry," and threw another shot, as the boy dropped. It was a clean miss.

It was a clean miss because the gunman, trying to jump aside, lost his footing on the slippery, packed snow and fell heavily on his side, as the Marquis' gun spoke. And the jar of the fall tightened the hold-up man's finger on his own trigger. Two spurts of fire jerked from his hand, unaimed.

The cripple, who had fallen in the middle of the road, had clawed and scrambled to his feet. The two wild slugs of the fallen gunman caught him—one in the cheek, the other under the ear—knocked him kicking, sliding, into the gutter on the far side of the street.

The car spurted away from the curb. The fallen gunman had a death grip on the running-board. The Marquis fired again and again. The gunman wriggled like an eel, pulled himself up to the running-board and the car zigzagged. The best the Marquis could do with the remaining shells in his clip was to explode the tail-light on the car, as it spurted around the corner and was gone.

A flood of bluecoats poured from the station-house, raced at the Marquis' heels. He waved some of them to the dead cripple in the opposite gutter, himself ran on toward where the dead thug lay on the sidewalk.

THE boy was climbing to his feet wearily, his face white and sick, his eyes frightened. He looked down at the dead thug whose mouth was hanging far open, the jaw broken, still bleeding. As the Marquis hunched down to feel perfunctorily for the non-existent pulse, Lyle stumbled to the curb and was sick.

Prowl-cars started screaming, the street coming gruesomely alight with their red beams.

"What happened?" the Marquis asked Lyle. "Were they going to beat you again?"

The boy said they had ordered him to get into their car.

The street was already rising to a crescendo of pandemonium—men running and shouting, cars and curiously morbid spectators springing from nowhere. The Marquis rushed the boy back to the station-house.

He told the lieutenant on desk duty: "I'm using the skipper's office. I want to talk to this kid, alone. Keep everyone out."

The desk phone rang, and, before the Marquis reached the office in the rear, the lieutenant sang: "Marty—it's the inspector for you."

The Marquis' round forehead was livid, the big vein standing out like a whipcord.

The inspector ground wearily over the wire: "What the hell do you think you're doing? Do you want a two-weeks' vacation out of town with pay, or do you want to go up on charges—suspension to start immediately?"

The Marquis said, tight-lipped: "Ben—they just threw in a murder. It was an accident, but it's murder. For God's sake, lay off me now."

"Lay off, hell. Can you tie that murder to a certain party? Positively?"

"No, not yet. Give me time. It'll come out—"

"It has come out. I'm not kidding you. My orders are to suspend you or send you on a vacation. You don't think I thought this up myself?"

"What charges are they digging up this time?"

"Extortion."

The Marquis was silent, breathing carefully.

"Suspend and be damned," he said finally, and hung up.

He unpinned the badge from inside his coat and tossed it on the lieutenant's desk without comment, passed to the rear.

IN THE captain's office, the white-faced Lyle suddenly erupted. He stood with his hands clenched at his sides, white muzzle lines around his trembling mouth. The swelling on his eye had been reduced so that it was only vaguely lumpy. His expression was sick, desperate, contemptuous. His voice was husky, his lips twisting to shape the words.

"I've nothing more to say to you," he blurted bitterly, "you—or this rotten skunk-hole of a town. Broadway—the amusement center of the world! The rotten, grafting sink-hole of all the rats in the world, more like it. One big racket—that's what it is—and you and all the rest of the crooks in uniforms are part of it, taking orders from gunmen. I can't have a gun to protect myself. I can't do anything but get slugged and kicked and threatened and booted out of jobs because your damned headman wants my girl. A great town—a great street! Well, get this, copper—I'm going to look after myself—and Miss Wilson, too—without

any help from you or your kind. Now, let me out of this hell-hole."

The Marquis' eyes were heavy, somber. His chin moved in its little circle. There was dull red in his temples. "You'll have to take it easy, Lyle, for just a little while. Wait a minute. I'd gladly give you a gun, and let you do as you please—except that you'd be certain, then, of winding up in the morgue. A certain—as you say—rat, has slipped out of control. It happens, from time to time. Believe me, it means more to me than it does even to you. My position would be too hot to live in, if anyone ever got away with what May is doing now. As I say, others have tried it. I've been here twenty years—and I'm still here. Think that over."

"Think it over, be damned. I've had all the thinking I want about you. If you're not crooked, then you're dumb and—"

"Could you identify the men that got away in that car?"

"You bet your damned life I could. I'll never forget their faces as long, as I—"

The Marquis' eyes were still somber as he took a step backward and opened the door behind him. He called: "Oh, Malloy."

A couple of plainclothesmen came out of the locker-room and peered curiously.

"This boy saw the gunmen that killed that cripple. Turn him over to homicide for questioning and a look at the picture-gallery. Then hold him for me, if they don't want him."

One of the detectives said: "Well, we wouldn't do this for every private citizen, Marty."

SNOW sifted down on Longacre Park, on huddled bums on the benches there. The incandescent fork of Broadway and Seventh Avenue, swarming with black crowds and thick lines of traffic, was brilliant, blazing, thundering. The curious curtain of white flakes toned everything to a harmonious, glowing, glamorous fairyland, put thrilled, expectant looks on the jostling eager crowds. An acre of sheer pleasure and delight. . . . .

Johnny Berthold found the Marquis there, and reported to him.

"You were right," he said. "The murder is clean. The kid can't pick out anybody in the rogue's gallery. The description he gives isn't much use. It looks like May has gotten clean away with it. This is the pay-off, Marty—murder. And there doesn't seem any possibility of ever laying it on his doorstep. By God—the district will run wild. Every killer in town will revise his ideas about Broadway being out of bounds. We'll have—"

The Marquis got up and walked away. He walked across to the cigar-store on the corner of Forty-fourth and dialed a number. When the inspector answered, he said: "Am I too late to change my mind about that vacation? Have you put through my suspension yet?"

"No. I figured you'd come round when you cooled off. Listen, Marty—I know the tough spot you're in. Anything I can do—anything at all—you know. What are you—"

"I'm leaving for Chicago on the midnight."

He went back to Longacre square and talked for a long time to Johnny Berthold.

THE bellhop that, two night later, brought the can of olive-oil to the Marquis' room at the Wortman Hotel, in Chicago, grinned as he set it down. "I guess you wouldn't remember me, Lootenant—Charlie Andrews. Remember that poker game last time you was here?"

"Oh, sure, Charlie. How's tricks?"

"Oke. Say—I saw Captain Crakas hoofing in the grill just a few minutes back. S'pose I—"

"I don't want anybody to know I'm

here, Charlie. Just looking the town over as a private citizen. Keep the lip buttoned, and I'll appreciate it."

That was all, for the first night.

The second night out, in Dink Lyman's waterfront saloon, he found the "Spender." The place was not strictly a waterfront saloon, though it fitted that description in every particular but one—it was not on the waterfront. It was within a block of the Loop in an odorous, dark little side-street that, at three in the morning, was swept icily bare.

The saloon—down three steps into a long dim room, thick with men, smoke, chatter—had little to distinguish it. A gray-painted swing-door at the rear evidently led to private cubicles beyond. The Marquis squirmed his way to the room-long bar, at the corner nearest the swing-door. He drank and smoked.

AFTER three hours, a head came along above the crowd—a grim man with wild, coal-black hair, a white fedora, a swarthy face and eyes like dancing jet-black specks of coal. He was three inches over six feet, wide-jawed, thin-lipped, in fine condition. He gave the impression of tremendous impatience, pent-up, burning energy that was a torture to him. He wore a gray overcoat and his striped silk shirt and purple tie, trapped by a gold collar-pin, were visible over the heads of the packed humanity at the bar.

He was making for the swing-doors at the rear, alone. The Marquis edged out to the very corner of the bar. When the man came abreast, he called in a surprised tone: "Hello, Spender."

The jet eyes flickered down and sidewise, jerking across the Marquis' face and back again. The man stopped. His eyebrows went up, and a thin smile curled his mouth. "Well, if it ain't the Marquis." He looked a quick question across at the bartender, and, receiving a negative answer, grinned down at the Marquis. "Come on back. I'll buy a drink."

Over a deal table in a cubicle, they drank and exchanged boisterous greetings.

Presently, the Marquis said: "Haven't seen you in the big town in three years, Spender."

The swarthy face crinkled. "Your memory's bad, Marquis. You ran me out of your town—gave me a floater."

"I did that? Well, you know how it was, at that time. Orders from way over my head to float out all the snatch-specialists."

There was a puzzled gleam far back in the jet eyes. "How are things now?"

The Marquis shrugged. "Still bad for baby-takers."

"I never had any of that."

"I know you didn't. I was sorry to have to chase you and one or two others like you. You didn't hurt my feelings any when you put the bee on the occasional grifter for a few pennies—gamblers and such."

The jet eyes were sharper, and the tall man said nothing.

The Marquis twirled his glass. "Your line has certainly gone dead now. Nobody around with the kind of reputation that makes an 'or else' mean something. I know of two operations that went sour in the last six months because the victim refused to pay and—believe it or not—the parties behind the snatch didn't know anything else to do but turn the victim loose. No muscle. Oh, well, times are different, I guess, though I don't know why they should be. Things good here?"

"Not bad; not good."

The Marquis drank the second third of his drink. "One of your best pals is doing all right for himself."

"My pals? I got no pals in New York."

"Frankie May. You worked for him once, didn't you?"

"I did a little election-slugging for him, but that don't mean he's no pal."

"No? Well, he's certainly making a fortune—so much he doesn't know what to do with it. I don't rate him very high, myself—I don't think he has the heart of a rabbit—yet—he's riding high. Maybe too high. I guess the trouble is that the Broadway Squad is just too damned good. We have the town so clean that there's nobody to take small bites out of people like Frankie. It's too bad. A bite now and then keeps a man's head down to the size of his hat, don't you think?"

"Sure. Yeah."

"Uh-huh. Well, I guess those are your friends, Spender. Great to run into you. Look me up, if you ever get to the big town."

There was a bewildered look in the Spender's jet eyes. "Hell, not much chance o' that—after you running the welcome off the mat."

"So I did. I keep forgetting. I won't be back for a couple of weeks, myself. Taking a little vacation."

"Couple weeks, huh?"

"Yep. Well, two weeks soon passes."

"Yeah."

THE phone in the Marquis' Central Park West apartment rang at four in the afternoon, on Tuesday. The Marquis reached a wine-silk-robed arm from the divan and picked it up. He listened.

Johnny Berthold said: "Spender and three ugsmay got in on a bus from Chi this A. M. Got a pencil?" He went on: "Spender registered at the Beveridge Hotel—right there on Times Square—alone, under the name of 'Conrad.' The three others went straight from the station out to Brooklyn, where men are men.

"They had the key to a little dump of a house on the edge of the swamps. They been ordering food and ice and such, taking care to keep their faces out of sight. A man from the phone company showed up a few minutes ago and went in. You know what this reminds me of?"

"No."

"Remember when Spender—or, at least, we pegged Spender for it—snatched little Freddie Borg? He had them take him out in the wilds like this, and his payoff man walked right in to Freddie's wife and asked. The wife stalled. When the Spender didn't get a phone call from his payoff man, right on the dot, he simply walked out of the hotel. His hoods had instructions to put Freddie out of the way right on the minute of the deadline if they didn't hear from him, and—well, you remember where we found Freddie."

"Such talk. Nobody ever proved Spender did that. Better not tire out your brain with all that thought. You say they're having a phone installed in a rush?"

"Yeah. The guy's in there now. What do I do now?"

Stick around there till dark. As long as anybody's in the house, you stick. Is Asa with you? Then, if anyone leaves, have Asa trail them."

At six-thirty, Berthold called again. He said: "Two of them left and walked to the subway. Asa's behind them."

"Did you arrange with Mike to relieve you, in case nothing happens today?"

"No. From the looks of things, something damn well is going to happen today. And, anyway, you're supposed to be in Chicago. I don't see any use in letting anybody else in on the fact that you're not. Mike's a kind of mouthy guy and—hell, I'll stick around."

At midnight there came another call, that said, "They're all three back again. They've got a secondhand sedan now. Asa called and said they shook him off in the subway, so I told him to go home and forget all about it."

At two o'clock, Berthold called to say:

"They've all three gone out in the sedan. Do I fan the joint?"

"Leave it alone."

At four-thirty, Berthold's call said: "The works. Big Casino. Game, set and rubber."

"They've got him?"

"Not his brother Max."

There was one more call, twenty minutes later, and Berthold reported: "A little spick with a face like a cigar-store Indian, wearing a black-felt hat, left alone and walked to the subway. He had what looked like a letter in his hand. He was about an inch shorter than you."

"You get a medal. Now, quit and go home."

"Huh? What—what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to have a little talk with Ginger. Meet me around, if you like."

GINGER, circulating among the dice-tables, spotted the Marquis the minute he appeared in the doorway. There was a big, noisy crowd in the vast, smoke-filled layout and more noise than the Marquis had ever heard in the place.

Ginger sauntered over, buttoning the one button of his trick Tuxedo and stared, green-eyed, at the Marquis' tight black scarf. His face was doughy, flat, his green eyes thick. "What's on your mind, Marty?"

"I hear Frankie's out. Any idea where?"

"No." Ginger conceded after a minute. "Do you need him to run this joint?"

Ginger blinked dully. "What's the gag?"

"I'm asking."

The green eyes got irritated. "You've blown your top."

"No. How would you and I get on, if you were the works?"

The green eyes went uneasy. "Tie it outside."

"Frankie's made himself a lot of enemies. He can't last forever."

The white face became red. "Go and choke yourself, will you?"

The Marquis' black-gloved hand caught him as he tried to swing away.

"You're not a farmer, Ginger."

Ginger's lips were like paper. His green eyes wandered over the wall behind the Marquis. "Whatever you're selling, I don't want any. I like things as they are, see? I been with Frankie four years. I ain't went short yet. Him and me are pals, see? Real pals. Anybody says different is a liar."

There was a second's silence.

The Marquis said softly: "So he's got that much on you."

The reply was almost inaudible, as Ginger turned his head as if to survey the room. "Yeah."

"With the right kind of friends, there's lots of things could be fixed up."

"It couldn't be fixed."

"What if Frankie sort of—didn't come back?"

Ginger's finger ran inside his collar, and his eyes were frightened. "Don't horse around, copper. You heard me."

"You ought to make a friend or two of your own. Frankie's stirred himself up plenty of trouble in one direction or another—or both. Some sorehead'll catch up to him one of these days. The cops will never know what hit him—or care much, I guess."

Ginger's jaw-points showed white. He licked dry, loose lips. "Why tell me all this?"

"Hell, I told you why."

"Well, it don't register, see?"

Now, worry was sharp in the Marquis' china-blue eyes. "Come out of it, Ginger. You know he's gone haywire about a girl. You know he's slipping. Get yourself a soft landing-place. I didn't expect this kind of talk from you."

"It's none of my business. Take that spearmint breath out of my puss, will you?"

"It is your business. If you had a brain in that thick head, you'd see it, and square yourself away. He's got to go sometime."

Ginger ran a finger again inside his collar. "I don't want no part of this talk," he said huskily, and turned away.

The Marquis swung him back. His blue eyes were hot, hard, now. There were little beads of sweat on his neck. "I'm telling you. With the proper friends, if you come clean with them, you've got nothing to fear from Frankie—or what Frankie leaves behind."

Ginger shook him off furiously. "You—don't know what you're talking about."

"And I picked you for a smarty! Are you crazy? I'm—"

"No, I ain't crazy. And that's why you're wasting your wind. I don't get your angle. What the hell do you want me to do?"

"Nothing. Just nothing."

"Nothing? Well, that's what I am gonna do—and I don't need no help from you. I'm for Frankie—six, deuce, and even. That's all. You're wasting your wind. You're wasting—"

A houseman was walking over from the door. Ginger turned. So did the Marquis.

Just inside the door stood a little Spaniard with a face like an evil cigar-store Indian, and wearing a black-felt hat. He was about an inch shorter than the Marquis.

"A guy here to see you," the houseman said.

The Marquis said quickly: "Before you see him, Ginger, I want to tell you—"

He was talking to himself.

HIS round Irish face was darkly flushed, his eyes strained. He watched Ginger to the second office in the side wall—the one adjoining Frankie May's office—and watched the Spaniard precede the red-headed assistant inside. The door closed.

He stood rooted, for ten seconds, his fingers taut in the tight pockets of his neat black Chesterfield, then he went swiftly toward the exit at the top of the stairway.

He gathered speed, as he went down. As he hit the street, he looked up at the sign that glowed high in the darkness, a block away—Hotel Beveridge. As he started toward it, Johnny Berthold's shaggy blond head, with its too small hat, popped up in front of him. "Hey—hey—where you—"

"Get out of my way," the Marquis said. "It came unstuck."

He made more speed with his side-slipping, darting walk than if he had run. He poured into the lobby of the Hotel Beveridge and snapped at the desk clerk, "Go back to sleep," commandeered an elevator and swung to the eleventh floor.

He knocked on the door of Room 1120 and heard pacing footsteps cease on the rug within.

He knocked again and finally said: "Mr. Conrad. This is Marty Marquis."

THE Spender opened the door. With his coat off, and an empty shoulder-harness plainly visible across his chest, he looked younger, darker, more vital and savage than ever. He was keyed to a pitch of tension that made his black eyes pinpoints. His wild dark hair was lumped on his head. He stared at the Marquis, tight-lipped.

"Well, what's the matter?" the Marquis wanted to know. "A hell of a way to greet a pal."

The Spender's face was troubled, badgered. "Marty—be a good guy and come back in"—he looked at his watch—"fifteen minutes."

The Marquis' tone was hurt: "I like that. No, Spender, I won't be back at all if I go—but maybe some other jobbies will—with axes."

The big man stepped away from the door, ran a taut hand over his thick black hair. "Hell—don't be like that. Come on in. I—I was just trying to think something out. I—well, what the hell. You're welcome to take a look round, Marty, if that's what's eating you."

The Marquis strolled in. It was a simple, single room. The desk-table was pulled out to the center of the room, and the telephone was looped from the little oak box atop which its twin bells and little ringing-hammer protruded. There was no one in the bathroom.

The Marquis asked casually: "Come to the big town alone, Spender?"

"Huh? Sure. Yeah. Just thought I'd run up and—and look the situation over, Marty. Listen, you can see I'm not pulling anything here, pal. Only—I'm expecting a phone call. A—a jane, see? It's got to come within a few minutes or —or it means something important, kind of. Be a good guy and let me be for fifteen minutes."

The Marquis slued an armchair around, took off his hard hat and sank down, hooking his hat over the twin bells and the little hammer that topped the phone box, screwed to the wall a foot from his hand. He looked at Spender, as if puzzled: "A phone call?"

The Spender made a jerky gesture. "No—that is, yes. Listen, be a good guy and scram, please—for God's sake!"

The Marquis looked at him quizzically.

"Hell—all right, Spender, if that's the way you feel. I just wanted to talk to you about that Frankie May we mentioned. The pup's become a killer now. We'd just love to—well, we'll talk about it later."

He got up, taking his hat, toed the chair a little further forward.

The Spender followed him nervously to the door, wiping sweat from his swarthy forehead. "Please don't be sore, Marty."

ON THE sidewalk, in front of the hotel, Johnny Berthold was waiting. The big, yellow-haired hulk fell into step with the Marquis, his Airdale-like face a troubled mask.

"For God's sake, Marty—give! What's going on?"

"I wish I knew," the Marquis said.

"Well, what's the score? Ain't I entitled—"

The Marquis held up a gloved thumb and forefinger, barely spread apart. "It's like that. It came unstuck. Maybe it got stuck together again. If it did, I'll have a few nightmares, probably, but I'll— Oh hell, come on up to the apartment and close your yap. What time is it?"

"How do I know?"

"Well, find out, you yap. Look in a window or something."

EARLY afternoon sun slanted in at the windows of the Marquis apartment. The inspector held his big square bald head between huge palms and walked up and down the thick carpet. The Marquis sat in a red-leather easy-chair, in bathrobe and slippers. The morning paper lay in the corner.

Johnny Berthold said vehemently from a corner: "Whatever anybody told you, Inspector, it ain't so. I was with Marty here every minute since six o'clock this morning. And that's on the level—among friends or among anybody. Furthermore, we dropped into the Blue Room for a bite on the way up here. We was both in the Blue Room from six to seven, and there's a dozen to prove it."

JOHNNY LYLE looked clean, eager, young, a little dreamy, a little actorish. The abrasions were gone—or hidden—

from his head and face, and he was round-eyed.

The girl had a hat like a pancake, floating on a small part of her shining black hair. Her gown of black, slashed with royal-blue, and black-silk stockings, pumps, made her look very sophisticated, yet vividly young and small.

They stood side by side, holding their wine-glasses, as if they didn't exactly know what to do with them. The two pairs of eyes were a little frightened, on the Marquis.

From the depths of an easy-chair, he told them: "Both of you are to go and see a man named Zimmerman at this address. He's opening a new night-spot and he—well, he has openings there for your type of work. Tell him I sent you. I'm sorry I lost you your regular jobs but these will be plenty better."

Two pairs of worried eyes followed the scribbled-on card he tossed on the table before them. And, as if they were controlled by a wire, both the boy's round blue eyes and the girl's velvet dark ones slipped from the card to the spread-open newspaper on the same table and its headline—

GAMBLER SLAIN

BODY OF FRANKIE MAY FOUND IN MARSHES OUTSIDE BROOKLYN POLICE WITHOUT CLUES

The phone rang.

Johnny Berthold's voice: "I fanned the Spender's room, like you sent me to do. His ex-room, I should say. He checked out six hours ago. Nothing in the room to interest anybody. But, hey—"

"Well?"

"Here's a funny one. You know these phone boxes—how they got two bells mounted on top and a little hammer in between that vibrates back and forth when the phone rings? Well, somebody stuck a wad of gum in the middle of the little hammers, see? So the phone couldn't ring. The phone was on a table in the middle of the room, and the box was kind of hidden by the armchair, so that whoever was sitting at the table wouldn't know—"

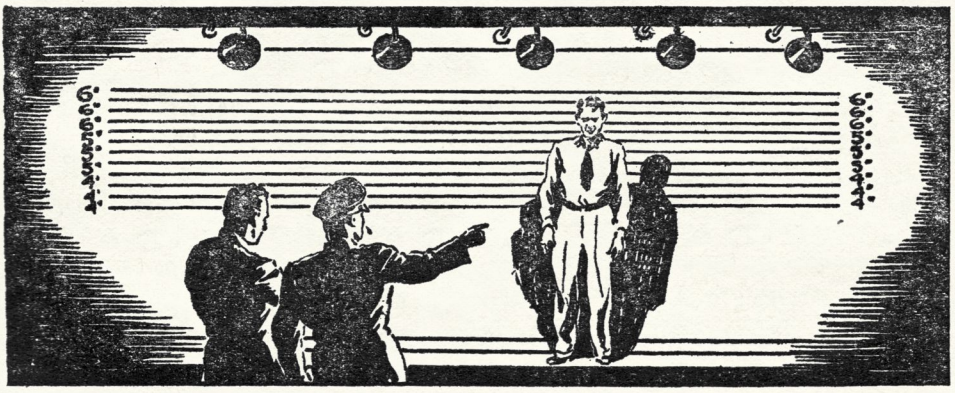
"All right, Sherlock. That'll do. Don't sprain that brain. Come on up here."

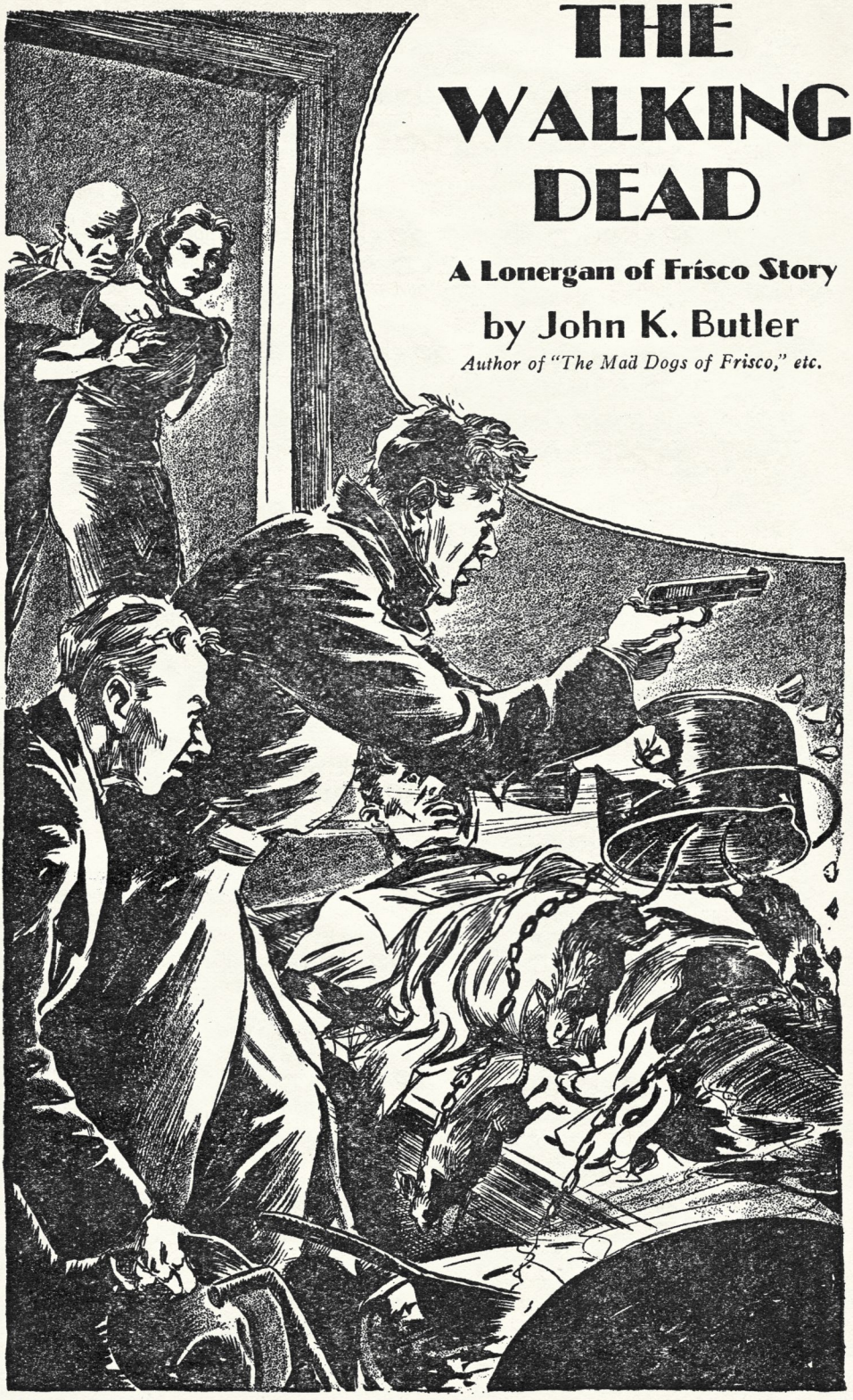
As he hung up, Jerry Lyle stammered. "Mr.—Mr. Marquis. Frankie May—who—what happened to him?"

"We'll have a time guessing that!"

"You mean, some rival gambler, or—"

"Something like that." The Marquis examined his wine critically. "But he was a sick man—Broadway sickness we call it, when a man grows a little out of his hat. It's nearly always fatal. The instrument that does the final trick is unimportant. Things just somehow work out. Just forget the whole thing. Life is but a bowl of cherries and all that rot," said the Marquis of Broadway.





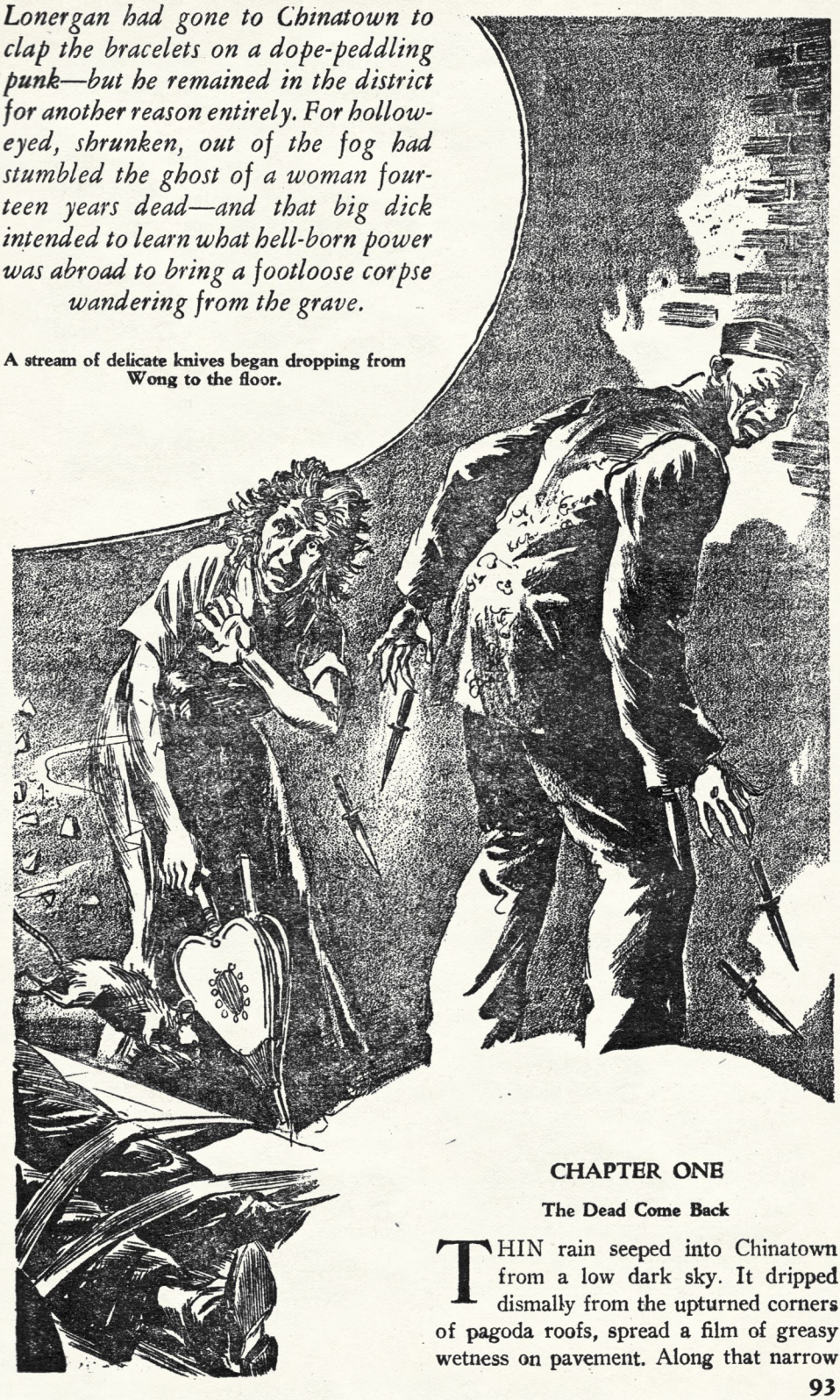
THE WALKING DEAD

A Lonergan of Frisco Story

by John K. Butler

Author of "The Mad Dogs of Frisco," etc.

Lonergan had gone to Chinatown to clap the bracelets on a dope-peddling punk—but he remained in the district for another reason entirely. For hollow-eyed, shrunken, out of the fog had stumbled the ghost of a woman fourteen years dead—and that big dick intended to learn what hell-born power was abroad to bring a footloose corpse wandering from the grave.



A stream of delicate knives began dropping from Wong to the floor.

CHAPTER ONE

The Dead Come Back

THIN rain seeped into Chinatown from a low dark sky. It dripped dismally from the upturned corners of pagoda roofs, spread a film of greasy wetness on pavement. Along that narrow

street, the drab buildings huddled tightly together, cowering, and above first-floor shops the darkened windows were gauntly staring and lifeless.

A man stood alone in a doorway and watched the rain seep down. He was tall, with wide thick shoulders, and wore a frayed overcoat that looked as if it had come from some charity mission. His hat had seen lots of service, its felt badly stained, its brim warped. His shoes were of the gunboat variety, broad-toed, battered—the laces in them didn't match.

Anyone glancing at him would write him off as a derelict transient. That was what he wanted. His transient's shabbiness was deliberate, all part of an act. Headquarters had sent him into the district to get a line on a certain police character known as Louie, the Fink. Without the disguise, some neighborhood stoolie might spot him and grapevine a tip that the heat was on. Such a tip would send many rats scampering into holes, and one of the first rats to scamper out of sight and reach would be Louie, the Fink.

A lone automobile went by cautiously on slippery pavement. For a few slow seconds, the click and clatter of its skid chains brought life to the sleeping street. Then the car had gone, and the street was forgotten again, and distantly, out on San Francisco's bay, a ferry-boat hooted mournfully.

In the doorway, Detective Lieutenant Rex Lonergan dug into the pocket of his shabby coat and fished out a crumpled cigarette. The doorway belonged to Chan Ning Tong. The shop had closed an hour ago, at ten P. M., but dim night-lights burned in the display-windows on either side of the doorway, revealing imported brass bowls, a carved, three-sectioned screen, a teakwood chair that was more like a throne with intricately brocaded silks draped over it.

As Lonergan put fire to his smoke, a haggard old woman shuffled into the doorway and stamped her low-heeled, run-over shoes to get the water out. She glanced at him from sharp, bird-like eyes.

"Some weather, eh, buddy?"

"You said it, mom," he agreed.

He saw the profile of her face. His shock at seeing it was something that went deeper than revolt from its ugliness. The face flashed unclear pictures in his brain and sent a sinister tingle up and down his spine. He studied the face.

It was deeply lined, but not entirely from age. It was a face that expressed long and inexpressible suffering. There was something hauntingly unreal about it. Maybe it was a dead face; maybe it had died a long time ago.

There were scars in the skin. One scar, he could see, ran a vivid line from her eyes to the bony set of her jaw. Another scar showed deep in her cheek and blended with the first scar, symmetrically, as if some fiend had carved them with hellish artistry.

Then he saw her hands.

She rubbed them together, trying to get circulation in them. All her fingers were amputated at the first knuckles.

Lonergan drew deep on his cigarette. "I know her," he thought. "That's what it is—I know her. But she's dead—she was dead a long time ago."

HE COULDN'T stop that mad impression from racing through his mind, so he gave in to it. His only idea now was to hold her in the doorway until he could make some sense out of the whirling merry-go-round in his brain.

"Say, ma," he invited casually, "how about a smoke?"

"Huh?" She turned to him, in owlish astonishment.

He fished the crumpled pack from his pocket, shook a cigarette loose and extended the package.

She grabbed the protruding cigarette

in hacked-off fingers. "Thanks, buddy," she said with a crackling voice. "Thanks a lot. Only, I can't pay you back."

Lonergan put a flaring match to the end of the cigarette clamped in her thin, ugly lips. "Forget it, mom," he grinned. "What the hell? It's a lousy night to be out, anyway."

When she smiled, he saw that the open slit of her mouth was a hideous red hole without teeth. She held the cigarette in her gums, sucked the smoke deep and exhaled through her sharp nose.

"Thanks, buddy," she grunted. "You're a good guy. I can tell just by looking at you."

"Nuts," scoffed Lonergan, and dug around in his pockets. "You got a place to sleep tonight, mom?"

She waved a maimed hand jerkily. "Sure, buddy, don't think I'm begging. I'm not a beggar. I got a place to sleep, all right. How about you?"

"I'm O.K.," said Lonergan.

She nodded with a toothless grin, and puffed on the smoke. "You're a good guy, buddy. I won't ever see you again, but I won't forget you."

"Thanks, mom."

She stared vacantly out at the steady drizzle of rain in the empty street.

Green blinds behind the show-windows of Chan Ning Tong's were drawn down. Similar blinds backed the glass panels in the locked doors. But the brightness of interior lights leaked from under the doors and traced patterns, like faintly golden cobwebs, in the cracks and crinkles of the old shades. Rex Lonergan could hear the click of dominoes, the almost inaudible slap of playing-cards. There were voices, too, the singsong murmur of Cantonese making ceaseless music.

Lonergan never took his eyes from the face of the bony woman sharing the doorway with him. That scarred, ugly skin had the color of death, and the idea of death persisted hauntingly in his mind.

HE knew he ought to remember that face. It had been changed, altered by indescribable horrors, yet it was a face that was trying to strike a memory chord in some deep recess of his brain.

The indistinct murmur of Oriental voices from inside Chan Ning Tong's sounded like the tensely repressed opening of a symphony, and, like a symphony, memory music struggled within Lonergan, striving to be released.

"She's dead," he thought, but then, following that nightmarish impression, came common sense. "She can't be dead—the dead don't come back. She's just somebody I think died a long time ago."

"Thanks, buddy, for the weed," the old woman grunted. She flashed him a toothless smile again, and then hobbled out of the doorway, a skeleton in cheap-cloth clothes, bundling her thin coat to her corded throat, shivering at the cold drip of the rain.

Lonergan stood rigid. That last flash of smile had struck a definite picture in his mind. Memory music rose suddenly to a smashing crescendo.

"Esther Rousseau," he said to himself, half aloud. "My God, that's who it is! Fourteen years ago! But it's her, all right —Esther Rousseau."

He'd forgotten all about his assignment in Chinatown on this wet night. He'd forgotten all about a certain police character known as Louie, the Fink, whose movements were to be checked for possible opium peddling. A woman had appeared like a ghost. She was Esther Rousseau.

He flicked away his cigarette, strolled casually into the rain. Halfway down that forgotten block on a forgotten street, he saw her dim, hunched shape passing jerkily under flickering electric signs.

Slowly sauntering, his hands pushed into his pockets, he tailed her through the rain.

SHE crossed two intersections, going into the better part of Chinatown—the part seen by tourists who think they're seeing the real Chinatown. The shops had more than mere night-lights burning in their windows, though they were closed, and on the second floor of a brick building, under the pagoda roof of the Shanghai House, a very American dance orchestra played a modern arrangement of *Sweet Sue,* and Rex Lonergan could hear the faint, rhythmic scrape of dancing feet.

He flattened himself against the wall of St. Mary's Church and watched the ghost of Esther Rousseau hobble along through the mist and pause before the Tuey Far Low Restaurant. That seemed to be her destination. She moved close to the plate-glass and seemed to be peering through its brilliant steaminess.

She stood there a long time. Out on the Bay, the night-boats hooted, and the running cables whirred and hummed in their slots between the California Street cable-car tracks, and the dance orchestra in the Shanghai House played on.

For over half an hour, the faded old hag stood at the window of the Tuey Far Low, peering in.

Lonergan shifted his position several times. Once he saw her take a handkerchief out and wipe her gaunt eyes. He was close enough to hear her sobbing. She cried in an odd, gasping way, sucking breath past toothless gums.

Then she tucked the handkerchief away, lifted her bony chin as if with great courage, and hobbled away, retracing her jerky steps, going back into forgotten Chinatown.

Lonergan, starting to follow again, paused at the restaurant window. Through the haze of steam he could dimly see the first dining booth. The floor of the restaurant was several feet lower than the sidewalk, and he looked down into the booth.

It was small. It's pine walls came only five feet high, enough to shield its diners from neighboring booths. The walls were enameled black, decorated with painted dragons and serpents, green and gold, breathing fierce crimson fire.

It was the only booth—the only part of the Chinese restaurant—which he could see fully from the window.

A young lady sat there, alone. In the warmth of the place she had no need of her fur coat, so it was dropped back from her shoulders. She wore a snug-fitting dress, and she had the kind of firm figure that could take snug fitting. Her dark hair waved back smoothly and neatly. Her eyes were strikingly blue, set in darkly curving lashes, and her nicely molded lips had the vivid color of the flame the painted dragons were breathing.

She just sat there in the manner of one resigned to waiting. The bowl of chop suey on the table before her had hardly been touched.

Not once did she glance up to the steamy window. It wouldn't occur to her, probably, that anyone would be standing out there in the rain at this hour.

She opened a large purse, took out mirror and lipstick, and, with careful feminine artistry, added somehow to the perfection of her mouth.

Outside in the rain, Rex Lonergan pulled up the collar of his tattered overcoat and shoved off, following the haggard old witch who had been peering into this window.

He followed her five blocks along Grant Avenue. It was easy tailing, because she was the only other pedestrian on the street. Any care he took was in making sure she didn't become aware of him.

CHAPTER TWO

Behind a Curtain

SHE turned into a dim, alley-like street. This was the outer fringe of Chinatown. White people lived here—white people who had never known respectability, or who had long ago given it up. These people crowded together in squalid rooms. They ate Chinese food because it was cheap. Sometimes they didn't eat at all. It was sinister, unhappy living, and death and disease always lurked in the narrow hallways and alleys. Very often, death came by violence, mysteriously, and the papers placed the news on their front pages.

A frosted globe over a door bore the word *Rooms* in faded letters. Beside the door, a glass-covered plaque read—*Singles 25c per day. Large clean singles with heat 50c per day.*

Lonergan went in.

The old woman had preceded him by a few minutes. He stood in a musty, foul-smelling hall. It was warm—too warm. It smelled of close-packed bodies.

He clumped up the narrow stairs, and went into a wider hall where there was a wooden bench, a battered desk, and a pock-marked clerk rolling a home-made smoke.

The clerk's furtive eyes focused on Lonergan's shoes, cruised appraisingly upward over his clothes. "O.K.," he said. "You know the rates. I can fix you up tonight for a dime, if you want to go in with a couple of guys in Three-forty-seven."

"I don't want a room," Lonergan said. "I want to see the woman that just came in."

"The old hen?"

"You heard me."

The clerk started to laugh, his pock-marked face getting set to make a crack. Lonergan frowned at him.

"O.K.," said the clerk. "She's in Seventy-eight."

Lonergan strode down the hall. The doors to the rooms came close together. They were made of flimsy pine panels. Back of them you could hear snoring. You could hear a man cursing his wife, and the wife cursing back, hysterically.

Lonergan rapped knuckles on Room 78.

The old woman yanked the door open, snapped: "Go away, drunk. You got the wrong—" she broke of, flashing him that toothless smile. "Oh, it's you. Hi, buddy."

"Hello, mom. How's about a gab?"

She gaped at him. "With me?"

"Yeah."

She shrugged, eyed him doubtfully. "Come in, buddy. Grab yourself a seat."

He went in, and she closed the flimsy door. He sat on a broken chair that nearly collapsed under him. She hobbled over and dropped her bony frame on the narrow, mussed-up bed.

"I got a little gin," the old woman muttered.

Lonergan shook his head. "Uh-uh, thanks."

She studied him suspiciously with her deep-set haunting eyes. "If you're hard up, I can fix you with two-bits?"

Again he shook his head.

"How come you barged here?" she spat out.

"I followed you, mom."

"What'd you follow me for?"

He leaned back in the creaking chair. "Well, I'll tell you, mom—"

"I know," she screeched. The finger she pointed at him showed its amputation at the first knuckle. "I know. You're a copper. But you can't pick me up for vagrancy, on account of I got a little money."

Lonergan grinned pleasantly. The only evidence that he was a copper was tucked

away in his pockets—a pair of handcuffs, a badge, a Colt's .38 Special, and a warrant for the arrest of Louie, the Fink.

HE took a long time in answering the old woman. But when he did speak, his voice was soothing. He said: "You got me all wrong, mom. I just want to gab, that's all."

"You're not a copper?"

"Uh-uh."

"Whatcha want to talk about, then?"

"Ghosts."

The one word hit her hard. She lurched off the sagging bed, went to the bureau and poured a drink of gin into a thick glass from a half-used pint. "Whatcha mean—ghosts?"

"I don't believe in them," he said, and added pointedly: "Do you?"

She sipped the drink. "Ghosts? No. Why?"

"Well, I mean this. Suppose you see a person that's been dead a long time—say, fourteen years. You see that person, and it isn't a ghost, is it?"

She finished her drink, shuddered, and her shudder was not from the drink. "Whatcha mean?"

"I mean the dead don't come back. If you see a person that's supposed to be dead for fourteen years, then that person wasn't really dead, at all. Something happened, but it wasn't death. Maybe it was something worse than death—but not death."

She poured from the bottle, her maimed hands shaking. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about Esther Rousseau," he said slowly.

She cackled, swallowing a mouthful of liquor. "Esther Rousseau? Who the hell's that?"

"You are," he responded quietly.

"Me?"

"Yeah, you, mom."

She smacked the bottom of the gin bottle on the battered surface of the bureau. "O. K.," she sneered, "if my name's Esther Rousseau, you better tell me about it, 'cause I never knew it myself."

"It was a long time ago," he said confidently.

She coughed into her bony palm, reached for the knob of a dresser drawer. She pulled out the drawer and fished into it, as if searching for another bottle. But both her hands came out quickly, holding something that wasn't a bottle.

The muzzle of an old Frontiersman revolver pointed its ominously gaping hole at Lonergan's face. Because of her hacked-off fingers, she had to clutch the gun in both hands.

"I can blow your head right off your shoulders," she cackled triumphantly. "When you slipped me that cigarette in the doorway, I thought you was a good guy. Now I know you're just some double-crossing copper. Lift the mitts, buddy."

He lifted them easily, locked them behind his neck, and rocked back in the chair, smiling at her. "You don't have a chance in the world, ma."

"Whatcha mean, I don't have a chance?"

"I mean, with that gun you're right up my alley," he said. "It's something practical, and I know how to handle things like that. You plug one shot, and you'll miss me. Then I'll yank the cannon away from you, part your hair down the middle, and carry you out of the joint piggy-back. That four-pounder you're waving around doesn't worry me, at all. But you do."

She lowered the gun a little, in trembling hand. "Why?"

"Because you're not so practical. You're a Chinese puzzle. You're supposed to be dead, and you aren't. You want me to believe you're not Esther Rousseau, but I know you are. You've gone through some suffering, and, phys-

ically, you're changed. But I still know you. You try to talk like an underworld tough, but that doesn't fool me either."

"You're crazy," she snapped.

"Crazy? No, I don't think so. Fourteen years ago, there was a woman named Esther Rousseau. She went to a Chinese joint with her kid daughter—"

The old hag took a jerky step at Lonergan, cocking the single-action Colt's. "You're a cop—I can tell it. You can't fool me. You're a cop."

HE said, after a minute: "Suppose I am a cop? Anyway, you're Esther Rousseau. Fourteen years ago, I was just a punk on a police beat in the mission district. When Esther Rousseau vanished, we all wanted to crack the case. We knew that, if we cracked it, we could turn in our brass buttons and get better dough on the plainclothes force. Everybody in San Francisco wanted to find out what happened to Esther Rousseau. But nobody could. Finally, they charged her up as dead."

The old woman's mouth bunched and wrinkled into a sneer. "What do I care about this? What happened to the dame, anyway?"

"She went through a door."

"A door?"

"Yeah, a door in Singapore Joe's. They call it the Tuey Far Low Restaurant now. But it was Singapore Joe's when Esther Rousseau walked through the door and wasn't seen anymore."

The old woman cackled. "You must be nuts, thinking I'm Esther Rousseau. My name's Minnie. I ain't got no last name—they never give me one."

Lonergan smiled wisely. "Don't kid me, ma."

"I'm not kidding you, you big heel. I never heard of no dame by that name. I don't know whatcha getting at. Who the hell was Esther Rousseau, anyway?"

"She was the wife of Charlie Rousseau. When Charlie was living, he was quite a character around town. Everybody called him 'Klondike Charlie.' He wore loud, ritzy suits, spats, and wide Stetsons. He had a diamond stickpin for every necktie, and his rings looked as big and bright as the searchlight on Alcatraz. Even his canes were diamond studded."

The old woman was staring intently at Lonergan now. She waved the huge revolver at him. "Go on. This guy was a millionaire, huh?"

Lonergan nodded. "Back in the 'Eighties, he was just a barkeep in a Market Street saloon. But the gold strike on Bonanza Creek gave Charlie a lot of ambition, and he was one of the first to take off adventuring to the Klondike. In three years, he made a fortune, came back to San Francisco in a private railroad car, and spent the rest of his life showing off. He married a fine girl named Esther. They had a child—a little daughter named Mavis."

"Go on," prodded the old woman sneeringly.

"Sure. Esther Rousseau had a weakness for Chinese food. Every Saturday night, Klondike Charlie took his wife and daughter to Singapore Joe's place, but one night, in Nineteen-twenty-two, Charlie was too drunk to go out, so Esther Rousseau and the child went to Joe's by themselves. That's when this queer thing happened. It had the whole city guessing. We're still guessing."

"What queer thing?"

"Well, while Esther and the child were eating, a waiter came to the table and said a man wanted to see Mrs. Rousseau, immediately—something about her husband. The man was waiting in a back room. So Mrs. Rousseau patted her child on the cheek and said: 'I'll be right back, darling'. That's the last thing Esther Rousseau said. As far as we know, it was the

last thing she ever said. She walked into that back room, and the curtains fell down behind her. She wasn't seen again. They gave her up as dead."

"Why not?" cackled the old woman. "She must be dead. What's eating you, anyway?"

"Tonight, I met you in a doorway," said Lonergan. "I'll call headquarters. Maybe, we're finally going to find out what happened for fourteen years behind those curtains. I'm going to lift those curtains, Minnie. I'm going to walk fourteen years back of them."

"Walk with the dead?" she laughed wildly. "You must be crazy."

He kept smiling in that polite, wise way. "I'm not afraid of the dead, ma. Like I told you before, I don't believe in ghosts. They don't scare me."

"Maybe this scares you," she snapped viciously. The Colt's hammer had been cocked to safety. Now, with her bony, half-amputated thumb, she pressed the hammer to its last click—full cock.

AFTER that last click, the room seemed deathly silent. Only removed sounds entered it—the sounds of the man and wife cursing each other, sounds of snoring, the faint bumping of the fat cockroach trapped in the corner.

There was a new sound. It came from the adjoining room. Voices. A door slammed. A toughly American voice barked: "O. K., Chinky, where is she? Where's your partner? Keep your hands quiet, or I'll blow your yellow guts out."

In that adjoining room, behind slender partitions, there followed an abrupt chunk sound, like the swift stroke of a light ax in a hollow log. From the American throat came the start of a cry. The cry gurgled off into a low groan, and a body thumped loosely against flooring.

"Wong," shrieked the old woman. Shock caused her faded body to shake, but she kept the big gun pointed at Lonergan.

Instantly, the door to the next room whipped open behind her. She glanced once over her thin shoulder, nodded, and looked back to her job of holding the gun.

A Chinese stood in the doorway. He was tall, of uncanny thinness, and his spine had a knotty twist in it that made him bend far over. That back had been broken once, and then healed crookedly. He wore straw sandals over skeleton feet, loose black pajama trousers, a loose-fitting jacket. A black skull-cap set squarely on his small head. He was sunken-cheeked, and one of his eyes had been taken from him a long time ago. The squinted lid, squeezed over the empty socket, wept perpetual tears.

He closed the door behind him, with his left hand. In his right appeared a long, delicate knife. He held it poised in his fingers, by the blade, in position to be snapped at Lonergan.

"Lady Minnie, please," he said, "who is man?"

"Cop, I think," she informed him. "He tailed me. He's got an idea I'm some dame named Esther Rousseau. Wong, what popped in your room just now?"

Wong still held the knife ready for Lonergan. "Lady Minnie, Chinatown have many eyes that see in dark. Dishonorable eyes have see us. Tonight, man follow me to room."

"What man?"

"I do not know."

"Where is he?"

"In room." There was something icy as death in his tone.

"W-what did you do, Wong?" The old woman said.

Wong shrugged. "When men become so bold to follow other men, then such men pay price for boldness."

Lonergan didn't take his laced hands from back of his neck. He stood no

chance now. It might be a simple matter to disarm the old woman who called herself Minnie, but there'd be nothing simple in snatching that delicately poised knife from Wong. Lonergan knew it. He knew that the blade would sink deep in his body before he could throw himself from the chair.

"What about me?" he asked quietly.

"What about policeman, Lady Minnie?" Wong inquired. "It is necessary we departure. It is necessary policeman will not be so bold to follow."

She saw his gesture with the knife and shook her ugly head in vigorous objection. "No, Wong. He may be a copper, but I guess he means all right. Let's slip him something easier than a knife."

She tucked the old Colt's under her dress and, from a bureau drawer, produced something that looked like a can of beer. It had a screw-cap which she twisted off with her maimed hands. It wasn't beer—it was ether.

"Put your mitts on your knees," she ordered. "If you try to get funny, Wong will toss his blade."

He put his hands on his knees, sat relaxed and waiting. "O. K., Esther Rousseau, I guess this is your round."

SHE lurched behind him, pouring some of the thin colorless liquid into a gauze cloth, clapping the cloth to his mouth and nostrils. The first deep breath of ether fumes almost nauseated him. His hands became fists on his knees, and he had an urge to rush that Chinese with the poised knife. He fought down the urge. The only sane thing to do was sit there and take it.

The round very definitely belonged to this night-marishly ugly woman and her sinister companion.

The pupils of Lonergan's eyes had dilated. His mind had begun to go fuzzy. Only vaguely was he aware of her movements, as she dropped more liquid on the gauze, and, through his mental fog, came the sharp realization that this might be his finish. They could kill him with ether. Even if they didn't plan it, death might result from inexpert use of the anaesthetic.

He struggled, but his muscles only partially responded. He struggled impotently, and all the time the figure of the Chinese with the knife was before him. But the figure grew less and less distinct. It was like something seen through shimmering green water.

He heard wild, mad laughter—from the woman, he thought. He heard sounds which had no explanation. The room teetered crazily, retreating deeper behind the shimmering green water, and his last stabbing thought was that he couldn't breathe. He was being suffocated by an overdose of the anaesthetic.

His face took on a dull-bluish color and his arms and legs thrashed weakly. He found himself falling fast into a dark oblivion, trying desperately to clutch for support where there was no support.

He slumped, heavily limp, to the floor.

CHAPTER THREE

A Corpse to Carry

THE first thing he saw, when his eyes opened, was that filthy corner of the room. The first bleary thought to come to him was that the fat, stupid cockroach had finally made its escape. He rubbed a palm over his sweat-beaded forehead. There was a thick, sharp taste in his mouth, on his swollen tongue. The flesh of his lower face was stiff and burned from direct contact with ether. Sickishness threatened his stomach.

He rolled over on the floor, breathing deeply, sucking in great drafts of air. For a time, he just sprawled there, breathing. Then he glanced at his strap-watch. Al-

together, he couldn't have been unconscious for much over twenty minutes.

He got his feet under him now, staggered groggily to a dirty wash-basin. Cold water felt good on his face, in his mouth. Dizziness began to leave him, but that sickish sensation remained.

He strode to the hall door, tugged. It had been locked from the outside. There was no hurry about getting out, though—not as far as that strange couple was concerned. They would have made good use of their twenty minutes.

Lonergan went to the door leading to the adjoining room, tried the knob. The door swung in under his hand. He wasn't surprised to see the body. Wong had said that men, who become bold enough to follow other men, pay for their boldness. The man sprawled on the floor had paid. A delicately thin blade had buried itself in his throat.

This room, like the other, had a door to the hallway. Lonergan stepped around the body and tried it. He peered outside. He could see down the length of the dim, smelly hall to the stairs. There was nobody but the pock-marked clerk who sat behind the desk reading a tabloid.

Lonergan shut the door again, quietly, and knelt by the body. Beside the dead hand lay a snub-nosed revolver. The man had threatened to "blow yellow guts out" with it, but the swiftness of a knife, snapped from Oriental fingers, had cheated him of his chance to carry out his threat.

Lonergan searched the pockets. He took out some change, some crumpled bills, and a neatly folded check dated yesterday and made out to *Tom Grady*. The check was signed *Benjamin Borchard*.

He also found a private detective's badge, keys, a license, and papers that indicated the knifed man was Tom Grady, private detective.

Lonergan had heard of Tom Grady. The man was notorious for shady practice. A long time ago, he had done a stretch at San Quentin for blackmail, and he'd been suspected of secret participation in a few crimes since. He should have had his license taken from him years ago.

As Lonergan was stowing the last article back in Tom Grady's pockets, there was the faint creak of footsteps in the hall and then a light rap on the door. He rose and tiptoed over. His service gun hadn't been taken from him, and he had his right hand in position to grab for it as he palmed the doorknob.

IT was Louie, the Fink. Lonergan had seen him numerous times under the glare of the electricity in the police show-up. He'd know Louie anywhere. But Louie had no idea he was standing in front of a cop who, at that moment, had a warrant for his arrest on suspicion of dope peddling.

"Hello," said Lonergan, holding the door open only a crack so Louie couldn't see into the room. He didn't want to arrest Louie now. The job at hand was bigger than a routine arrest of a dope peddler.

"Hello," grunted Louie, the Fink.

He was a diseased wreck of a man, with unnaturally long legs, hairy hands that dangled far out of his ragged cuffs, and a huge, hooked nose that was always pushing itself into other people's business—mostly underworld business.

Louie, the Fink, blinked his reddish, protruding eyes, asked, in a tight, secretive whisper: "Is Wong here?"

Lonergan wanted to dig out information. He didn't want to reveal himself to Louie as a copper and try to hammer out information. That method didn't always work. There were other methods.

Lonergan opened the door a trifle wid-

er so Louie could take in the shabby clothes he wore. Louie did take them in, examining them carefully, appraisingly.

Lonergan whispered from the side of his mouth: "Wong ain't here right now. How's about letting me take the message?"

Louie, the Fink, had a long, slim package wrapped in newspaper. In general shape, it suggested a short umbrella crudely wrapped and tied with heavy string. Louie held tightly to the package.

"Who the hell are you?" he grunted.

"I'm a friend of Wong's."

"How do I know that?"

"Because he told me you'd be here," Lonergan gambled. "You're Louie, the Fink."

The gamble worked. Louie concluded that Lonergan was a friend of Wong and that Wong had explained things. "O. K.," he grunted. "I got his pipe for him. Did he leave the dough for me?"

"Yeah." Lonergan reached out a hand. "Give me the pipe."

Louie shrugged away, hugging the package. "Nothing doing till I see the color of your dough. I ain't no sap. I had to lay plenty on the line to pick up a pipe like he wanted. Hell, in this state they don't sell dream-pipes at drug-stores."

"No," agreed Lonergan. He fingered some money from his pocket.

"Fifty fish," Louie said, greedily eying the currency. "I ought to charge a hundred, but I'm givin' it away at fifty on account of Wong's a good customer."

"Sure," Lonergan nodded, and took a long time counting the money. He wanted to hold Louie as long as he could, getting information from him.

"This Wong sure is a queer duck, ain't he?" Louie remarked.

"I'll say."

"You a good friend of his?"

"Yeah."

LOUIE shrugged, his mind and eyes very much focused on the bills Lonergan was fingering. "A queer duck. He and that old witch partner give me the creeps. They're both like a couple of stiffs that sneaked out of some graveyard when the caretaker was lookin' the other way. Honest, they give me the creeps."

"Me, too," Lonergan nodded, pretending he'd miscounted the money, and starting over.

"Honest," Louie the Fink went on. "I can't figure them. I can't figure why Wong buys his joy-powder off me. A white man don't get much trade from the Chinks. The Chinks got their own dealers. But Wong, he always steers clear of the Chinks in Chinatown."

"Yeah," Lonergan agreed, as if with that one word he covered up the many mysterious secrets which he knew about Wong.

"Don't get me wrong," said Louie, "I ain't curious. Me, I see a lot and hear a lot, but I ain't never curious. That's the fine thing about me. I never got nothing to do with the other guy's business."

"That's the way to be."

"Sure, that's what I always says to myself. I says to myself: 'Here's me, and I got *my* business, and here's them and they got their business.' That's just exactly what I always says." He licked his lips and got his hand ready to take the money. "So, like I says, I ain't curious, but I sure can't figure Wong and the old witch. I can't figure why they got that hole in the ground. It gives me the creeps, trying to figure it."

Lonergan didn't say anything. He began to count the currency slowly into Louie, the Fink's, palm.

"I guess that Wong don't want me to take the stuff down there anymore," said Louie. "It's jake with me. I don't like to crawl in them holes, anyway. But don't get me wrong. I won't tell nobody about

the hole. I can keep a secret. You just tell Wong that. Wong says to me, 'Don't tell nobody about this place,' and I says: 'Don't you worry a minute, Wong—what I see goes in one ear and out the other.' "

He clutched the money greedily and started to hand over the package. As he did so, his elbow accidentally bumped the door, and it swung back wide on its hinges. Lonergan grabbed for it, too late.

"Geez," Louie, the Fink, exclaimed. His big, protruding eyes had focused instantly on the sprawled dead body of Tom Grady. "Geez—"

LONERGAN lunged out for him, but Louie, the Fink, lurched away with incredible agility. He was already in the hall. Lonergan had to dive through the doorway, spin around. By that time, Louie was bounding away in great quick leaps, like a jack-rabbit.

"Hold it," Lonergan commanded. He was running down the hall after Louie and groping for his gun, at the same time.

Louie yelled something indistinct and kept running. He bounded past the desk where the startled clerk had dropped his paper and had jumped up, watching.

Louie's fast feet clattered on the stairs.

"Stop, or I'll burn you down," Lonergan shouted, and, as he came abreast of the clerk, he had his gun out. He was making time toward the stairs in racing stride.

The clerk snaked his leg forward. The toe of his shoe caught one of Lonergan's ankles, and Lonergan, abruptly tripped up, crashed sidewise to the wall, spilling heavily to the floor at the head of the steps.

Downstairs, the street door banged loudly behind Louie, the Fink.

Lonergan rose from the floor, without hurry. The pursuit of Louie, the Fink, had ended with the tripping. "What's the idea?" he demanded.

The pock-marked clerk grinned apologetically, shrugging, spreading his hands. "I'm sorry. It was an accident. I just happened to stick my foot out."

"Yeah?" Lonergan barked. I'll tell you another thing you accidentally stuck out—your chin."

Hard fist smacked to jaw-bone. The clerk's head jerked back sharply, as if the neck had been broken. The clerk tumbled limply over the desk, knocked against a chair, and chair and clerk hit the floor, together.

Lonergan grabbed up the phone and clicked the hook in a way that probably deafened the operator. He got headquarters, gave the address and said: "Send the boys down to pick up a stiff in Room Seventy-nine. Also, tell them to put the pinch on a pock-faced clerk down here that tried to get funny and impede the wheels of justice."

"All right, Lieutenant," said headquarters. "You got this clerk in custody?"

Lonergan peered over the desk at the lifelessly sleeping clerk. "Uh-uh," he said into the phone. "But don't worry about it. He'll still be here, when the boys drop around."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Girl at the Tuey Far Low

OUTSIDE, the rain had stopped, but the sky still pressed down with dark threat, and, far apart along the street, Chinatown's lamps glowed dull-gold on wet pavement. Rex Lonergan strode to Grant Avenue, clicked his hard heels through its dead silence. A police car came screaming toward him, shot by—it was headed for the rooming-house in answer to the call.

Lonergan wasn't waiting for them. He approached California street, walked directly to the Tuey Far Low Restaurant, and pushed through its steamy glass doors. The Chinese headwaiter eyed

Lonergan's shabby clothes and seemed embarrassed. Lonergan paid no attention. He turned into the first booth by the front window.

The young lady was still there.

"Hello," he said.

She looked at him steadily, didn't know him. "I'm afraid there's some mistake."

He shook his head, removed his battered hat, sitting down at the other side of the table from her. She saw the police shield he flashed in the palm of his hand.

"Oh—you're an officer?"

"Yes. I'm sorry to bother you, but if you don't mind I'll have to ask a few questions."

"Oh."

This young lady, he noted, was strikingly beautiful. Seeing her first through the misty window from outside hadn't been a fair test. He'd come back because the old hag had peered at this girl through the window a while ago, and now the old hag had vanished, Wong had vanished, Louie the Fink, aided by his pock-marked friend, had taken off, and the corpse of Tom Grady lay on the dirty floor of a filthy rooming-house. This girl, on a gamble, was the only track Lonergan had back into the case.

He didn't know who she was, though he had a guess. He checked his guess.

"Why, yes," she told him, in surprise, "that is my name—Mavis Rousseau. I live in an apartment on Russian Hill. If you want proof of my identity, I can give you references.

"I believe you, Miss Rousseau. You're the daughter of Charles and Esther Rousseau?"

"Why, yes." She was surprised still. "But my parents aren't living."

"Not either of them?"

She lowered her eyes, and he saw only the dark curve of her lashes. "Well," she hesitated, "I always think I'll see my mother again, but perhaps that's just a sentimentality."

"Maybe not," Lonergan said. "Let's see—it was fourteen years ago?"

He saw into the clear depths of her eyes, as she asked: "You remember?"

IT was a minute before he answered. "I was a rookie on a beat in the Mission, when Esther Rousseau walked through the curtains. It was right here in this building. Nobody knew what happened. Everybody had a guess. Finally, they figured she wasn't living."

Mavis Rousseau smiled cynically with attractive lips. "I know those guesses. I remember some, and some I see in old newspapers I still have. I was just ten years old then. One guess they had was that my mother was kidnaped."

Lonergan nodded. "But that was pretty well discarded when nobody kicked through with a demand for ransom."

"Yes."

"Another guess was that your mother had taken that way to run away from her husband and barge off with some other man.

"Yes," she agreed quickly, "but that couldn't be so. She was fond of Dad, and there wasn't another man, and, anyway, she wouldn't leave her ten-year-old daughter sitting alone in a booth at Singapore Joe's."

"Right," Lonergan nodded. "Another wild guess was that she'd been abducted and sold into one of those underground Chinese dives. But that's out, because, even though Esther Rousseau was a beauty, she wasn't a young woman at the time and the evil element in Chinatown wouldn't have bothered with her."

Mavis stared at her slim hands. "So what happened to my mother?"

"That's what I want to find out."

"Are you working on the case, officer?"

He shrugged. "I hope so. I'm up to my ears in something, and I think it's that case."

"Do you think you'll find my mother?"

He shrugged again. "Don't build up false hopes, Miss Rousseau. Sometimes, funny things happen to people."

"I'll help you all I can," she told him eagerly. "I was very young, but I can recall most of it. We were coming here for dinner. Daddy—well, he had too much to drink during the day. Mother was peeved, so she and I came alone to Singapore Joe's. We used to come here every Saturday night. Well, Mother and I sat in a booth just like this one, right here by the window. During the dinner, a waiter came to the table and said a man out back wanted to see Mother for a minute —something about Daddy. I can remember it very well. Mother patted me on the cheek, like she always did, and said, 'I'll be right back, darling,' and I never saw her again."

Lonergan nodded thoughtfully. "A few hours later, you were still sitting here and beginning to cry. The waiter called Singapore Joe, and Singapore Joe called the police. There was a quick and thorough investigation. The back room, where your mother was summoned, had a trapdoor in the floor. But Joe and all his employees pretty well proved they didn't know anything about it. All they could say about the man who summoned your mother to the back room was that he was white, and a stranger to them. They hadn't looked at him closely, so they couldn't even give a description. The trapdoor led to the alley. That's as far as the investigation could go."

"Yes," the girl agreed breathlessly, "and you must believe that Mother wouldn't just run away from me. And she wouldn't run away from Daddy."

"As I remember it, your father was quite a character around town," Lonergan said.

"Yes. He was an eccentric, but really a good man. He had a weak heart. He died with the shock, when mother disappeared."

"He had a lot of money, didn't he?"

"Yes. He made it in the Klondike gold-rush. That's why they called him 'Klondike Charlie.' Daddy loved publicity and attention. He wore gaudy clothes and diamonds. He gave to all the charities, had picnics for orphans, and once he bought an old ferry-boat so he could steer it around the Bay. The only thing that worried him was when he couldn't find his name in the papers. He was a good man and a good father. I guess he just never grew up, and money went to his head."

LONERGAN stroked his jaw in thought, for a few minutes. "It seems to me I remember something odd about his money. After he came out of the Klondike, he hid a lot of gold up there. He called it his 'store.' He'd tell the papers he was broke—then he'd dash up to the Klondike to his 'store' and come back riding a chartered locomotive with a hundred grand in gold bricks, and he was a wealthy man again. The papers would run a picture of Klondike Charlie sitting in the cab of the locomotive, grinning, with his hand on the throttle. The headlines would say: 'Klondike Charlie Visits Secret Store and Returns with Private Fortune in Gold Bricks.' The government men were always after him for income."

Mavis Rousseau smiled a little. "Daddy didn't have any 'store.' That was just a hoax. When the World War came on, Daddy got awfully worried because the papers told all about the War and not a thing about Klondike Charlie. Daddy steered his ferry-boat around the Bay, hired a man to swim the Golden Gate, and once paid a young chap to jump off the Humboldt Bank Building with a parachute. But all that just got notice on the back pages."

She was laughing silently, in sympa-

thetic reminiscence, tears in her eyes. "Daddy sounds awfully silly, when you discuss him."

"So all his blowing about cached gold in the Klondike was just a gag for publicity?" Lonergan said.

"Yes. We all believed it—even Mother. The lawyers and Ben Borchard kept begging Daddy to give them a sealed map of directions to the hidden wealth, so that Mother could inherit it, if Daddy should die. But he'd just laugh it off and tell them Mother knew where the Klondike 'store' was. Mother protested that he hadn't told her at all, but she didn't care much. After all, Daddy had a lot of money right here in the city, and Mother wouldn't need any more, if he should die."

Lonergan nodded thoughfully. "Who's this Ben Borchard you mentioned?"

"My fiancé. We're going to be married next month. Ben used to be Daddy's secretary and bodyguard. You'll meet him any moment now—he's calling for me."

Lonergan nodded again. "How long after your mother disappeared did your father die?"

"A few weeks. He sank very quickly from the shock. It was while he was dying that he confessed his Klondike 'store' was just a big fib. We were all there—doctors, nurses and lawyers. The lawyers kept pleading with him to tell where the 'store' was so I could inherit it if he should pass away. Then Daddy looked up at Ben Borchard, grinned and winked. He said, 'There *ain't* no buried gold, Ben—there never was no buried gold, Ben—there never was no buried gold. I had some gold bricks in my safe for souvenirs, so I took them out and sneaked up to the Klondike, and when I came back I told everybody I got the bricks from my store. The laugh's on them newspaper birds, Ben. You tell 'em, when I see 'em in hell, the drinks gotta be on them!'" Mavis Rousseau blinked tears from her eyes. "Those were the last words of Klondike Charlie. He was very eccentric and made himself appear foolish, but he was a wonderful father, and I won't forget him—not ever."

Lonergan was mulling things over in his mind, when a voice said, "Hello, darling." He looked up.

A tall, well-dressed man stood in the entrance to the booth—a darkly handsome man with a neat mustache over his lip.

Mavis Rousseau greeted: "Hello, Ben. I've been waiting for you. This gentleman is—" She smiled at Lonergan, helplessly.

Lonergan said: "Lieutenant Rex Lonergan, police department."

SHE introduced Benjamin Borchard, and the man took the seat beside Mavis. A silver cigarette-case flashed in his well manicured hand. He had polish, sophistication, but it was obviously of the sort that is affected. He offered a smoke to Lonergan across the table and regarded the detective's shabby coat with faintly amused, slightly bored eyes.

"Plainclothesman, eh, Lieutenant?" His tone gave a smugly clever emphasis to the "plainclothes."

"No," Lonergan corrected sourly. "This is my best suit. I wear it to weddings and funerals, and on special occasions."

Mavis Rousseau felt the tense animosity and put in quickly to Ben Borchard: "Mr. Lonergan's working on mother's case."

Borchard raised his eyebrows. "Really? I understood that the police had closed the records on that unsolved case, fourteen years or so ago."

"The police *never* close records on an unsolved case," Lonergan said pointedly.

Borchard smiled thinly, trying to be pleasant. "I'm sure we'll help you all we can, won't we, Mavis? You see, Lieuten-

ant, Miss Rousseau is not convinced that her mother ever died. Every year, on the anniversary of her mother's disappearance, Miss Rousseau comes to this restaurant and sits here in this very booth."

The girl's eyes studied Lonergan's face intently. "You don't believe that's a silly sentimentality, do you, Lieutenant? The papers seem to think so. Every year, they print an article about my coming here. Of course, I don't care what the papers say." She smiled. "I'm not like Daddy."

Lonergan was staring at Ben Borchard. "Do you know a private detective named Tom Grady?"

Borchard touched a silver lighter to his cigarette. "Tom Grady? Yes."

"Did you give him a check yesterday?"

"Certainly. I've hired Grady. It's for Miss Rousseau. She feels her mother may be alive, and I'm leaving no stone unturned in an attempt to locate Esther Rousseau. Of course, fourteen years is a long time. I don't like Mavis to have too much hope. When a person drops out of sight, like Esther Rousseau, and like Wong—"

"Huh?" Lonergan interrupted. "Wong? What Wong?"

Mavis said quickly: "Perhaps you don't remember. Ko Wong was our family servant. He worshipped our family. The day after mother vanished, Ko Wong came into Chinatown to search for her. Ko Wong was well acquainted with the tongs, and he thought he could help. But we never saw Wong again, either."

Lonergan's broad palm slapped the table-top. "I forgot that. Sure—Wong."

A Chinese waiter stood in the doorway to the booth. His manner was one of apology for his intrusion. He waited patiently, until they all looked up.

"Missa Borchard, pliz?" he asked.

"Yes?"

"Chinese gentleman outside — Chan Ning Tong. He like see Missa Borchard just one moment, kindly."

Ben Borchard eyed the waiter steadily. "Chan Ning Tong wants to see me?"

The waiter bowed deeply. "Yiss, pliz. Outside on street, pliz. Just one moment, kindly."

Borchard slipped the waiter a dime and rose. "Chan Ning Tong is the importer, you know. I have an interest in his shop. Business, I guess." He reached over and patted the girl's cheek. "I'll be right back, darling," he said.

Those last words drummed hard into Lonergan's mind. "I'll be right back, darling." A long time ago, Esther Rousseau had said that to this girl. Now, Ben Borchard had said it. Esther Rousseau had never come back.

His mind raced with that idea, without meaning, without purpose. It was a screwy idea, he concluded.

Mavis was smiling at him across the table. Ben Borchard had gone out, the street door clicking behind him. Smiling, Mavis started to say something. The smile became a frozen grimace.

Outside, in the wet, dark street, a man cried for help. It was the voice of Ben Borchard. It cried out only once. A gun banged sharply, echoing, and somewhere glass crashed and tinkled.

Lonergan jumped to his feet. Mavis Rousseau started up. Abruptly, he pushed her down.

"Stay there," he snapped. "Don't move."

CHAPTER FIVE

Hell's Hidden Chamber

AMAZEMENT and fear made a mask of Mavis Rousseau's young face. Lonergan had shoved her roughly into a corner booth. Outside, a gun banged again, and the plate-glass window of the Tuey Far Low now had jagged cracks spreading from a tiny hole.

Lonergan came out of the booth, crouching, his Colt's gripped in his fist. He saw the Chinese waiter running along past the booths, calling to the customers: "Pliz, be quiet, kindly. Everything all fine, pliz."

The waiter's quick attempt to control the startled customers didn't work, altogether. A woman, in the back of the restaurant, shrieked hysterically.

Lonergan yelled, "Everybody lie on the floor," and, as he yelled that, he edged up to the front doors. He pushed the doors open gently.

Instantly, a stream of bullets smashed glass by his face. He threw himself flat on the pavement. He saw a blur of four struggling figures. They fought closely and fiercely. One fat figure lurched away from the tightly fighting group and ran toward California Street.

Lonergan, lifting his revolver, shouted: "Hold it—police."

A knife came hissing through the dark at him, clattered against the pavement and ripped flesh from the back of his left hand. He fired over the heads of the three fighting figures. Somebody returned the fire. He ducked back.

The fat running figure slipped around the corner. The threesome continued to struggle in the dark. There was the dull thud of a blackjack, and one figure slumped. The other two picked him up between them. Lonergan emptied his gun, but he was at a customary disadvantage. He had to shoot over their heads. He hoped to frighten the struggle to a halt. He couldn't shoot a hit, because he didn't know what he was shooting at. The peace officer can't quash a disturbance by wholesale massacre.

Two persons were dragging away a third through that dark, wet street in Chinatown.

They got away.

Lonergan took off after them, his shoes slipping and skidding over the wet sidewalk. Halfway down the block, a figure he hadn't noticed before, darted out from a doorway and bounded across the street on long, leaping legs.

Lonergan cut over obliquely, running in a sort of crouch. The long-legged man stumbled on the curbing, and Lonergan closed in the distance, took a sliding dive on his knees, locked his hard arms around those leaping, stumbling legs, and both men skidded over the sidewalk together. Lonergan chopped down with his gun.

LONERGAN got out a small, flat flashlight and shot the beam into the face of Louie, the Fink. "O.K., Louie," he clipped. "You sneaked away from me in that rooming-house because that pal of yours, the clerk, ran interference for you. But you're not sneaking out this time. You're pinched, Louie."

"What for?" Louie whined innocently. "I ain't done a thing. You mean 'cause I scrammed? Hell, I seen that stiff on the floor, and I ducked. I didn't want no trouble. You can't pinch me for that."

"I've got a warrant for you," Lonergan said. "Anyway, I'll pinch you for possession of that opium pipe."

Louie reached out a hand and touched the package which had fallen to the sidewalk with him. "You mean this?"

"Yeah, that."

"Hell, that ain't mine," said Louie. "I don't know nothing about it. I was just holding it for a fella. This fella comes along and he says, 'Louie, will you please mind this package for me a minute?' and I says, 'Why sure, I shall be very delighted to mind this package for you'. Geez, how do I know it's got a dream-pipe in it?"

"Sure, and I suppose this fellow told you to sell the package to Wong?"

Louie, the Fink, cleared his throat hesitantly. "Well, I'll tell you how it

was. You see, there's this fella, and he says—"

"Yeah. What did he say?"

"Well, he says to me, 'Louie,' he says —" Louie, the Fink, batted his big eyes in the glare of the flashlight. "Aw, hell," he grumbled disgustedly, "you got me. There wasn't no fella. Wong offers me fifty bucks to get a pipe like that for him."

"And you got it. When you went up to the room, I was there. You saw the corpse, and ducked. What're you doing around here now?"

"Well, I'll tell you how it was," began Louie. "After I scrammed, I figured maybe you was a cop and maybe you wasn't. So I waits and tails you. I sees you go in to that chop-suey joint, and through the window I sees you buzzin' that dame in there. After a while, a guy goes in and sits down there."

"Ben Borchard," said Lonergan. "Then what?"

"Well, after a while, this shooting—"

"Come on," snapped Lonergan, "don't skip. I want the works. You tell me about this shooting, or I'll add complicity to the charges I'm pinching you on."

"Well, I don't want you to think I had something to do with it, 'cause I never did. Well, after this guy sits in the booth with you—"

"Borchard?"

"I never seen him before. Anyway, he's sittin' there, and I looks up and here comes Chan Ning Tong, walkin' down the street. So I hides, on account of I don't want no gab with Chan Ning Tong."

"Why not?"

"Well, yesterday Chan Ning Tong offers me a hundred fish if I'll tell him where Wong and the old witch hide out. I pretend I don't know, but Ning Tong don't believe me. He thinks I know, on account of I sell a little dope, now and then."

"Why didn't you tell him, and earn yourself the hundred bucks?" Lonergan said.

Louie grunted. "What's a hundred fish, if a guy like Wong sticks a toad-stabber in your guts? Wong and the old witch told me to keep my talker shut, and, believe me, I'm keepin' it shut."

"All right. So you hid out from Chan Ning Tong when he walked down to the restaurant. Then what?"

"Well, Ning Tong buzzes the waiter, and the waiter goes to the booth—and out comes this guy."

"Borchard."

"If that's his name. Well, Borchard and Ning Tong gab for a second, and then Wong and the old witch come rushing from that alley, and Ning Tong yanks a rod and shoots at them. They come up and grab Borchard. He fights. Ning Tong makes a get-away while you come blasting out the door. Wong and the old witch pack away Borchard. Me, I scram."

LONERGAN grabbed Louie, the Fink, by the necktie and shook the man's head till his teeth chattered. "You holding out anything? If you are holding out on me—"

"Honest, I ain't. I don't know nothing about this set-up. It's just that I peddles a little dream-powder, now and then."

"You're a damn liar," Lonergan snapped.

"Honest, I ain't. I don't know a thing more."

Lonergan's eyes had narrowed to dark thoughtful slits. "There's something you know, Louie. Where's this 'hole-in-the-ground'? You mentioned it to me in the rooming-house. You just said Chan Ning Tong offered you a hundred bucks, if you'd tell where it was."

"What hole-in-the-ground?" Louie whined innocently.

"The place where you sometimes took dope to Wong and the old woman—the place that gives you the creeps."

"You mean the rooming-house?"

"No. You know damn well what I mean. Come on, Louie, give. Where is it?"

"Well," said Louie, "it's sort of—"

"You're taking me there. If you slip me a bum steer, I'll ride you to headquarters and rubber-hose that long-nosed face of yours till you spit your teeth out. I'll hang so many raps on you that a life sentence'll sound like two minutes. Up at Folsom, the warden will stuff you down the Back Alley. Know what that is? Solitary. They have a fire hose with enough pressure to turn your nose clear around so it grows out the back of your head—"

"Geez," said Louie, the Fink.

"Come on," Lonergan snapped, hefting Louie to his feet.

The patrons of the Tuey Far Low had rushed out to the sidewalk. A police siren was screaming distantly. Mavis Rousseau hurried away from the crowd, coming to Lonergan.

"Lieutenant," she called, "what happened to Ben? Where's Ben Borchard?"

Lonergan, pushing Louie, the Fink, before him, dodged around the corner into the deep darkness of Chinatown.

THE dull clapping of their shoes made the only sound in the dead quiet of the sleeping back street. Then Louie, the Fink, whispered: "I been down here three times to sell a little joy-powder to Wong and the witch. It gives me the creeps. I'll show you how to get there. Then you slip me a break, huh, chief?"

"Come on," Lonergan snapped impatiently.

"Wong and the old witch don't live here. They been living in that rooming-house. I don't know what they got this other place for. The joint gives me the creeps."

The rain had started again, and they sloshed along with it, through inky darkness. Louie took Lonergan's arm in both hands. "You gotta follow me, officer. It's kind of tricky."

They moved into a narrow black canyon between buildings. Louie groped ahead with one hand. Finally, he stopped.

"This is it," he whispered hoarsely.

A door opened under his hand. There was nothing beyond the door but a faintly lighted corridor in a Chinese lodging-house. It was built on the lower side of Grant Avenue, so this main floor, entered from the alley, was considerably lower than the street and seemed to burrow back into the hillside, like a tunnel.

"A Chink smoke-house," Louie explained.

They tiptoed silently down the underground corridor, past tall narrow doors that were closed. None of the doors had numbers or labels. Louie, the Fink, counted them off in the dusty darkness. He rapped gently on one of them.

There was no answer.

He rapped again, and put his face to the door, saying, "Hey, Wong. This is Louie. I got that pipe."

Still there was no answer.

Louie shrugged his shoulders at Lonergan.

THE police detective bent down over the lock under the porcelain knob. It was a cinch. The key was on the other side, but he poked it out with a leather-punch blade in his pocketknife. The key fell to the floor, inside. He inserted a simple skeleton, the kind any real-estate agent possesses. The key turned over clickingly in the lock.

He opened the door cautiously, holding his service-revolver in his right hand.

A faint yellow bulb burned weak electricity in the empty bedroom.

"They ain't here," said Louie softly.

Lonergan dragged him in, closing the door. On the worn carpet he saw footprints that had been very recently tracked in from the rainy pavement. The wet marks, two sets of them, along with dragging stains that might have dripped from a third person carried, marched directly to a set of double-doors. Ben Borchard, dragged along by Wong and the old woman, had gone through those doors.

Lonergan opened them. There was nothing but a wall-bed standing on end. He pulled the bed down creakingly. It was mussed.

"Just a bed," Louie, the Fink, offered secretively. "Guess they ain't here."

"Is this where you sold them the dope?"

"Yeah," Louie nodded. "Let's scram. It gives me the creeps."

"If wet footmarks go to a place and don't come back, what does that mean?" Lonergan said.

Louie glanced, wide-eyed, at the prints on the floor. "Geez, they just go to the bed."

Lonergan started to push the bed back on its hinged frame against the wall. The wall to which it was bolted moved a little. He grinned to himself and put the bed all the way upright but didn't close the double-doors on it.

"Very simple," he whispered to Louie. "Lots of apartment houses have them like this."

He turned the upright bed, and it swung on a central rod, the wall moving with it. As it pivoted, a dark void was revealed. Once, that dark void may have been another room available for the wall-bed if a person didn't want it in the front room.

Lonergan snapped on his flash and dragged Louie, the Fink, through the opening. It was a cramped, empty space, and a flight of stairs had been built down under the floor. Wet marks still showed on the treads of the steps.

"Walk easy," Lonergan said softly, using one hand to hold Louie's sleeve and the flashlight at the same time, using his other to hold his .38.

It was a short flight of stairs. At the bottom, they could hear the steady rush of thick water in sewer pipes, the slap and clank of cables under street-car tracks.

A heavy door was only partially shut. Light seeped through the cracked opening. Lonergan stepped close to it, clicking off his flash. He still held onto Louie's sleeve. He peered into the basement room.

What he saw checked his breath.

CHAPTER SIX

Fangs of Vengeance

BEN BORCHARD lay strapped on his back to the table. Wong and the old woman hovered over him. The forge, like a blacksmith's forge, stood close to a long table, and the woman pumped the bellows.

It was a very ancient system of torture. It was as old as China. The victim lay strapped helplessly on his back. The victim's clothes were ripped away from his abdomen. A heavy iron cooking-kettle was placed, inverted, over his stomach, chained down. Inside the kettle were big sewer rats. The rats couldn't get out. They were trapped by the iron kettle and the flesh of the man.

At first, the terrified rats didn't try to escape but remained in the inverted kettle over the man's torso. On the forge, the torturers heated coals to glowing fire. They used a big iron ladle. They ladled

up hot coals and heaped the coals on the inverted bottom of the kettle.

Gradually, heat penetrated through iron. The victim screamed, as the lips of the kettle burned his flesh, but the torture grew more hideous than that.

The rats trapped in the kettle felt the intense heat. They could no longer cling to the hot iron walls. They went mad from the dark hot inclosure. They had to escape. They couldn't eat through the sides of the iron kettle, so they began to gnaw with fine, sharp teeth into the abdomen of the man. And the man, strapped down, went shrieking mad, as the rats gnawed their escape through his flesh.

All that Rex Lonergan saw in the brief moment he peered through the partially opened door—the inverted kettle, Wong ladling up more coals from the forge, as the old hag pumped the bellows, the insane cries of Ben Borchard.

Two small rats managed to squeeze out from between Borchard's flesh and the hot lip of the kettle. The small rats fell to the dusty floor, lumbering away. Others, bigger and trapped, made of Borchard's face a horror-mask with the pain of their fierce gnawing.

Rex Lonergan kicked the door open wide. "Freeze," he commanded harshly. "Don't even twitch an eyebrow."

Wong and the old woman became as rigid as death, starting at the gun he held low to his side and pointed at them. He pushed Louie, the Fink, into the room ahead of him, and Louie stumbled and brought up against the wall, gaping in terror at the man strapped to the table.

Lonergan advanced slowly. "Ease back," he said, and Wong and his ghostly woman companion took short, retreating steps before the steadily aimed menace of his gun. "Now, face the wall," he continued. "Reach up that wall as high as you can."

They obeyed him sullenly. He wasn't taking any chances on the Oriental's swift and expert handling of knives, and he wasn't taking chances on the woman, either.

"Help me," groaned Ben Borchard, and fainted.

LONERGAN stepped over and used the ladle to scoop the hot coals from the kettle's flat base. He dropped the ladle into the forge, and, with his left hand, worked quickly on the chains and kicked the kettle to the floor. The freed rats scampered away crazily.

"Geez," cried Louie, the Fink. "Look at the poor guy's belly."

But the appearance of the burned and scratched flesh was worse than the actual damage. So far, Ben Borchard was frightened by the horror of his experience, rather than hurt. Lonergan unstrapped the man, still working with his left hand, keeping his gun ready for any sudden attack from Wong.

"All right, Ko Wong," he said. "Keep facing that wall but start dropping any knives you've got."

Wong's thin yellow hands moved under his jacket. Four delicate knives fell to the floor.

"I want more," Lonergan told him. "I'm walking right over, and, if you've got any more, I'll blast you. Savvy?"

A fifth knife fell from the looseness of Wong's sleeve.

"No more, pliz," he grunted sullenly.

"Tough for you, if you're holding one out on me," Lonergan snapped and started to walk over. He didn't take more than a step.

A smooth, unexcited voice spoke from the doorway.

"You stand like statue, kindly. Nobody in room move even little bit. Knife may slip."

It was the fat dumpy Chan Ning Tong in the doorway. He held Mavis Rous-

seau in front of him, with one hand. With his other hand, he pressed the blade of a curved knife to her throat. In her speechless, wide-eyed fright, she looked very young and as if she mentally fought to keep from fainting.

CHAN NING TONG'S bloated, moon-like face leered into the room over the girl's shoulder. He pressed the flat of the blade deep into the softness of the girl's throat. "Policeman, kindly drop gun. No good to policeman now. Shoot gun—knife cut lady's throat. Too bad. Velly nice lady." He bowed in mock politeness.

Lonergan lowered the gun to his side, shrugging. "Pick up the marbles, Ning Tong." But the defeat in his voice was affected. He couldn't give up. His own life, these other lives, hung by threads in this small basement room. It was no time for him to throw in the sponge.

"Velly wise policeman," singsonged Chan Ning Tong, as Lonergan lowered the gun.

Mavis Rousseau now saw Ben Borchard, as he sat up on the table, gingerly stuffing his shirt under his belt. She saw the blood. "Ben," she murmured. "Oh, Ben—are you all right?"

He didn't answer, just lowered his eyes and didn't look at her.

Across the room, both Wong and the old woman had turned from the wall. Wong's face remained Orientally impassive, as his one eye watched Chan Ning Tong. But the woman's face was not impassive. Each haggard line of it, every scar in her ugly skin, had deepened to a mask of tragedy. There was something pitiful about her, as she fought to keep her tortured face from reflecting the love that was welling up in her eyes as she looked at Mavis Rousseau. She sobbed. She got down on her knees clumsily and turned her pleading face to Chan Ning Tong.

"Don't hurt her," she begged, almost like a prayer. "You let her go, Ning Tong—you've got me again."

The fat Chinaman leered at her moonishly over Mavis Rousseau's shoulder. "Velly nice. Just like I think when I come to save Missa Borchard." He glanced flatly at Borchard. "Get guns, pliz."

Borchard nodded. While Chan Ning Tong kept the knife at the girl's throat and so held everybody checkmated, Borchard eased the Police Positive from Lonergan's hand.

"Ben," cried Mavis, "help me, quick."

Borchard's face had gotten very white. He didn't look at the girl. He slipped around behind the old woman and took the big Frontiersman Colt's from under her dress. He searched Wong and dropped another concealed knife from Wong's belt under his jacket. He frisked Louie, the Fink.

"Geez, I ain't done a thing," sobbed Louis. "I ain't packin' a rod. I don't know nothing about this. I just steered the copper to that room upstairs on account of he's got a rap on me—"

Borchard didn't find any weapon on Louie. He struck Louie across the face and came over to Chan Ning Tong, handing the Chinese Lonergan's gun, while he retained the clumsy Frontiersman. They both checked the cylinder loadings. Then Chan Ning Tong dropped the knife and shoved Mavis Rousseau across the room.

He and Borchard stood side by side at the doorway.

Lonergan, leaning against the forge, casually turned his gaze on Ko Wong. The thin Chinese returned the gaze with his one eye. No message seemed to pass between them, but Lonergan's hand lay carelessly on the edge of the forge and Ko Wong saw it, showed no expression at all, turned away.

"Everybody, he die," said Chan Ning Tong.

Perspiration beaded Ben Borchard's white face. "Wait a minute, Ning Tong," he said. "Don't you think—"

The fat Chinaman wagged his head. "You and I, we go. Everybody else, he stay."

Lonergan threw the ladle. He did it fast. His hand had been close to the wooden handle, and he grabbed it, scooping up coals that were still hot, though not red-hot, and hurled ladle and all straight into Chan Ning Tong's face.

Ning Tong cried out once, shooting the gun aimlessly as he staggered back against the door jamb.

LONERGAN took a running dive at Ben Borchard. The big Frontiersman whammed twice over his head, as he and Borchard spilled to the floor together, struggling fiercely.

While Chan Ning Tong still staggered, Wong bent down quickly and gathered up the six knives. He held them spread, fan-like, in his left hand. His right hand, with incredible speed, picked off the first knife in the fan and hurled it. The blade chunked deep into Chan Ning Tong's shoulder, and the handle quivered there.

Chan Ning Tong leaned back against the wall and fired. His first bullet almost turned Wong around. Wong hurled another knife. The next bullet burned into Wong's abdomen, causing him to stoop a little. But Wong hurled another knife. No bullets could stop that determined advance of the scrawny Chinese who picked knives from his left hand and tossed them with his right, always marching forward, checked by nothing, whipping his knives as calmly as a man might whip them toward a wooden target.

Chan Ning Tong, supported by the wall back of him, emptied the gun into Wong. Wong staggered in a short circle, like an acrobatic dancer. He came out

of his stagger with graceful control, and his last knife chunked to the hilt into Chan Ning's throat.

Both Chinese fell to the floor together. Wong looked up blearily, coughing blood through his yellow teeth, and saw Lonergan fighting Ben Borchard.

Nobody in the room heard Wong's last words. Nobody heard him say: "Good luck, policeman. Good luck—"

Lonergan smashed his fist into Borchard's face, and tried again to get the big gun. It boomed by his ear, deafening that ear, the biting powder scorching the whole side of his face. Borchard lurched to his feet, and missed Lonergan with the last shot in the cylinder. The old woman tried to rush Borchard while Lonergan was getting up from the floor. Borchard threw the heavy gun at her. It sent her sprawling awkwardly.

Over in the corner, Mavis Rousseau and Louie, the Fink, looked on, speechlessly and impotently.

Lonergan went at Borchard in a slight crouch, throwing out his left, following it with a chopping right. Borchard hit him in the mouth, and Lonergan's lip split open.

It wasn't anything like a boxing match, but it was a prize-fight—with life as the prize.

Borchard snatched up the heavy chain which had been used to strap the kettle to his belly. He lashed out with it, caught Lonergan squarely across the face, and the blood spurted.

Borchard rushed in, lashing the chain, as Lonergan staggered. Lonergan tipped the table over, pushing it suddenly against Borchard's legs. They were both on the floor, and Lonergan got his feet under himself first, pitched himself forward into Borchard. They slid over the floor, together, grappling. Borchard kneed him twice in the groin.

Lonergan struggled to breathe. His breathing was the loudest sound in the room. Borchard kneed him again, and settled claw-like hands on his throat. Lonergan smashed the heels of his fists at Borchard's eyes.

They rolled over on the floor, and Borchard had the curved knife of Chan Ning Tong. The blade neatly sliced coat-sleeve, shirt-sleeve, and cut sharply into Lonergan's arm. Borchard tried a second stroke with it, hard, fast. Lonergan caught his wrist, twisted out of the way of the blade, and the momentum of the thrust, coupled with Lonergan's sudden push, stabbed the blade into Borchard's own chest.

Borchard coughed and went limp.

Lonergan slowly got to his feet, with his hands pressed to his face. When he took his hands away, they cupped the warm red blood he had lost. It was still difficult to breathe.

Louie, the Fink, stared at him owlishly and sighed: "Geez, officer. By gosh—"

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Woman Dies Again

YOUNG Mavis Rousseau could no longer bear the sight of that basement room. She swayed on the precarious edge of fainting, and Lonergan helped her up the stairs and told her to wait. He handcuffed Louie, the Fink, to the iron frame of the wall-bed.

"Geez, you got me all wrong, officer," Louie protested. "I won't lam. I never had nothing to do with this. You know what I am? I'm just an innocent standerby."

Lonergan clumped down the steps again and closed the door behind him. He fixed his eyes on the old woman. She was crying into her maimed hands, in little rasping sobs.

"You're Esther Rousseau," he said quietly. "You're Klondike Charlie's miss-

ing wife. You're that girl's mother, but you've been hiding out. Why?"

She took her hands down and let him see the hideously tortured thing her face was. "Look at me," she challenged. "Look at me and try to tell me I ought to let that child know who I am."

Lonergan glanced away from her. "That's what I guessed. You didn't want to be a burden on your daughter. You thought it would make her life happier, if she thought you died fourteen years ago. You love her too much to let her see you like you are now. So you've been living in the dark, just coming out to peek at your daughter, when she wasn't aware of it—like through the Tuey Far Low window, tonight. You've kept the secret of what happened to you, for her sake."

Her gaunt body shuddered. "It won't be a secret, any more. It's spoiled. If you hadn't recognized me tonight, everything —but you did."

He took her shoulders gently in his hands. "Look, ma, sometimes I'm the world's lousiest cop. Sometimes I pinch the wrong people and get the wrong answer on cases. When headquarters finds that out, I'm sunk. Maybe I'll guess wrong this time—"

She met his eyes. "You mean—you'll help me? You'll keep the secret?" She clutched his hands. "I'll do anything for you. I'll confess to killing. I don't mind being hanged. It's just that I don't want Mavis to know me."

He nodded quickly. "But first I have to have it straight in my own think-tank, ma. We've got to cover fourteen years in about four minutes. Let's go back to that night you vanished from Singapore Joe's. You were snatched, huh?"

She bowed her head. "Yes."

"Ben Borchard was your husband's secretary and bodyguard. He had a part in the snatching, huh?"

"Yes. Borchard and Chan Ning Tong. They brought me down to a place like this. They kept me there for two weeks. You can see some of the things they did to me—my hands, my face—they even strapped me under the rats. I went through a lot."

Lonergan winced. "They tortured you because your husband, Klondike Charlie, was supposed to have a fortune in gold bricks hidden somewhere in the Bonanza Creek country. Borchard couldn't get Charlie to tell where it was, by pretending he was interested in your inheritance. So he had Chan Ning Tong snatch you. He thought you could be forced to tell where the 'store' was."

"But I couldn't. I didn't know a thing."

"Naturally," Lonergan smiled coldly. "Neither did Klondike Charlie know. It was all a gag. Your husband didn't have that buried gold, at all. Borchard didn't learn the truth till your husband confessed his publicity joke, as he was dying."

"Yes," she managed hoarsely. Her eyes were staring.

"So they tortured you all for nothing."

SHE went on slowly: "My servant, Ko Wong, came into Chinatown to look for me. He found me and tried to kill Chan Ning Tong, but they caught him, and they—well, they treated Wong even worse than me. After they found out my husband's hidden gold was just an eccentric man's joke, they left Wong and me to die in a cellar. Wong was wonderful. He was almost dead, but he helped me out of there, and a laundryman cousin of his took us to a Chinese vegetable farm in the Sacramento Valley. We hid there for years. We had to learn to walk all over again. My eyes were almost blind after that."

"You decided to let everybody think

you were dead, for your daughter's sake, but you and Wong planned to come back and take out your revenge on Borchard and Ning Tong. Right?" Lonergan looked at her.

"Well, partly. Wong wanted vengeance. He wanted to torture them as they had tortured me. He didn't care about himself. Time didn't matter to him—the Chinese think nothing of time. He didn't care how long he had to wait. I tried to restrain him, because I didn't want to have my identity discovered if we came back to the city. Then I read in the paper about Borchard marrying Mavis."

"Sure," said Lonergan. "The dirty heel had failed to nab Klondike Charlie's phony gold, so he worked on Mavis to get the real fortune by taking her to the altar. That was too much for you to stand. So you and Wong came to Chinatown to even up the score. That was it, wasn't it?"

"Yes," she breathed. "It was a mad plan, but I'd listened to Wong so long I guess I was beginning to be Oriental myself. We came to the city and took those rooms and this place here. We fixed this secret basement up for the torture. For the last week, we were buying narcotics from Louie, the Fink. Wong smokes the pipes, and he couldn't risk trading with Chinese dealers because one of them might be spying for Chan Ning Tong. But I guess we were double-crossed, anyway. Louie, the Fink, must have told you about our place here in this hole."

"I made him do it," Lonergan said. "Now, I'll tell you the rest. You and Wong were spotted in Chinatown by Chan Ning Tong. He got worried and ran to Borchard. The only thing they could do was find you and kill you, or the fourteen-year-old case might bust open again. They were afraid of you

and Wong. Ning Tong tried to bribe Louie, the Fink, into telling where your hiding-place was. Louie dodged giving anything out. Borchard hired a private dick, named Tom Grady, to hunt you. Tom Grady got on Wong's tail, and Wong knifed him last night. You were nicer to me, when I got on your tail out there."

The old woman put her scarred face in her hands again. "It's all a bad dream—and now I have to wake up. Why did you have to butt in?

"Chan Ning Tong went to the Tuey Far Low a while ago to speak to Borchard. You and Wong were ready to strike," he said. "Ning Tong got away, but you nabbed Borchard and lugged him down here to give him a taste of his own medicine. He deserved it. Ning Tong sneaked along behind you and saw where you went. He knew what would happen and wanted to save his partner in crime. He knew the best way to checkmate you was to snatch your daughter. He did that before the police came to the Tuey Far Low, dragged him down here, and tried to take command. But Wong and I got together and took him. That's the whole story."

SHE glanced down at Wong's sprawled bony body. "Poor Wong." Big tears dripped over her wrinkled cheeks. "He always said he could never look his honorable ancestors in the face until he hurled his knives into Chan Ning Tong. He said nothing could stop him—and nothing did."

"Bullets didn't," Lonergan finished quietly.

She studied him haggardly, a very weary old woman. "What do we do now?"

"You scram," he told her. "It won't be the first time somebody pulls a get-

away on me. Where you're concerned, this case ought to end right here in this room. No use dragging you through the newspapers. No use letting your daughter know you had anything to do with this. Esther Rousseau died fourteen years ago. Get me?"

"Yes, but I don't see—Well, Mavis and Louie, the Fink, will wonder who I was."

"I'll cover it," he said firmly. "You're just some underworld character. The papers eat that stuff up. I can handle it so you'll just be a mystery-woman who drops out of sight. I can even say that Wong gave a dying confession about you and about how Esther Rousseau was murdered years back. There's nobody to check me. This ought to be an easy one."

She stared at him. "And Mavis won't ever learn I'm living?"

"Why should she?" He grinned and opened the door. "Get going, ma. You're supposed to be escaping from an officer of the law."

She started to say something to him, choked up, and couldn't say it. She only stared.

"Can you go to that Chink vegetable farm?" he asked.

"Yes. Wong's cousin—" She halted uncertainly.

"Go there," he clipped. "Drink yourself some sunshine. Don't get any crazy idea you ought to kill yourself. I'll get in touch with Wong's cousin and come out to that farm next Sunday. You be there."

"I'll be there," she murmured throatily now.

Lonergan led her to the steps, and she began to hobble up them. "Grow some string-beans, or something," he suggested. "I'll be out there to chisel. I'm nuts about string-beans."

BONES to PICK

ALL too infrequently do we have room to spare for the controversial material that comes to our desk from both readers and authors. We wish we had more space to devote to such letters, for one and all, whether or not we happen to agree with the point of view expressed, they are interesting and deserving of attention in these pages.

For example—way back in the October issue we printed a letter from Reader Charles F. Arnold in which he took John K. Butler to task for what he considered an error in auto-driving technique. "By watching race drivers you learn to hit the curve fast and ease off on the throttle," was the particular sentence that roused Reader Arnold's ire. Here's what Author Butler has to say to his critic's remarks. We regret that we have been unable to print Mr. Butler's rejoinder till now.

September, 12, 1936

Just saw the letter from DIME DETECTIVE'S reader, Charles F. Arnold, as printed in the current (October '36) issue, and I was pleased to see he included Rex Lonergan and Tricky Enright in his line-up of D. D. entertainment.

Mr. Arnold calls my attention to an incident in *Parole for the Dead* which he considers an error; he refers to a paragraph in the story wherein Tricky Enright makes certain statements regarding the race driver's technique of maneuvering a speeding car around a turn.

Mr. Arnold's own statements regarding the technique seem to me darned accurate. I can't really argue with them. About all I can say is that the paragraph in question gave Mr. Arnold the wrong impression; and in such a case Butler takes the rap. There's no alibi in the world for a writer who fails to make a point clear.

When Tricky Enright, speaking of race drivers going into a turn, said, "they *go at it* fast," he didn't mean to imply that they go all the way into it fast, easing off on the throttle afterwards. Only the novice automobilist tries to handle the turn that way. Yanking the foot from the accelerator when the car is sliding in the turn causes an abrupt compression of the motor, and this acts similar to sudden brake application. It doesn't check the skid. It throws the car completely out of control.

Mr. Arnold's phrase: "controlled skid" hits the nail squarely on the head. The race driver negotiating a turn can't avoid skid, or slide; he controls it. He prevents the slide from becoming an end-for-end spin, or a wide wild side-slip to the nearest fence

or crash wall. In racing lingo, he fights to avoid "a merry-go-round", or "a wing-ding", or a "gilhoohie".

The problem is one of controlled skid. On a familiar track, the driver rides in what he terms "the groove", a path with no official marking; it's a route around the track in which centrifugal force most favors his car at a certain speed; it's discovered by "feel".

A couple of years ago, as a racing enthusiast, I had an interesting time working on a movie scenario (still unproduced) with a well known professional driver, an Indianapolis place-winner. On more than one occasion we forgot (or *I* forgot) the business at hand, and we had some gabs on the more technical aspects of the game.

Roaring down a straightaway, a turn soon to smack him, the race driver, either pioneering a "groove" or blasting along a "groove" already mastered, comes to a point where he must reduce his speed. He doesn't use brakes. (Most race cars are equipped only with a hand brake that operates on one rear wheel, being used for pit stops, or for holding a stalled car on a steep embankment so it won't roll down into "track traffic.")

To cut the speed the driver eases off on his throttle. He eases off at a point just before the turn. Nobody can say just where this point is, nor how much the driver slows down. Obviously, it depends on his straight-away speed, tightness of the turn, bank of the turn, the weight and balance of the car he's driving.

The car dives into the turn, steered *with* the turn. *But,* almost immediately, it begins to slide. As one driver expressed it to me, the car begins to "wag its tail". That's the danger point, that start of skid. The driver no longer steers with the turn; he steers into the skid.

Let's say the turn is to the left. (As far as I know, all races, except for a comedy affair sometimes entered in racing programs, run to the left.) But momentum throws the car sliding to the right. In that kind of spot, Mr. Average Motorist gets a stroke of panic. He wants to turn left, and his car is sliding right. Instinctively, he tries to tighten his wheels to the left, thinking he'll finally make it. And that's where he's wrong. That's Mr. Arnold's accurate point. The car, instead of following its front wheels, goes into a "gilhooie".

Now certainly, as I see it, Mr. Arnold has the answer when he says, in such a case, that the steering wheel is "turned hard to the right", in a fast left (sliding) turn. But I don't think Mr. Arnold means "turned hard" in all cases. I wouldn't say that the driver "cramps" them right. How far he turns them into the skid is a matter of the skid itself, the track surface, the speed of the car, the car's weight and balance, the bank of the turn. I think it might be better to say that the driver "jockeys" his front wheels right. He's "shoving gun to the motor" now. The drive and churn of the rear

wheels, under steadily increased acceleration, is keeping the car moving *with the skid,* yet advancing it, keeping it in control, pushing it, under front wheel "jockeying", around to the left.

So herewith my apologies to Mr. Arnold because I didn't make a point clear, and thanks to him for coming to the front with his opinion.

Tricky Enright says: "It's not *my* fault. It's this stumble-bum that writes about me. He goes and gets things all horsed up."

Sincerely,

JOHN K. BUTLER.

All of which just goes to show that neither authors nor editor are intentionally churlish in failing to give heed to letters from you fans when they pour in on us. It's all a matter of space and we'd print 'em all—and the rejoinders too—if we just had room.

And while we have Mr. Butler on the spot we think you might be interested in an exchange of letters we had with him regarding the story, *The Walking Dead,* which appears in this issue. We had heard that he had been laid up with a siege of influenza at the time he was working on the yarn, and when it finally arrived we hastened to assure his agent of our approval of the story and suggested facetiously that if the flu had begot that good a tale he delay recovery till he had another one under way. And, quite unaware what sinister motives he would attribute to us, we enclosed a news story about a cemetery for pets we thought he might be interested in seeing, in view of the background he had used for the last Lonergan yarn, *The Mad Dogs of Frisco.* Here's what we drew.

October 26, 1936

I was darned pleased to hear you liked *The Walking Dead* so well. Through my agent, I learn that you believe my recent combat with influenza had the effect of making this yarn better than others and that you suggest, therefore, with utter lack of personal concern, that my recovery be retarded till I do another.

In response to this cold-blooded and thoroughly ruthless editorial suggestion, I plan to use a courageously new system on the next D. D. story; for twenty-four hours prior to starting work I'll alternately sit in a steaming hot bath and in a chair placed directly in the path of a window draft. While lounging in the bath I will inhale from several sinister-looking bottles and test tubes containing insidious germs imported from the upper reaches of the Amazon.

The manuscript will be mailed to you sealed in cellophane and wax, and, if you have any more regard for your own physical welfare than you have for mine, it's highly advisable that this manuscript be opened and read while immersed in a ninety percent solution of Lysol.

When you sent me that clipping about New York's swank cemetery for dogs, cats, horses, and birds, I thought it was motivated by a belief I might be interested in it because of the background used in a previous "Lonergan" yarn. You said as much, and I was naive enough to accept the explanation. But now that I've discovered your attitude toward my personal health, I see the ironic truth behind your gesture. "Hartsdale Canine Cemetery—a Final Resting Place for Dogs, Cats, Horses, and Birds . . . and Loyal Dime Detective Writers who Sneezed out Their Lives that Entertainment Might March On."

Yours to the Last Cough,
JOHN K. BUTLER.

We're going to have a hard time convincing Mr. Butler we're not really the heartless ogre he imagines us and when we see him—he sticks to the West Coast and we've never had the pleasure of meeting him yet—we'll have to be on our best editorial behavior—or else!

And here are a couple of letters putting Mr. Frederick C. Davis in his place. We can take it if he can!

Los Angeles, Calif.

Gentlemen:

For some unexplained reason you seldom fail to return unread manuscripts submitted by so-called "unknown" writers, yet in the July first 1935 issue of your "Dime Detective Magazine" you published a yarn called "Doorway to Doom" written by Frederick C. Davis in which the author has taken it upon himself to move the San Bernardino Mountains into the Pacific Ocean. It is quite evident the author never visited my native city of Hollywood. He has his characters riding *west* on Santa Monica Blvd. toward the ocean yet he delivers his cargo in San Bernardino. Wonderful navigating! By driving west you ordinarily arrive at the ocean's edge. For Mr. Davis' information Hollywood and Los Angeles lie west of San Bernardino and at no time are the mountains over that city visible in Hollywood unless you are in a plane. How some informed readers must have laughed.

Sincerely,
THEODORE RUDOLPH,
(A writer you insist on ignoring).

We showed the letter to Mr. Davis and if it's any consolation to California-fan Rudolph the author of the boner in ques-

Kidneys must *clean* acids from your *blood*

DR. W. R. GEORGE
Former Health Commissioner of Indianapolis

Your System is Poisoned

And May Cause Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, and a Run-Down Condition When Kidneys Function Poorly

Your health, vitality and energy are extremely dependent upon the proper functioning of your kidneys. This is easy to understand when you learn that each kidney, although only the size of your clenched fist, contains 4½ million, tiny, delicate tubes or filters. Your blood circulates through these tiny filters 200 times an hour, night and day. Nature provides this method of removing acids, poisons, and toxins from your blood.

Causes Many Ills

Dr. Walter R. George, many years Health Commissioner of Indianapolis, recently stated: "Most people do not realize this, but the kidneys probably are the most remarkable organs in the entire human anatomy. Their work is just as important and just as vital to good health as the work of the heart. As Health Commissioner of the City of Indianapolis for many years and as medical director for a large insurance company, I have had opportunity to observe that a surprisingly high percentage of people are devitalized, rundown, nervous, tired, and worn-out because of poorly functioning kidneys."

If your kidneys slow down and do not function properly and fail to remove approximately 3 pints of Acids, Poisons, and liquids from your blood every 24 hours, then there is a gradual accumulation of these Acids and Wastes, and slowly, but surely, your system becomes poisoned, making you feel old before your time, rundown and worn out.

Many other troublesome and painful symptoms may be caused by poorly functioning kidneys, such as Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Frequent Headaches and Colds, Rheumatic Pains, Swollen Joints, Circles Under Eyes, Backaches, Loss of Vitality, Burning, Itching, Smarting and Acidity.

Help Kidneys Doctors' Way

Druggists and doctors in over thirty-five countries throughout the world think that the proper way to help kidney functions is with the modern, up-to-date Doctor's prescription, Cystex, because it is scientifically prepared in strict accordance with the United States and British Pharmacopoeia to act directly on the kidneys as a diuretic. For instance, Dr. T. J. Rastelli, famous surgeon and scientist of London, says: "Cystex is one of the finest remedies I have ever known in my medical practice. Any doctor will recommend it for its definite benefit in the treatment of many functional kidney and bladder disorders. It is safe and harmless."

And Dr. T. A. Ellis, of Toronto, Canada, has stated: "Cystex' influence in aiding the treatment of sluggish kidney and bladder functions can not be over-estimated." And Dr. C. Z. Rendelle, of San Francisco, said: "I can truthfully recommend the use of Cystex," while Dr. N. G. Giannini, widely known Italian physician, stated: "I have found men and women of middle age particularly grateful for the benefits received from such medication. A feeling of many years lifted off one's age often follows the fine effects of Cystex."

Guaranteed 8-Day Test

If you suffer from any of the conditions mentioned in this article or feel rundown, worn out, and old before your time, poorly functioning kidneys may be the real cause of your trouble. And because Cystex has given successful results in thousands of cases throughout the world after other things had failed, you should put this doctor's prescription to the test immediately, with the understanding that it must prove satisfactory in every way within 8 days, or you merely return the empty package and the full purchase price is refunded.

Because Cystex is specially and scientifically prepared to act directly on the kidneys as a diuretic, it is quick and positive in action. Within 48 hours most people report a remarkable improvement and complete satisfaction in 8 days. Cystex costs only three cents a dose at druggists. Put it to the test today. Under the guarantee you must feel younger, stronger, and better than you have in a long time—you must feel that Cystex has done the work thoroughly and completely, or you merely return the empty package and it costs nothing. You are the sole judge of your own satisfaction. You can't afford to take chances with cheap, inferior, or irritating drugs or any medicine that is not good enough to be guaranteed. Telephone your druggist for guaranteed Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex) today.

tion looked decidedly glum, and promised not to let the slip occur again. However, we insist on taking this occasion to point out that NO writer is "ignored" around these premises, and if Incipient Author Rudolph hasn't yet cracked our market it's not because his mss. don't get read. The explanation, we feel sure, must lie deeper that his ability to keep his mountains in order. An admirable trait but one to which other qualities need be added before successful fictioneering results.

And the following from Hawkinsville, Ga.

> An omniverous reader of detective yarns, I have one decided kick coming, about the Carter Cole stories in DIME DETECTIVE.
>
> Your Mr. Frederick C. Davis writes a splendid yarn—interesting, logical and technical—and yet—
>
> Since he must be considerable of a psychologist and psychiatrist why on earth hasn't he tumbled to the reactions of his readers at his constant reiteration of—"But I'm not Jane Doctor, I'm June. But I'm not June Doctor, I'm Jane," *ad nauseam?*
>
> I've gotten so I look for those expressions and hate the story when I find them. Rather puerile as a word filler for such a talented author, and I advise that he adopt his own suggestion in the future and call them both—"Annabelle." Otherwise, some industrious seismologist may soon be locating an earthquake center from his literary tomb stone.
>
> Hopefully,
> A CONSTANT READER.

We have to confess to "Constant Reader" that the idea of the twin sisters, June and Jane Day, in the Carter Cole stories, was our own and not Mr. Davis's at all. We must also confess that the Georgia gentleman—or lady—is not alone in his—or her—judgment and we have been made to see the light. In the future one of the sisters Day will no longer be found on this earth. After much consideration we consented to permit the author to make a corpse of her—June or Jane, we can't be sure which, even in death—and while we can't do anything about changing the remaining sister's name to Annabelle we hope this drastic procedure will suffice those readers who have begun to be upset by Dr. Cole's inability to differentiate between his two secretaries. R. I. P.

—The Editor.

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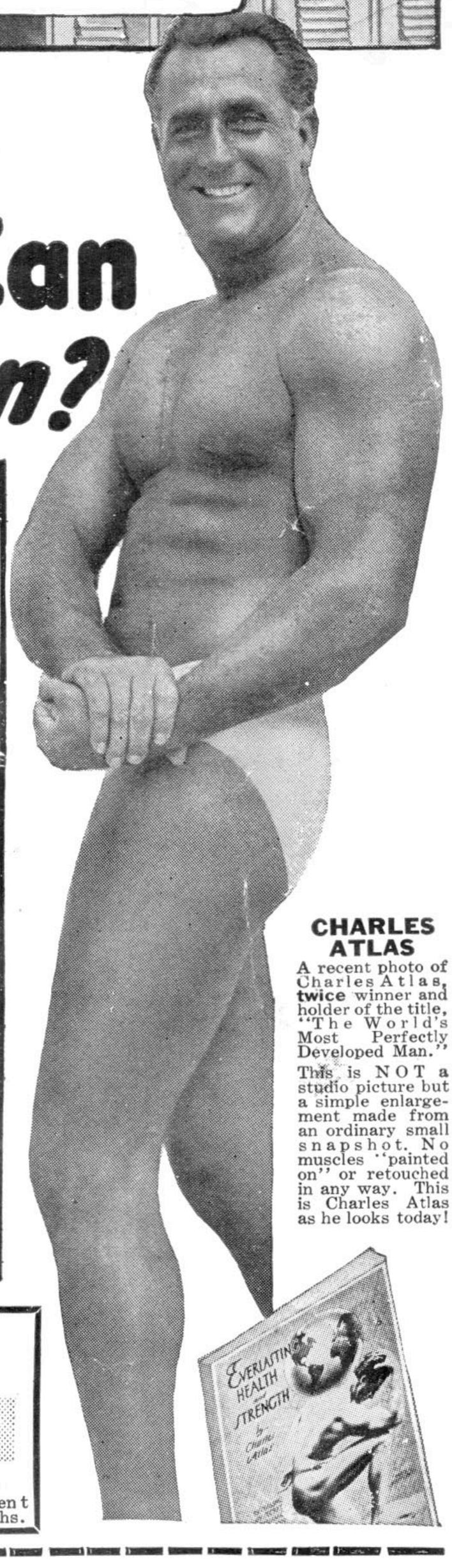

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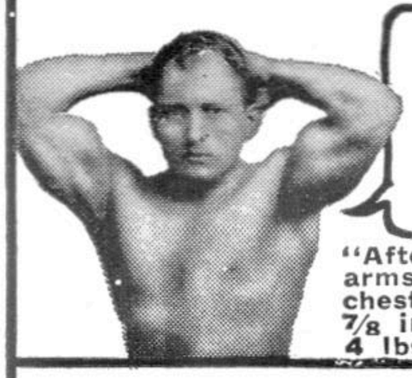

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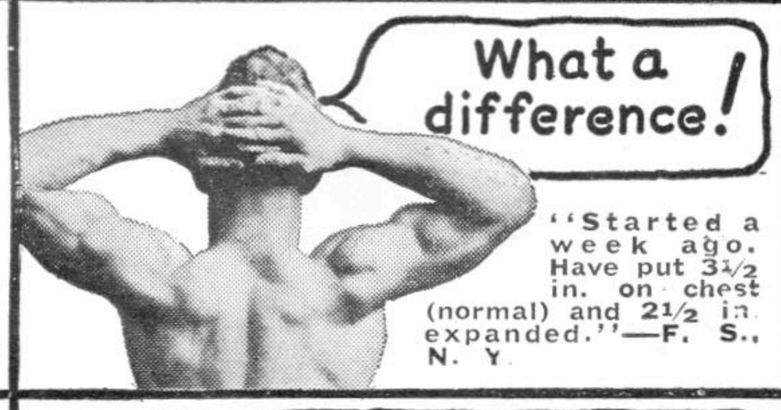

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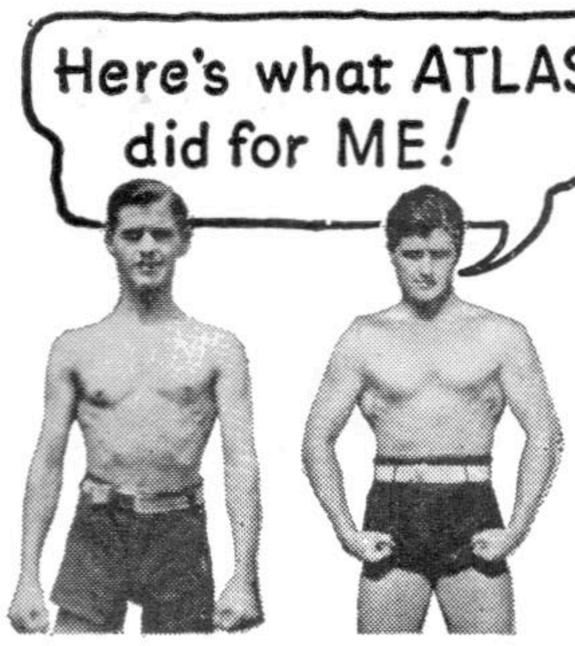

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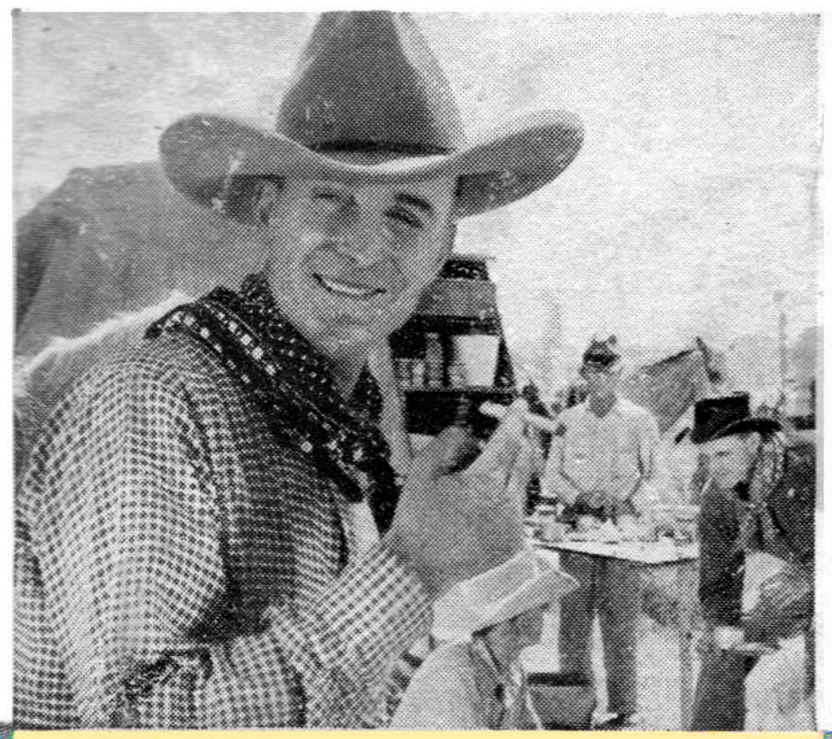

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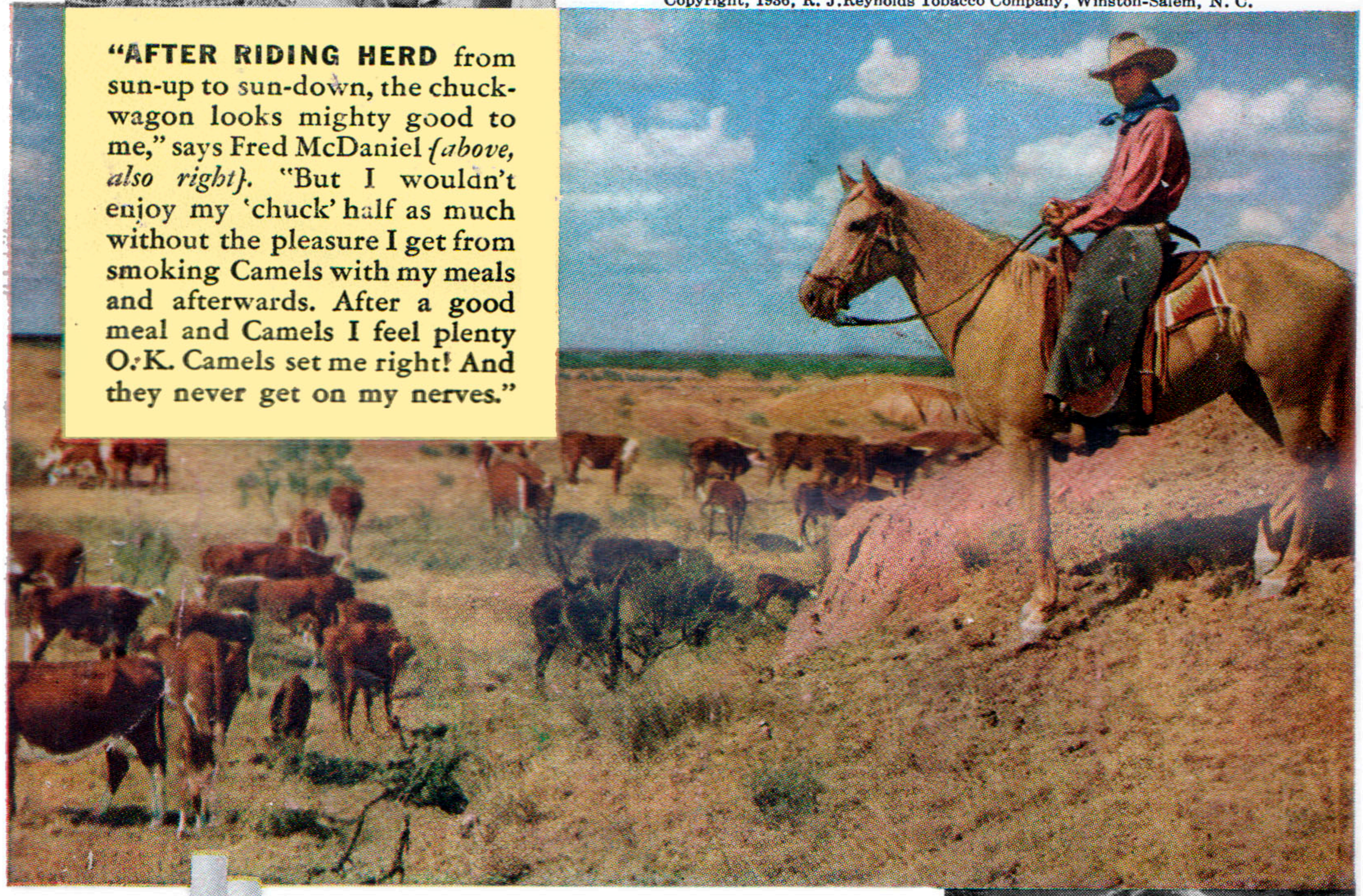

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Smoking Camels, you enjoy a sense of greater ease while you're eating, and afterwards too!

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