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AUGUST

# 10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

LAWRENCE  
WOOLRICH  
AND OTHERS

A black and white illustration depicting a dramatic scene. A man in a dark suit and hat (the detective) is in the foreground, holding a handgun and looking towards a man in a light-colored suit who is running away. In the background, another man in a dark suit and hat is running towards the left, with his hands raised in a gesture of surrender or alarm. The scene is set in what appears to be a doorway or a narrow hallway with a lamp hanging from the ceiling.

**RACE WILLIAMS**  
*PROVES THAT*  
**DEAD MEN DON'T KILL**  
*by CARROLL JOHN DALY*

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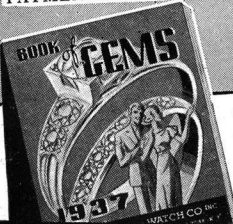
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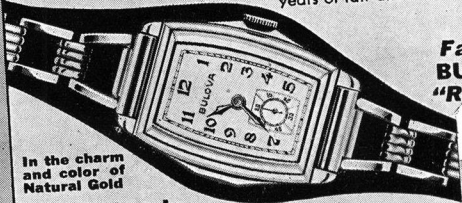
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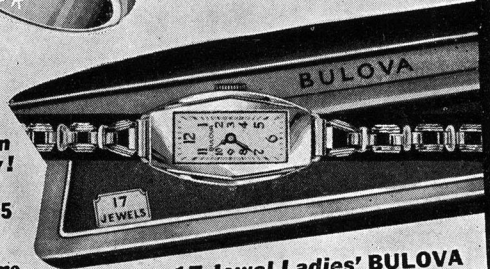
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# 10<sup>c</sup> DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



EVERY STORY COMPLETE

EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 25

CONTENTS FOR AUGUST, 1937

No. 1

## A SMASHING NOVEL-LENGTH RACE WILLIAMS THRILLER

*Watch that hard-boiled private dick prove that*

- Dead Men Don't Kill**.....Carroll John Daly 6  
Even when they are able to touch off a fuse that leads straight to a powder keg planted on the doorstep of the underworld.

## 2—GRIPPING MIDNIGHT MURDER NOVELETTES—2

*Help a smart newshound solve*

- The Riddle of the Velvet Ladies**.....Beulah Poynter 58  
All of whom—including his own fiancée—had more than enough reason to plunge that stiletto between the shoulder blades of the interesting Doctor Alaric Scott.

*Don't try to step into a*

- Live Man's Shoes—A Marquis of Broadway Story**.....John Lawrence 100  
Particularly when they happen to be worn by the master of Manhattan's Main Stem, or you're liable to meet plenty of trouble before you even get the laces pulled tight.

## 4—EXCITING SHORT DETECTIVE MYSTERIES—4

*Serve yourself a portion of*

- Murder at the Automat**.....Cornell Woolrich 45  
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*Take a shot at dodging*

- Too Many Guns**.....Allan K. Echols 84  
In the hands of a pair of hard-boiled babies in distress, each of whom wanted to corner the misplaced chivalry of a lone insurance dick.

*Follow a trail of*

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As a man dictates his own death warrant, only to tear it to pieces after he dies.

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- Reverse English**.....Brad Monroe 98  
On your shot when you try to carom out of murder. It's apt to boomerang and freeze you to the cushion of the hot-seat.

*Take stock of our*

- New Blood in Crime-Writing**.....The Editor 124  
A bit about the unfamiliar faces that enter these pages from time to time.

*We want to know if you are*

- Ready for the Rackets**.....A Department 125  
In this revealing series giving the lowdown 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 chance to catch a preview of*

- The September Thrill Docket**..... 4  
Some of the sure-fire hits scheduled for production in the next DIME DETECTIVE.

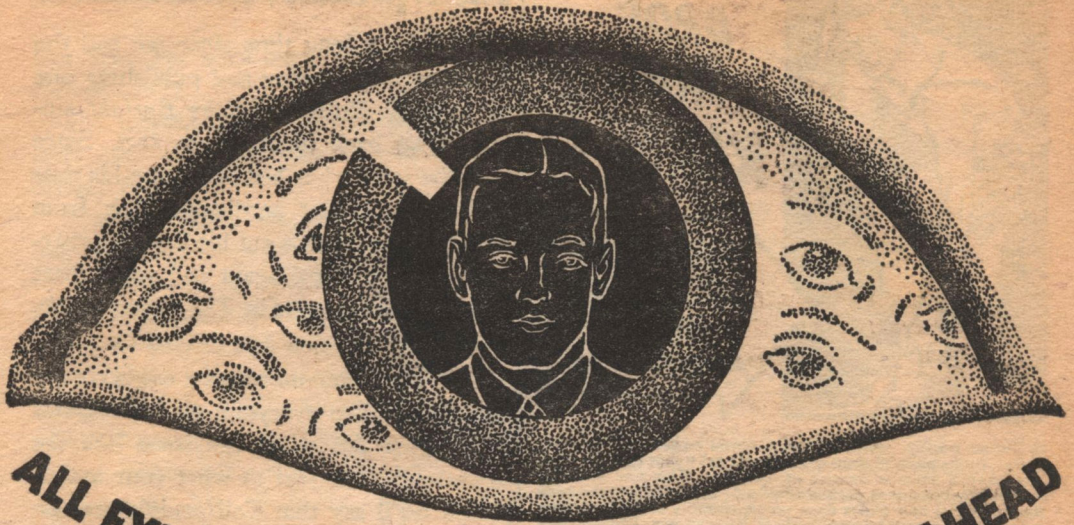
- Cover—"There's Your Woman—You're Welcome to Her"**.....Malvin Singer  
From *Dead Men Don't Kill*.

Black-and-white illustrations by John Flemming Gould

Watch for the September Issue

On the Newsstands August 5th

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## The September Thrill Docket

IT'S been a long time since we had the pleasure of reading and publishing one of John K. Butler's *Tricky Enright* stories. Way back in April, in fact. Since then the author has been devoting his time to Lonergan, that hardboiled dick from Frisco, but now he's got his favorite character under control again and you'll meet him in the next issue in *The Secret of the Wax Lady*.

The mere announcement ought to be enough to keep everyone on tenterhooks till August 5th when the issue hits the newsstands, but just to whet your anticipation we'll say that California's ace undercover operative gets himself framed for murder in the first chapter and doesn't manage to beat the rap until the beautiful girl who ran the shooting-gallery started to double for her own targets.

We're taking bets now that you'll not guess the answer to the mystery till the last paragraph of the last page!

The cover, incidentally, shows her bull's-eyed among the clay pipes and ducks at the end of her rifle range and is painted by Malvin Singer. Watch for it. It'll knock your eye out!

And William Edward Hayes is on deck once more with a novelette called *The Strip-Tease Murders*. As you might guess from the title it's laid against a burlesque-show background and has to do with the killing of a lovely masked Venus in full view of the audience as she completes her dance.

Then there's a short story by O. B. Myers based on a man who won a puzzle contest—any of you fans had any luck?—we haven't—and a novelette-length race-track murder mystery by Edward S. Williams, plus other thrilling stories and features.

How do you think it stacks up? We rather like the prospect ourselves.

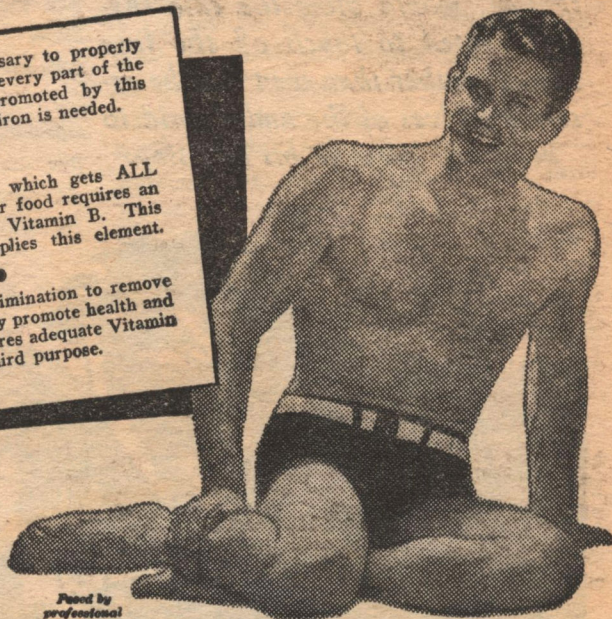
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Doctors now know that the real reason why many find it hard to gain weight is they do not get enough Vitamin B and iron in their food. Now with this new discovery which combines these elements in little concentrated tablets, hosts of people have put on pounds of firm flesh, normal heftiness—in a very short time.

This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is made from special imported English ale yeast,

one of the richest known sources of Vitamin B. By a new process this special yeast is concentrated 7 times—made 7 times more powerful. Then it is combined with 3 kinds of blood-building iron, pasteurized whole yeast and other valuable ingredients in pleasant little tablets.

If you, too, need these vital elements to aid in building you up, get these new "7-power" Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist today. Then day after day watch flat chest develop and skinny limbs round out to natural attractiveness. Soon you feel like an entirely different person, with new charm, new personality.

### Money-back guarantee

No matter how skinny and rundown you may be from lack of enough Vitamin B and iron, try these new Ironized Yeast tablets just a short time, and note the marvelous change. See if they don't aid in building you up in just a few weeks, as they have helped thousands of others. If you are not delighted with the benefits of the very first package, your money will be instantly refunded.

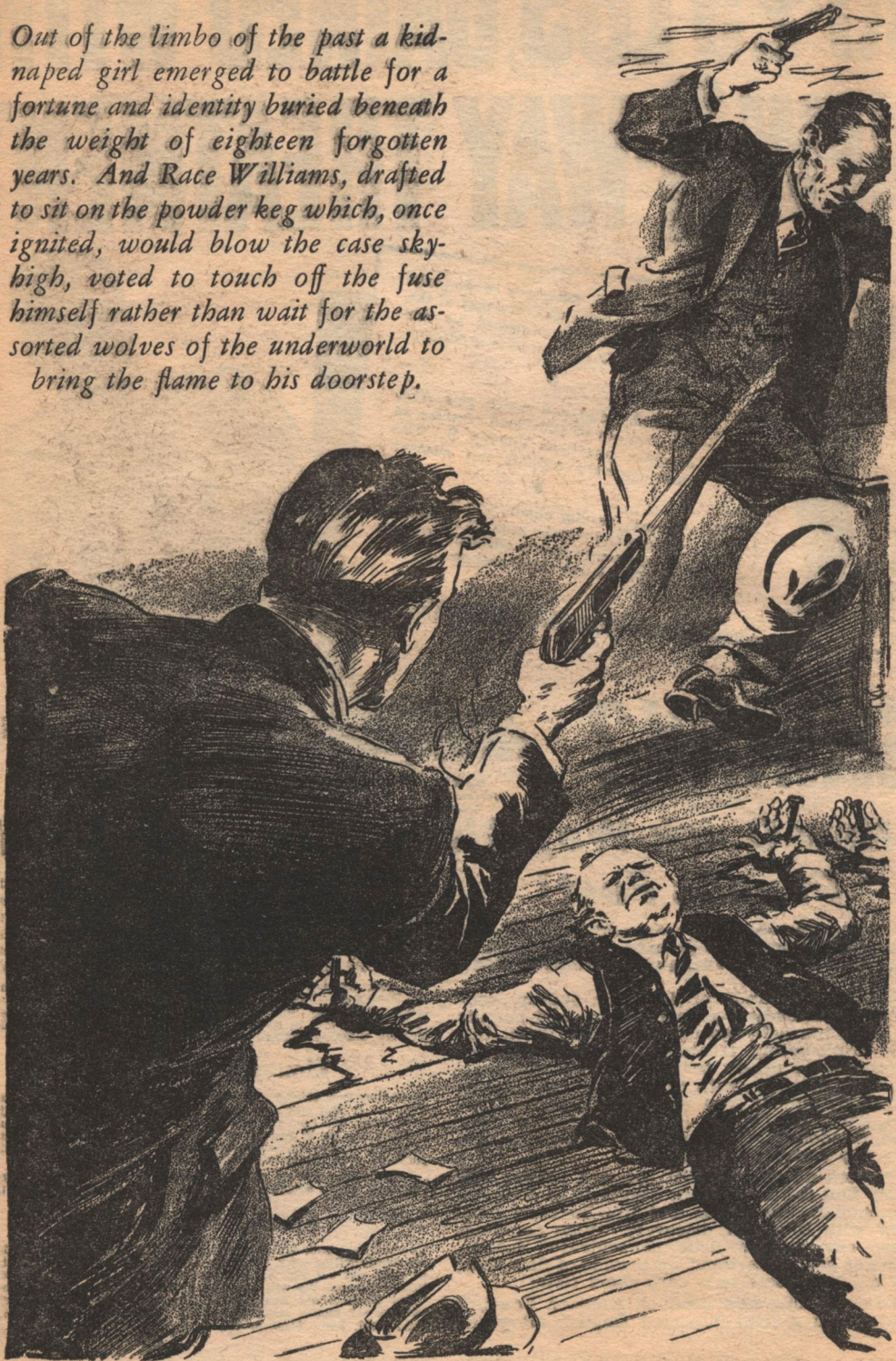
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# DEAD MEN DON'T KILL

*Out of the limbo of the past a kidnaped girl emerged to battle for a fortune and identity buried beneath the weight of eighteen forgotten years. And Race Williams, drafted to sit on the powder keg which, once ignited, would blow the case sky-high, voted to touch off the fuse himself rather than wait for the assorted wolves of the underworld to bring the flame to his doorstep.*



The girl protected Benny Shay so I potted his brother.





## CHAPTER ONE

### River-Rat Trap

**I** WAS to go by boat, and a nasty, foggy night it was along the river. Yet, the crew—the four men standing beside the huge man whose distinction as captain consisted in wearing a dif-

ferent hat—made the night seem clean in comparison. I could see them on the long, low-cabined boat directly beneath the pier as I stood on the torn planks and leaned against the great round piling, talking with the water-rat who did his business on shore.

"It's a bad night and a worse job—a murder job, I understand." He put a

stubby finger hard against my chest. "I thought as how more than you would be coming, and tougher ones. I can't be responsible once you're aboard the boat. They're tough customers."

I spotted them again by the bobbing lantern, said: "They just look dirty to me."

"Huh," he grunted. "Even if you were one of them G-men, they wouldn't be scared of you none—alone on the water like that. I've been paid cash on the dot. I'm a lad who makes deals square. Oh, I won't give the money back—that part is done and gone with. But I'll give you a bit of advice and sort of stand here while you beat it. These guys got to know a lad's tough or they rough him around."

I took a smile in the darkness as a figure snarled up something about getting under way.

"Do they think you're tough?" I asked the man who had brought me.

"They know it. They—"

That was all of that. I simply side-swiped him in the chest, saw his hands go out, and heard him flop into the muddy, shallow water on the opposite side of the planking. Then I dropped down onto the boat. "O. K., boys" I said. "Let 'er ride."

They were off, and they knew their river. I ducked sharply as the glare of light came, a voice cried out, and a shot roared. Then blackness and fog and night—we were out in the river. I didn't have to be told that the harbor police had taken a shot at us!

For a few minutes, I watched the boat dart in and out between tiny lights, miss dark hulks by inches—even once scrape the side of a big barge, yet never slow down in its mad dash.

The lad who had called to me took me by the arm, cursed softly when I shook him off, said: "What did you knock Floyd Taylor in the drink for?"

I swung on the evil-faced, six feet of

grease so suddenly that he stumbled back against the low-roofed cabin. "Because he didn't say 'sir' when he addressed me. What you need on this scow is a little more manners and a little less toughness." I tapped the closed hatch. "The cabin, eh?"

"Yeah—yes, sir," he added quickly. I was going to pin him down with the butt of my gun if he gave me any of his lip. Then, "No—no, sir." He looked toward the little wheel house where the captain stood gripping the broken spokes, a tall, skinny, sickly looking guy beside him.

The boat was an old dilapidated bit of junk—everything but the timber that floated it, I guess, and the high-powered engines that drove it. It was as if a 1937 engine was hidden under the hood of a 1927 car. Speed without beauty—and without suspicion. But I had seen the other two guys slip into the cabin, and that seemed the place for me to be. The guy on deck was arguing about my lying flat and being safer.

I said again, "The cabin?" and, when he still hesitated, "Floyd could walk ashore, but it's deeper out here."

He didn't even look at the churning water. He used his head and led me straight to that cabin, pulled back the hatch. Being a gentleman, I let him precede me down the steps,

**T**OUGH? These guys were so bad they probably sat around taking turns frightening each other. Two men, playing cards beneath a lantern, came to their feet. Their eyes burned with a sullen sort of hatred out of hard, unwashed faces. Water isn't much good without soap, especially when you only ride on top of it. They were both big lumbering fellows who got in each other's way. Great guys in a dock brawl, or carting stolen pianos, or something like that. Born tough, lived tough—but they never really knew the meaning of the word.

A man can be a fool and tough, too. The one nearest the steps was both. He had a knife in his hand the moment he turned and faced the stairs. Dangerous that? Not at all—not even to him. If it had been a gun, he might have died where he stood.

He cursed beautifully—real old-time filth that the boys along the Avenue have given up. He walked toward the steps, and, with his left hand tore the six-footer from before me—never gave him a chance to explain through chattering teeth. Yep, he just tore him from the steps and hurled him with that single hand against the side of the cabin. He was out for the evening.

He hitched up his pants in the best style when he spoke to me. "So—you don't take the water cure, eh? Well, it's a rip and a tear up and down the belly." Half turning to his friend as he put a foot on the step, he said: "He asked for it, didn't he, Stan?"

Stan nodded that I had, and the lad on the step started into what he thought was action. Anyway, he came up a step as I came down one. His left hand shot out and gripped at the lapel of my coat; his right, with the knife in it, swept back and down. I'm not saying he wasn't fast—as knife-users go. He was fast enough to kill a man who was used to taking his killing that way.

That was the trouble. I wasn't used to being cut up or ripped down. Not being used to it, I didn't like it. I simply jerked my right hand beneath my left armpit and brought it out with a sideswipe. And what a swipe! Nothing like the one he had handed his friend. But then he was tough, and could take it. He took that one, all right—the nose of my .44 against the side of his head.

It damned near drove his body through the side of that cabin—below deck I mean. The paneled wood cracked as if it were papier-mâché, and he was stuck fast

as if someone had hammered his arms and legs grotesquely into it. Was he dead? Hell, what do you think?

STAN was on his feet staring at me, dropping back and fingering at his belt and the knife it contained—long, sharp-bladed like the other lad's. Stan went further back.

"Good God, man," I said to him after I set both feet firmly on the cabin floor. "Don't any of you guys carry guns?"

"Don't need to." He gulped out the words and actually started pulling out his knife. Then the knife jabbed back in again. He looked at the men on the floor, felt of his throat, stared inanely at the heavy knob that must have been the center of a long, closet-like panel which backed up a single bare berth of wood. But if it was a place to keep tackle or maybe a rifle or two, it was closed now.

"Captain Fergeson won't let us carry guns," Stan said, after a bit.

"He's got sense," I agreed with that. "Is he the lad who's steering this ship?"

"Yeah." The ugly face began to lose some of its fear. He scowled ferociously. I crossed the room, sat down facing the open hatch and the man Stan as he said: "He understood you was her—the girl's friend—and that you weren't tough."

So my client was a woman. But I showed no surprise.

"And he was right." I nodded magnanimously. "I am her friend—and I'm not tough. Toughness, like speed, is only relative. You boys have been playing at being tough so long, you got to believing it. On shore, I imagine, you spend your time rolling drunks."

"I never did roll a drunk. I never—" He sputtered in anger, and damned if I didn't think he was going to grab the knife and sling it. He was in a childish, uncontrollable rage. But crouched there he couldn't make good. Like an animal, his eyes dropped before mine. The tense-

ness went out of his body, as he straightened.

He coughed, jerked aside as huge boots appeared on those steps. "The captain—Ferguson," he muttered.

THE captain came. Nothing but his cap to distinguish him from the others—at least, in the way of dirt. Of course, there were his matted whiskers. But he was bigger, broader and the great ham-like hands hung down almost to his knees. He didn't speak, at first. He just looked down at the two men, walked over and rolled the first lad over with his foot. He gave a grunt then, tried to turn the other over, and found that he stuck. He sunk great fingers in the man's jacket, jerked, and the dead lad with the busted head was on the floor—large pieces of the broken paneling with him.

As for me, I leaned back easily on that wooden berth or long seat, felt the knob against my back and moved slightly.

The captain turned, looked at Stan, jerked a thumb at me and said, "Him?"

Then his leather jacket spread slightly. I saw the butt of the gun. I watched his great hairy hands, settled my own .44 on my knee and whistled softly.

The captain had a shrewd look. There was a table almost in the center of that room, the lantern hanging above it. He leaned on that table and watched me. It was a heavy table—as heavy as the hair that partly hid his eyes. His face was exactly like a German Schnauzer's. His eyes were there—the flash of them plain enough—but without color or general size. You just guessed they were there back behind the hairy face.

I was face to face with the real stuff. Primitive stuff—but a lad who had a gun, knew how to use it, and wouldn't hesitate if he saw the opportunity. I recognized the reason for his brainless crew. He stared men down—scared them to death before he struck with one of his

great hairy hands. Yep, he had the stuff, but in a way it was funny. He was actually staring me down.

"You did that?" he finally said, and repeated, "You did that on my ship!" He pushed his hand along the table, gripped the end of it and thrust it back over on its side behind him as if it were a campstool. Here was a real killer. Hands, knife, gun—anything was his meat.

I waited, finally said: "I made the mess, if that's what you mean. Want to lay down with the boys?" Then I saw Stan reach behind the dirty hunk of grease that was meant for a cushion. I saw the gun flash in his hand—and I let him have it.

It was hardly a matter of lifting my gun the fraction of an inch before I tightened my finger on the trigger. I wasn't fooling then. The horse-play was over. I had quit being the life of the party. Stan took it close to his left eye. Close to it? Well, we'll leave it that way.

I think the captain turned in time to see the body fall. I'm sure he caught the picture of his one-eyed mate. I jerked a chair between the captain and me, and had it there when he turned.

Oh, hell, it wasn't that I objected to killing him so much. It was simply a matter of business. I had been paid a thousand dollars to be on this boat, and already I had earned far beyond that amount. But the note had said—

Mr. Race Williams,

Here is a thousand dollars. I need you to prevent murder. The bearer of the note will lead you to the boat. I'll be on it, if it leaves the dock. You can be sure of that—and nothing else.

Cash Customer.

Nice note? Sure, nothing about a plea of a woman—just cash and "to prevent murder." Yes, I had prevented murder, all right—my own murder. I wouldn't have known it was a girl except from the way Stan talked. Now, I needed

the captain alive to take me where I was supposed to go, to the girl—to some place anyway.

THE captain turned very slowly, looked steadily at my gun, and raised both his hands. He didn't have a knife in either of them. He didn't reach for his own gun. I stepped back a bit from the chair, jerked my head toward the dead man on the floor, said; "So the boys are tough, eh?"

He didn't snarl or even glare through the hair. He just turned into Leo, the Lion-faced boy, spoke very calmly—almost gently—and I saw the whiteness of his teeth.

"You are a very conceited man, mister," he said slowly. "A very conceited man, indeed."

I did it—just as those hands were ready to reach out. I pulled that chair from between us, crashed it against the wall much as he had done with the table. I spoke my piece. "Conceited? Sure. But what the hell are you going to do about it?"

He gave ground against the gun I shoved into his stomach.

"Sit down, you big squirt, before I blast your guts all over the room." I let him have it straight.

Damn it, he sat down—flopped right into a chair. I could see the lights in his eyes now. And the girl? She was to be on the boat, or it wouldn't leave. I decided to talk it out.

I went back to the long wooden berth and sat down on it. "Suppose we start from scratch? I came aboard this boat for a certain purpose. Where's the girl?"

His shaggy brows creased, tightened. He came slowly to his feet, walked toward the steps.

"Go back and sit down, Captain. Take your foot off that step." I drew a bead now smack on his leg. "I didn't kill you before because I needed you to tell me

where I'm going and where the girl is. The man at the wheel might not know."

"He don't—he don't." Maybe it was triumph in Leo's voice. "If you kill me, I—"

"Back," I said, "or I'll shoot both legs from under you, then talk to you afterward. At your age, you'd never walk again."

He put his foot back on the vibrating floor, sat down and stared at me before he spoke. "I never had no one like you come aboard my ship. I could place a hand on each side of your skull and squeeze it in like an eggshell. No, no." He shook his head. "You don't fool me like the others, with your fine clothes and the fancy talk. I seen too many of your kind, but I allowed to think they only shot lads like me through the back. Never a one of them faced me and put a gun in my belly. I—"

"The girl!" I killed his speech.

"Blast her hide," he cursed in. "She's waiting up the river. She told me to get her brother and bring him to her. I might of known the little spit-cat would have a brother like you. But you ain't her brother?"

"Call through that speaking-tube, and have the pilot turn back to the pier we were—"

I stopped, came to my feet, jumped sidewise so that I faced Leo, and also the long section of paneling that was slowly opening. Hell, I had heard the knob click, but thought it was my back against it.

Now something was forcing that huge panel open!

## CHAPTER TWO

### Female Killer

THE long heavy door increased its speed downward until it struck the berth. A human figure was wrapped tightly in a blanket and fastened with

great leather thongs to either end of that long hinged panel. Dead? From the position it looked as if it were a small, slender, dead body. Yet, beneath that blanket, there was muscular movement inside the body that had forced the long panel downward against the heavy springs at each end.

I jumped forward, tore the coarse matting from the head—then swung, crouched on one knee, my gun up.

The captain stepped back, laughed. "All right," he said. "I'll earn my money from now on. Talk no more of shooting me. There's your woman, and you're welcome to her."

I took the strong hand he held out to me, counted up to nine while he gripped my hand, deciding that ten would be the limit of pain, and then I'd plug him. But all unconsciously he dropped my hand before ten. Yep, he changed. His eyes brightened differently and his teeth showed more pleasantly. I decided to trust him, but first I leaned over and jerked his gun from his holster.

The girl wasn't dead. She was breathing better now. It took strength to pull those straps from her ankles, her outstretched hands and even the huge strap about her waist. But I did it, as I heard the captain say into the speaking-tube: "To hell with what I told you. Turn it back up the river."

Leo went into his act like a tame lion. He got me water to rub on her swollen face and her almost black lips. He even rubbed her legs while I rubbed her arms after she had swallowed a little water. She set her teeth against the pain as she lay full length on her back.

They say there are no black eyes, but hers were jet black with dots of fire in the center of them. She didn't try to talk, but just lay still and let us do everything for her. Occasionally, when I leaned back, she stretched up her chest, breathed deeply, stuck out her swollen tongue, and

then I'd give her another swig of water.

"She'll be coming around right soon," the captain said. "She was out to start trouble tonight, and I believed— Well, she was rich, and I held her like that for a bit of a rest and some more money."

I read the message in her black eyes and, leaning down, whispered the answer in her ear. "All right, kid. I'm the thousand-dollar guy—Race Williams. Don't be afraid."

Her eyes brightened, and the name Race Williams made her breathing easier.

"I came to the boat," I told her. "Things were rough—a couple of men got hurt and—"

"Two are dead," Leo chimed in gruffly, and, when I glared at him, added: "She won't mind that, nor the bodies neither. I should have suspected the kind of a man who'd come for her." He said to the girl: "The misunderstanding's over, miss. I hope you'll play along with me."

THE girl didn't speak, but let her glims stay hard on Leo's. He didn't stare her down. He simply jerked back quickly as her left foot shot up and landed on his chin. Then she straightened, tossed her head away from the arm I put in back of her neck, but grabbed at my arm in rising, swung her feet over the berth, and, leaning forward, balanced herself on the long stretch of wood. She raised her head slightly and spoke.

"Time?" she asked.

"Eleven-thirty," I told her.

She got up, staggered to a tiny port-hole, tore back the black curtain and looked into the night.

"The Battery," she muttered. "I can see the Park. He was going the wrong way. We'll be late." She turned and looked at the captain. "You've given orders to turn back. Go the right way. I heard you." She looked at the men on the floor—the one crawling to a sitting position. She said nothing, made no grimace.

Her face was very hard, very cold—and very beautiful.

The captain said: "We've decided to start over and start fair. Now, a little brandy might—"

"I need nothing but water." She lifted the glass, sipped it slowly, had difficulty in swallowing it, waited, tried again, drank a bit and nodded in satisfaction. Then she turned and looked at me. "You have a gun. I know the river well. I can handle the boat." She looked at the captain and spoke to me. There was nothing vicious in her voice when she said: "You have a gun, Mr. Williams. The captain is no longer any use to us."

I don't know about the captain, because I wasn't looking at him. But I do know about myself. Beautiful, young—she rocked me back on my heels. No, I couldn't put it down to fever because there was nothing of that in her eyes. I stammered as I tried to laugh it off: "Aren't two dead men enough for a thousand dollars? I'm not kicking, understand, but I generally get more money for such a knock-over."

She didn't crack a smile, but said very solemnly: "Uptown, an old man and an old woman may already have been nailed with spikes to a bare floor. There are plenty of spikes—and an extra space for another expected person. Our hope is that they will wait for that third person. That third person is myself. This filthy

man in the beard would have delivered me there."

"That's a lie—a damned lie. Now, mister, I did take an old man and woman up the river a piece to a house. This girl knew it. She didn't know where, but she came and got my promise to take her there—you and her."

"You knew they were to be tortured?" the girl said.

"Yes, I knew that, if you told me the truth."

"And you took my money."

"Well, yes, but I didn't intend to double-cross no client. They was a damned bad crowd. I just thought I'd take you around the river a bit, let your friend go—this here gentleman—and later deliver you to him for a certain price. But I didn't know what you told this friend to do if he didn't find you on the boat, and I didn't want the police combing the river. That's why I let him aboard."

"And don't forget," I cut in, "I was sent one thousand dollars for a talk, and look what happened. How about the talk?"

"The talk?" She wasn't much more than up to my chin when she raised her head. "I am laying five thousand dollars to nothing that you won't come through this thing alive, tonight—five thousand to nothing."

"To nothing—nothing but my life!"

"To nothing but your life," she repeat-

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ed, then turned to the captain. "The money with my bag. All of it, Captain—even to the twenty-five hundred I paid you for the boat and its destination."

Great hands twitched. Eyes and teeth both flashed now.

"All of it, Captain," I said.

**H**E ducked a hand inside his shirt. His arm sort of disappeared on that side, for, although the black wallet was long, it was considerably thick. He grumbled about the rest of the money—the twenty-five hundred that he took from his jacket-pocket in a folded bunch of bills. His temper wasn't so good now as he tossed the money at her.

I backed up and leaned close to the little corner ledge where I had parked the captain's gun. "It might be a good thing to let the captain have the money you first promised him."

She was at that ledge, slowly counting the money in the wallet. "Will big bills—thousands—hurt you in changing them? I mean will you have any difficulty with them?"

"My business is an honest business," I told her sharply. "I'd have no trouble changing or depositing a ten-thousand-dollar bill, if I had one."

"No?" Her eyes shot sidewise. "Well, Mr. Williams, if you are with me—if our plans have a happy ending—I'll see that you have one."

I took the bills that she laid in my hand, flipped them easily for a double-count and said: "About the captain. He'd be a better friend than an enemy."

"Not than a dead enemy," she said. Suddenly, she swung from that little shelf, and the captain's gun spouted lead before I knocked it from her hand. It was a big, heavy gun, and she had fired her first shot in the very moment she swung. At that, she took a piece out of the side of his face—enough to show the blood against the white, or the black, if

you want the truth. The next shot would have done for him sure.

The captain staggered slightly, went over to the water-tap, said: "Thank you, sir. If that's how she wants it, that's how she'll get it. She's a killer—a female killer."

I tried putting a little dignity into things that had been rather messy. "Captain, we'll use you tonight—at least, as the young lady hoped to use you. What did these men pay for—for what you did?"

"Five hundred dollars for each of the old ones I took up. One lousy grand for the two of them." He pointed a finger at the girl. "They offered me more for the girl when I said I had a party what wanted a ride. But they gave me nothing but promises. I swear I was only going to hold out for a piece of change. I didn't know about the torture—that nailing stuff she spoke of. I wouldn't 'a done it, if I'd known. No, I wouldn't take no part of torture—not me." After a minute's thought, as he bathed his face, he added: "Not for no lousy five hundred dollars a throw, I wouldn't."

"Captain, I have five thousand dollars here," I said. "You do what the young lady expected you to do to the best of your ability—and here's the twenty-five hundred again."

He turned, quit rubbing at his face—forgot it entirely. Greed pierced from those eyes through the thick hair of his face. "I believe you will—and I will! Shake."

But I simply shook my head. "There is no need of thanking me. I am speaking for my client who will no doubt reimburse me." I tossed him the dough.

**T**HE girl got up as if nothing had happened, watched me take the gun and put it in my jacket pocket. She rearranged her black skirt, pulled easily at her coat across her sweater and suggested



that we go on deck. Certainly here was a woman client to work for who wouldn't be at all likely to throw hysterics on you. But when she stepped over the corpse of Stan, which she might easily have walked around, and waited for the captain to proceed us to the deck, I didn't know if I liked her quite that way.

Leo also looked back over his shoulder as she followed him.

We went toward the pilot-house, if you could call the box that. The captain relieved the man at the wheel, grunted something about a good hour yet, and the girl spoke to me.

"Don't you think you'd better search him for weapons?"

"Why?" I said aloud, for I figured he could lay his hand on a knife or a bit of pipe any time he wanted to. But to the girl I explained, and loud enough for Leo to hear: "If he gets mussy, I'll have to shoot him to death—which will put twenty-five hundred back in my pocket, and just a few lead pellets in his."

She laughed, then. At least, I think she laughed, though I couldn't see her face in the fog.

The girl and I sat close against the wheel-house, crouched down upon the deck where we could see the huge back of the master of the dirtiest vessel that ever put to sea, and the skinny guy slinking into the cabin below. There would be no trouble from him.

"I think the captain told you the truth," I said. "He hoped to shake me down for more money for your release—else why would he take you around the other way?"

She didn't speak, just sat tight and watched the back of Leo.

"Well, miss," I gave it to her flat, "there isn't much more time to go. I've got to know things. Oh, I don't like to pry into your affairs. But if the whole thing has been planned for my death, someone made a mistake. I know it's a

lot of jack to trap a man—and things look on the up-and-up. Still, I can think of a lot of fellows who want me dead."

"I can think of just one. He wants your death, all right. He put you in a hospital, once. That's the reason I picked you to come. He wants to kill you—will at the first opportunity. I thought maybe you'd like to kill him, too."

"Now who ever put me in a hospital? Who would have the guts to—"

"Benny Shay. . . . So you remember!"

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Death—Sure and Certain

I DID remember. Benny and I hadn't met face to face since the night he tried to have me done in. If we had, Benny wouldn't have had any face, anymore. But a couple of his boys did sprinkle me with a few slugs from a tommy-gun before I burnt them down. Yes, I would have liked to meet Benny most any time, any place. But I had the satisfaction of knowing that Benny hadn't strutted the Avenue since I walked out of the hospital.

I had telephoned him that day. I recalled his snarling voice over the wire in his rooms at the swanky Tennyson Hotel. He had said: "So you're out again, Williams. Good. I'll arrange to put you back in, or— But what the hell did you want to tell me?"

"I wanted to tell you, Benny, that I'm coming over to the Tennyson Hotel and shoot you to death. Or maybe you'd like to step outside and die in the gutter where you belong. But any way you take it, Benny—our first meeting is our last."

After that, what? Why, I simply put on my hat, took a taxi to the Tennyson Hotel—and didn't see Benny. I didn't see him from that day to this—six months later. In those six months, Benny had been active, or rather his lawyers had. Indictments against him were quashed

and now there wasn't a thing any prosecutor in any state could hang on him, though the D. A. hated his guts.

Benny had kept in touch with things. He could have raised bail to any amount, but he let it be known around that he was staying out of the city until he cleared everything up. Then he'd hop back. Hop back! That was a good excuse no longer. Benny was needed in person. The boys were beginning to suspect why he didn't come back—and I helped those suspicions along. My method went something like this: I'd trot into a night club—high-class bar where politicians hung out—and this conversation would follow—

"Is Benny Shay around, Charlie?" I'd ask.

"No, Race, he isn't. What do you want of Benny?"

"Oh, I was going to lay enough lead in his belly to kill him. There's no hurry. I'll find him in Newark, some day."

Sure it riled Benny. Yet he didn't come back. Bluff? No, it wasn't bluff. It was the truth. Benny and I both knew that, and the district attorney had more than sent me a hint that his office wouldn't raise too much fuss over it if they found Benny dead in the gutter some day. Yep, it was a big racket—a combination of many rackets that Benny headed. He had big offices in a big building to make it look real. Lately, his name in big letters was on that main-office door. But no Benny. I'd drop in there once every week telling the folks how anxious I was to have Benny come back.

I LOOKED down at the girl. Was she the lead that would trap me for Benny? Benny would consider my death cheap at any price. It wasn't simply that I interfered with his plans. I interfered with his life. But the thing didn't make sense. She wouldn't have mentioned Benny's name, if it had been a trap.

"I never thought there was a living

person whom Benny feared." She paused. "And I don't know that he fears you now. He wants to come back a respectable businessman. He's cleared up everything against him and is making an in with the right politicians. He's set for big stuff. You lower him with the cheaper element—the gangsters, racketeers, killers whom he'll need. He can never trust them. He can never be sure they fear him, while they think he fears you."

"All I need is Benny's address, and I'll give him a chance to prove that he doesn't fear me," I said.

"I understand." The girl nodded. "It's a question of prestige—for the high and the low recognize it, if not by name. Benny's got to kill you to make good. At least, he's got to have you killed. Tonight, I offer you your chance to kill Benny, and will pay you well for it."

"And why do you wish Benny Shay killed?"

Slim shoulders moved up and down. "He's a danger—rather I should say an annoyance to my peace of mind." I think her lips set rather grimly. "As I told you, he intends to torture, or maybe already has tortured, an old man and an old woman and I believe he wishes to trap me to the same torture through the captain."

"It doesn't sound like Benny." I shook my head. "And it doesn't sound like what you told me of his plans—respectability. Surely, he could hire someone to do such a job for him. He's to be so big now."

"Not as big as the thing he seeks tonight. He can't order anyone else to do it. He doesn't dare tell anyone the real truth except his brother, Louie."

"But Benny's got some big men he could trust."

The girl grinned crookedly. Her lips were slim, but not vicious. There was more of a determination in the set of them. She said: "The amount of money involved is somewhat over a million—

perhaps two. He trusts his brother—and did trust one other.”

“Did trust?”

“Yes—did. He made a mistake there. The other was not familiar with the details. He was my friend—fancied himself in love with me, and then Benny shook the lure of gold in his face. Love was forgotten in greed. The man trapped me, bound me and was ready to bring me to Benny Shay.”

“And you escaped?”

“I am here.” She nodded her head. “Yes, I suppose you might say I escaped. I simply offered this man the love I had denied him. I offered him with that love a great deal of money. I offered him—there don’t smile, because it meant a lot to him—marriage. And I told him why he was to bring me to Shay?”

“He freed you?”

“Yes.” She nodded very seriously. “He freed me, and I killed him. I won’t go into the details. I won’t deny that he was a very shrewd man. But the wild story I told him about why Shay wanted me rang sincerely to him because it was true. He went over it, point by point, and believed me. Naturally, after his knowing the truth, I would not want him alive. But I killed him with his own gun, protecting myself—from him. He told me first what Shay had done and the name of the boat. It was then I hired the boat, and the captain must have told Benny my plans. I had to kill, for the hate and loathing must have plainly shown in my eyes.”

“Sure, sure.” I put on the heavy sarcasm. “You couldn’t have a guy insulting you—not a guy who knew too much to live.” And as the fog lifted and the moon shot through for a second and landed right on her face I said: “Well, it must be one or the other with you—environment or heredity.”

She smiled. At least, I think she smiled, for the moon was gone now.

But it was a long time before she spoke again. “Environment can certainly mark a person, but whether the mark goes deep enough to blot out heredity forever, I don’t know. Your success or failure tonight will answer that. My environment consists of eighteen years in what the papers call the underworld—though some of those years were good living, high-class living. My heredity—well, I have to admit I don’t know much about my ancestors back of the Revolution.”

I TOOK a guess. “The man you killed, then, was Riggie Holtman. A deserted house in Brooklyn, a woman seen leaving at night—the gun was found clasped in Holtman’s hand, but suicide doubted.” The thing had been in the papers, and Riggie Holtman was a friend of Benny Shay’s.

“We will not discuss names, Mr. Williams,” she said quite seriously, and somewhat as if we were having a bit of small-talk. “The man grabbed at the gun when I fired. It was peculiar and a bit nauseating. He was erect on his feet—and I think dead when he tore that gun from my hand and gripped it in his.” She shivered slightly, but it might have been the night air. “It is not pleasant to kill a man.”

“I wouldn’t go as far as to say that.” I cupped a match, lit a butt, let her take it from me and lit another for myself. “Want to tell me more?”

She inhaled deeply, waited. The smoke left her mouth and was lost in the fog. Then she said: “There is little doubt that I am heir to a great fortune and a great name. I don’t know—maybe I’ll miss the old life.”

“Come, come.” I tried cheering her up. “I’m sure you’ll be able to liven things up with a new one—society, maybe.”

“Society, certainly. It is peculiar, Mr. Williams. I can’t imagine presenting a check over the counter in a bank and re-

ceiving money—large amounts of money—honestly.”

“And this money tonight?”

“Holtman—Riggie Holtman.” Her shoulders fluttered. “He was hot—set to leave town. He had the money on him. I simply—” She stopped.

The captain was in the doorway. He said: “Over there—the dock, miss. It’s like you said you wanted—like they said they wanted. I was to go to the boat-house with you for some more money. Now you’ll take him.” He jerked a finger at me. “Will I run the ship up to the dock?”

“Yes, yes.” I saw her hands clasp together close against her chest. “We’re going through with it as they planned, and as I planned. You never spoke to the man who paid you to so trap me, about my friend here?”

“No.” The captain clamped his jaws down hard beneath his whiskers. “I didn’t know until Floyd brought him. I didn’t even intend to take you here. It’s to be exactly as both of you planned it.”

“As both sides planned it—yes.” The girl nodded. “Except that my friend will accompany me—as you. The fog is thick.”

**T**HE captain swung the boat suddenly toward the shore, and the blinking misty lights of the city. He muttered thickly through his beard: “Here it is as both sides planned it. One of you must be wrong tonight.”

The girl was on her feet peering into the fog. She said, and her voice was almost eager: “The dock—the boat-house—the narrow way around to the door and the street beyond. There lies my future, my wealth, my place in the world.” She gripped my hand. “Were you ever afraid, Race Williams?”

“I don’t know exactly what you mean by fear,” I said.

Her fingers were steady, but icy. “That’s right. That’s right. Terror is a

different word and dates far back in my head. Fear, I guess, is the apprehension I have for others tonight—an old man and an old woman whom I should hate. Now, is it to save them—to prevent their suffering—or to save them for what they mean to me in money and position?” She laughed aloud in derision. “I could do a lot with position and with the money. I could buy the minds and bodies of little children. I could buy them for the state to be proud of and not punish or even kill. Yes, Race Williams, a thousand dollars would buy a future murderer, save him from his act and another man—today unknown—from his death. It’s a strange truth, but the same money that ruins souls can buy and save other souls. That’s heredity—my heredity—buying the environment of others. I—”

She paused, as we neared the bobbing float, the long cat-walk back to the unlighted boat-house. Her eyes narrowed, as did mine, but though the fog was still heavy, we both felt sure that no living creature was between us and the dismal boat-house.

The girl opened her mouth to speak—maybe did—but a train roared by, back close to the water, and killed her words. Then as it passed, and we brushed the float, I heard her plainly as she gripped at my arm. “I’ve lived hard, Race. I didn’t dare bring more than just you. I expect to die hard tonight, facing lead and cursing those who use it. I’d hate to break. Promise me I won’t die by torture.”

My shoulders moved up and down. She had not painted a pleasant picture. The best I could say was: “I’ll do all I can for you, kid. And if the first shot doesn’t kill me, I’ll lay down a barrage which will finish all the boating along this section of the river for next summer.”

She stretched out a hand and gripped mine. The boat touched the side of the float and she hopped the rail.

"I'll lay around," the captain said. "That's the best I can do with guys like them and a guy like you."

"O. K., Cap." I nodded as I clutched the rail. The little boat was drifting, was at the far end of the float when I did my stuff. Soft-rubber soles dropped me onto the float without a sound. I turned in the air, too, and was facing the boat when I landed—facing the captain, and noticing that he was leaning over now, and both his hands were visible and empty as they clutched the rail.

There was no death in his direction, so I straightened, turned, and faced the shore where the girl said death was sure and certain.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dead Men Don't Kill

THE GIRL and I stood on the float as the boat silently slipped away with the strong tide. She gripped my arm tightly, said: "I am your client. I know that you will remain silent. If you are successful—if we are successful—I will pay you what you wish." And so simply that it did not knock me off my feet at first, she added: "My real name is Iris Parsons."

"Yeah?" I didn't roll over at that one. And then I did. I just stopped dead and looked at her—this girl I had dreamed

about as a boy years ago. She had been the one-hundred-thousand-dollar baby. Next to Dorothy Arnold's disappearance, it was probably the strangest case the police ever had to solve—and didn't solve. That's right—she was the kidnaped child who disappeared before the government men were even allowed to play with fire-arms.

My thought, then, after the first bewilderment, was—is this girl lying? But I gripped her arm, said: "If that's true, if you have any proof—let's get away from here at once.

"It is the proof we are after tonight. It is the proof that Benny Shay is after tonight. Don't you see how easily, how quickly, how silently and alone he would murder me?"

"Murder you—worth all that money, alive?"

"To myself, alive—to another dead. Benny Shay would split my vast fortune with another—perhaps take most of it."

"It's a tough story." I shook my head. "Alive or dead, how does the kidnaper cash in on you? It would be rather late for him to get in on the ransom money?"

She turned, looked up at me. Fog or no fog, there was class in her face now—or did a couple of million affect my vision?

"In my case, the kidnaper's money came from my death—not my life," she said. "It came if I was never returned, and later proof of death was shown. Now



OVER 200 MILLION TOOTSIE ROLLS SOLD LAST YEAR

—I wish to show proof of my being alive. Benny Shay wishes to sell a certain party proof of my death. I don't know where Shay is, where these old people are. There is to be a man in the boat-house—a friend of Shay's. He is pretending to be a friend of mine. He is to direct me to Shay. Let us hope he thinks you're the captain—that was the arrangement. My name for eighteen years has been Jane Blake."

We were by the side of the boat-house now, turning toward the water so that we were completely hidden from the city beyond. No windows were open—all were boarded tightly.

Jane walked to the boat-house door, felt of the knob, turned it. She was too quick for me, then I heard her hushed whisper. "They won't harm me yet." Then the door was open, and we were slipping inside.

I FOLLOWED the girl into the dark, felt the hinges of the door tighten, and let it close behind me. Something moved. I felt it as I braced my back against the door. I heard the girl say: "I've come. I've brought the money, as you directed the captain. You'll show me the house?"

A figure moved close to me that seemed to be maneuvering toward the door. It was not a black shadow in the darkness—nothing at all but creaking boards, the feel of another human almost against my side. Eery? Well, perhaps, if you like the word. The lapping of water sounded faintly. There was that steady movement, so close to me, and finally the voice. The voice came from across the room.

"So you've come, Jane—brought the money to me, as well as the innocent captain who played both ends against the middle. He, too, has come to his death. Lights, Joe! Let the captain have it first."

I'm a lad who craves action, likes it—asks for it. I got it in that one sudden click with the boat-house flooded with light from the single big overhead bulb.

I saw a motor-boat, a few rowboats, a loose motor, a canoe—then action. A figure was rushing toward the girl, blackjack in hand. Another figure was standing above me—a giant of a man who would dwarf the captain. Yes, these boys had planned every action of surprise—the girl to be knocked unconscious, me, suspected of being the captain, stabbed to death, and all in a few seconds—just that single rush, and it would be over.

That's right. The presence I had felt was near the closed door, towering above me, and the long knife he held in his hand was on its way down with a driving forward movement right smack at my chest.

I'll give Benny Shay credit for picking the real thing in silent murderers. Neither the girl nor myself would have a chance to even scream. There was no time for me to turn, throw up my hand and grip that wrist that held sure death. Besides, the knife was flashing with great power. They had planned to take care of everything, anyone—except me.

I didn't clown around. I didn't duck back and start running. I closed my finger three times in one third as many seconds. I never did have much respect for a lad with a knife, and the evening had given me plenty of knife-wielders to practice on. I just closed my finger three times and opened a hole in the giant's stomach you could have shoved one of the rowboats through—or, if you think that's an exaggeration, the canoe, anyway.

That man, strong and powerful, certainly had put all the strength he had behind his knife. My slugs didn't knock him back. They knocked him sort of peculiarly. His feet skidded out from under him, spread like a puppie's on a slippery floor. After that, he seemed to brace them and jump forward on his face.

Action? I should say it was action! I had moved a foot or two to let the big killer bounce on his face, and I was talk-

ing before the other man had more than gripped the girl by the arm and was wielding a blackjack over her head. I said: "Race Williams talking. Drop it."

That was all. The name Race Williams got him. Besides, he had turned and was staring at me. His mouth fell open, the blackjack dropped to the floor. He turned and started back toward the wall. When he reached it, he tried to go further, couldn't get through the thick worn plank, so he had to stand where he was.

"Race Williams," he repeated, and then, while the saliva formed on his lips and his legs shook as I drew a bead between his eyes, "I didn't know it was you."

I ENJOYED the situation now. I drew it out of him. "I know," I told him lightly. "I'm incognito tonight, don't want anyone to know I'm out so I can't have you going around—"

"No, no," he shrieked in terror as the hammer of my .44 went slowly up and down.

The girl cried out: "Don't! He knows where they are—Benny Shay, Shay's brother, Louie and the others. Only he can tell us about them."

"Hell!" I tossed the girl off my arm, as she ran toward me. "He's a good pal of Shay's. I'll sort of let Shay know I blew him out, then maybe Shay will hunt me up. There, there, Jane. He's one of those big noble fellows. He wouldn't tell where Shay is no matter what you did to him. Poor guy, I'll put him out of his—"

Yellow? No wonder Shay didn't trust these guys too much. A killer, all right, a beater-up of women, and a torturer. I knew his kind. He fell to his knees, squealed like a stuck pig.

"I'll tell. I'll tell!" I had to walk forward and put a hand over his mouth, afraid they'd hear him downtown. When he got through squawking, I told him exactly how I felt about things. Maybe it

wasn't all true, but I made him think it was true just the same.

"It's like this, tough guy." I gave it to him straight. "I want to know exactly what your plans were for tonight. Just what were you to do with the girl? Wait a minute until I get through. You're a little playmate of Shay's, and I'm not anxious for him to know I'm catching up with him. So I'll listen, and if you lie, or if I think you're lying—understand, just one lie—then the talk is off. So begin talking."

"How will I know if you don't believe me?" He stammered out the words, but slobbered after I told him how he'd know. I raised my gun, just about the level of his open mouth.

"You'll know," I said, "by the taste of lead. That's right, a couple of forty-fours right into your open face."

He talked fast then. "It's the truth—God's truth. Shay thought the captain might double-cross him—yep, the captain was to come with her for more money. Anyway, that's what Shay said, but I know he wanted the captain dead." As my eyes widened, he groaned: "That's the truth, Mr. Williams. He wouldn't even let me know what's doing in the house in the Bronx."

"Then the coming by boat was a stall, eh? Benny is across-town. But you know this girl here."

"Who? Jane Blake—sure. She knows me, has known me since she was a kid. I'd never hurt a hair of her head. Used to sit her on my knees. She trusted me. Ain't that right, Jane?"

The girl said it was, and neither one of them took a laugh. So I let it go while the lad talked on.

"I was not to hurt her, understand. I wouldn't harm her, and don't believe they would or I wouldn't have touched the job. Jane's too fine—"

I got bored, said: "That kind of talk calls for a shot in the open trap. Just stick to facts."

And he did.

He was to tie Jane up, dump her into the back of the car, and cart her over to a house in the Bronx. He was to drive straight into the garage where a "gentleman", known to him as Tom Manning, was to take her to Benny Shay. What the racket was he didn't know. And if the girl's story was true, I believed him. What's more I liked it. We could still go through with the trip, except that I would lie in the back of the car with the girl, and blow the top of Benny's head off when he peeked in.

**W**AS I thinking of the girl's identity, then? Was I thinking of the two old people she said were being tortured? I hope so. Yes, I guess I was. But I was thinking also of the trip to the hospital Benny Shay had given me. Not that I minded the trip. But I did mind and hate the thought that the lad who sent me there was still alive. When I go to the hospital from bullet-wounds, the other fellow goes into an open grave. That's my motto, and I like to stick to it.

So I helped the man called Joe to his feet, patted him on the back, whispered words of encouragement in his ear. I told him he was going to live, to go free—live a happy and prosperous, long long life.

When I got him all sold on my pep talk, I said: "We're going through with the ride, boy—just as Benny planned it." And when the look I took for surprise came, "Sure, right now. We're going by-by."

I had been wrong about that pat on the back, the freedom, the pep talk I gave him. For, at the mention of "by-by," he simply folded up like a beach-chair and sat down on the floor.

This time, I dragged him to his feet. This time, I slapped him around the room. This time I spoke about lead in his belly. Maybe it didn't make him stand so

straight, maybe it didn't make him cocky—but at least he was able to walk. For now I gave him his choice of sure death in that boat-house or a possible one at the house in the Bronx.

"But Benny will kill me—kill me," he repeated, as if I only killed once and Benny killed twice.

"You take me to Benny and he won't kill you," I cheered him up.

"Why?" he stammered.

"Because," I gave him a simple truth, "dead men don't kill anybody."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Easy to Hit

**J**OE bellyached, cried, begged, threatened, grew bold, and shivered. But when he got right down to facts, there were only two ways about it. He would take the dose right here in the boat-house—or take a chance at missing the dose over in the Bronx. After all, Joe had only one answer to that question. He'd go through with it as planned. The dead hunk of meat on the floor who was his friend did not fit into things. It was a simple arrangement.

Joe was to tie and gag the girl and toss her in the back of the car. Then he was to drive straight to this house in the Bronx. Just into the connected garage where she'd be lifted out, untied and escorted to Benny Shay.

"That's all you had to do, Joe?" I asked him.

He nodded, and I looked at the girl. "Well, what do you say?"

Her face was white, but her lips were firm. "We'll go. You can crouch down in the bottom of the car with me."

"All right." I walked up to Joe, stuck a gun in his back and said: "Put out the lights and we'll start. You and me, Joe, are just a couple of dumb clucks to be in this thing. Perhaps you can think



up some way of signaling Benny Shay that things went wrong. Perhaps you already have a way of signaling him. But I'm counting on you, Joe, to be on my side tonight."

"That's right—that's right." We were out on the long gangway now. "You can count on me."

"Good. For my first bullet goes straight into your back. I'm sure Benny would appreciate it if you died for dear old Yale. It's how you feel."

I felt Joe was with me. He knew me and my record, had seen his friend go suddenly stiffer than a mackerel. Yep, Joe was with me. He had hashed things up, anyway. I offered him life. Benny meant death. I had a feeling I could trust Joe alive—but any way you look at it, I could certainly trust him dead.

It was a big sedan, and we could sit comfortably in the back and watch Joe's bull-like neck. Of course, I had searched Joe and the car. As we sped across town I said to the girl: "A couple of guys dead on the boat—another one in the boat house. It'll take a lot of money to make things worth while tonight. But you're talking millions and that's enough. Enough, if it isn't just talk. Let's hear some more."

"Every detail of my kidnaping is stamped upon my mind," she said. "What I heard, what I read in all the old papers at the library. Iris Parsons—I was three years old. My grandfather had died, leaving me a fortune to be received by me at twenty-one. My mother was married again. My step-father was very fond of me and I adored him. This is according to the articles in the papers. Then one day my uncle took me for a walk, and I think I ran down the road a bit. Someone grabbed me and put me in a car. For a while I lived with two old people. They were very nice to me. Then we moved to a nice home up in Yonkers. Suddenly, everything changed. They weren't nice to

me any more. They kept me locked in the house. One day someone came to see them. I remembered the man's voice. That is, I remembered having heard it before. They were all very excited. That afternoon we moved back to New York."

SHE went on: "After that they didn't treat me so well. One day they had a talk with a woman, and she took me away with her. For a while, I lived a peculiar life. The woman used to take me to department stores, pick up an article, study it, turn and slip it down my blouse. I guess I stayed with her for a year or two. Three or four times she had trouble in the store, and I'd go home and wait. The last time they came after me. A few weeks later, I was placed in a private home by an agency for delinquent children, treated fairly well if I worked hard. Then the woman died, and her husband sent me to his relatives in Utica.

"There was some trouble with a society over this. I stole a few dollars, left Utica, came back to New York, found the first woman who had gone to jail. I guess she treated me all right. But I was old enough now to get around by myself. She protected me in her way, I suppose. Then"—her shoulders shrugged—"I just moved by myself. After that came the big shot, Benny Shay. He was pretty nice to me—different than he was to the other girls. I was wise enough to know there was some reason besides myself."

"Some past," I cut in then, for, as a matter of fact, I was interested in her present, her immediate family and the heavy dough. I asked her: "No ransom was ever asked nor collected? I forget the details, but Benny Shay wasn't old enough to have pulled that deal eighteen years ago."

"No, Benny never had a hand in that. It was a family job. It was my uncle. I'm sure of that—at least from Benny's questions."

"Let's have it—the money, I mean. Where would your uncle fit?"

"It was my grandfather's money. If I died before my mother did, it all went to her."

"And she?"

"She died." The girl sighed. "Died because of anxiety and worry over me. The money then would go to my uncle—at least, he is administering my estate until I am twenty-one."

"But if you were dead—and surely the court would presume your death after so many years—the money would be his by now."

She shook her head. "I don't know. My step-father had trouble with my uncle. You see, my mother left everything to her husband. But the court ruled that since my mother was not in legal possession of my trust fund at the time of her death, she could not will it to her husband. So my uncle—her brother—gets every cent of it."

"They are both alive?"

"My step-father"—she coughed slightly—"committed suicide. That makes two deaths on my uncle's hands. Yes, my uncle is alive yet. I believe Benny Shaw is blackmailing him about me.

"And how did you find out so much about yourself?"

"From the questions Benny asked. From the newspaper articles I first found in his room, from tracing him to the library, and following him on his search of these two old people—Mr. and Mrs. Fink."

"Who is your uncle?" I asked.

"Judge Cameron Osterman. He was my mother's brother."

"Why"—I blurted it right out—"he's the most respected judge on the bench today!"

"I know." She nodded. "But I have met many respected men, including judges, whom I would not have felt safe with in Central Park."

IT WAS good she could crack wise at a time like this. But I was thinking over what she had told me. It smacked of truth. It was so like the oddities of life. The entire country looking for the child. One hundred thousand dollars reward, and the girl was in the hands of the wise money-people—the law even. Kicked and passed around, and no one laid a finger on her. That was natural enough, I suppose. You don't expect hundred-grand children to be chucked into your hands. And hell, if the girl told the truth, I was crouched in the back of the car with a million-dollar baby now.

It was hard to believe about Judge Cameron Osterman, but it was harder not to. If Benny Shay was close to him, it was for a single purpose—blackmail. It would be blackmail until he could establish, without the shadow of a doubt, the identity of the girl.

"And your step-father—he died, didn't he? What was his name?"

"Frederick Stern," she said. "He killed himself shortly after my mother's death."

I took a thought, said: "Why not come out in the open? Why not claim your inheritance? Why does Benny Shay want to torture you and the old people who must have had you? But he's right. Fear or no fear. Sending you away or not sending you away. That old couple would hide away something that would identify you. That's human nature. They probably never meant to lose track of you, or were afraid and—" I stopped.

Joe leaned back, said: "I'm with you, Mr. Williams. I'm blinking the curblights that everything is all right the first time around the block. Dismal place, isn't it? A place for murder. Want to chance it?"

"Why not?" I sank my head lower as we bumped over the unfinished side-road before the three-story wooden house. "If Benny Shay is there, it suits me."

There are two ways of looking at death.

It depends on whether it's to be your death or the other fellow's.

**J**OE told me, as we swung the block and started back again: "I'm to drive straight into the garage beneath the house. I think Tom Manning will be waiting in the garage. He's bad. What will you do?"

"No can tell what to do." I crouched low in the car. I knew Manning. The Shay brothers weren't using any cheap workmen tonight. But I said: "We'll give it to Manning any way he wants to take it. Let the car go in." And as we turned and bumped over the sidewalk, I whispered: "Don't get any bullets in your own head, Joe—they're damned unpleasant."

A jerk, the sudden grinding of brakes, the quick closing of doors, and, but for the headlights of the car against the wall, darkness. Then a voice spoke: "All O. K., Joe? You've got her?"

"In the back, like the boss said." Joe's voice didn't shake. "Now, it's your job."

"Yeah." I could hear Manning smack his lips. "There's been some real squealing here tonight. Don't know why, but it's important. Holler for another grand, Joe. I think they got what they wanted from the old girl. The man had a bad heart, and passed out. I'll pull the girl out and knock her around a bit. She damned near pushed a hammer down my throat when I tried to be nice to her the other night. Come on, sister. Benny means business tonight. He'll slit them pretty lips from ear to ear—so guys like me won't bother you no more."

A foot on the running-board, a white face in the semi-darkness, a single sentence—short, unoriginal, but expressive.

"What the hell!"

And "What the hell," was right. I had swiped my gun up with a backhanded motion that should have driven his lower teeth up into the back of his skull. He was staggering when I opened the door

and stepped from the car. But I don't think he felt the blow on the head that crashed him to the hard cement. He whirled slowly looking for a soft spot to lie down. I simply wanted him to be comfortable—stay put for a while in one place.

Cruel? Unnecessary violence? Maybe. But you can't figure those things out with any mechanical precision. You've heard about guys being knocked down and coming back to stick a knife or a gun in a lad's back. Well, you never heard about them coming back to bother me—not unless I fell asleep you didn't.

Joe muttered complimentary curses, as the girl followed me from the car. She was game all right—at least, I liked to think of it as game, and not just tough.

"Tom Manning—who feared nothing!" she said.

"Well, he still has nothing to fear. That open door there—it leads to the house?"

The girl looked from the crouched, unconscious figure back to me. Her eyes glittered slightly—there was admiration in them. She placed a hand familiarly on my shoulder, squeezed it. I thought if her story was true, society was in for a jolt when she entered it.

"Benny is right," she said. "He wants no part of you. What about Joe?"

I looked at Joe as his white face hung out of the car. His head twisted so as to look at me. I had thoughts, too. Just two steps, an upward and downward swing, and Joe, the good and faithful, would play dead for a bit.

Joe read my thought—or maybe the upward twist of my arm gave him the idea. Anyway he squawked: "Not me, Williams—not me. You'll need a car to get away in. There'll be guys outside with tommy-guns and I—"

No time to argue. They'd be expecting the girl. But I liked most Joe's assurance that I was coming back. No time now. I just looked at Joe, nodded, leveled my

rod just between his eyes as a remembrance, and shoving the girl before me, followed her up the steps that led to the house, itself.

"They'll be expecting you," I told her, "so they won't shoot you. That's right—keep your hands behind your back and they'll think they're tied."

"I've been here before," she whispered, as we hit the narrow steps and went toward the kitchen above, her feet moving rapidly. "If we go fast, they won't suspect anything, and will wait. I know the room. Hurry, hurry!"

## CHAPTER SIX

### A Few Sociable Shots

WE TURNED at the ice-box, went up another step, and she opened a door that led into the kitchen. If she was on the level, and I believed she was, she sure was one who looked for trouble. Like me, she wanted action. It was a nice thought, if she was entirely on the level with me.

A quick turn, and ignoring the dimly lit lower floor, we mounted the stairs to the floor above. A sudden pounding of feet sounded there, and a harsh voice.

"You've done him in, you fool," said the voice. I licked at my lips. Benny and I were to meet, at last.

"Hell!" The other voice was cruel, rough, cheap—nothing like the lower, more menacing, yet cultured voice of Benny Shay. "There's the girl. She's coming now. I'll tear all the clothes off her back with a knife."

"But the old man would have told us," Benny said, as the girl never missed a step in her rapid style. "The girl's clever—damn clever and—"

"Manning's bringing her now." That voice would be Benny Shay's brother, Louie. There was elation in his voice. "She's a double-crossing little—" Benny

interrupted, as we turned on the stairs and went toward the sliver of light that came from a half-open door. Benny said, and there was the slightest quiver to his voice: "O. K., Manning—is it little sister?"

"Yes, it's little sister." The girl's voice shook slightly, but there was anger or pretended anger in it. "I know too much now, Benny, for you to collect without me." I tried to push her aside then, but she had reached the door and was slipping through the opening. Then she sort of crashed sidewise and knocked the door wide open. "Oh, God!" she cried out. "You killed them like that!"

"Yeah, just like that." It was Benny's voice.

I saw him standing across the room, close to a curtain that looked as if it might have led to a closet. The man and woman were on the floor, staked out like rats on a barn door—except that they lay upon the floor beneath the heavy steel, and I guess, sound-proofed window, for neither one of them was gagged, and they must have cried out horribly before they died.

No ordinary tie-up job this. None of this wrist-bound-to-stakes business. I could still see the hammer, the great spike-like nails. Yes, I could see one protruding through each hand, as if a single blow from that great hammer in the hands of the powerful Louie Shay had driven those nails there.

It only takes a second to see things in a time like that. Benny with his hand on the curtain, standing by that closet-like entrance, a table with a heavy bath-towel. On that towel was placed a bunch of odd-looking stuff. Like old clothes of some kind—musty, worn—a hunk or two of jewelry, either cheap or tarnished with neglect. A smaller table, with a phone on it was close to the door where I was.

I was standing there in full view. After all, there were only the two bodies, and

the man who knelt beside them—Louie Shay. Benny moved quickly toward the larger table and the junk-filled towel. I raised my gun, teeth set hard. I knew what those things were. They were a child's clothes—clothes that had been worn by a baby eighteen years ago. Two people horribly slaughtered, Benny grinning at the girl, the broad-shouldered man turning toward him—that was the picture.

Death isn't funny. But at times it is pleasant. I had promised Benny death when I saw him. Now I saw him. A better occasion for knocking him over could not be found. I jerked up a couple of guns, said: "We meet again, Benny. Hell—and good-by."

I simply closed a finger on the trigger. I almost dropped the gun from my hand as I loosened that trigger again. The girl had given a little shriek and gone for those things upon the table. Yep, she had simply thrown her body forward to beat Benny—she had dashed right between my easy mark—straight between Benny's eyes and myself.

And the figure on the floor turned, came to one knee, made a single motion and flame spit from a heavy gun.

**I** FIRED, of course. I hit him, too. Maybe things in that room—two old people—rattled me. I don't like to believe that. Maybe my eyes were half on the girl who struggled with Benny, as he tried to break free and get me. Maybe—But, anyway, I didn't kill Louie Shay. Oh, I hit him, all right, knocked him around a bit. Knocked him to his feet, his body facing me, his gun blasting again.

There are few guys who get two shots at me, let alone one. I was watching the girl and half picked out Louie with my left hand and let him have it. The picture with the girl seemed to have changed. Maybe I was wrong then, maybe not. But it looked now as if Benny held the girl,

and not the girl Benny. Anyway, I could see the left arm he had wrapped around hers, and the towel now a tight bundle held in his hand. I could also see the gun in his right hand, and the girl's frantic efforts to grip his arm—at least misdirect his fire.

She did, too. Plainly, I saw the belch of flame and knew that the girl had spoiled Benny's shot. At least, I didn't feel anything.

Then maybe I got mad. Here I had been hunting the city months for Benny—for Benny's brother, too. And now when I had them, I was caught between them because I hadn't realized that rats can fight. Here I was, cornered—with both the Shays taking shots at me, and a slip of a girl—well, she was small—protecting me from one of them.

I forgot then what the medical-examiner used to say about my clean work. I had hit Louis three times, and I could see him now out of the corner of my eye. He was still on his feet, and his gun was coming up. Also, there was Benny ready to kill me. He might have, too, if it hadn't been for the girl. And I might have killed him if it weren't for the girl. But you can't pop off two men at once when one has a girl before him—a girl you don't want to pound lead into.

My vision was bad, things beginning to seem slightly blurred. I crossed over my right hand as I closed the finger on my left hand. Louie was a shadowy, dancing figure, so I let him have it from both directions. Perspiration was on my forehead, running down into my eyes. I didn't see so well. Maybe I forgot all about my pride in my shooting. Maybe I forgot I was an artist in death. Anyway, it sure did the trick. Funny—a couple of good shots at twenty or twenty-five feet, and the man still lived. Now, five or six shots tossed at random in his general direction, and every one made him do a loop.

Somebody laughed. It was me, I guess.

Maybe it was a derisive laugh. I had put about five extra shots into a dead man. I hate to waste lead, but I can take a joke on myself just the same.

Now, I spread my feet apart and turned. I wanted to do this right. Benny Shay could never hold that girl as a protection against my shots now that I could give him full attention. I won't say I could kill him with the girl in his arms, but I could take nicks out of him here and there. One of them would be sure to drive him out in the open.

The damned water ran in my eyes and I couldn't see very well, and when I did get a look, he had dragged the girl behind the curtain into that closet.

I heard the thud like the fall of the girl's body. But I couldn't be sure, and I couldn't think. A closet is a closet. He was safe for me finally to get in there, but a shot from me might hit the girl, and a shot from him might hit me. So I ducked back into the hall, lay there waiting.

**T**HERE was something wrong with my head. But I did realize one thing. I simply had to lie there in the hall and wait. If he walked out that door, I'd blast a hole in his middle, tommy-gun or no tommy-gun. If he couldn't see me, he couldn't hit me.

Funny, I had hard work keeping awake. I was like a man who was drugged—the smell of burnt powder couldn't have done that to me. But the perspiration, the damn cold sweat—no, not cold, hot—I brushed it from my forehead again. This time I saw it on my hand—it wasn't sweat. It was blood streaming down my face.

So that was it. I felt better as I dabbed with my handkerchief. I was glad to know why I didn't see so well, had shot so rotten and acted so dumb. It was Louie Shay, then. His first bullet must have done it—dug a ridge right through my scalp. I could imagine Sergeant O'Rourke,

my friend on the police force, saying: "Lucky break, Race, that you got shot in the head. Now, if it had hit your arm, it might have hurt you."

A waiting game suited me. Every minute, every second even, was in my favor. I was like a prize-fighter getting a long count. I stuck up my hand again and made sure the bullet hadn't sunk into my skull. It hadn't. I could trace the course of it easily enough—just an inch along my scalp, and the bullet had gone on its way.

I grinned to myself as I lay there and mechanically loaded one gun after another. For once, time was on my side. Of course, I thought of Jane and the towel full of stuff Benny had grabbed from the table. I waited for Benny to make his proposition. The girl's life for his. And as my head began to clear, I decided not to mention the things in the towel just as if I knew nothing about them. Then once the girl was safe, I'd let him go, but hold the towel.

Time passed, the blood stopped flowing. My head was completely clear. Yet, only silence came from that closet. Not a cry sounded from the girl or a whisper from Benny. Maybe Benny thought I was dead, but wanted to be sure. But hell, it was his move—or was it? I decided to open up negotiations.

"You know me, Benny," I started. "Want to talk business?"

No answer. I said again, "Maybe she can use you, Benny," then the buzz came. It got me, at first. Then I remembered the bit of cloth against the telephone bell, deadening the sound.

So things would have to happen, if Benny wanted to answer the phone. He would want to answer it. Few people were in on this show—fewer still in on the torture. Who could be calling Benny? Not his brother—he was too dead. Not the lad, Manning, downstairs, for he was too far into the cement. Not Joe—he

wouldn't have the guts even if he knew the number. Now, I had it—or thought I had it. The big shot behind Benny! The lad who was going to cash in on the girl—but cash in when she was dead. The lad that Jane said Benny was dealing with. That's right. The honest, upright guy, fearlessly dispensing justice mixed with mercy, and free from all taint of corruption—Judge Cameron Osterman, the girl's uncle.

A lot of things hit me, then. Maybe Benny wouldn't even dare answer the phone. Maybe Benny had a knife stuck in him by the little society heiress. Maybe Benny had knocked her cold with the blackjack, and— I saw it and acted. I reached in my hand, jerked the leg of the table, toppled it over. The phone rolled a bit, but I was out of gun-shot range from the curtain. The double ear and mouthpiece in my hand. I said in a soft, disguised voice: "O. K., this is Benny Shay. What's the trouble?"

"Trouble?" A voice laughed. "Why, there's no trouble, Benny. But, really, I thought Benny had left there, and I wanted to speak to Race Williams."

"Well he hasn't left, and I'm Williams. Spill it." I was giving this guy the hard-boiled stuff now.

"The message? Well, it's like this, Williams. Go home and forget what happened. If you remember, you'll get it later—the girl sooner." I gasped over the phone at the voice: "Come, Williams, don't be an idiot all your life. This is Benny Shay speaking, and I've got the girl with me." He laughed—low, pleasantly. "I took her out the room behind, down the ladder—and to safety. If you want to call it safety. What? It doesn't strike you as funny? Well, listen to this," and his voice was hard. "Cross my path and I'll nail her down and cut her to ribbons. Don't leave the house for ten minutes. I'll call you back."

Suddenly a voice, piercing, shrieking,

"Gunmen on the way to kill you, Race. Gunmen—"

There was a cry, a bang, a fall and silence. Then the voice of Benny came again, low, ominous.

"I rather liked my brother. Good-night, sweetheart."

I had dropped the phone, was running toward the curtains, through them, into the tiny hall with the open door at the other end of it. Into another room, an open window, and yes, a ladder. There was some red on the floor—the girl's blood? Was she dead, then? Hell, I had just heard her warning over the phone. Benny was trying to hold me until his boys came. It was safe for him to cut loose in that house of death now.

That suited me as well as it suited them. They were on their way, and didn't know that I was wise. Well, I could wait at the top of the stairs and mow them down with lead as they came up. I could— Then, turning back, I threw myself out that window, and went quickly down the ladder. No climbing, understand—just a knee gripping either side and a fast slide. Then the fence behind, an alley beside a house, and the street beyond. No, I wasn't mad, altogether—though I'd have liked like hell to stay.

**J**ERRY, the boy I'd picked up in the underworld years before, and who now fancied himself as my assistant, let me into my apartment. I guess I cursed some of my troubles out to him as he poured damned near a bottle of iodine into the cut in my head.

"A million dollars, Jerry," I said over and over. "Maybe two million, and I was a jackass. Sure, sure, I took my chances and knocked over some choice specimens, but I played the fool. That judge—that crooked, murdering judge!" With a sudden inspiration, I gave Jerry orders for the next day. "Don't forget—the small car. I may want the big one."

With that, I went to bed. I didn't have any plans, perhaps, but I had the start of one. And when I have even the start of a plan—that's big-brain-detective work for me. All right, then. I wasn't fool enough to think I could find Benny and the girl. But I could find the judge—the crooked uncle who wanted her dead. Sooner or later, Benny would meet up with the judge.

The girl—Jane Blake or Iris Parsons—was the one who paid me the cash on the line. Where I had had every intention of killing Benny, and still did have, for that matter—it wouldn't do a dead girl much good. But give me credit for will-power. I needed sleep. I tucked a gun under my pillow and got it.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Call for the Body

**I**N the morning I turned over in bed, picked up the phone, and called Sergeant O'Rourke. I said simply: "Race, O'Rourke. Do you remember that Iris Parsons kidnaping years back?"

"Sure, sure." O'Rourke didn't take long to think. "I was wearing my first stripes as a sergeant—got the same stripes yet."

"The hell with your stripes. Tell me about it."

"Well, the kid was snatched—someplace around the house, I think. There was no ransom paid and many indications that the child was dead. No federal law then. A few ransom notes, then the sudden death of the mother from shock—and nothing ever heard from the kidnaper since."

"Never had any idea what happened to her?"

"Sure, sure." O'Rourke was very confident. "But not until Frederick Stern, her stepfather, knocked himself over."

"The case is closed then, officially?"

"Hell, no!" O'Rourke was emphatic. "That was only my opinion. You see, the cards played a grim joke on the stepfather. The mother had a million-dollar trust fund, the principal of which she would inherit upon her becoming thirty-five—in the event that her daughter was not living at that time, or did not survive to be twenty-one. Mixed up a bit, sure, but it was one of those wills that kept money in the family."

"So what?" I was trying to figure.

"So she made a will, leaving this principal sum to her second husband, Frederick Stern, if her daughter did not survive her. The child was O.K., but the mother had heart trouble. Her brother, Judge Cameron Osterman, had no need for the money. He was a coming lawyer, and had fared well in the estate. I don't think he knew about her will leaving the fund to her second husband—at least, at that time. This thing called love, you know—giving away money when you don't happen to have it. So the stepfather snatched the kid, killed her, and later intended to kill the mother, I guess."

"Why guess?"

"Well, his wife fooled him—bad heart and all that, and died the night she got a telephone call. It must have been about the child because she simply hollered 'Iris!' clutched at her heart, and dropped dead."

"So the stepfather tried to have the court presume that the child was dead and collect the million bucks?" I thought I knew my law.

O'Rourke laughed. "That's the way I read the will. That's the way half a dozen good lawyers read the will. But the surrogate read it different. He said that it was too early to presume that the child was dead, but, if that presumption were taken, the money went to Judge Cameron Osterman."

"Hell! How come?" I was surprised. O'Rourke seemed to be enjoying him-



self. "The ruling was that since Mrs. Stern, Iris Parson's mother, was not yet thirty-five years old she did not possess the principal sum of the trust fund, and therefore, not owning it or any part of it, had no right to will it to anyone. And since—if the child was dead and under the age of twenty-one and had no control over the principal, the one-million fund went back into the corpus of the estate—residue to you, Race—and so since the residue had been left to Judge Cameron Osterman, he took the fund."

"He got that dough, eh?"

"No, he administered the fund by court order, but never made any petition for the principal sum on the ground that the child was dead. Now, she'd be about twenty-one, and I understand that the judge is trying to establish the fact of her death."

"Does it strike you that the judge might have done the trick—knowing, perhaps, the little catch in the law?"

"Judge Osterman's the straightest guy who ever sat on a bench. You don't have to play politics in his court. Why, he couldn't do such a thing. He hired detectives for years, examined with the old family physician, Doctor Robert Carlton, the bodies of kids—and later older girls picked up in the river. He could have pretended a dozen times, said that it was his niece, wept bitter tears and collected a cool million."

"Maybe he couldn't." I jumped into life there. "Maybe Doctor Carlton knew of some deformity in her birth."

"What the hell is your interest in the estate? Surely not putting forth a claimant. Every time one of those fact articles about the Iris Parsons case comes up we have a dozen claimants—right age, right color of eyes. But Judge Osterman says not, and Doctor Carlton agrees with him."

"I'm laying my money on the judge for that kill."

"Don't drag up that old case," O'Rourke exploded. "Judge Osterman is incapable of the act. He's strictly on the level. He's just and honest. Respect the dignity of his position, Race. He'll call you in, sue you, or lock you up in jail for contempt."

"You know me, O'Rourke." I took a laugh. "If I felt like it, I'd walk into the judge's chambers and pull his hat down over his ears."

Then I dropped the receiver.

SO I had a kidnaping case to clear up that was eighteen years old, a real dangerous kidnaping case less than eighteen hours old—and both the same girl. For a chance to put lead in Benny's belly, and make him spill his guts—literally and mentally!

Great stuff. Honorable stuff. A man who planned all his life to get away with a million-dollar murder—even if it took eighteen years—and then the courts forced the money on him. Now, there is Murder Man Number One for you. Just one flaw in his perfect crime. He had delayed having the kid killed, or maybe only left her with that dead old man and old woman, suggesting the kill. They got panicky and, in the shuffle, the kid was lost, tossed into the whirlpool of the city's criminals. The last two people who could or might appear against the judge were dead—or maybe three people if you thought of the girl. I shivered slightly there. I didn't like to think of the girl as dead. Not simply my own pride. Not simply because she was my client, though that did rile me. I don't like having dead clients. Besides, I liked the girl.

I slipped silently into Judge Osterman's court, and got a look at him. Stern, yet kindly face. Good, yet not quite a sanctimonious face. Character in his map—sure, lots of it. But then character is both good and bad. He might have stood in front of a looking-glass thirty years

before and stuck that puss on, held it that way for a year or two until it finally set, and afterward carried it around like a written testimonial.

The calendar was being called, and, after spotting Sergeant O'Rourke wandering about, I stuck my face behind a newspaper so he couldn't see me.

Headlines—plenty of them. The old couple in the Bronx, but not the bit of killing aboard that boat. Captain Lion-face had taken them out and dumped them in the ocean. The giant with a chest full of lead had been located in the boat-house. The paper didn't give it much more than a gang-row.

I looked up. The judge was returning to the bench. I had not seen him leave. His face was flushed—then it went white, and he leaned a bit on the bench as he started to sit down, leaned forward over it and said, "Gentlemen." He hesitated and then, "Court is adjourned for the rest of the day." Smack like that—and it was two minutes after eleven A. M. to the dot.

I didn't see O'Rourke, so I moved around a bit, heard an old guard say to a friend: "He never did that before."

I'm no brain trust, but something was about to break. The judge was needed on the scene, or something was going to keep him busy.

**E**VERYTHING seemed to jell O.K. I skipped out of that courtroom, nodded to Jerry, who was across the street with the car, to be ready to take up the judge's trail. No, I didn't figure on following Judge Osterman, myself. That would give me away and perhaps invite a few carloads of machine guns on a lonely road.

I saw Judge Osterman leave his chambers, and hurry into the big chauffeur-driven car. I saw Jerry move from the curb across the street and settle on his tail. If any other car settled on Jerry's tail, I didn't see it.

Sergeant O'Rourke spoke behind me.

"Hello, Greta Garbo," he laughed. "Why didn't you put on dark glasses when you hid behind that newspaper in the courtroom? You looked funny as hell, but you've got the stuff on the ball, Race. Three well-known racketeers got up and left hurriedly. You can never tell who you are looking for." A pause and then, "Maybe the judge?"

"Yeah." I lit the butt and left the match between my teeth for a minute. "I wanted to interview him about that story—that snatch of eighteen years ago."

O'Rourke shook his head.

"No sense of propriety, Race. The judge never allows that subject to be mentioned. I guess he had private detectives and police on it for years. Now, with the money shooting his way, he won't even let the police discuss it with him." He reached out and grabbed me by the arm.

"Not going to throw the old line today—Tuesday—at Benny Shay's new offices?"

"I was just on my way over to ask for him—why not?"

"His brother was killed last night, up in the Bronx. Found with two old people. It's in the papers by now."

"Yeah? And who were the old people—his mother and father?"

O'Rourke shook his head seriously. "Name of Fink—Andrew and Ella Fink. We traced them back. They arrived in this country in eighteen eighty-seven, had a child, but it died, I guess."

"A girl?" I fairly gasped.

"No, a boy. You seem interested."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"If it was Benny's brother, it was a good job. Never had much to do with him. Hell, you don't suspect me."

"No, no." O'Rourke stroked his chin. "You'd better have an alibi, anyway. You know Inspector Nelson never liked you. The old people were horribly tortured be-

fore they died. It was some kind of a gang feud. A couple of carloads of tough boys arrived from downtown, but beat it when the cops came in. The others had already gone."

"Why an alibi? Does Nelson think I did it?"

"No. All the boys agreed it didn't look like one of your jobs. No clean shooting, understand. Louie Shay was full of lead." He smiled pleasantly. "We know the Scotch comes out in you when it comes to killing—one slug to a corpse."

So the shot on the head had done me some good.

"Still got ideas about the judge?" O'Rourke smiled, and, when I didn't answer: "Don't go to Benny's office today. I understand they wired him about his brother's death, and he's back in town."

"It's Tuesday," I told O'Rourke. "I go around every Tuesday."

"And you mean to—" O'Rourke stopped.

I looked at my watch and said just before I walked away: "You can come for the body in half an hour."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### A Couple of Corpses

I WALKED straight across town, took the subway for a couple of stations, entered the huge office building and shot to the fifteenth floor. I just tossed in the door and entered the reception-room. Two lugs hid their maps behind the papers they were reading. The girl at the desk looked up. She was a fine-looking girl, but hard, rough. She said: "He ain't here. You'll have to do your killing some other place, wise guy. You oughta be tired looking for him."

Others behind the partition could hear the girl, and me, too. She was too damn fresh, anyway, so I took a rise out of her. "I am tired—tired looking at that mugg

of yours every time I come in. Next time, if anything I don't like comes out of your pan, I'll smack it right back in again." As her mouth opened to throw more talk, I added: "Or this time, either."

She hesitated, finally snapped closed the opening.

I turned and walked out of the office. What sense was there in making that visit? Childish, you think? But we learn a lot from children. This time it was to convince Benny that I did not suspect the judge, was not trailing him. Benny knew I was a lone worker. And Jerry was one of the shrewdest shadows in the business. Why shouldn't he be? He'd been ducking cops all his life until I picked him up. Then I let him rove back in the underworld occasionally. Jerry knew his way around.

I went back to my apartment.

Then came the hard part of my job—the waiting. I'd have to stick to the apartment and wait for Jerry to phone me where the judge was going—or better still, where he had gone. Was the judge going someplace to meet Benny? Or was the judge going someplace and wait for Benny to meet him there? It was a question of time. But I'd have to wait until Jerry telephoned. Good old Jerry never missed.

It was dark when the phone rang. Jerry, of course. But it wasn't Jerry. My eyes opened wide, because it was about Jerry. Yes, and it was Sergeant O'Rourke talking.

"Tough, Race. It looks bad for the boy. What? He was tossed out of a car near your place. It looks like a torture job."

"Jerry tortured? Why I never let him know my plans."

"That's it," said O'Rourke. "But others didn't know that or believe it when they heard it. He wants to talk to you bad."

"I'll be right down."

"No," said O'Rourke. "We have a phone here by his bedside."

No, my heart wasn't in my mouth, but my gun was in my hand before I got through listening. Jerry was saying: "Me, I followed O.K. There was a long stop at his bank, one for dinner, then straight out to—"

"Yes, Jerry." Hell, he sounded like he was dying!

"Don't you worry, boss. I can talk it out. The flatfoots are here by the bed. They want me to tell you I'm dying. Hell, I'm fine. But I want to put it right. Me, I got there—nearly there. Now, they think I'm dead, all right. The other two are dead, no mistake about that." He started to cough. "You got to hurry." When I thought he wouldn't speak again, he said: "I got it, boss! You'll find his name and address in the Westchester telephone book. The caretaker and his wife left for the city—a hotel. I don't know what time you got, or—"

"Is he dead?" I asked O'Rourke.

"You'd better come down, Race." O'Rourke was very serious.

"I can't," I told him. "It's life or death—or just death."

"He's a boy who thinks a lot of you." When I shook my head and finally shouted that I couldn't come, he went on: "He hollered for you, but the hospital informed the police. So I came over. I'll tell you what we'll do, Race. You wait there for me and— Just a minute. A report came in that may interest you." He held the wire for a long time. "No, it wasn't about you. It's nip and tuck with Jerry. But perhaps if you wait, I—"

"I do what?"

"There's another ring. I think you'll be glad to hear the message. You wait a bit and—"

Now, I was wise to it. Clever, shrewd old O'Rourke. While he talked to me, cops were speeding up to my apartment. They'd hold me until he came or follow me to where I went!

I DROPPED the phone, tossed on my double-harness, felt of the two guns, put my jacket back on and, grabbing my hat and topcoat, made tracks for downstairs. A taxi was waiting. I started toward it, noticed the police car screeching up the street, ducked around a corner and grabbed another cab. You can roast the police of New York all you want, but if you want action, they give it to you.

I only took that cab to the subway station, watched him drive away, then walked a couple of blocks across town, slipped into a drugstore and called my garage.

"Race Williams, Eddie," I told the manager. "Drive my car straight up to the corner of Forty-eighth. Go slow there. If I get in, O.K. If I don't, why just drive around the block and put it back in the garage. Drive it yourself. There's ten bucks in it for you."

"For ten bucks I'll drive it all night. Yeah, I understand. Lads in blue coats and brass buttons and not firemen, either. O.K., Race. She's moving already."

She must have been, I crossed the street, stood in a deserted doorway and along he came. Before he hit the corner, I was on the running-board. He slid over as I took the wheel. Before I jumped the car ahead he was out the other side and walking leisurely across the street. I was making tracks uptown.

I let the car go a bit, spotted a fairly decent cigar-store, and, going in, found a Westchester telephone directory. Judge Cameron Osterman was there, all right. The name of the town was Purchase. Oh, I know it by name and so do you. But try and get to it, or find anyone who lives there. Several good roads all point to Purchase, but, if you're not quick, you'll simply find that you've crossed from one main highway to another and missed the town.

But I won't go into the details of that ride, except that I made speed and didn't cross right through and find myself in

Portchester. Sure, I had the breaks. Houses were not numbered on the road where the judge lived, but my luck was good. A light, a lad calling a dog, and I got directions—complicated, maybe, but directions just the same.

I made speed as directed to the cross-road and the caution-light, then I slowed down to the next road, and drew up altogether when I was to make the turn. Nice country here—nice estates, too. At least, the grass was cut, even if the houses were too far back to see them. Though there was nothing but foliage-covered stone walls, thick forests of trees and long stretches of dimly made out, well-trimmed lawns, you had the impression that you were associating with class.

I should have taken my tip from that outlook on both sides of the road, but I didn't. I found a swell place to park my car, hide it entirely, then on foot with nothing but a flash, two heavy revolvers, and a couple of pockets full of cartridges, I turned and started down the country road.

There was no beautiful full moon to be in contrast with the dead I expected to find before morning. No dull drizzle and deep fog, and the scattering of wild life to make the night eery, and to fit in with its grim purpose. Grim? Well, a purpose, anyway. I was certainly going to pop a lot of lead into Benny Shay's stomach if I saw him. Or let's say rather into his middle, for, back or front, he was overdue. Few guys stay overdue on me. You know, you feel it. Tonight one of us was going to die.

I slunk close along the great trees and the heavy foliage. It was slow going. I passed the first estate's big gate in five minutes. But these weren't any city dwellings. I walked my feet off before I found the second estate gate. The third was still longer, and I was slower. A lad lit a butt on the wall across the road. He had a mean face on him, and a shotgun across

his knee. No country boy, this. He would have copped me right out of the car, if I'd driven all the way down.

I paused in the shadows of big trees, saw his face plainly. Then put my gun back in my pocket, and went on. He was to carry that mean puss for a bit longer. Oh, the temptation was strong—the glare of the match and all. But somehow I didn't want to shoot yet. But he let me know where I stood. Guys who picked their faces out of the gutters of New York were polluting the country—to guard someone.

OF COURSE, I'm not much of a hunter in the dark, but I daresay I could cop over a guy who bobbed out from behind a tree just as well as I could if he bobbed out from behind a telegraph pole. Certainly, I didn't expect to meet anyone until I got close to the house, which I couldn't see yet. The lad on the road was looking for big game—an oncoming car full of police, or something like that. He was not looking for a single prowler in the night.

I thought of Jerry and the girl, and I saw the house. It wasn't so far from the thick trees and had another bunch that I could get into after crossing plain grass. I suppose I should have crawled on my belly like a snake, but I didn't. If snake stuff was to be started, why it was up to Benny.

I made the trees and saw the whiteness of the rambling house. I saw blackness, too, at the windows. Was it just that heavy curtains were drawn tightly to shut out the light? And I thought I was right, for that idea only struck me at one window—a lower window—raised up on a terrace. There was a little balcony, with ivy almost completely hiding the railing, and two great fir trees at both sides of the balcony, itself.

I saw the light plainly, a blowing curtain, a tiny slit, but I saw the light.

Crouched outside the stone railing, I could now feel cold beneath the ivy and, working my way to the left where the vine was thickest, I settled my stomach on that railing and slid over to the stone floor. I saw and touched the thing at almost the same time. I tried to draw back, but couldn't—rather, let my body lurch forward on the figure of a man. It was a man I pinned quickly to the stone, whispered death in his ear and stuck a gun against his back. Yeah, his back—and the thing that protruded from his back.

The man was dead. Another, awkwardly sprawled against the far railing, was dead enough, too.

Why worry about a couple of dead guys? I had a nice safe berth—a small balcony with a lighted window, and those suspected of playing peek-a-boo already slipping into the obituaries.

Curtains parted slightly again a little above me. I ducked back from the sliver of light and, glancing up, got the lay. The windows were broad French affairs, tightly closed. But a single pane of glass was missing, just about up where the catch inside would be. The boys, then, were set to enter easy, if necessary. Just shove a hand through the empty square and snap back the latch.

The draft from that removed square twisted a curtain and gave me a fine view from just a kneeling position. Then I discovered a perfect view of the room if I lay down and pressed my eyes to the bottom of the window. As for being seen, well, a lad would have to climb over with a knife in his hand—and if he could get away with that one he was welcome to it.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Benny Asks for Blood

I LOOKED straight into the room. The single occupant sat in that comfortable library, the books about the walls like a

stage show—great, heavy volumes. But the figure who sat so quietly in the big chair, close to the nicely burning logs in the fireplace, was not reading any of them. He leaned down far in the chair, his pipe resting on his chest as well as in his mouth.

Perfect peace, you think—and you think wrong. He was like a sleeping hunting-dog. Occasionally, he'd jar erect. Occasionally, his eyes turned and looked at two pictures on the wall just in front of the long flat mahogany desk. They were pictures of a woman and a child—mother and child. I had seen plenty like them in the newspaper files.

The man, himself, was Judge Cameron Osterman.

He didn't move now, but just stared at the pictures. However, I moved slightly. I jerked my head erect. Plainly came the hum of a high-powered car as it easily took the grade. Lights, too, the shifty glare of them above me on the side of the house—gone again as it took the curve. Then the slightest sound of breaks as the car stopped.

The judge heard it, too. He came erect in the chair, listened, and the front doorbell rang. He started to rise, but didn't, leaned back in his chair, the pipe still settling on his chest as his lips simply touched it. "Come in," he shouted. "Come as I— Ah!"

The judge stared at the man in the doorway. His overcoat was pulled well up about his neck. His slouch hat was pulled forward over his forehead, a scarf half covering his mouth. I guessed who he was, but didn't know for sure until he spoke.

The judge said: "So you are the man who has been in touch with me—phones, meetings in the park. Now, we come face to face."

"As nearly face to face as we are going to come. Yes, here are the things." Benny Shay swung the gun into his left

hand, pulled a tightly tied towel from his pocket and tossed it over to the judge. He said: "Her baby clothes and things—a ring, initials and all that, and the doll she used to play with. There's a picture of it there. I copped it from the old folks."

**T**HE judge went over the assortment, eagerly. The clothes were falling apart in places in his hands. "How did you discover all this—get these things? Where in the world could you have ever found them?"

"The old people. Yeah, the ones who were found croaked this morning. Don't look so dumb. You gave the kid to them, and, when the shock killed your sister, they got scared and ran out of town. You lost them, too, after a bit. Nothing to worry you now. The old man and the old woman died last night. They might have died easier, if they had talked faster—but I got the stuff."

"And they told you about me?"

"They didn't need to. We knew about you. Snatching and murders are done for money. When the kid's mother kicked over—before you had a chance to kill her—well, the dough was looking your way, only you couldn't find the kid and kill her. You couldn't collect because the old people might squeal. They couldn't find the kid, either. But there's the girl's stuff when she was a baby. There's a dumb rookie walking the Kingsbridge beat. We'll see that he picks the towel up. He don't know enough to cop it. That'll be proof of her death to the satisfaction of the courts."

"Her death," said the judge slowly. "To the satisfaction of the courts. But I could have proved that death to their satisfaction before. Eighteen years is a long time."

"You were foxy." Benny leaned forward, a gleam of enjoyment in his eyes. "While the old couple lived, you were on the spot. Now the girl, Iris, will turn up

dead. It can be a drunken row with a lover in an apartment. If that makes too much of a stink on the family pride, we'll have her pulled out of the river."

"She's alive yet?"

"Well, yes." Benny Shay leaned forward. "And she suspects the truth—knows it."

"I must see her alive," said the judge slowly.

"Hell—why?"

"I can't be going and investigating the dead any longer. I want to know I can identify her this time."

"You *can* put the finger on the corpse?" Benny's mouth fell open—at least the scarf dropped.

"Yes, I can identify the body. Doctor Carlson can identify the body. A distant cousin, and a nurse, who was in the house, can all identify the body."

"Something peculiar?"

The judge said, again, his voice now a bit judicial despite the gun so close to him: "I must see her alive."

"Or else?" Benny leaned forward, a sneer on his lips.

"Or else," said the judge, "your time is up, Mr. Shay. I will close all dealings with you, order your arrest, accuse you of holding the girl against her will. My part, as you say, died with the death of the old people. Don't look surprised. I never forget a face or a voice. I saw your picture many times when they sought to indict you. I heard your voice plainly on a record from a tapped telephone wire.

Benny was perplexed. He said: "Now, you want the girl alive so that you may identify her. It isn't that you want to see her dead—here in this room?"

The judge pulled at his pipe. "I want to see her first alive in this room."

"And we split a million bucks apiece."

"If I paid you a million dollars at this time—and you exaggerate your half—it would cause suspicion to fall both upon you and me."

"Naw." Benny shook his head. "You'd probably think up a better way, if I was to split the dough with you. But it's simple enough. Invest the money in real estate. I'll sell you some stuff at a pretty stiff price. At that, you may make money on it later. You want to see the girl. I thought of that. I got her tied up in the car outside." He turned back after he had started toward the door. "You might like to give her the works. You might like to kill her yourself, eh?"

"I might," said the judge slowly. "If you will supply me with the gun."

"Sure, sure." Benny stared at the judge in open admiration. "Even when I was working deep with you, I had my doubts. Still, if you knock over a piece of dress goods worth a couple of million yourself, you know it's done. No, no one would ever take you for a crook or a murderer."

"Thank you very much," said the judge. "I am sorry I cannot say the same thing about you."

"Oh, don't apologize. That's all right with me." It was quite evident that Benny didn't get the point of the judge's crack. He went to the door, called, "O.K., Harry, bring in that bundle from Heaven." He turned back to the judge. "I got a couple of boys with me—just a precaution. If the cops are around, you are the lad who could holler them down."

"The police?" The judge seemed surprised. "Surely, I want them less than you do. Ah, so that is the girl."

JANE BLAKE stood in the doorway. Harry, a flat-faced guy, was kneeling down, unwinding the rope from her feet. But her hands were securely bound, and there was a gag in her mouth. The judge must have stared at her, but I couldn't see his face when he swung his chair. There was hell in the girl's face. Not fear—just hell. You could see it far back in her eyes, in the new scar on her face. Her mouth was working beneath the gag.

The judge said: "Iris? No, it can't be Iris. Send her here. Let her kneel at my feet. Take off that handkerchief."

Benny Shay tore the gag from her mouth. "At his feet, tart." Benny Shay raised his hand and belted her toward the chair. She swirled, struck her side against the long table, tried to balance herself with a hand that would not move, feet that were twisted and bloodless. Then she crashed at the judge's feet.

The judge arose at once, moved as if to step over her toward Benny, then, leaning down, he drew the girl erect. Little feet pounded against his, but he did not seem to feel them. He spoke to Benny in a low voice.

"Hell, sure." Benny came forward, grabbed the girl by her hair, pounded her head down upon the table and held her so. The upper part of her body stretched from her waist far over the table.

She didn't kick, then, but dull vicious sounds, that must have been words, barely reached me. She had on a black dress. I saw the judge feel for the neck, low, but still up by her shoulder blades.

The judge spoke. "Benny, I want you to—" He stopped, grabbed at that dress suddenly, and ripped it down her back, almost to the waist—slightly farther, then. The girl didn't move or mumble now, didn't even kick.

Benny spoke. "Hell, some identification. Is this what you want?" As the judge stretched a hand across the table, Benny Shay handed him the powerful magnifying-glass. For a full minute, the judge held it and carefully examined the girl's back.

"Doctor Carlton will have to see it, of course, but there is no doubt." He laid down the glass, tried with trembling fingers to replace the dress. His voice shook when he spoke. He tried to lift the girl back from the table. She slipped and sprawled upon the floor. The judge staggered, too, I think as he half sat, half fell back into the chair.



Benny Shay crossed, jerked up the girl's head, slapped her in the face. "She's faking it. There, take it easy, Judge. These things don't come easy to a lad like you, no matter how long you plan it. She's the dame, eh? No doubt of that?"

"Don't—don't do that." The judge took the girl's head upon his knees. "Don't touch her again, Shay—don't lay a hand on her again." He lifted the girl's head. I hardly caught his voice. "The little baby—the little baby taken away and so abused. Now, you're back again."

Big eyes opened, stared right at the judge. He placed a hand beneath her chin, stroked her hair. "So you know who I am?" he asked.

She did—and she told him. And I think the judge was hearing a lot of words for the first time. "Cripes!" Shay burst in. "After the beating I gave her, too. I thought I broke her, but only death can break this kid, Judge. I know." He raised the gun. "I'll do the trick for you."

"Stop." The judge raised his hand. "When you first spoke to me, I thought the story was a wild fancy. Later, I wondered if it was. Two old people—But you worked hard, Shay, even if it was for a dishonest criminal purpose. There was a hundred-thousand-dollar reward withdrawn long ago, of course. But tonight—leave the girl alone with me. The one hundred thousand dollars will be yours. Just one condition. You must forget everything of tonight. If you remember it"—the judge's hands moved apart—"then I shall remember you."

"What are you driving at?" Benny seemed stunned. "Oh, I expected you'd cross me in some way. You have others working for you. You slip me a hundred grand—if I ever do get it—then have the girl knocked over by some lads who'll do it for a century note."

"The hundred thousand dollars will be paid to you tomorrow morning. This girl is my niece. I loved her very much as a

child." He looked at the girl. "I—I— And I didn't blame him for swallowing the love angle, then. She looked as if the only reason in the world that she didn't drive a knife into his chest was because she didn't have any knife.

"Let's hear it all." Benny set his mouth grimly.

**C**RAMPED from long interest holding me in one position, I took up a better one—at least, one that was different. I was almost on my back now, a gun picking a place in the glass to cover Benny Shay, and trying to keep an eye on the lad Harry who still lurked back in the doorway.

Before the judge spoke. Benny said: "Out in the hall, Harry. But be within earshot—and gunshot." When Harry backed into the hall Benny said: "O.K., Judge. Give us what's on your chest."

"I loved the child very much, and she returned that love," Judge Osterman said very slowly. "I didn't like her stepfather, the man my sister married. When she disappeared, I did everything in my power to locate her. The stepfather made the first contact, which we kept from the papers. They evidently distrusted him, for it was I who went with the money. That was quite a while after the child had been taken. I waited at the appointed place, and two people, a man and a woman met me. I waited with the money until they went for the child." The judge paused a long time. "I never saw those people alive again. I saw them this morning, dead. So you see, Mr. Shay, it is to your advantage to take the reward, say nothing, and I will arrange to have the girl return—er, from abroad. No notoriety, no excitement."

"And the girl puts the finger on me in court for killing! Look at her eyes now. She hates my guts and—"

"What will you do, my dear?" Even the judge felt the word "dear" didn't

register. "You will save your life and happiness?"

"Life? Happiness?" she sneered. "Will I get this money—close to two million?"

"Yes, the court will award you every cent of it."

"Well"—the girl licked at slightly swollen lips—"I'll spend every cent to roast Benny Shay and to see that you warm the seat for him. Don't tell me." She fairly hurled the words at him. "Benny's a dope, but not you. He's only good with a gun. He has no brains to mix heads with you. Benny killed the people who could identify me. You killed my mother—"

"But, child, after these years of hunting, how—"

"How? I don't know how. But the courts know, and you know the courts. You both have to fry."

"No, no," the judge shook his head. "You'll feel differently, later. You will understand, later. You—"

"No more of your talk." Benny jerked his gun suddenly up. "You couldn't get away with it, Judge—not with her talking. Now, we'll go through with the deal. Will I knock her over here in front of you, or do you want me to take her off someplace and kill her there? You and me split." When the judge didn't answer—just stepped between Benny and the girl—Benny went on: "O.K., I'll give it to her here. She knows the truth about the kidnaping. She knows that I killed to get you the dough. Now!" He shoved the judge aside, drew a bead on the girl.

SHE was on her feet now. Death was coming and she didn't like it. She wanted to get her speech in and realized perhaps how weak it was at the time. "Williams knows," she said to Benny. "Race Williams knows—yes, the truth about the judge too. If he talks—"

Benny laughed. "He doesn't know. You're too tight-lipped for that, and you

told me he didn't know, when I put the screws on." The gun was high now, and the girl stood erect, her shoulders back. Benny said: "Good-night, sweetheart." His ugly mouth curved into a sneer, and the judge, wild-eyed, jumped between them.

"No, no!" he cried out, too. "Not death at such a time. You can still have that hundred thousand." And suddenly as he saw Benny drawing a bead around him, he said: "There are two men on the balcony, outside. All right, boys, come in."

I was standing up now. The curtains slipped slightly back by the inside lock of the door. I had been covering Benny, too—at times even covering the judge. But I watched Benny.

Benny laughed. "Two detectives, eh? Sure, I know. I came up earlier, figured you'd protect yourself. The grounds were searched first, and those two dumb private dicks were knifed out. I didn't entirely trust you, Judge. I thought—"

The girl said: "Williams—Race Williams. Didn't he go to you, Judge—threaten you? He's not dead. He couldn't be dead, and he knew how—how—" The gun was coming up again, "Race—Race—Race!" A cry of desperation? A cry of hysteria? Was it a cry of hope?

I jerked another gun into my left hand and raised my right foot. Dramatic? Sure, it was dramatic. For just as I raised my foot, Benny Shay cried out mockingly: "Come on in, Race. Come on for the little girl. Come on in, Race."

Sure, he called me—and I came.

## CHAPTER TEN

### The Morgue's My Meat

MY RIGHT foot just crashed in those windows, the curtains jumped, and I was in the room. "Right on the job, Benny," I said and let loose a bullet from my right gun. I wasn't going to fool with

Benny this time. With a wave of his hand, Benny jumped sidewise and toward the judge. It was a quick jump and saved Benny's life—for the moment. But in that jump he forgot to take a good part of his left arm with him. I had been playing for his heart—if he had a heart.

Benny didn't have a chance, if the judge wouldn't stand there so damned dumb. Or he wouldn't have had a chance, anyway, if friend Harry hadn't suddenly show up in the doorway with a spitting gun and threatening language. I heard Harry's last words—and rather liked them. They made him shoot rather wild before I laid the bullet in his gasping open mouth. His last words had been:

"Race Williams—oh, God!"

Benny was tough, a good shot and a fast thinker. He hadn't changed in his jump much, even if his left arm had been nearly torn from its socket. Yep, believe it or not, he whipped up that left arm, crashed the judge on the head and around the neck, brought him to one knee, and was now hiding behind him.

Same old trick. It had worked with the girl because she was my client. It would work again because she was still my client, it would work to her advantage this time. The girl had two million bucks, the judge only a protestation of innocence.

Benny was fast. He shot from between the judge's left arm and side, then ducked his head behind the old man's body.

"Too bad, Your Honor," I muttered, and laid a .44 slug right through the judge's arm. Through it is correct. The judge did a waltz to one side, but Benny was right smack in the open, back against the wall. His eyes were bulging and his lips were hanging open. His left hand clutched at his chest—tore at it. My slug must have widened as it traveled, for Benny didn't like the feel of it.

Benny wasn't easy to kill. I was dashing forward, as I had expected to bowl the judge over on Benny, and didn't know

that he'd be so quick on the side-step. I had another quick, stumbling shot at Benny, as he took some plaster off the ceiling with his spouting lead. I guess I hit him in the same place, for his coat was open and his shirt torn when he had scratched at his chest. The hole there was much larger—matted, blood-soaked hair.

Benny dropped his gun, rolled his eyes, turned over and lay on his back.

The girl came across to me, holding out her wrists, her bound arms. I took my knife out, then saw her eyes wander. I said: "Listen, kid. Any way it turns out, you want to be a lady. If the judge is on the level—" When she broke in, I added: "Oh, I know he isn't, but you'll have to be a lady to the court—put on a front. It's a lot of jack and—What's that?"

Plainly, I heard the throb of a motor. I turned and grinned. Benny Shay was still alive. He clutched the gun in his hand again. He was pointing it straight at the girl. I simply said, "Good-night, sweetheart," and shot him straight between the eyes.

THE judge came toward me, bewildered. I snapped out the light-switch, pressed the button on the single lighted lamp. That's right. A car had pulled up to the front door, and men were in the hall outside. I faced the door, held my small flashlight in my left hand, my gun in my right. "Lie down on the floor," I whispered. "The rest of the boys are in for a surprise. What the hell!"

A voice called, "Boss—Mr. Williams!"

"O.K., Jerry." I let the flash go before I put the lights on. "And Sergeant O'Rourke. How many others in the party?"

"Only two living, Jerry and myself." O'Rourke looked around the room, and walked over to the body. "Benny Shay, eh? Well, you promised it to him, Race."

"Better get it over with." I pointed to the open window. O'Rourke looked out.

He shrugged his shoulders, said: "Now, who hired those two dumb private dicks? Oh, pardon me. I didn't see you, Judge. It's a mess."

The judge started in to speak as I cut the girl's hands free. O'Rourke said: "It isn't—Iris Parsons, your niece, Judge?"

"Exactly, and, I'm afraid, not overfond of her uncle. However, I have spent years looking for her. Then this—this Shay telephoned me about three months ago. I couldn't believe him, of course, but of all those who have come to me over the years, his was the best story. He asked for no cash. I wanted proof of her identity. He got baby clothes, but he was entering into a conspiracy with me to produce the girl's body—not the girl. I had to pretend to enter into a murder-pact. It wasn't hard to make him believe me, with so much money at stake. He hated the girl, too—was afraid of her, alive. Tonight—yes, he would have killed her." And as O'Rourke took his arm, he told me: "Not bad, Mr.—er— The bullet went through the flesh, and not the bone."

"There was identification—some mark on her back?" I asked the judge.

"Yes, well down her spine. So small you could not make it out. It was an almost perfect five-pointed star. Iris"—he looked toward the girl—"seems to think I am guilty of all her terrible unhappiness."

I PUT an arm around the girl's neck, clapping my hand affectionately over her mouth, for she was about to speak, let us say, in none too gentle words. Thank God, O'Rourke spoke before she chewed my fingers apart.

"Well, she won't think so now. No one else did." O'Rourke cleared his throat. "Except a half-wit I know. You'll never guess who the two old people were. We traced them back until the day they came to this country with one son—a son who denied their name and very existence. This

son was your sister's husband, Judge, and the stepfather of Miss Iris Parsons. That's right, Fred Stern—alias Fink!"

I don't think the judge even believed it, until the girl nodded suddenly. "Yes, I lived for a while with those old people. I remembered them well when I saw them—when—" She paused, and I nodded my head, for it would be silly to hide anything now. O'Rourke was a great guy by you, if you were a great guy by him. "Well, it was when I saw them dead up in the Bronx. Benny Shay told me my uncle had brought me to them, had planned to kill me, and they got frightened. They left me, and I never saw them again until last night."

After much more talk, O'Rourke asked her: "You knew Benny? Now, don't worry, Miss Parsons. We'll make this thing as easy as possible for you and lock your past life out of the police record, and out of the papers. But if Benny had you, why was he willing to split the money with the judge? Why didn't he let you come forward and claim the inheritance? Why didn't he even marry you to be sure of it?"

"Because I would have killed him as soon as the money was in my hands," she said.

After that crack, I did all the talking for the girl. I introduced her to Jerry who wasn't badly hurt at all. Jerry told me O'Rourke just kept him in the hospital until he got his story—Jerry got O'Rourke's promise to forget the law, and fearing, for my life, he led him to the house.

"Gee, boss," he said. "The judge or Benny or none of them ever knew I was at the house. But I followed the judge up—at least saw where he went, saw the dead men and came back. I had plenty of time and didn't telephone you, but was getting out of the car around back of the apartment when they nailed me. Just hit me on the head and chucked me out of the

car again. They weren't set on killing me—just indifferent. I heard one of them say, 'This will make Williams think Benny's right here in town.'

**T**HERE was the Doctor Carlton later at the judge's city home, and that sort of thing—plans made to announce the girl's return. But at the girl's request she was left alone with me. "There's the reward," she said. "But you and I won't bother about that. It's me, Race. I'll disgrace him and everything. I suppose he's all right."

"He's one swell guy, if you give him a chance. Remember, it was environment before." I looked over the big room. "It's heredity now." And when she put her arms around my neck, I said: "Sure, kid—I'll help."

"You're my kind." She clung to me pretty tightly. "My kind."

"That's right." I shook her up a bit, stood her on both her feet, and, holding her squarely by both shoulders, added: "And I want you to be my kind."

"That's right. That's what I said. I didn't mean it as a crack even."

I left her in her swell suite of rooms, went downstairs and killed the trained-

nurse-and-the-maid business the judge was working on. "That can come later," I told him flat. "She's led a hard life, but a good one."

The judge thanked me, explained for the fifth time that the bullet had only gone through the fleshy part of his arm, and finally said: "There's your fee, Mr. Williams. Oh, I know how you feel—just how you must feel about Iris. Inside, the Osterman is still there. But there must be some fee." His laugh was not so hot. "After all, you're in business. Just drop down to the office about the money sometime."

I looked him straight in the eye. There was no doubt that he meant it. There was no doubt also that in a day or two he might find I had provided him with a wild-cat, but I gave it to him straight from the shoulder.

"It is my custom," I told him flat, "to take my fee immediately upon completion of the case."

"Immediately?" His eyebrows went up. He looked strangely hurt and dignified and slightly surprised.

"Well," I gave him my pleasantest smile. "If you're busy right now, I won't insist." I sat down in a chair. "Suppose we say in fifteen minutes, then."



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# MURDER AT THE AUTOMAT



*That miserly diner had been murdered in full view of a whole restaurant full of customers yet no one had seen the killer. What could Detective Nelson hope for but failure with no one to work on but a hospitable widow in a dingy basement, no clue except an indigestible bologna sandwich in a slot?*

**N**ELSON pushed through the revolving-door at twenty to one in the morning, his squadmate, Sarecky, in the compartment behind him. They stepped clear and looked around. The place looked funny. Almost all the little

white tables had helpings of food on them, but no one was at them eating. There was a big black crowd ganged up over in one corner, thick as bees and sending up a buzz. One or two were standing up on chairs, trying to see over the heads of the

ones in front, rubbering like a flock of cranes.

The crowd burst apart, and a cop came through. "Now, stand back. Get away from this table, all of you," he was saying. "There's nothing to see. The man's dead—that's all."

He met the two dicks halfway between the crowd and the door. "Over there in the corner," he said unnecessarily. "Indigestion, I guess." He went back with them.

They split the crowd wide open again, this time from the outside. In the middle of it was one of the little white tables, a dead man in a chair, an ambulance doctor, a pair of stretcher-bearers, and the automat manager.

"He gone?" Nelson asked the interne.

"Yep. We got here too late." He came closer so the mob wouldn't overhear. "Better send him down to the morgue and have him looked at. I think he did the Dutch. There's a white streak on his chin, and a half-eaten sandwich under his face spiked with some more of it, whatever it is. That's why I got in touch with you fellows. Good night," he wound up pleasantly and elbowed his way out of the crowd, the two stretcher-bearers tagging after him. The ambulance clanged dolorously outside, swept its fiery headlights around the corner, and whined off.

Nelson said to the cop: "Go over to the door and keep everyone in here, until we get the three others that were sitting at this table with him."

The manager said: "There's a little balcony upstairs. Couldn't he be taken up there, instead of being left down here in full sight like this?"

"Yeah, pretty soon," Nelson agreed, "but not just yet."

He looked down at the table. There were four servings of food on it, one on each side. Two had barely been touched. One had been finished and only the soiled plates remained. One was hidden by the

prone figure sprawled across it, one arm out, the other hanging limply down toward the floor.

"Who was sitting here?" said Nelson, pointing to one of the unconsumed portions. "Kindly step forward and identify yourself." No one made a move. "No one," said Nelson, raising his voice, "gets out of here until we have a chance to question the three people that were at this table with him when it happened."

SOMEONE started to back out of the crowd from behind. The woman who had wanted to go home so badly a minute ago, pointed accusingly. "*He* was—that man there! I remember him distinctly. He bumped into me with his tray just before he sat down."

Sarecky went over, took him by the arm, and brought him forward again. "No one's going to hurt you," Nelson said, at sight of his pale face. "Only don't make it any tougher for yourself than you have to."

"I never even saw the guy before," wailed the man, as if he had already been accused of murder, "I just happened to park my stuff at the first vacant chair I—" Misery liking company, he broke off short and pointed in turn. "*He* was at the table, too! Why doncha hold him, if you're gonna hold me?"

"That's just what we're going to do," said Nelson dryly. "Over here, you," he ordered the new witness. "Now, who was eating spaghetti on his right here? As soon as we find that out, the rest of you can go home."

The crowd looked around indignantly in search of the recalcitrant witness that was the cause of detaining them all. But this time no one was definitely able to single him out. A white-uniformed busman finally edged forward and said to Nelson: "I think he musta got out of the place right after it happened. I looked over at this table a minute before it hap-



pened, and he was already through eating, picking his teeth and just holding down the chair."

"Well, he's not as smart as he thinks he is," said Nelson. "We'll catch up with him, whether he got out or didn't. The rest of you clear out of here now. And don't give fake names and addresses to the cop at the door, or you'll only be making trouble for yourselves."

The place emptied itself like magic, self-preservation being stronger than curiosity in most people. The two table-mates of the dead man, the manager, the staff, and the two dicks remained inside.

AN assistant medical-examiner arrived, followed by two men with the usual basket, and made a brief preliminary investigation. While this was going on, Nelson was questioning the two witnesses, the busman, and the manager. He got an illuminating composite picture.

The man was well known to the staff by sight, and was considered an eccentric. He always came in at the same time each night, just before closing time, and always helped himself to the same snack—coffee and a bologna sandwich. It hadn't varied for six months now. The remnants that the busman removed from where the man sat each time, were always the same. The manager was able to corroborate this. He, the dead man, had raised a kick one night about a week ago, because the bologna-sandwich slots had all been emptied before he came in. The manager had had to remind him that it's first come, first served, at an automat, and you can't reserve your food ahead of time. The man at the change-booth, questioned by Nelson, added to the old fellow's reputation for eccentricity. Other, well-dressed people came in and changed a half-dollar, or at the most a dollar bill. He, in his battered hat and derelict's overcoat, never failed to produce a ten and sometimes even a twenty.

"One of these misers, eh?" said Nelson. "They always end up behind the eight-ball, one way or another."

The old fellow was removed, also the partly consumed sandwich. The assistant examiner let Nelson know: "I think you've got something here, brother. I may be wrong, but that sandwich was loaded with cyanide."

Sarecky, who had gone through the man's clothes, said: "The name was Leo Avram, and here's the address. Incidentally, he had seven hundred dollars, in C's, in his right shoe and three hundred in his left. Want me to go over there and nose around?"

"Suppose I go," Nelson said. "You stay here and clean up."

"My pal," murmured the other dick dryly.

The waxed paper from the sandwich had been left lying under the chair. Nelson picked it up, wrapped it in a paper-napkin, and put it in his pocket. It was only a short walk from the automat to where Avram lived, an outmoded, walk-up building, falling to pieces with neglect.

NELSON went into the hall and there was no such name listed. He thought at first Sarecky had made a mistake, or at least been misled by whatever memorandum it was he had found that purported to give the old fellow's address. He rang the bell marked *Superintendent*, and went down to the basement-entrance to make sure. A stout blond woman in an old sweater and carpet-slippers came out.

"Is there anyone named Avram living in this building?"

"That's my husband—he's the superintendent. He's out right now, I expect him back any minute."

Nelson couldn't understand, himself, why he didn't break it to her then and there. He wanted to get a line, perhaps, on the old man's surroundings while they

still remained normal. "Can I come in and wait a minute?" he said.

"Why not?" she said indifferently.

She led him down a barren, unlit basement-way, stacked with empty ash-cans, into a room green-yellow with a tiny bud of gaslight. Old as the building upstairs was, it had been wired for electricity, Nelson had noted. For that matter, so was this basement down here. There was a cord hanging from the ceiling ending in an empty socket. It had been looped up out of reach. "The old bird sure was a miser," thought Nelson. "Walking around on one grand and living like this!" He couldn't help feeling a little sorry for the woman.

He noted to his further surprise that a pot of coffee was boiling on a one-burner gas stove over in the corner. He wondered if she knew that he treated himself away from home each night. "Any idea where he went?" he asked, sitting down in a creaking rocker.

"He goes two blocks down to the automat for a bite to eat every night at this time," she said.

"How is it," he asked curiously, "he'll go out and spend money like that, when he could have coffee right here where he lives with you?"

A spark of resentment showed in her face, but a defeated resentment that had long turned to resignation. She shrugged. "For himself, nothing's too good. He goes there because the light's better, he says. But for me and the kids, he begrudges every penny."

"You've got kids, have you?"

"They're mine, not his," she said dully.

Nelson had already caught sight of a half-grown girl and a little boy peeping shyly out at him from another room. "Well," he said, getting up, "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but your husband had an accident a little while ago at the automat, Mrs. Avram. He's gone."

The weary stolidity of her face changed

very slowly. But it did change—to fright. "Cyanide—what's that?" she breathed, when he'd told her.

"Did he have any enemies?"

She said with utter simplicity. "Nobody loved him. Nobody hated him that much, either."

"Do you know of any reason he'd have to take his own life?"

"Him? Never! He held on tight to life, just like he did to his money."

There was some truth in that, the dick had to admit. Misers seldom commit suicide.

The little girl edged into the room fearfully, holding her hands behind her. "Is—is he dead, Mom?"

The woman just nodded, dry-eyed.

"Then, can we use this now?" She was holding a fly-blown electric bulb in her hands.

Nelson felt touched, hard-boiled dick though he was. "Come down to headquarters tomorrow, Mrs. Avram. There's some money there you can claim. G'night." He went outside and clanged the basement-gate shut after him. The windows alongside him suddenly bloomed feebly with electricity, and the silhouette of a woman standing up on a chair was outlined against them.

"It's a funny world," thought the dick with a shake of his head, as he trudged up to sidewalk-level.

**I**T WAS now two in the morning. The automat was dark when Nelson returned there, so he went down to headquarters. They were questioning the branch-manager and the unseen counter-man who prepared the sandwiches and filled the slots from the inside.

Nelson's captain said: "They've already telephoned from the chem lab that the sandwich is loaded with cyanide crystals. On the other hand, they give the remainder of the loaf that was used, the left-over bologna from which the sandwich

was prepared, the breadknife, the cutting-board, and the scraps in the garbage-receptacle—all of which we sent over there—a clean bill of health. There was clearly no slip-up or carelessness in the automat-pantry. Which means that cyanide got into that sandwich on the consumer's side of the apparatus. He committed suicide or was deliberately murdered by one of the other customers."

"I was just up there," Nelson said. "It wasn't suicide. People don't worry about keeping their light bills down when they're going to take their own lives."

"Good psychology," the captain nodded. "My experience is that miserliness is simply a perverted form of self-preservation, an exaggerated clinging to life. The choice of method wouldn't be in character, either. Cyanide's expensive, and it wouldn't be sold to a man of Avram's type, just for the asking. It's murder, then. I think it's highly important you men bring in whoever the fourth man at that table was tonight. Do it with the least possible loss of time."

A composite description of him, pieced together from the few scraps that could be obtained from the busman and the other two at the table, was available. He was a heavy-set, dark-complexioned man, wearing a light-tan suit. He had been the first of the four at the table, and already through eating, but had lingered on. Mannerisms—had kept looking back over his shoulder, from time to time, and picking his teeth. He had had a small black satchel, or sample-case, parked at his feet under the table. Both survivors were positive on this point. Both had stubbed their toes against it in sitting down, and both had glanced to the floor to see what it was.

Had he reached down toward it at any time, after their arrival, as if to open it or take anything out of it?

To the best of their united recollections—no.

Had Avram, *after* bringing the sandwich to the table, gotten up again and left it unguarded for a moment?

Again, no. In fact the whole thing had been over with in a flash. He had noisily unwrapped it, taken a huge bite, swallowed without chewing, heaved convulsively once or twice, and fallen prone across the tabletop.

"Then it must have happened right outside the slot—I mean the inserting of the stuff—and not at the table, at all," Sarecky told Nelson privately. "Guess he laid it down for a minute while he was drawing his coffee."

"Absolutely not!" Nelson contradicted. "You're forgetting it was all wrapped up in wax-paper. How could anyone have opened, then closed it again, without attracting his attention? And if we're going to suspect the guy with the satchel—and the cap seems to want us to—he was already *at* the table and all through eating when Avram came over. How could he know ahead of time which table the old guy was going to select?"

"Then how did the stuff get on it? Where did it come from?" the other dick asked helplessly.

"It's little things like that we're paid to find out," Nelson reminded him dryly.

"Pretty large order, isn't it?"

"You talk like a layman. You've been on the squad long enough by now to know how damnably unescapable little habits are, how impossible it is to shake them off, once formed. The public at large thinks detective work is something miraculous like pulling rabbits out of a silk-hat. They don't realize that no adult is a free agent—that they're tied hand and foot by tiny, harmless little habits, and held helpless. This man has a habit of taking a snack to eat at midnight in a public place. He has a habit of picking his teeth after he's through, of lingering on at the table, of looking back over his shoulder aimlessly from time to time.

Combine that with a stocky build, a dark complexion, and you have him! What more d'a want—a spotlight trained on him?"

**I**T WAS Sarecky, himself, in spite of his misgivings, who picked him up forty-eight hours later in another automat, sample-case and all, at nearly the same hour as the first time, and brought him in for questioning! The busman from the former place, and the two customers, called in, identified him unhesitatingly, even if he was now wearing a gray suit.

His name, he said, was Alexander Hill, and he lived at 215 Such-and-such a street.

"What business are you in?" rapped out the captain.

The man's face got livid. His Adam's apple went up and down like an elevator. He could barely articulate the words. "I'm—I'm a salesman for a wholesale drug concern," he gasped terrifiedly.

"Ah!" said two of his three questioners expressively. The sample-case, opened, was found to contain only tooth-powders, aspirins, and headache remedies.

But Nelson, rummaging through it, thought: "Oh, nuts, it's too pat. And he's too scared, too defenseless, to have really done it. Came in here just now without a bit of mental build-up prepared ahead of time. The real culprit would have been all primed, all rehearsed, for just this. Watch him go all to pieces. The innocent ones always do."

The captain's voice rose to a roar. "How is it everyone else stayed in the place that night, but you got out in such a hurry?"

"I—I don't know. It happened so close to me, I guess I—I got nervous."

That wasn't necessarily a sign of guilt, Nelson was thinking. It was his duty to take part in the questioning, so he shot out at him: "You got nervous, eh? What

reason d'you have for getting nervous? How'd you know it wasn't just a heart-attack or malnutrition—unless you were the cause of it?"

He stumbled badly over that one. "No! No! I don't handle that stuff! I don't carry anything like that—"

"So you know what it was? How'd you know? We didn't tell you," Sarecky jumped on him.

"I—I read it in the papers next morning," he wailed.

Well, it had been in all of them, Nelson had to admit.

"You didn't reach out in front of you—toward him—for anything that night? You kept your hands to yourself?" Then, before he could get a word out, "*What about sugar?*"

The suspect went from bad to worse. "I don't use any!" he whimpered.

Sarecky had been just waiting for that. "Don't lie to us!" he yelled, and swung at him. "I watched you for ten full minutes tonight before I went over and tapped your shoulder. You emptied half the container into your cup!" His fist hit him a glancing blow on the side of the jaw, knocked him and the chair he was sitting on both off-balance. Fright was making the guy sew himself up twice as badly as before.

"Aw, we're just barking up the wrong tree," Nelson kept saying to himself. "It's just one of those fluke coincidences. A drug salesman happens to be sitting at the same table where a guy drops from cyanide poisoning!" Still, he knew that more than one guy had been strapped into the chair just on the strength of such a coincidence and nothing more. You couldn't expect a jury not to pounce on it for all it was worth.

The captain took Nelson out of it at this point, somewhat to his relief, took him aside and murmured: "Go over there and give his place a good cleaning while we're holding him here. If you can turn

up any of that stuff hidden around there, that's all we need. He'll break down like a stack of cards." He glanced over at the cowering figure in the chair. "We'll have him before morning," he promised.

"That's what I'm afraid of," thought Nelson, easing out. "And then what'll we have? Exactly nothing." He wasn't the kind of a dick that would have rather had a wrong guy than no guy at all, like some of them. He wanted the right guy—or none at all. The last he saw of the captain, he was stripping off his coat for action, more as a moral threat than a physical one, and the unfortunate victim of circumstances was wailing, "I didn't do it, I didn't do it," like a record with a flaw in it.

HILL was a bachelor and lived in a small, one-room flat on the upper West Side. Nelson let himself in with the man's own key, put on the lights, and went to work. In half an hour, he had investigated the place upside-down. There was not a grain of cyanide to be found, nor anything beyond what had already been revealed in the sample-case. This did not mean, of course, that he couldn't have obtained some either through the firm he worked for, or some of the retail druggists whom he canvassed. Nelson found a list of the latter and took it with him to check over the following day.

Instead of returning directly to headquarters, he detoured on an impulse past the Avram house, and, seeing a light shining in the basement windows, went over and rang the bell.

The little girl came out, her brother behind her. "Mom's not in," she announced.

"She's out with Uncle Nick," the boy supplied.

His sister whirled on him. "She told us not to tell anybody that, didn't she!"

Nelson could hear the instructions as clearly as if he'd been in the room at the time, "If that same man comes around

again, don't you tell him I've gone out with Uncle Nick, now!"

Children are after all very transparent. They told him most of what he wanted to know without realizing they were doing it. "He's not really your uncle, is he?"

A gasp of surprise. "How'd you know that?"

"Your ma gonna marry him?"

They both nodded approvingly. "He's gonna be our new Pop."

"What was the name of your real Pop—the one before the last?"

"Edwards," they chorused proudly.

"What happened to him?"

"He died."

"In Dee-troit," added the little boy.

He only asked them one more question. "Can you tell me his full name?"

"Albert J. Edwards," they recited.

He gave them a friendly push. "All right, kids, go back to bed."

HE went back to headquarters, sent a wire to the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Detroit, on his own hook. They were still questioning Hill down to the bone, meanwhile, but he hadn't caved in yet. "Nothing," Nelson reported. "Only this account-sheet of where he places his orders."

"I'm going to try framing him with a handful of bicarb of soda, or something—pretend we got the goods on him. I'll see if that'll open him up," the captain promised wrathfully. "He's not the push-over I expected. You start in at seven this morning and work your way through this list of retail druggists. Find out if he ever tried to contract them for any of that stuff."

Meanwhile, he had Hill smuggled out the back way to an outlying precinct, to evade the statute governing the length of time a prisoner can be held before arraignment. They didn't have enough of a case against him yet to arraign him, but they weren't going to let him go.

Nelson was even more surprised than the prisoner at what he caught himself doing. As they stood Hill up next to him in the corridor, for a minute, waiting for the Black Maria, he breathed over his shoulder, "Hang on tight, or you're sunk!"

The man acted too far gone even to understand what he was driving at.

Nelson was present the next morning when Mrs. Avram showed up to claim the money, and watched her expression curiously. She had the same air of weary resignation as the night he had broken the news to her. She accepted the money from the captain, signed for it, turned apathetically away, holding it in her hand. The captain, by prearrangement, had pulled another of his little tricks—purposely withheld one of the hundred-dollar bills to see what her reaction would be.

Halfway to the door, she turned in alarm, came hurrying back. "Gentlemen, there must be a mistake! There's—there's a hundred-dollar bill here on top!" She shuffled through the roll hastily. "They're all hundred-dollar bills!" she cried out aghast. "I knew he had a little money in his shoes—he slept with them under his pillow at nights—but I thought maybe, fifty, seventy dollars—"

"There was a thousand in his shoes," said the captain, "and another thousand stitched all along the seams of his overcoat."

She let the money go, caught the edge of the desk he was sitting behind with both hands, and slumped draggingly down it to the floor in a dead faint. They had to hustle in with a pitcher of water to revive her.

Nelson impatiently wondered what the heck was the matter with him, what more he needed to be convinced she hadn't known what she was coming into? And yet, he said to himself, how are you going to tell a real faint from a fake one? They close their eyes and they flop, and which is it?

HE slept three hours, and then he went down and checked at the wholesale-drug concern Hill worked for. The firm did not handle cyanide or any other poisonous substance, and the man had a very good record there. He spent the morning working his way down the list of retail druggists who had placed their orders through Hill, and again got nowhere. At noon he quit, and went back to the automat where it had happened—not to eat but to talk to the manager. He was really working on two cases simultaneously—an official one for his captain and a private one of his own. The captain would have had a fit if he'd known it.

"Will you lemme have that busman of yours, the one we had down at headquarters the other night? I want to take him out of here with me for about half an hour."

"You're the Police Department," the manager smiled acquiescently.

Nelson took him with him in his street-clothes. "You did a pretty good job of identifying Hill, the fourth man at that table," he told him. "Naturally, I don't expect you to remember every face that was in there that night. Especially, with the quick turnover there is in an automat. However, here's what you do. Go down this street here to Number One-twenty-one—you can see it from here. Ring the superintendent's bell. You're looking for an apartment, see? But while you're at it, you take a good look at the woman you'll see, and then come back and tell me if you remember seeing her face in the automat that night or any other night. Don't stare now—just size her up."

It took him a little longer than Nelson had counted on. When he finally rejoined the dick around the corner, where the latter was waiting, he said: "Nope, I've never seen her in our place, that night or any other, to my knowledge. But don't forget—I'm not on the floor every minute of the time. She could have been in and

out often without my spotting her."

"But not," thought Nelson, "without Avram seeing her, if she went anywhere near him at all." She hadn't been there, then. That was practically certain. "What took you so long?" he asked him.

"Funny thing. There was a guy there in the place with her that used to work for us. He remembered me right away."

"Oh, yeah?" The dick drew up short. "Was *he* in there that night?"

"Naw, he quit six months ago. I haven't seen him since."

"What was he, sandwich-maker?"

"No, busman like me. He cleaned up the tables."

Just another coincidence, then. But, Nelson reminded himself, if one coincidence was strong enough to put Hill in jeopardy, why should the other be passed over as harmless? Both cases—his and the captain's—now had their coincidences. It remained to be seen which was just that—a coincidence and nothing more—and which was the McCoy.

He went back to headquarters. No wire had yet come from Detroit in answer to his, but he hadn't expected any this soon—it took time. The captain, bulldog-like, wouldn't let Hill go. They had spirited him away to still a third place, were holding him on some technicality or other that had nothing to do with the Avram case. The bicarbonate of soda trick hadn't worked, the captain told Nelson ruefully.

"Why?" the dick wanted to know. "Because he caught on just by looking at it that it wasn't cyanide—is that it? I think that's an important point, right there."

"No, he thought it was the stuff all right. But he hollered blue murder it hadn't come out of his room."

"Then if he doesn't know the difference between cyanide and bicarb of soda at sight, doesn't that prove he didn't put any on that sandwich?"

The captain gave him a look. "Are you for us or against us?" he wanted to know

acidly. "You go ahead checking that list of retail druggists until you find out where he got it. And if we can't dig up any other motive, unhealthy scientific curiosity will satisfy me. He wanted to study the effects at first hand, and picked the first stranger who came along."

"Sure, in an automat—the most conspicuous, crowded public eating-place there is. The one place where human handling of the food is reduced to a minimum."

He deliberately disobeyed orders, a thing he had never done before—or rather, postponed carrying them out. He went back and commenced a one-man watch over the basement-entrance of the Avram house.

IN about an hour, a squat, foreign-looking man came up the steps and walked down the street. This was undoubtedly "Uncle Nick," Mrs. Avram's husband-to-be, and former employee of the automat. Nelson tailed him effortlessly on the opposite side, boarded the same bus he did but a block below, and got off at the same stop. "Uncle Nick" went into a bank, and Nelson into a cigar-store across the way that had transparent telephone-booths commanding the street through the glass front.

When he came out again, Nelson didn't bother following him any more. Instead, he went into the bank himself. "What'd that guy do—open an account just now? Lemme see the deposit-slip."

He had deposited a thousand dollars cash under the name of Nicholas Krasin, half of the sum Mrs. Avram had claimed at headquarters only the day before. Nelson didn't have to be told that this by no means indicated Krassin and she had had anything to do with the old man's death. The money was rightfully hers as his widow, and, if she wanted to divide it with her groom-to-be, that was no criminal offense. Still, wasn't there a

stronger motive here than the "unhealthy scientific curiosity" the captain had pinned on Hill? The fact remained that she wouldn't have had possession of the money had Avram still been alive. It would have still been in his shoes and coat-seams where she couldn't get at it.

Nelson checked Krassin at the address he had given at the bank, and, somewhat to his surprise, found it to be on the level, not fictitious. Either the two of them weren't very bright, or they were innocent. He went back to headquarters at six, and the answer to his telegram to Detroit had finally come. "Exhumation order obtained as per request stop Albert J. Edwards deceased January 1936 stop death certificate gives cause fall from steel girder while at work building under construction stop—autopsy—"

Nelson read it to the end, folded it, put it in his pocket without changing his expression.

"Well, did you find out anything?" the captain wanted to know.

"No, but I'm on the way to," Nelson assured him, but he may have been thinking of that other case of his own, and not the one they were all steamed up over. He went out again without saying where.

He got to Mrs. Avram's at quarter to seven, and rang the bell. The little girl came out to the basement-entrance. At sight of him, she called out shrilly, but without humorous intent, "Ma, that man's here again."

Nelson smiled a little and walked back to the living-quarters. A sudden hush had fallen thick enough to cut with a knife. Krassin was there again, in his shirt-sleeves, having supper with Mrs. Avram and the two kids. They not only had electricity now but a midget radio as well, he noticed. You can't arrest people for buying a midget radio. It was silent as a tomb, but he let the back of his hand brush it, surreptitiously, and the front of the dial was still warm from recent use.

"I'm not butting in, am I?" he greeted them cheerfully.

"N-no, sit down," said Mrs. Avram nervously. "This is Mr. Krassin, a friend of the family. I don't know your name—" "Nelson."

Krassin just looked at him watchfully.

The dick said: "Sorry to trouble you. I just wanted to ask you a couple questions about your husband. About what time was it he had the accident?"

"You know that better than I," she objected. "You were the one came here and told me."

"I don't mean Avram, I mean Edwards, in Detroit—the riveter that fell off the girder."

Her face went a little gray, as if the memory were painful. Krassin's face didn't change color, but only showed considerable surprise.

"About what time of day?" he repeated.

"Noon," she said almost inaudibly.

"Lunch-time," said the dick softly, as if to himself. "Most workmen carry their lunch from home in a pail—" He looked at her thoughtfully. Then he changed the subject, wrinkled up his nose appreciatively. "That coffee smells good," he remarked.

She gave him a peculiar, strained smile. "Have a cup, Mr. Detective," she offered. He saw her eyes meet Krassin's briefly.

"Thanks, don't mind if I do," drawled Nelson.

SHE got up. Then, on her way to the stove, she suddenly flared out at the two kids for no apparent reason: "What are you hanging around here for? Go in to bed. Get out of here now, I say!" She banged the door shut on them, stood before it with her back to the room for a minute. Nelson's sharp ears caught the faint but unmistakable click of a key.

She turned back again, purred to Krassin: "Nick, go outside and take a look at the furnace, will you, while I'm pouring



Mr. Nelson's coffee? If the heat dies down, they'll all start complaining from upstairs right away. Give it a good shaking up."

The hairs at the back of Nelson's neck stood up a little as he watched the man get up and sidle out. But he'd asked for the cup of coffee, himself.

He couldn't see her pouring it—her back was turned toward him again as she stood over the stove. But he could hear the splash of the hot liquid, see her elbow-motions, hear the clink of the pot as she replaced it. She stayed that way a moment longer, after it had been poured, with her back to him—less than a moment, barely thirty seconds. One elbow moved slightly. Nelson's eyes were narrow slits. It was thirty seconds too long, one elbow-motion too many.

She turned, came back, set the cup down before him. "I'll let you put your own sugar in, yes?" she said almost playfully. "Some like a lot, some like a little." There was a disappearing ring of froth in the middle of the black steaming liquid.

Outside somewhere, he could hear Krassin raking up the furnace.

"Drink it while it's hot," she urged.

He lifted it slowly to his lips. As the cup went up, her eyelids went down. Not all the way, not enough to completely shut out sight, though.

He blew the steam away. "Too hot—burn my mouth. Gotta give it a minute to cool," he said. "How about you—ain't you having any? I couldn't drink alone. Ain't polite."

"I had mine," she breathed heavily, opening her eyes again. "I don't think there's any left."

"Then I'll give you half of this."

Her hospitable alarm was almost overdone. She all but jumped back in protest. "No, no! Wait, I'll look. Yes, there's more, there's plenty!"

He could have had an accident with it while her back was turned a second time,

upset it over the floor. Instead, he took a kitchen-match out of his pocket, broke the head off short with his thumbnail. He threw the head, not the stick, over on top of the warm stove in front of which she was standing. It fell to one side of her, without making any noise, and she didn't notice it. If he'd thrown stick and all, it would have clicked as it dropped and attracted her attention.

She came back and sat down opposite him. Krassin's footsteps could be heard shuffling back toward them along the cement corridor outside.

"Go ahead. Don't be bashful—drink up," she encouraged. There was something ghastly about her smile, like a death's-head grinning across the table from him.

The match-head on the stove, heated to the point of combustion, suddenly flared up with a little spitting sound and a momentary gleam. She jumped a little, and her head turned nervously to see what it was. When she looked back again, he already had his cup to his lips. She raised hers, too, watching him over the rim of it. Krassin's footfalls had stopped somewhere just outside the room door, and there wasn't another sound from him, as if he were standing there, waiting.

AT THE table, the cat-and-mouse play went on a moment longer. Nelson started swallowing with a dry constriction of the throat. The woman's eyes, watching him above her cup, were greedy half-moons of delight. Suddenly, her head and shoulders went down across the table with a bang, like her husband's had at the automat that other night, and the crash of the crushed cup sounded from underneath her.

Nelson jumped up watchfully, throwing his chair over. The door shot open, and Krassin came in, with an ax in one hand and an empty burlap-bag in the other.

"I'm not quite ready for cremation yet,"

the dick gritted, and threw himself at him.

Krassin dropped the superfluous burlap-bag, the ax flashed up overhead. Nelson dipped his knees, down in under it before it could fall. He caught the shaft with one hand, midway between the blade and Krassin's grip, and held the weapon teetering in mid-air. With his other fist he started imitating a hydraulic drill against his assailant's teeth. Then he lowered his barrage suddenly to solar-plexus level, sent in two bodyblows that caved his opponent in—and that about finished it.

OUT in the wilds of Corona, an hour later, in a sub-basement locker-room, Alexander Hill—or at least what was left of him—was saying: "And you'll lemme sleep if I do? And you'll get it over real quick, send me up and put me out of my misery?"

"Yeah, yeah!" said the haggard captain, flicking ink out of a fountain pen and jabbing it at him. "Why dincha do this days ago, make it easier for us all?"

"Never saw such a guy," complained Sarecky, rinsing his mouth with water over in a corner.

"What's that man signing?" exploded Nelson's voice from the stairs.

"Whaddye think he's signing?" snarled the captain. "And where you been all night, incidentally?"

"Getting poisoned by the same party that croaked Avram!" He came the rest of the way down, and Krassin walked down alongside at the end of a short steel link.

"Who's this guy?" they both wanted to know.

Nelson looked at the first prisoner, in the chair. "Take him out of here a few minutes, can't you?" he requested. "He don't have to know all our business."

"Just like in the story-books," muttered Sarecky jealously. "One-Man Nelson walks in at the last minute and cops all the glory."

A cop led Hill upstairs. Another cop brought down a small brown-paper parcel at Nelson's request. Opened, it revealed a small tin that had once contained cocoa. Nelson turned it upside down and a few threads of whitish substance spilled lethargically out, filling the close air of the room with a faint odor of bitter almonds.

"There's your cyanide," he said. "It came off the shelf above Mrs. Avram's kitchen-stove. Her kids, who are being taken care of at headquarters until I can get back there, will tell you it's roach-powder and they were warned never to go near it. She probably got it in Detroit, way back last year."

"She did it?" said the captain. "How could she? It was on the automat-sandwich, not anything he ate at home. *She* wasn't at the automat that night, she was home, you told us that yourself."

"Yeah, she was home, but she poisoned him at the automat just the same. Look, it goes like this." He unlocked his manacle, refastened his prisoner temporarily to a plumbing-pipe in the corner. He took a paper-napkin out of his pocket, and, from within that, the carefully preserved wax-paper wrapper the death-sandwich had been done in.

Nelson said: "This has been folded over twice, once on one side, once on the other. You can see that, yourself. Every crease in it is double-barreled. Meaning what? The sandwich was taken out, doctored, and rewrapped. Only, in her hurry, Mrs. Avram slipped up and put the paper back the other way around.

"As I told Sarecky already, there's death in little habits. Avram was a miser. Bologna is the cheapest sandwich that automat sells. For six months straight, he never bought any other kind. This guy here used to work there. He knew at what time the slots were refilled for the last time. He knew that that was just when Avram always showed up. And, incidentally the old man was no fool. He

didn't go there because the light was better—he went there to keep from getting poisoned at home. Ate all his meals out.

"All right, so what did they do? They got him, anyway—like this. Krassin, here, went in, bought a bologna sandwich, and took it home to her. She spiked it, re-wrapped it, and, at eleven-thirty, he took it back there in his pocket. The sandwich-slots had just been refilled for the last time. They wouldn't put any more in till next morning. There are three bologna-slots. He emptied all three, to make sure the victim wouldn't get any but the lethal sandwich. After they're taken out, the glass slides remain ajar. You can lift them and reach in without inserting a coin. He put his death-sandwich in, stayed by it so no one else would get it. The old man came in. Maybe he's near sighted and didn't recognize Krassin. Maybe he didn't know him at all—I haven't cleared that point up yet. Krassin eased out of the place. The old man is a miser. He sees he can get a sandwich for nothing, thinks something went wrong with the mechanism, maybe. He grabs it up twice as quick as anyone else would have. There you are.

"What was in his shoes is this guy's motive. As for her, that was only partly her motive. She was a congenital killer, anyway, outside of that. He would have married her, and it would have happened to him in his turn some day. She got rid

of her first husband, Edwards, in Detroit that way. She got a wonderful break. He ate the poisoned lunch she'd given him way up on the crossbeams of a building under construction, and it looked like he'd lost his balance and toppled to his death. They exhumed the body and performed an autopsy at my request. This telegram says they found traces of cyanide poisoning even after all this time.

"I paid out rope to her tonight, let her know I was onto her. I told her her coffee smelled good. Then I switched cups on her. She's up there now, dead. I can't say that I wanted it that way, but it was me or her. You never would have gotten her to the chair, anyway. She was unbalanced of course, but not the kind that's easily recognizable. She'd have spent a year in an institution, been released, and gone out and done it all over again. It grows on 'em, gives 'em a feeling of power over their fellow human beings.

"This louse, however, is *not* insane. He did it for exactly one thousand dollars and no cents—and he knew what he was doing from first to last. So I think he's entitled to a chicken-and-ice-cream-dinner in the death-house, at the state's expense."

"The Sphinx," growled Sarecky under his breath, shrugging into his coat. "Sees all, knows all, keeps all to himself."

"Who stinks?" corrected the captain, misunderstanding. "If anyone does, it's you and me. He brought home the bacon!"

So much more  
**FLAVOR**  
 - WHEN YOU  
 SAY - **PABST**

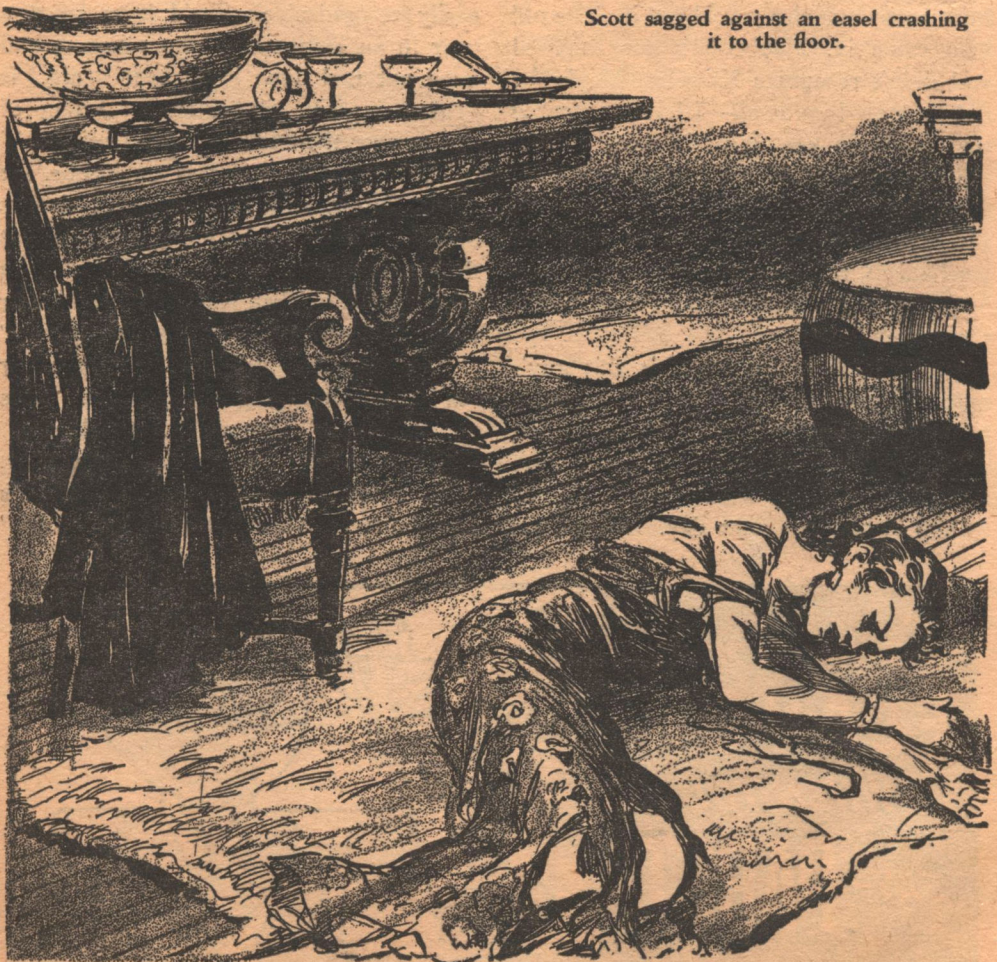
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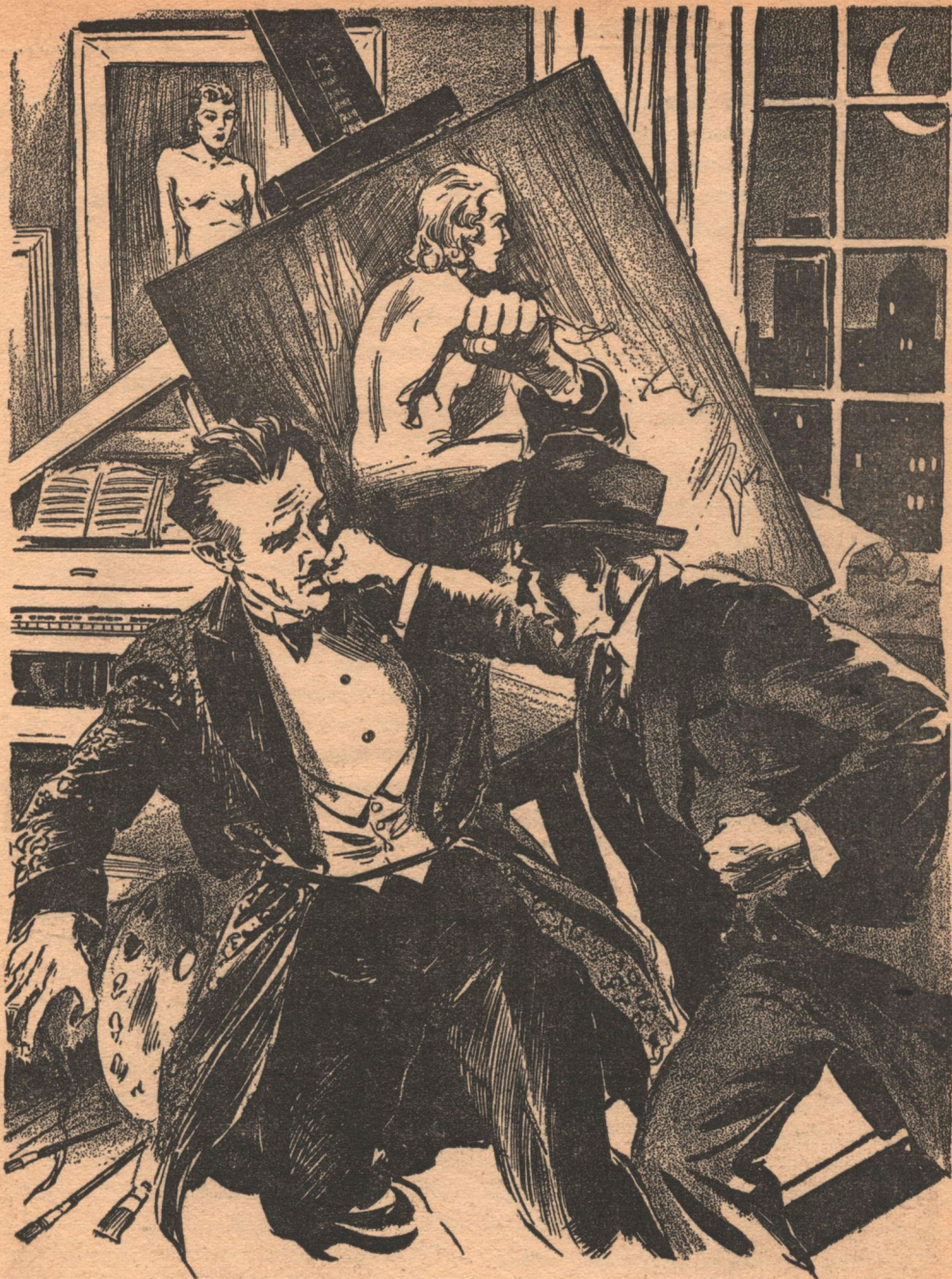
# THE RIDDLE OF THE VELVET LADIES

by  
**Beulah Poynter**

*Three of them there were at that murder soirée given by the sadistic Doctor Alaric Scott—three black-velvet ladies—any of whom had more than enough reason to murder their host. Which of the trio had plunged that stiletto between his shoulder blades? How could Rod Bannerman of the Globe prove it was not his own fancée who had succumbed to a sudden blood-lust and made herself a candidate for the chair?*

Scott sagged against an easel crashing it to the floor.





## CHAPTER ONE

### Doctor's Dilemma

**T**HE nurse at the desk said: "Doctor Aldrich is busy. Will you wait?"

Rod Bannerman nodded. He dropped his soft hat on a table, drew out a copy

of the *Evening Globe* from his overcoat pocket and sat down on the bench opposite the door.

The Mainwaring murder still occupied front-page space. Bannerman read the testimony given at the trial of Ann Mainwaring with as much interest as if he hadn't written the article himself.

It was very quiet in the office. Only

the low mumble of voices beyond the closed door broke the absolute silence. The white-uniformed nurse with her head bent over a magazine might have been carved out of stone for all the signs of life she possessed.

At last the door opened, and a man slid noiselessly across the threshold. The young reporter gave him a casual glance as the door closed after him, then a sharper, more appraising look as he crossed to the street exit. A hat pulled far down over his forehead and the collar of a heavy black overcoat concealed the better portion of his face, but the contour of his pale cheeks and chiseled nose, the wisp of black mustache over blood-red lips and close-set ears, were enough for Rod to establish his identity.

"You wished to see me?"

Bannerman turned to face the physician for whom he had been waiting. The psychiatrist had an overpowering personality that instantly banished the fleeting impression made by the dapper person who had just made his exit.

"Yes, I do, if you can give me a few minutes."

Hard steel-blue eyes inspected the newsman, then the psychiatrist stepped aside to permit entrance into his sanctum.

**I**T WAS an austere room with no visible medical equipment, with nothing decorative either in furnishings, drapes or pictures. A desk, two chairs and a denim-covered couch comprised all it held.

The physician indicated a chair beside the window and lowered his own massive figure into a swivel seat at the desk. His penetrating eyes narrowed in such concentration that Rod felt his ruddy skin crimson.

"Well?" said the big man.

Rod laughed with a slight cough and ran a hand through his tawny hair. "I'm not a patient, Doctor. I'm here on another mission. In fact, I want a story

from you. Bannerman's my name. I'm a special writer on the *Globe*."

Doctor Aldrich moved his black head in a definite negative. "I've no stories to tell," he said quietly.

"Sure you have." The reporter shifted his chair closer to the desk. He extracted a cigarette from a case he took from his pocket, extended the case to the physician. The latter accepted the cigarette with a murmured, "Thanks," but did not unbend. On the desk beside him was an ashtray. There were several stubs in it, only partially burned, and each was engraved with the initials, *A. S.*

The psychiatrist followed Rod's glance, smiled and tossed the contents of the tray into a wastepaper basket under the desk.

"Thought I recognized him," Rod said. "Doctor Alaric Scott, wasn't it?"

"The man who just left here? Yes. Do you know him?"

"I've met him. His nephew is a friend of mine."

"He was consulting me about one of his patients."

Rod grinned. "Yeah? He's such a queer bird himself I thought maybe he was consulting you as your patient."

Aldrich did not reply. He struck a match and lighted his cigarette.

"Here's what I want," Rod said abruptly. "You were treating James Mainwaring about the time he was murdered, weren't you?"

Not a muscle moved in the other man's face.

"It occurred to me that if I could get the lowdown on the situation from you I'd have a big scoop for my paper and give you a little publicity at the same time."

"Publicity is the last thing I desire," was the terse reply.

"But the man's dead and his wife is on trial for his murder. She confessed she killed him and no one can find any motive for her act—"

"The case is in the hands of the law," reminded the psychiatrist. "I'm sorry, I've nothing to say to the papers."

"Not if you knew Ann Mainwaring to be innocent?"

"I never met Mrs. Mainwaring so I don't know if she is innocent or guilty."

"But her husband must have—"

"Her husband said nothing to me that would indicate he expected his wife to kill him."

"Just like that?" Rod muttered, chagrined.

"Just like that."

"But you were Mainwaring's physician?"

Aldrich laughed. "I'm not denying that. I believe the papers have printed that fact already."

"Clam, eh?"

"Clam, yes."

Rod rose. "Sorry you won't talk. It'd be a good story if you would." He hitched his topcoat on his broad shoulders. "Maybe I'll get a story out of seeing Doctor Scott in your office."

The psychiatrist's thin lips tightened. "I wouldn't try it if I were you."

"Why not? From what I know of Alaric Scott he's not averse to publicity."

"He is to scandal. Your paper might be sued for libel. Doctor Scott is eminent in his profession."

"Is he? Seems too la-di-dah for the real thing, to me." He chuckled. "Well, sorry to have taken up your time, Doctor. But if ever you do feel inclined to talk, give me a break, will you?" He offered his hand. The other's strong fist closed over it.

ON THE street Rod shrugged off his disgust at failure, and walked briskly to the hotel where he was to meet Jessamine Ladd for luncheon.

She was waiting for him in the lobby and her black brows were drawn together in a scowl that portended trouble.

She did not smile at his, "Meet the late Mr. Bannerman!"

"It's ceased to be funny," she said sharply, shaking off his hand. "You'll stand me up just once too often—"

"Ah, now lover, I'm a newspaperman." Ignoring the rigid manner in which she held her arm close to her side he slipped his hand under her elbow and led her toward the grill.

"Some day you'll show up and I won't be there," she continued. "How I ever imagined I could marry a newshound and expect happiness—"

"When we're married you'll have all the opportunity in the world to teach me what time means."

She wrinkled her nose at him. "Well, anyway, if I ever fall out of love with you I'm going to fall in with someone as far removed from the newspaper game as New Orleans is from the North Pole."

Rod chose a table and with elaborate care drew out a chair for her. "Guess where I've been."

"I wouldn't put that much stress on my brain. Probably the morgue."

"Wrong. I paid a visit to a prominent psychiatrist and had the supreme pleasure of watching your Doctor Scott sneak out of his office."

"Why *my* Doctor Scott? I'm no patient of his."

"No, but you are one of his ardent admirers."

To his surprise she flushed. She took a sip from her glass of water and turned frank, hazel eyes to his. "I do admire him. There's nothing one-sided about him. I've always admired anyone with the ability to do many things well."

"Serious as that?" he asked, trying to speak lightly.

"Not serious at all, but your stupid dislike for a man you don't know at all is just . . . just childish. Doctor Scott cured Mother, and if for no other reason I'd be fond of him."

"There wasn't anything the matter with your mother but hysteria."

"Well, he cured her of thinking she was sick, and that's the same thing. Honestly I think you're jealous of him."

"Hah!" scornfully. He studied the menu. "Because he can paint daubs of purple nudes and play bum sonatas on the piano! Don't make me sick!"

"Not jealous of him because of me?"

"When I'm jealous of you and a stuffed shirt with a straight nose and a misplaced eyebrow I'll be off women for life."

She laughed and patted his hand. "Watch out or the little green devils will get you yet. Did you speak to him this morning?"

"If you'd seen the way he slunk out of that office you'd know I didn't."

"Don't be ridiculous! Why should he slink out? Why shouldn't he consult a psychiatrist about a case? Physicians often do."

"No reason he shouldn't, only I'll bet my last dollar that wasn't why he was there. I've a feeling there'll be a pretty scandal blow up about that bozo some day. He's clever, yeah, and he's got a lot of patients who think he's the salt of the earth, but to me he oozes slime. Now you have it."

Her color deepened until even her forehead, shadowed by a fringe of ebony hair, was suffused. "Then it's no use inviting you to his *soirée* tonight," she said, dangerously quiet.

"*Soirée*? Scott's?"

"Yes. He's taken a studio in the Kent Building on Fifty-eight Street and is giving a housewarming. I'm invited, with escort. You, if you'll come."

"What's his idea?"

"None that I know of. Even a physician can entertain, can't he? Doctor Scott is a patron of the arts and one is sure to meet interesting people at any of his parties. I'm going whether you do or not."

"I see." He beckoned to the waiter. "More ways than one to kill a cat."

"Meaning what?"

"Professional ethics forbid advertising, don't they? Probably the small select East Side Hospital isn't paying large enough dividends to please the medical Adonis. *Soirées* would insure social publicity and more patients."

"You're being horrid," she snapped.

"Not a bit of it. Personally, I don't see why a doctor can't insert an ad in the newspapers and still keep his rating, but I do object to Scott's roundabout methods of getting publicity without paying for it."

"This party isn't for publicity."

"Don't forget Scott's nephew and I went to the same college, and while I don't see Mort Scott once in a blue Sunday, I've learned this much from him, that his uncle never invites the same people twice to his shindigs, and that by hook or crook there is always a reporter of sorts among his guests."

"I don't think much of Mort if he lives off his uncle and talks behind his back."

"All Mort gets from Alaric Scott he works for and don't you forget it. Probably turns his stomach to answer a thousand or so mushy love letters a week and—"

"Oh, for crying in public! Let's not talk any more about Doctor Scott. You don't need to worry about going to the party with me. I can find someone who'd be glad to accompany me. . . . Mixed grille," to the waiter, "and black coffee."

THE afternoon session of the Mainwaring trial was in full swing when Rod entered the courtroom. Another man from the *Globe* was covering the case but Rod, with a fresh spurt of interest in the small faded blonde facing a charge of murder, stationed himself near the entrance and swept his eyes over the spectators.



Ann Mainwaring, sallow, small-boned and vacant-eyed, seemed the least interested of anyone in the courtroom. Apparently she was not even concerned in the fact that an alienist was testifying that he believed her to be unsound emotionally.

"She's nutty," Rod mused. "Doesn't take a brain specialist to see that. Maybe she confessed to a crime she never committed."

The avid morbidity of the vast assemblage sickened him. Good show to them, nothing else. The fact that a prominent banker had met his death at the slim frail hands of a woman who had shared his life for twenty years was of less importance to the curiosity-seekers than the thrill they experienced in watching the victim of the law squirm under the lash of the prosecuting attorney.

Squirm!

The word recalled something Mort Scott had said once, and at the same time, Mort's uncle. It was as though Rod's mind, focusing upon the neurologist, impressed upon his consciousness the latter's presence in the courtroom.

Not a little surprised, the reporter stared at Doctor Scott, who sat in the rear of the room in such a tension of attention as to indicate an almost personal interest in the proceedings. And on his blood-red lips was a peculiar smile that sent a shudder of revulsion through Rod, who had been schooled in spectacles of crime and punishment.

With his hat in his lap, the lustrous waves of the neurologist's thick black hair threaded with silver were particularly noticeable in contrast to the two bald-headed men sitting on either side of him, and the cameo-regularity of his features was more pronounced in juxtaposition with their bulbous noses and fleshy chins.

"What's he doing here?" Rod thought, as he had thought earlier in the day at the psychiatrist's. "With his love of money he wouldn't be in a courtroom

during office hours without a good reason. Something screwy somewhere. Not a witness—I wonder—"

The doctor turned, and his long narrowed eyes, slate-gray with flecks of yellow, looked full into the reporter's without recognition, but Rod knew that he recognized him.

Court adjourned with the alienist's testimony. Rod lingered long enough to compel the neurologist to pass him and was witness to a little scene that intrigued and baffled him. As Scott moved briskly up the aisle to the door a man, probably thirty years of age, his full face mottled with angry blood, blocked his exit.

"Why the hell don't you tell them she's crazy and have done with this scavenging?" he demanded fiercely grasping the physician's arm.

Scott stared at his interrogator with stony face.

"You know she is," the other threatened. "An old woman who goes off her nut about a snide doctor half her age is crazy—"

Scott brushed the man's hand from his arm as one would flip aside an insect, laughed shortly and drawled in an irritating fashion: "That's a matter of opinion, my dear sir, and I've no conception of what you are talking about."

A sudden decision sent the reporter to the telephone to inform his sweetheart that he would accompany her to Scott's party that night.

The little radio that was his brain had somehow tuned into a station that sent a shrill disturbing message to the reporter. There was Doctor Scott's visit to the psychiatrist that just didn't click. His morbid interest in the woman on trial for her life, an interest that smacked of unholy pleasure. The man who had accosted the physician. . . .

The incidents all linked together made—what?

Jessamine's wire did not respond.

**B**ANNERMAN hadn't seen Mort Scott in months. But because of his sudden interest in Mort's uncle Rod subways uptown to the private sanatorium that bore Alaric Scott's name. A small enclosed garden surrounded the building. The entrance hall bore little resemblance to an institution. The young woman who greeted him in the doorway wore no uniform and was particularly attractive in a tawny opulent way.

"Is Mort Scott busy?" Rod asked.

"He's upstairs," the attendant answered. "Who shall I say wants to see him?"

"Rod Bannerman."

"Go in there, please. I'll call him."

"In there" was a library that would have done credit to a private dwelling. The girl moved to the stairway off the hall. As she did so the outer door opened and Alaric Scott came in. Through the open doorway Rod saw him. The girl paused. Scott walked to her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

Leaning forward Rod saw the slim sallow hand of the neurologist slide from the girl's shoulder down to the tense muscles of her rounded arm. She winced perceptibly and Scott laughed.

Rod's sudden involuntary movement attracted the doctor's attention. His hand dropped to his side. He said something to the girl and passed out of sight down the hall.

"I'm damned," Rod muttered. "What was he up to?"

A few minutes later Mort Scott joined him. He was a slim blond man with spots of crimson on his lean cheeks.

"Hello old man," Rod said. "Haven't seen you in ages. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Playing watchdog to the uncle. But I'm leaving today. If you hear of a man's size job let me know, will you?"

"Surprised you stuck it as long as you did."

"Well, there's only two of us in the family and I'm supposed to be his heir. Then jobs don't grow on trees. I want to get married you know. To Leila Webb. But—there's some things a fellow can't stomach. God! No Roman emperor had anything on him when it comes to turning the screws on a guy."

Rod's gaze followed Mort's. On his right wrist just below the cuff was an ugly bruise. Mort colored violently and pulled the cuff down.

Rod said dryly: "You too?"

"Don't get you?"

"You spoke of Roman emperors. I just witnessed a little scene that reminded me some jaded tastes get a fillip of pleasure out of torture."

"Meaning?"

"That possibly one of the reasons you are quitting Doctor Scott isn't altogether psychic."

Mort's face became livid. "If he ever—" He paused. "I was on my way out when Miss Travers told me you were here. Mind if I get my bag and we'll leave together."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Murder Soirée

**A**T NINE o'clock Rod called Jessamine's number, hoping that she had not gone to the *soirée* without him, but he received no answer. He tried to push aside a mounting uneasiness.

At midnight he phoned again. Still no answer. He put on his coat and hat and went out. "Maybe she won't thank me for calling for her, but I won't rest easy until I know she's at home and in bed," he said to himself.

The lobby of the Kent Studios was in semi-darkness when he entered. The elevator was stationary and its operator slept noisily on a red velvet bench.

"Hey, bud," Rod aroused him. "What's

the number of Doctor Alaric Scott's apartment?"

The boy sat up, rubbed his eyes and mumbled: "Three J—third-floor rear."

"Party over?"

"Think so."

"Suppose you ring up and say Mr. Bannerman is calling."

The boy stretched and moved to a switchboard behind the elevator. "I don't think anyone's up there. I brought a raft of folks down a little while ago."

"What time was that?"

"'Bout twelve I guess."

"Call Scott's apartment anyway."

The boy plugged the number. He said over his shoulder: "No answer. I guess Doctor Scott's gone out too."

"Take him down with the crowd?"

"No. But he might have walked."

"Thanks."

The operator stepped into the elevator. Rod shook his head. On an impulse he ran up the stairs. On the third floor he peered at several doors until he found 3J. The certainty that if Scott were in his apartment and had not answered the bell it was because of some sinister reason caused Rod to turn the knob. The door opened and he walked noiselessly into a brilliantly lighted room, still redolent of tobacco smoke, French perfume and wine.

There was no one in the room, but it bore every evidence of recent occupancy and gaiety. Between windows that extended to the floor and were heavily curtained with lustrous yellow damask, was a long refectory table, on which were a cut glass bowl, innumerable cups and empty champagne bottles. On a cabinet of carved oak were more glasses and ash trays filled with cigar and cigarette stubs.

Rod gave a fleeting glance at the white-and-gold piano, the hanging Gobelin tapestries and the oil paintings, all nudes, that occupied all the wall space, and strode further into the room. Facing him were double doors, slightly open. He

pushed one on his right and paused with his foot on the threshold. His horrified gaze focused upon the struggling bodies of a man and woman beside the window. Their struggle was noiseless but for the labored breathing of the black-haired man whose taut muscles strained the seams of his flowered silk dressing-gown, and the scuffle of their feet upon the polished floor.

Neither was aware of Rod's presence for the few seconds he stood there incapable of action. The girl's frail hands pulled futilely at the hard sinewy fingers pressing into her white throat, and though her eyes were closed she was putting up a brave fight against her attacker, who seemed to be toying with her, releasing her just before strangulation, then choking her again. Suddenly her head snapped back and over her limp body the man's glassy bloodshot eyes met the reporter's.

Rod leaped. He tore the murderous fingers from the girl's throat and with every ounce of strength he possessed pushed the madman from the girl as she slumped to the floor.

"Why you lousey—"

Scott sagged against an easel, sending it crashing to the floor. A choking rasping sob escaped him, and he rubbed away a froth of foam from his quivering mouth.

**R**OD bent over the girl. He did not know her. She was small and dark-haired and pretty. Her gown was in shreds. On her white flesh were deep indentations, rapidly turning purple. A trickle of blood showed on her chin from a bitten lip. He lifted her in his arms, jerked up an evening cloak of black velvet which lay in a chair and flung it around her.

"It's all right, sister. Come on I'll take you out of here."

She shuddered violently, but protested she could walk.

He put her on her feet and started for

the double doors. Before he could reach them Scott lunged forward and grasped his arm. "Wait," he hiccoughed. "Don't go! Let me explain."

"Don't bother!" Rod retorted.

"I—I lost my head. She—she tempted me beyond—"

"You beast!" sobbed the girl.

"Take your hand off me," Rod commanded, pushing the girl through the doors.

The talon fingers cut deeper, until Rod winced with the pain. A shiver of revulsion gave him strength. He swung about and struck at the livid face so close to his, and sent the man tottering across the room, where he cowered, his face in his hands.

Almost carrying her, Rod led the girl through the other room and into the corridor.

"Not the elevator," she said. "I'll go down the stairs."

"Can you make it?"

"Yes. I'm all right now. If you hadn't come—" She began to sob again.

Rod patted her shoulder. "But I did. How come you were alone with him?"

"He said Mort would be there and asked me to wait for him."

"Mort? You mean his nephew?"

"Yes. I'm engaged to him."

"But Mort and the doc quarreled. Didn't you know that?"

"Yes. But Doctor Scott telephoned me the quarrel had been made up and begged me to come to the party. He asked me as a special favor to come because of Mort. I'm sure he was lying. He couldn't have done what he did if he—expected Mort."

They reached the first landing. She said: "I'll go on alone if you don't mind."

"No, I'll put you in a taxi."

The elevator was above when they reached the first floor. They went into the street and Rod summoned a cab, bade her good-night.

God! He'd like to take another crack

at the strangling devil! Why, that girl could have been Jessamine! Any girl! So the eminent Doctor Scott was a sadist! A strangling madman! No wonder he'd visited Aldrich! Did Mort know the truth? What would he do when Leila Webb told him what had happened?

Scott couldn't get away with this! He'd have him locked up if it was the last thing he did. He'd insist that he give himself up—now! Rod swung on his heels, reentered the building and climbed the stairs to the third floor again. In the corridor he heard footsteps on the stairs. Glancing quickly he saw the flutter of a dark garment as its owner descended another flight. A woman's hurrying steps and a wisp of black velvet! He knocked on the door. When there was no answer he admitted himself as before. "I'm back, Scott. Let's hear what you've got to say for yourself," he called.

Complete silence. A curtain fluttered from an open window. Its hem touched the inert figure on the floor beneath it. Alaric Scott lay with arms outflung, his face pressed into the Aubuson rug that was splattered with the crimson blood which still flowed from a wound between his shoulder blades. A carved stiletto protruded from the wound.

Rod recoiled in horror. Mastering his nausea he knelt and listened to Scott's heart, felt his pulse. Dead, unquestionably.

He looked at the moving curtain, went over to the window and peered down into the black cavern of a court. Across from it the brick wall was broken by another window in complete darkness. A person standing at that window could have witnessed the scene he had interrupted. Or had someone been lurking on the fire-escape and taken justice upon himself after Rod had left? Sweat trickled down his forehead and his collar choked him. Less than ten minutes had elapsed since he had taken Leila Webb to a taxi. And

in that ten minutes Alaric Scott had met a violent death! Had Mort arrived after all?"

ROD jerked the receiver from the telephone, called his paper, then dialed the police. After that he looked about the apartment for some clue that would lead to the identity of the murderer, but found nothing. He went into the corridor and started for the elevator. A button lying there on the tiling arrested him. It lay a few inches from the studio door. A broken strand of thread clung to it and a bit of frayed wool. It might mean a great deal or nothing. He picked it up and put it in his pocket, then rang the elevator bell.

It wasn't until the sleepy young operator faced him that he remembered the woman he had seen hurrying down the stairs; and the flutter of black velvet that had floated behind her. Jessamine owned a black velvet evening gown.

"Going down?" the elevator boy asked.

"No. But I want you to wake up and listen to me."

"I'm awake now," the other retorted.

"All right. Think hard. What time was it when you took the last of Doctor Scott's guests down in the elevator?"

"What difference does it make?"

"A hell of a difference and no back talk." Rod jerked him from the car and held him upright by the collar. "In about ten minutes this place will be swarming with dicks and you'll have plenty of questions to answer. So start now."

"Hey, you—" stammered the startled youngster. "What's the idea? D'ye mean detectives?"

"You guessed it. Now what time was it when you took those people downstairs?"

"Most midnight."

"That's no answer. It was twenty minutes past when I came here and you were asleep."

"Eleven-thirty. That's it, eleven-thirty."

"How d'ye know?"

"Why—er—one of the women—a big woman in an ermine coat said, 'Look, it's eleven-thirty already and I've got to be on the air sharp at nine tomorrow morning.'"

"Who was in the car?"

"I dunno. I dunno the names of people who visit the tenants. That's not my business. And Doctor Scott only moved in last week. What's happened?"

"Murder. Somebody stabbed Scott between the time you took those people down and my arrival."

"Oh my Gawd!" The lad's pinkish skin became saffron-colored. "Is he—is he dead?"

"Murder, I said. Who was in the car? Never mind if you don't know their names, describe them."

"Why a woman in an ermine coat . . . Shouldn't I call the super?"

"Soon as I've finished with you. Was she large, yellow-haired?"

"Yes. A stunner."

"Madame La Croix. Go on."

"A little feller with a goatee and too-long hair. A big gray-bearded man and I guess his wife, they acted married anyway. She was kind of old. Two sort of pansy boys, wrist watches, handkerchieves-sticking-out-of-their-pockets kind. You know. A yellow-haired girl in a black dress."

"That's all?"

"Yes."

Rod drew a deep breath. "The cops are going to ask you the same questions. See you give them the same answers. Now rouse the super."

HE HEARD the elevator descend, then admitted himself again into Scott's apartment. No reason to associate Jess with the black velvet he had seen on the stairs. But where in the name of God had she been when he phoned her?

He dialed her number and waited unnerved with apprehension until she replied.

"Rod? This is a fine time to be calling me up!"

"Check it. How long have you been home?"

"Ages." The reply seemed too prompt.

"What do you mean by ages? I phoned you at midnight. What time did you leave Scott's place?"

"Oh, eleven-thirty or so."

"Sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Maybe before that."

"Alone?"

"Why the inquisition?"

"I can't talk over the phone, I told you. Answer me."

"Yes, *alone*, and if you must know I descended the stairs, walked to the corner of Fifty-seventh Street and took a bus home *alone*."

"I'll be over there as soon as I can make it. I can't say when it will be, maybe not before daylight, but whatever the hour let me in. I've got to see you."

"Rod Bannerman! Are you crazy? I'll do nothing of the kind. What's come over you? Has anything—"

"Hush," he said quickly as he heard the rumble of the elevator ascending. "Got to ring off. Remember, *let me in*." He clicked the receiver back into place.

A minute later two uniformed officers and a plainclothesman strode into the studio.

Outwardly composed but far from feeling so inwardly, Rod greeted them from a perch on the piano stool.

"You the guy that sent in the call from here?" one of the former demanded.

"Yes."

"What's doing?"

"Murder," Rod spoke nonchalantly, careful that his hand did not shake as he lighted a cigarette.

"Yeah. I know. The call said you

were a reporter on some newspaper."

"Right. Bannerman of the *Globe*. This is Doctor Alaric Scott's place. Scott has been killed."

"Doesn't look like an office to me," mumbled the plainclothesman, eyeing two purple nudes fluttering among water lilies that hung on the wall.

"It isn't," Rod informed him. "Scott had offices at his hospital on Park Avenue. He goes—went in—for art and smart parties. This is his studio."

The first uniformed man, tall, robust, red-haired, squinted speculatively at him. "What are you doing here?"

Rod was prepared for the question. "Because I could dish out the publicity, I was invited to a party that took place here tonight. Couldn't make it earlier in the evening, so I dropped in at midnight. The affair was over but I didn't know that until I was inside."

"How did you get in then?"

"The door was unlocked."

"*Hm*." The red-haired man walked to the double doors and beckoned to his companions. Rod remained in the outer room. He saw them bend over the body, then move about inspecting the contents of the room and examining the windows, but what they said did not reach him.

Presently the red-haired man came back into the room where Rod sat, took up the telephone and talked to headquarters. When he replaced the receiver Rod asked airily: "Any need for me to stick around? I'd like to give my paper—"

"Don't be in a hurry," drawled the other. "Who was at this party?"

"Afraid I can't give you any information there. As I said, no one was here when I arrived."

"Call that elevator boy, Ryan," the red-haired man directed. "Hello, who are you," as a tousled, grizzled man, showing the effects of hurried dressing came into the apartment.

"I'm the superintendent. Joseph says

Doctor Scott has been—" He saw the body. "My Gawd!" Ryan left abruptly. The detective walked about the drawing room, firing questions at the bewildered sickened superintendent as he lifted wine glasses, peered into the punch bowls and ash trays.

"I don't know anything," the super mumbled. "Nothing. I helped move him in. That's all I know."

"Looks like there's been a pretty wild party here. Lot of booze drunk. Funny it broke up so soon."

"It was twenty past twelve when I arrived," Rod said.

"Thought you said midnight."

"I meant approximately."

"Did you know Scott well?"

"Not at all. Met him once. That's all."

"But you were invited here?"

"Sure. For the publicity I could give him."

THE room suddenly swarmed with men—the medical examiner, an authoritative man in a dark well tailored suit that Rod recognized as Lieutenant Holmes of the Homicide Bureau, a photographer with his paraphernalia for flashlights; a fingerprintman, plainclothes detectives and several reporters, and behind them the chalk-white elevator boy.

Holmes turned on the latter. Joseph's answers were glib and similar to the ones he had given Rod. "Course I'm not sure that everyone wearing evening clothes was going to Doctor Scott's party. Lot of the tenants give parties. Some go up and down the stairs when the elevator's busy. Doctor Scott said it wasn't necessary to announce his guests. I remember one girl who asked for his apartment, cause she had such black hair. She wore a black velvet coat and I thought black velvet must be stylish cause so many was wearing it."

"Did you take her down when she left?"

"No. I had to go on an errand around eleven o'clock. Maybe she walked down then."

Rod asked casually, "Any reason to believe one of the guests killed Scott, Mr. Holmes?"

Holmes looked at him speculatively, "You're on the *Globe*, aren't you?"

"Yes, met you on the Mainwaring case."

"I remember. That fire-escape gives easy access; but there's no indication of robbery, and crooks carry gats. They don't use their victim's silettoes."

"Is the knife Scott's?"

"There's another just like it on the desk. Reasonable to think if there are two knives in the studio just alike both belonged to Scott. By the same token the guests should be eliminated before figuring it an outside job. I've heard Scott wasn't averse to playing up to the fair sex. All women patients?"

"Men have nerves, too." Rod grinned engagingly.

"Nut doctor, wasn't he? Neurologist."

"Not quite the same. Scott's patients weren't insane. Wonder if I could beat it, Holmes?"

Holmes studied. "Anxious to get to press, eh? Stick around a little longer. Maybe you'll think up the name of some of the guests."

"Nary a chance."

Holmes turned to the superintendent. "Did he have any friends in this building?"

"Don't think so. I wouldn't know. Maybe Joseph—"

The elevator boy answered. "He's only been here a week. Nobody came to see him till tonight. He said good-evening to the tenant in Three K, but not like he knew him."

"Three K?"

"Yes, sir. Around the corridor."

"Call him in," Holmes said to Brett. Brett left the apartment. He was back

in five minutes. "Nobody home," he said.

Impatiently Rod watched the departure of the elevator boy, and made notes of the necks craning in the corridor; heard Holmes direct one of the uniformed policemen to make a survey of the court; listened to the medical examiner's terse comments about the obvious cause of Scott's death and the approximate hour he had died, somewhat earlier than Rod knew to be true; saw Linge, the fingerprint expert, go through his usual procedure, and the photographers take their flashlights.

When a streak of gray light penetrated between hanging draperies he found himself unable to sit still and began to pace the floor, kicking at and scattering rugs in an attempt to quiet his nerves.

"Scott live alone?" Holmes' question arrested him.

"No, his nephew Morton Scott lives with him." He hadn't intended to say that, since Mort no longer did reside with his uncle.

"Only one bedroom here," Holmes said.

"Don't think Scott lived here, himself. Say listen, how much longer do I have to hang around—"

"Oh, run along. Drop into headquarters tomorrow."

It was five o'clock when Rod reached the street. He glanced cautiously over his shoulder and ascertained what he feared. He was being shadowed. Less than a block away lurked a man in dark inconspicuous garments hugging close to the railing that enclosed Central Park. He wasn't in the clear, after all. If it became known Jess attended the party, things might happen fast and heavy.

But to his relief there was no one in sight when he entered the Globe Building. Like a flash he entered a telephone booth and dialed Jessamine's number.

"Get into your clothes and hop a taxi as quick as you can make it," he said,

giving her no opportunity to reproach him. "I've been with the dicks all night and there's a guy trailing me, but I've got to see you. So beat it down here."

"I'll do nothing of the kind until I know the reason why."

"Doc Scott was murdered last night—"

"My God!" she shrieked. "No! No!"

"Save it," he rasped. "I'm trying to keep you out of it. Now will you do as I say?"

"There's a dairy lunch here in the building. It's open now. Slip in and take a seat in the rear. I'll join you. On second thought, you'd better take the Sub, don't want anyone to catch on you're coming down to see me. I'll expect you in thirty minutes."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Ladies in Black

PERHAPS it was because she'd not taken time to use any make-up that she looked so pale when Rod sat down beside her a half hour later, but studying her with a cruel scrutiny in the brilliance of the all-night restaurant he noted the pinched line to her mouth, the blue shadows under her eyes and the excessive whiteness of her skin.

He squeezed her fingers in greeting and whispered: "Look natural and pretend nothing has happened."

"I'll try," she said with a wan smile, "but I'm sick, simply sick about it and eaten with curiosity."

"Here it is briefly." In staccato whispers he told her all that occurred, including his rescue of Leila Webb from Scott's clutches. He added: "Everyone who attended that party is going to be under suspicion, just as I will be if they discover Scott was alive when I entered the studio the first time."

"But why?" she asked tensely. "Why not a burglar or—"



"Because burglars wouldn't have used a knife when a gat is more efficient, and because there was no evidence of robbery. And because Scott's reputation was so lousy the cops jumped at the chance to pin the deed on a woman."

"A woman," she breathed, passing a shaking hand over her white lips.

"Yes. To date they don't know the names of those who attended that party. I don't suppose I've a chance to keep it quiet that you were there, but I'm going to do my darndest to prevent it."

"Thanks," she whispered.

"Now," he said after they were served, "get some food under your belt and give me the lowdown on all that happened at the party."

"Nothing happened—that is, nothing really."

She studied with her chin cupped in her hands. "I learned last night that everything you said Scott was . . . he is . . . er—he was. He—"

"Go on."

She shivered. "I left early because—" With a little gesture she pushed back the fluted ruffled collar of her dress. Just under her ear the flesh was discolored and there were two sharp abrasions. "He did that."

"Scott made that mark on you!"

"Yes. Everyone was drinking a lot—you know how it is. Not drunk but feeling good and beginning to get a little noisy. That prima donna—"

"La Croix?"

"Yes. She decided to sing, and her accompanist, a boy by the name of Ross sat down at the piano, so Doctor Scott insisted that we be quiet. I was sitting on the couch, he sat down by me. He was drinking too, but somehow he didn't show it. . . . I didn't dream he was intoxicated, but he must have been. La Croix started singing *Marguerite's* aria—from *Faust*, you know. A good voice always makes me feel sad. Doctor Scott saw I had tears

in my eyes and he took his handkerchief and wiped them away, then he took my hand and held it in his—"

"God!" Rod muttered.

"I didn't mind that, but suddenly without the least warning he released my hand and his fingers crept up my arms until they touched my throat . . . it was so sudden . . . His nails dug into me before I could push them away. . . ."

"Good God!"

"I sprang up—of course I must have shown I was perturbed, I hadn't time to regain control of myself. I pretended I had another engagement and that I had to leave at once and went into the bedroom for my wraps. They accepted my excuse but I think my leaving started the others' departure. Scott followed me into the bedroom and apologized . . . claimed it was a spasm of his hand or something . . . that the music enthralled him. . . . But never in all my life was I so afraid of anyone as I was of him, or so glad to get out of a building."

ROD DID not speak at once when she paused. His own face had a grayish tinge and his eyes were hard and bitter. "You went right home?" he asked at length.

"Yes. Just as I told you."

"I said I phoned you at midnight."

"I know, but I waited interminably for a bus."

"What were you wearing last night, Jess?"

Her eyes met his candidly. "The only evening clothes I possess, that black velvet ensemble."

Another silence. "Who was there?"

She checked them on her fingers. "I didn't meet everyone. But there was a Mr. and Mrs. Fischer. He's a broker about fifty, she had been one of Scott's patients and from something she said I believe a share of her money went into Scott's hospital. The impressario Miquel

Donato. A portrait painter named Jennings, some woman who tries to write poetry by the name of Annabel Frost, and of course, Leila Webb."

"This Annabel person, what's she look like?"

"Small, dark, not unattractive."

"What did she wear?"

She gave him a sharp look. "Why are you so interested in clothes?"

"I'd like to know, that's all."

She laughed nervously. "Funny, three of us women wore black velvet dresses. Leila Webb, Miss Frost, and myself."

"Black velvet. *Hm.* Come on, drink your coffee."

"Will they question me, Rod, I mean the police?"

"They will when they learn you were at the party, but I hope to God not before you get rid of that mark. And whatever you do, don't mention that."

"As if I would," she shuddered.

"None of the gang there knew what happened?"

"I'm sure they didn't. La Croix and Ross were at the piano as I said. I believe Annabel and Miquel Donato were in another room and the others were listening to the music. I think they accepted my excuse for starting up, unless"—she paused—"unless La Croix didn't. . . . She gave me a funny look. . . . Yes she did. . . . And it's generally known she and Doctor Scott were lovers. But—"

"Don't worry about that. Go home now and say nothing till you're forced to talk."

**T**HE elevator shot Rod up ten stories and he went into the pressroom. The short details of the discovery of Scott's dead body had already been elaborated into two lurid columns and rushed to press. After he had repeated the reason for his delay at least six times, retorted in no uncertain terms to a criticism from his chief, he left the office and again went to the courthouse.

The little radio in his brain was buzzing, but clogged with static. Scott and the woman on trial for her life . . . where was the connection? Black velvet. Three girls who wore black velvet. The woman on the stairs. Was Jessamine that woman? If so, why had she been there? Why had she lied to him?

The trial was a summary of all that had taken place before. Through it sat the faded blond woman with the vacant look in her eyes and the serene expression upon her face. Thin gnarled hands lay in the lap of her lustrous gray silk gown, hands that never moved nor betrayed any emotion.

Obviously only one thing could save her from conviction. She had murdered her husband and the murder had been premeditated. Why had she done it? There had been no other woman involved, so jealousy was not the motive. Had Mainwaring been a cowardly brute who had tortured her to a point beyond endurance?

No, according to the testimony given, Mainwaring had been a mild, gentle little man whose nervous breakdown had resulted from the failure of his bank. Surely if there had been anything in his case that would offer freedom and excuse for his widow, Aldrich would not hesitate to come forward and say so. Surely her lawyer would have forced the dead man's physician to testify.

Rod felt a grudging admiration for the physician who had denied him a good story, and a certainty that he would not let a woman go to the chair, professional ethics or not.

The defense finished its plea. The prosecuting attorney summed up the case and the jury filed out. A hush fell over the courtroom. It was as though the spectators, keyed to the highest pitch of their imagination, suddenly realized they were not witnessing a drama enacted upon a stage but had at last awakened to the

stark reality of the tragedy before them.

Rod stepped outside in the sunlight. He remembered Holmes' admonition to drop in at headquarters during the day. He was loath to do it, yet he knew if he didn't he would be sent for.

Clicked a warning. With only a fillip of fate he might be in the same position as the woman in the courtroom. Undoubtedly every word he had said was being checked up. They couldn't tie anything on him unless they learned of Scott's attack upon Jessamine and the fact that Jessamine was his future wife, then they would have both opportunity and motive in their hands. Of course if Leila Webb talked he'd be in for a grilling, but he had a hunch she wouldn't talk. And she didn't know him.

The jury would be out for hours. He'd see Holmes and find out what he wanted.

Holmes greeted him noncommittally. "Expected you earlier," he said.

"Still covering the Mainwaring trial," Rod answered. He sat down facing the homicide man and offered him a cigarette. It was refused. "Jury's out and I think it will be out a long time."

Holmes did not answer.

Rod lighted his own cigarette, drew a few puffs, tried to appear unconcerned. "Any developments?" he asked in his best newspaper manner.

Holmes peered at him under shaggy brows that were knitted with concentration. "Nothing to write home about. Fingerprints all over the place as expected, but none that tally with our gallery. However, didn't expect to find any, and the carving all over the stiletto handle was a break for Scott's murderer. Hands couldn't leave any marks on it. Sure you don't know who attended the party?"

"No more than you do, Holmes. I heard what the elevator boy told you and that's all. He verified my time of arrival and—"

"I know," Holmes broke in impatiently,

"but I don't quite figure why you should have been there at all. Thought the society editor covered such affairs."

"Not in such cases. Then"—he hesitated, reluctant to bring Mort's name into it—"Scott's nephew and I are friends."

"Yeah, so he says," Holmes said dryly, "but he swears he didn't attend the party."

Rod mastered his surprise at their locating Morton so quickly. "I couldn't say as to that."

"No trouble between Scott and his nephew, was there?" Shrewd yellow-brown eyes pierced him.

"None that I know of. They did live together. Mort was Scott's secretary. I saw him rarely so I don't know how they got along. O. K., I guess."

"He seems to be Scott's only relative and Scott was well off. But he doesn't impress me as a guy who'd murder for money."

"Good Lord, no!" Rod exclaimed. "And if he wasn't there—"

"We've only his word for that. However, we'll know before the day's over who did attend that party and someone will talk."

Rod rested his elbows on the lieutenant's desk. "This may or may not mean a thing," he said slowly, "but yesterday I saw Doctor Scott in the court room watching the Mainwaring woman's trial."

"What of it? Thousands have done the same thing."

Rod explained the incident that occurred afterward, and gave a description of the man who had accosted the neurologist.

"That man might have been a nut," he added, "but it's a cinch he knew Scott."

"Scott know him?"

"Hard to tell, his face expressed nothing."

"Not much to go on," Holmes mused. "But we'll see if we can round him up. Nothing else to tell me?"

Rod had no intention of mentioning Scott's visit to the psychiatrist until he had talked again with Aldrich. He was still too much the newspaperman to hand out information he was sure was valuable to the police before his paper had it.

"No," he answered.

**T**O ROD'S surprise the jury had given their verdict when he returned to the courtroom, and Ann Mainwaring had been found guilty of murder in the first degree. The news was a blow to him in his absolute certainty she would be considered insane.

"Scott's getting enough publicity now," Rod muttered on his way back to the pressroom. "Maybe Mort will cash in on it if the hospital keeps going."

He motioned to a "cub" and asked him to look up some photographs of Madame La Croix, then with a half dozen of them in his hand, pictures of the prima donna in her various operatic roles, he strolled into his chief's office.

"Keep this under your hat, boss," he said, "for I may not get what I'm going after, but either headquarters is holding out on us or doesn't know that Marguerite La Croix was at Scott's affair last night."

Jennings gave a low whistle.

"I'm off after the story," Rod continued. "I'll telephone in, but you may not see me for a couple of days."

Marguerite La Croix occupied a small austere brownstone dwelling in the East Eighties, unpretentious and drab. Rod rang the bell and a mulatto girl opened the door.

"Is Madame in?" he asked ingratiatingly.

"She is, but she ain't seein' no one. No one," emphatically.

"Then take this message to her. Bannerman of the *Globe* wants an interview with her and if she cannot find time to give it to him he'll write it anyway."

"That's a funny message," giggled the maid. "It don't make sense."

"It will, if you add my visit has to do with the party she attended last night. Go on, tell her. She'll want to see me all right."

He did not have long to wait. The maid returned and ushered him in to the drawing room. Five minutes later he was joined by the prima donna. Rod had seen her many times over the footlights, and the majesty of her carriage, the opulent bloom of her florid blond beauty had not impressed him, but, facing her in the studied luxury of her setting he was startled at the magnificence of her personality. A clinging tea gown of peacock-blue velvet outlined every shapely curve and accentuated her height, and the milk whiteness of her throat and full perfectly modeled arms.

She wore her red-gold hair in a coronet of braids banding her head and forehead, and the eyes that met his under them were as blue and candidly chillike as the most naive ingenue's he had ever seen.

Their gaze somewhat disconcerted him. He stood uncertainly until she dropped with graceful languor upon a black velvet divan and adjusted a cigarette in a turquoise holder she lifted from a lacquered table beside her.

"Well?" she queried with a slow smile.

Rod, feeling gauche and young, sat down facing her. This wasn't going to be so easy. He had expected hysterics, bravado, anything but serenity.

"It's this way, Madame La Croix," he said clearing his throat. "I know you attended the party Doctor Scott gave last night at his studio on Fifty-eighth Street—"

She continued to smile and bowed her head ever so slightly.

"But evidently none of the other newspaper men are aware of it yet."

"I don't see that it makes any difference

whether they are or not," she answered quietly. "I wasn't the only guest."

He hesitated, then plunged. "But you were the only one who might have had a motive for killing Alaric Scott."

The cigarette holder slipped to the floor. Blue fire blazed in her eyes and her full soft mouth became livid. "May I ask what occasions such a statement?" she demanded with repressed fury.

"You were in love with him. As a matter of fact there had been an affair of long standing between you and the doctor and—"

"One doesn't kill the man one loves," she said with dangerous sweetness.

"When a woman is flung over for another one, younger, harder to capture, that woman is capable of doing anything."

SHE SPRANG to her feet and kicked open the door leading into the hallway. "I consented to grant you an interview at an hour when I always rest. For my graciousness I am being insulted. Get out!"

"Just a minute," he soothed. "I only wanted to show you where you stand. It's not common property that you and Scott were lovers, and if you'll give me the information I'm after it won't become so through me. I'm not an enemy but I am a newspaperman. Please sit down and let's see if we can't get some place."

She did as he asked, her eyes still icy, her lips compressed. "How did you know of Alaric and myself?" she demanded. "We were discreet."

"You were his patient for a considerable length of time. Being an exceedingly beautiful woman I figured that a man obviously as susceptible as Scott would fall in love with you. After you were seen in public with him later—many times—I deduced the truth."

She smiled. "Very clever. Well, what of it? I've had lovers before. I shall have more."

"As your name hasn't been linked with any other man's recently, though it is well known that Scott played about with several women, then seemed to have lost his head over Leila Webb, it was again obvious he had discarded you for his nephew's fiancée."

"That's a lie," she rasped. "He cared nothing for that little chit! She threw herself at his head and—"

"And carried the marks of his caressing fingers upon her throat," Rod drawled.

Her plump white hand flew to her own throat. Her face became ashen. "You—you—know?" she gasped in a strangled voice. "How much do you know?"

None of the elation he felt showed in the reporter's face. A hunch, only a buzz in his brain had given him a vital lead. "Rather a weird manner to express one's affection, eh, Madame La Croix? Most women would object strenuously to it, perhaps fight against it even to the point of—death."

She rose again. She was trembling visibly. "I—I—" she began with a shaking voice. "I've nothing more to say."

"Not even to deny that you killed Alaric Scott?"

"That's ridiculous! Of course I deny it. I left his apartment with my accompanist and Miquel Donato and I can prove it. And Alaric bade us goodbye at the door."

"You could have gone back, Madame La Croix."

"I could have, but I didn't. Good day, Mr. Bannerman." She motioned to the door.

Rod bowed and not a little pleased with himself left the house.

At the corner he purchased an evening paper and satisfied himself that nothing he had just learned had been obtained by a rival sheet. A list of guests who had attended Scott's party was given and of course Jessamine's name was on the list, though his own relationship with her was

not mentioned. Did the police know yet?

In a booth he telephoned her. Her voice came over the wire excited, tearful and apprehensive.

"An officer called here today, Rod. I was out, but he left word for me to get into touch with headquarters at once. What'll I do?"

"Have you phoned to find out what they want?"

"No. I know already what they want with me. It's in the papers that I attended that party. I wish I'd never gone. What'll they do to me?"

"Nothing. They'll question you. You've known all along that they would. All you've got to do is to answer them. As you weren't home when the cop called, you can stall a little longer."

"I'll fix some dinner," she said eagerly, "if you'll come up right away."

"Can't do that. I'm not certain I've lost my shadow. I'll meet you in the Plaza entrance at seven and we'll have a bite there. Now keep your nerve. You've nothing to worry about."

"I have if they suspect you."

"Let me take care of that."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Nero's Nephew

THREE hours later he reached his own lodgings and flung himself upon his bed fully clothed. Save for the doze before twelve the night before he had not slept in twenty-four hours and even his iron-clad constitution was feeling the effects of the strain.

But despite weary muscles and heavy eyelids sleep eluded him. If he could establish some link between Ann Mainwaring and Alaric Scott he could make Doctor Aldrich talk. He was sure of that, just as he was sure that the Mainwaring case had something to do with Scott's death.

But if Aldrich did talk, how much further along in the solution of Scott's murder would he be?

Sleep being out of the question, he dressed, hoping that the fresh night air would clear the cobwebs in his brain and make his thinking more coherent.

As he walked toward the Kent Studios it occurred to him he was running true to form (if suspected) and making good the old adage, "a murderer returns to the scene of his crime."

As a newspaperman he had no difficulty in gaining admittance. Several officers were in charge and he recognized a colleague in a slouchy hatchet-faced individual talking to one of them.

Evidently nothing had proven sacred to the minions of the law, for the priceless Gobelins had been removed from the walls, the Aubussons rolled up as if so much rag carpet and kicked into a corner, and the drawers of the de Medici cabinet had been removed and left in the center of the floor.

Holmes was studying the picture that had been on the overturned easel when Rod entered. He glanced over his shoulder at the reporter and gave him a quizzical smile. "Still hot on the story, eh?"

Rod nodded. He had not expected to see Holmes uptown.

"Had an interesting conversation with your girl friend," the detective added.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Cagey, aren't you? Any reason for not spilling that that was why you were here last night?"

"Because she was at Scott's party? Sure, a good reason. Didn't want her name mentioned."

"Did she pose for this picture?"

"No. Of course not."

"Looks like her."

"It does a little. But it's not Jess."

The man from the *Morning Call* strolled over to the easel. "That's Leila

Webb, Morton Scott's fiancée," he said. "Pretty, huh?"

Rod gave him a quick glance. "Are you sure of that?"

"Sure I'm sure. I've seen her too many times not to recognize even a bum picture of her. Shouldn't wonder if she'd been playing the young man against the older one. Regular Casanova, Scott was, and kids sometimes find middle age more attractive than youth—*without* dough."

"Doing a little detecting yourself?" Holmes drawled to Rod.

"Why not?"

"Personal or professional?"

"Don't get you."

Holmes laughed. "Maybe your girl's in a tight spot."

"Not her. She left here last night a half hour before any of the other guests."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Do you think a woman did the trick?"

"You asking me?"

"I'm asking you."

"Don't mind telling you that when we locate the girl who fled down the stairs through the lobby and hopped a taxi on Fifty-eighth at twelve twenty-five last night, we'll know a lot more than we do right now."

Rod's hands were in his pockets so when they knotted they were not seen. "A girl did that?" he asked quietly.

"Yes. She passed out of the hall while you were on this floor summoning up the elevator boy. The coast was clear for her exit."

"Who told you about her?"

Holmes chuckled. "A blind beggar selling pencils in front of the building. She saw the girl leave and made note of the time. Saw her hop a taxi."

"Blind eh?"

"Yeah. Caught her in a round-up of fakes. Well, Bannerman, how about it?"

"Told you all I know." He crossed to the window and stared across at the one

in the darkness opposite. "That apartment occupied?"

"Huh? Yeah, it's occupied."

"Don't suppose the tenant could give you any information?"

Holmes grunted. "Nah. Wasn't home the night of the murder. "Too bad he wasn't. We'd have an open-and-shut case if he had been."

"Where's the entrance to it?"

"The apartment? Two doors around the corridor."

"This building?"

"Yeah. Don't try to poke your nose in there, Bannerman. We've done all that's necessary."

"I see," Rod said drily.

The elevator boy gave him a disconsolate smile as he descended. Rod said: "Say bud, give me a list of your tenants, will you?"

"There's a list over the switchboard," the boy answered.

Rod studied the typewritten page, made a note of the names and numbers and left the building.

MORT SCOTT was sitting on the lower step of the stairs leading to the second floor when Rod admitted himself with a latch key. The foyer was in darkness. Mort did not move, Rod stumbled over him. "Hello," Rod ejaculated and turned on the light. "What are you doing here?"

Mort lurched to his feet and smiled miserably. "Waiting for you. I got in when one of the tenants opened the door. Took a chance you'd be at home and I've been here ever since."

"Come upstairs. What's on your mind?"

"Plenty," Mort mumbled. He swayed unsteadily as he mounted the stairs behind the reporter.

Rod flung open the door of his room, turned on the light and surveyed his caller. "You look like the tag end of a

hard winter," he said laconically. "Been on a binge?"

"No."

"Then you need a drink. Rye in that bottle. Help yourself."

Mort poured himself a stiff drink, downed it and sat on the bed. "I've got to talk to some one," he said thickly, "and you're about the only person I figured would be up at this hour."

"Better be careful what you tell me," Rod warned him. "I'm a newspaperman."

"You're my friend."

"Sure. Shoot."

"It's Leila." He moistened his lips with his tongue. "She's got to leave town."

Rod's eyebrows lifted. "Why?"

"It's confidential. You know that."

"Certainly."

"She *was* at the party. Alaric tricked her to get her there. He'd been doing a portrait of her—from memory—I'll swear she never sat for him for she never really liked him, only accepted him for my sake. I was busy and she couldn't find me to ask if the thing was true—but early in the evening he phoned her about the affair and asked her to be a guest, said our quarrel had been patched up and that I'd meet her at the studio. She went. Of course I wasn't there."

"I see. But there's nothing to that that makes it imperative for her to get away."

Mort took another drink before answering. "She—she didn't leave with the others," he said jerkily. "That is, not the building. Scott persuaded her to wait a little longer, insisting I'd show up to take her home."

"And—"

Mort bent his rigid body at the waist and looked steadily at the pattern of the rug at his feet. "She had a sort of feeling he might not be on the level, woman's intuition, you know, and left immediately after the gang had started down in the elevator, then halfway down the first

flight of stairs she reconsidered. She thought I'd think it strange if she ran away when I was expected any minute—"

"Were you expected?" Rod interrupted tensely.

"No. As I was saying, she reconsidered and went back. Alaric was standing in the door watching her and"—his mouth contorted—"his damn egotism convinced him she had returned because of him. He showed his hand the minute he had her alone—"

"And?"

"Caught her in his arms and told her how much he loved her, that the reason he hadn't wanted me to marry her was because he was mad about her himself, and the rest of the bunk a man pulls when he has no conscience and is after a woman. She was so stunned that she couldn't say anything or fight him, and that was all he needed." He wiped his moist forehead with a trembling hand. "She escaped before—er—went down the stairs and taxied home."

Rod drew a breath of deep relief. So that was her story. "Then what are you afraid of?"

"The police are trying to tie the murder on the girl who went down the stairs, and if they discover it was Leila—God, do you see what she'll be in for? She'll have to admit going back to the apartment and being alone with a man proven a roué by all kinds of testimony, and there will be those who won't put my construction on it. She'll"—his eyes widened—"why she might—"

"Why cross bridges? If Alaric Scott was alive when she left the studio I don't think she'll have any difficulty in convincing the officials that she had nothing to do with the murder. And money will keep the rest of it out of the public eye."

"But will it?" Mort groaned. "Will it?"

"I know this much," Rod said definitely. "If she cuts and runs for it she will



practically admit guilt—or at least guilty knowledge.

Mort looked at him sharply. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Then use your noodle. I suppose you kids are rattled and I'm not surprised, but it seems to me the wisest thing she could do is to admit going back. Tell the truth and trust to Holmes or whoever is in command to keep her name out of the papers as much as possible."

"She can't do that. She simply can't."

Rod poured himself a stiff drink and over the brim of the glass studied the other's pallid, haggard face. "You aren't at all sure Scott *was* alive when she left the building, are you, Mort?"

"Yes I am. Of course I am," he cried defiantly.

"Set your mind at rest. He was alive. Don't ask how I know it, but I do."

Mort's bloodshot eyes met Rod's, then wavered. "I see," he said slowly. "I see. Good God, the whole thing is horrible!"

"Keep your faith and don't do anything foolish. Now you better beat it. A night's rest will do you more good than talking me out of my sleep."

Mort rose, lifted his hat from the bed and pulled it down over his disheveled hair. "Thanks for listening to me."

"S'all right. Incidentally, do you know the names of Scott's private patients?"

"A good many of them, those to whom I had to send bills."

"Don't suppose by any chance Ann Mainwaring was ever a patient of his?"

"Yes. Yes, she was."

"Boy!" Rod slapped his hands together. "Boy! That's great. Why wasn't Scott called in on her case?"

"She was treated with the utmost privacy. She had some nervous affliction. Didn't amount to much but she didn't want it known. She never said anything about him, I suppose, and he didn't think it necessary to come forward so long as she didn't."

"Did he think she was crazy?"

"No. He would have dismissed her if he had. Most of his cases were functional. If they weren't and didn't spell much money he turned them over to a brain specialist. What's the trend?"

"I don't know—but somehow I've a feeling that Mrs. Mainwaring may be linked up in this; that your uncle was behind the murder of old Mainwaring and in that way got his."

Mort's face brightened. "I wonder. She was rich. While I couldn't swear to it she gave a pretty good imitation of a woman madly in love. A nephew of hers believed she was in love with Alaric. I recall he came to the office one day and demanded to see Alaric. Alaric afterward said a crazy nut had demanded that he cease his attentions to a woman old enough to be his mother. Laughed when he said the man had accused him of being after the woman's dough."

"What did the man look like?"

Scott described the person Rod had noticed in the courtroom. Rod smiled to himself and felt of the button in his pocket.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Truth Never Hurts

AFTER Mort's departure Rod spent some time over his encyclopedia. First he read all that was printed about hypnotism, followed that with psychosis, and made copious notes. It all tied up. If he could get Aldrich to verify what he believed to be the truth, that Scott had unquestionably used Mrs. Mainwaring as the instrument to kill her husband, either through suggestion or hypnotism, the condemned woman would be given a new trial.

Did Aldrich know that Mrs. Mainwaring had been Scott's patient? Surely not, or he would have come forward in her

defense. Beyond a doubt Aldrich had been treating Scott. It was all hoey that Scott had been consulting him about a patient of his own.

On a chance that the psychiatrist had not yet retired Rod consulted his directory, found the number of his house phone and dialed it. A woman, evidently a servant, replied and informed him the doctor was in bed.

On the verge of hanging up the receiver Rod thought better of it and insisted that she call the psychiatrist to the phone.

After some little time Aldrich spoke. "Who is it?"

"Rod Bannerman, Doctor. Remember me. *Globe* writer. I called on you. Sorry to disturb you—"

"I must say, Mr. Bannerman—"

"Wait. Don't hang up on me. This is very important. Did you know that Mrs. Mainwaring had been Alaric Scott's patient?"

Unquestionably Aldrich was surprised. "No, I didn't."

"Now will you admit that you were treating Scott for—shall we say a penchant for strangling?"

There was a hesitancy. "How do you know of the penchant?"

"I know all about it. You were treating him, weren't you?"

"Ye-es."

"Didn't he have homicidal tendencies? Didn't his desire to torture go further?"

Again Aldrich hesitated.

"This isn't just curiosity," Rod assured him. "Mrs. Mainwaring has been convicted. If it's proven that under Scott's influence she committed the murder she might get an insanity verdict. Isn't it possible for Scott to have passed on his desire to kill to a mentally unstable woman in love with him?"

"Very possible."

"Hypnotism?"

"Suggestion. Is this for your paper?"

"Yes."

"I dislike being quoted."

"Sorry. Thanks, Doctor." He hung up the receiver.

THE story printed in the morning *Globe* had an after-result that Rod did not anticipate. Triumphant over digging up evidence that would reopen the Mainwaring case he had forgotten his own position in the Scott murder until he received a summons from headquarters.

They'd got the dope on Leila. If so he might be in a pretty tight hole. He took the button from his pocket and studied it. Under a small magnifying glass he peered at the strands of wool clinging to it. Tweed, brown at that. Well, the time had come to turn that button in. Fortunately he had never owned a brown tweed suit in his life.

Holmes was grim-faced when he greeted him. "Pretty smart lad, aren't you?" he said. "Thought you'd give the squad the ha-ha while you spilled information all over the place. Soft-soaping me about some man at the Mainwaring trial accosting Scott and believing I'd follow that up and leave the coast clear for you."

"That was a lead and a real one," Rod retorted. "If I printed something you should have known and didn't, that's your hard luck, not mine."

"Don't be so cocky, my lad. The lead was all right as far as it went, to Brooklyn and back. The man was Mrs. Mainwaring's nephew. She'd been a patient of Scott's all right, infatuated with him and the rest of it, but the nephew, Joe Blynne by name, was playing bridge with his wife and friends on the night of the murder and twenty miles away."

"Well, why jump on me?"

Holmes bit off the end of a cigar and scrutinized the reporter. "Come across, Bannerman. You know a lot more than you've given either the public or me. This sadistic stuff you've printed about Scott

... You wrote you got a prominent psychiatrist to admit why he was treating Scott and so on. You had facts that led you in that direction. I want those facts."

"Well," Rod hedged, "when I interviewed Madame La Croix—"

"She didn't tell you anything of the kind and you know it. Didn't you learn this from your girl? Didn't you go into Scott's apartment and find her struggling in his arms. Catch him throttling her and didn't you seize the revolver and plunge it into his heart?"

"No, Scott was dead when I got there."

"So you say. But you've given us a motive and we know your girl was there."

Rod's eyes narrowed. "I thought you weren't sure a woman killed Scott."

"A woman was in on it. But a man killed him. It required strength to strike such a blow. The girl who hopped the taxi was small. Come on, admit the truth. If you killed him in defense of the woman you loved—"

"I'll come clean, Holmes. I know of Scott's proclivities from my sweetheart, but she's out of this absolutely. Scott showed his hand early in the evening and she left the party. But—another girl did go back and was with Scott alone for a few minutes—"

Holmes pressed a button. An officer in uniform entered the room. Holmes said: "Tell Miss Webb to come in here."

Rod sprang to his feet. "You knew already!" he gasped.

"We know Miss Webb did return to the studio, that she left the building at twelve twenty-five and hopped a taxi, and for some particular reason decided to leave New York this morning. Now you tell me what you know of Mort Scott."

Mort Scott! Had Mort killed his uncle?

The suspicion sent a shiver of horror over him. Had Mort been in the studio during his ten-minute absence? Or was Holmes putting him in a trap?

LEILA WEBB came into the room. She was ghastly pale, with hollows in her cheeks and shadows under her brown eyes; her lips trembled visibly.

Holmes rose. "This is Mr. Bannerman of the *Globe*, Miss Webb," he said courteously. "Mr. Bannerman is a friend of your fiancé, and in his confidence."

She merely glanced at the reporter and bent her head.

"Now," said Holmes, still courteously, "don't you think you should tell us the truth?"

"I have. I have."

"No, you haven't. Only that Scott tricked you into remaining after the others left, then attacked you. You didn't tell us that your lover came into the studio in time to save your life and that to do so he had to stab his uncle."

"He didn't! He didn't!" she cried passionately. "Mort never came to the studio at all. He didn't know anything about the party! I didn't know the man—"

Holmes snapped: "Then you did see the murder committed?"

"No, no, I didn't! Scott was alive when I left the studio! Alive! He was choking me! I was too frightened to know or see anything. Then someone pulled his hands from my throat—threw me across the room. I must have fainted. When I came to I was outside in the hall."

"It was a man who saved you?"

"Yes."

"Morton Scott?"

"No! no! no! I didn't know him. I'd have known Mort, wouldn't I?"

"And you didn't know this man?"

"No, no!"

Rod's throat ached with the pounding pulse that dried his saliva. Was she acting? Didn't she recognize him?

"And you left the studio alone?"

Her hands writhed with nervousness. "No. He—the man went downstairs with

me. He put me in a taxi, sent me home.

"And you've not seen him since?"

Holmes pounded relentlessly.

"No."

"You're lying, Miss Webb. Before night we'll have a confession from Mort Scott, and if you're wise you'll come clean now."

"You—you've arrested him?" she gasped.

Holmes nodded. Her gaze wavered from the officer's face to Rod's. Rod swallowed and squared his shoulders. "You're all wet where Mort Scott is concerned," he said. "I rescued Miss Webb from Doctor Scott."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I went to the studio just as I told you, only Scott wasn't dead then. It might have been my girl—only it was Mort's. I put her in a taxi. When I went back—Scott was dead."

"You mean he was dead after you killed him."

Rod shrugged his shoulders. "Looks that way on the face of it."

"Better telephone your paper, Bannerman. Their ace writer is under arrest for the murder of Doctor Alaric Scott."

"Let's wait a little while," Rod said easily. "You tied me up with this not because I was on the scene but because I knew Scott was a rotten sadist. Well, suppose the tenant whose window looks into Scott's knew he was one. Because no one answered his bell on the night of the murder is no positive proof the apartment was empty. Suppose that tenant, knowing better than any one in the world Scott's homicidal tendencies, witnessed the scene I interrupted and rushed from his own place, just a few yards away, with the intention of preventing murder?"

"Suppose while I was on my way down the stairs, he, unaware I had saved Miss Webb, entered Scott's apartment and that when Scott swung upon him he protected himself with the stiletto?"

"*Hm*," Holmes mused.

"You beefed a lot about what I printed. But I gave you a lead I hoped you'd follow up. I didn't want to."

"No? And why this tenant?"

Rod pulled the button from his pocket and placed it on the desk. "Because the last time I saw him he was wearing a brown tweed suit. This button came off a brown tweed suit. I found it outside Scott's door. Scott may have grabbed it in the struggle, loosened it and the tenant lost it outside."

"Concealing evidence—" Holmes began.

"It wasn't on the scene of the murder."

Holmes stroked his chin. "How long have you had this interesting theory, Mr. Bannerman?"

"Since I learned who was the tenant of Three K. It didn't quite click. Too many things against it, but it all tied up, except the woman in black velvet that I saw on the stairs."

Holmes smiled. "Oh, she was a respectable married lady having a rendezvous in another apartment. We checked her. Funny"—he pressed a button—"maybe your hunch—"

"I thought he'd confess," Rod said, "but perhaps—"

Holmes scribbled on some paper. When an attendant entered he handed him the paper. "We'll see, Bannerman. You may go, Miss Webb."

She smiled at Rod. "It's going to be all right, isn't it?"

"I think so. If it isn't, you get in touch with my girl, will you please?"

**T**HIRTY minutes later a policeman ushered a gentleman into the room. He was tall and black-haired. Across his chiseled nose was a strip of court plaster. His cheeks were almost as pale as the plaster.

"You sent for me," he began then saw

Rod. His eyes narrowed, then he smiled aloofly.

"Sorry, Doctor," Rod said. "I didn't use your name in any of my articles, but this time I think you're going to get publicity."

"Sit down, Mr.—er—Doctor Aldrich," Holmes said.

Aldrich did so. Holmes toyed with the button, looked at the blue serge the psychiatrist was wearing. "Do you own a brown tweed suit?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes. And I killed Doctor Scott. Strange. I thought myself a brave man. I discovered I hadn't the courage to come to you and admit I'd killed a man, even though it was in self-defense. I'm glad you sent for me. Perhaps if you'd have arrested someone I'd have found my courage—but—" he wiped his forehead with a large white handkerchief.

"It was self-defense?"

"Oh, yes. Curious. Scott came to me to cure him of an obsession that made him desire to kill and I, his healer, had to take his life." He smiled and the color came back into his cheeks. "I'd had him well on the road to recovery. But the wild party—it was wild—I couldn't sleep for the racket—must have given him a turn for the worst. My bedroom window is on a court facing his. When I saw a young

girl struggling for her life in his arms, knowing that he had lost all control of himself and would strangle her to death unless I interfered, I dashed around the corridor and broke into his place. But I had no power over him. He associated me with someone who had rescued the girl and turned his mad fury upon me. I seized the only weapon available to defend myself. He swung around to snatch at the other knife and I plunged mine deeper than I intended."

Holmes did not speak.

"When I realized he was dead I lost my head. I should have waited for the police, instead I fled back to my own place, put out the lights and pretended I was not at home. I was aided in this because my servant was away for the night. Publicity will ruin me, but now it can't be avoided, I suppose?"

"I don't think the truth will hurt you," Holmes answered quietly, "Trust Bannerman to smear his sheet with what a rotter Scott was and I think you'll be voted a medal for doing him in. Of course you are under technical arrest—but—"

"I understand." He glanced at Rod. "I suppose you figured *this* out too?"

Rod grinned. "Sure. Good luck, Doc. I'll see that you're made all kinds of a hero."



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# TOO MANY GUNS

By Allan K. Echols

*All that gallant insurance-company dick wanted was to help a weeping lady recover her stolen pearls. He didn't count on their being two damsels in distress—pitted one against the other—and both eager to corner his misplaced chivalry at a pistol's point!*



I SUPPOSE that if she hadn't come floating over to my table like a bachelor's dream of Sheba I wouldn't have taken my eyes off Vito Moreno like I did. I'd been looking for him for so long that to lose sight of him even for a second was a nutty thing to do.

But I lost him, anyway. I was sitting at my table at the "99" Club, catching the floor-show with my ears and keeping a

"I'll take your case, lady," I said.  
"You're getting in on the ground floor, all right,"  
the burglar bit out as he pocketed the pearls.

tail on Moreno with my eyes, when this beauty wafted herself over and slid into the empty chair at my table. She held a gold-tipped cigarette in her fingers, looked at me coolly and asked, "May I have a light, please?"

You know, yourself, that you can't keep your heads a mile apart while you're giving a lady a light. So maybe that's how I happened to get a good focus on her eyes. Anyway, I got the idea that I was reading a message in the look she gave me that had my name on it. I would have sworn right then that she had spent all her life looking for me. Which just goes to show that a man that's been on Broadway ever since he was big enough to say, "Watch your car, mister?" can still read the signs wrong. That's why bookies were born.

Anyway, she blows a balloon-tired smoke ring and asks right suddenly: "You're Chuck Ware, aren't you? I know because you were pointed out to me."

"That was sure kind of somebody," I answered. "Must have been a real good friend of mine."

She lets that implied compliment sail over her head and asks, "And you're a detective?"

Now that was disappointing, and I told her so. "Pleasure before business," I reminded her.

"I have a case for you," she kept on. I couldn't get her off the main line at all.

And seeing that it wasn't me as a person that she was so much interested in as in talking to a detective, I suddenly remembered that I was supposed to be working on a case. I looked around. It was then that I realized that I'd lost sight of Vito Moreno. The gal at Vito's table was still there so I hoped that Vito had just gone to speak to a man about a dog. But I didn't feel any too sure about that slippery bird. All I could do was wait and see.

So I asked the girl, just to kill time for a while: "What kind of case did you

mean? I'm pretty busy right now."

The lady had been fumbling in her gold-beaded bag, and now I saw a hundred-dollar bill lying beside my glass. "A retainer," she said. "I can't talk to you here, though, because I think I'm being followed. If you will come to my apartment—"

Trying to offer myself excuses, I suppose, I let myself think that now since I knew where Vito Moreno hung out I could get back on him any time. And besides, this gal was a pretty number.

**H**ER apartment was a pretty number, too, and her brandy was good. It was her story that choked me. "It's like this," she says. "I've got a pearl necklace that's worth fifty thousand dollars. I needed some money badly, so I tried to borrow some money on the necklace, but the man wouldn't give me as much as I needed. I know that he trailed me home, and I've also heard that he's a dangerous man. So I'm afraid that now, since he knows where I live and knows about the necklace—well, I'm afraid he'll kill me and rob me or something. I want you to protect me."

I could see that she was scared, all right, but I had to tell her: "What you want is one of those boys that are broad across the shoulders and narrow between the eyes. You want a armed bodyguard, and you can get them for ten bucks a day."

She was determined. She said: "But I don't want such a person. I tell you, my life's in danger. You are a detective and your business is with jewels. You work for rewards offered by insurance companies."

All right, she had me there, but I tried to explain the difference. "I have to get big money for my work," I told her. "There's no use in you paying my price just for a bodyguard."

"You don't think you'd like to take

care of me?" she asked, and there was a funny kind of look in her eyes.

I passed it up in a way and said: "Sure—after business hours. But you need twenty-four-hour protection."

And then a cold voice behind me said, "No, she doesn't—not now."

The voice sounded like a flood of ice-water poured down the back of my neck. I jumped off that divan like it was the hot-seat. I got a look at the man. My first inclination was to dig for the gun under my left armpit, but I came to the conclusion that it wouldn't be the proper thing to do. The man's automatic pointed to that conclusion—and to me.

He was a tall kind of a character and had on a good Tuxedo with the shoulders padded square in the Broadway manner instead of draped as they do it a few blocks east. His slanting eyes and thin lips were hard. I knew the type too well. He wasn't fooling.

Then it dawned on me what this was all about. And in this day and age! I had to laugh, even if I didn't put much heart in it. "The old badger game, eh? I'd forgotten all about it. When did you pull it out of the mothballs?"

Now this character with the gun didn't think the pay-off was very funny, because he didn't laugh at all. And I saw that there was a kind of panicky look in the girl's face. I wondered whether I could have stumbled on the real thing. Suppose he really was an outraged husband or thought he was?

**T**HE girl looked at the man while she gulped and held her handkerchief to her mouth. I'd swear that her eyes went as big as pie-plates. Then, when she got her breath, she said, awfully excited, "Who let you in here? Where's my maid?" and a dozen other questions. They flowed in torrents, now that they'd started.

The man waited politely until she came

up for air, then said: "Your maid is out—*quite* out—and will be for some time. Now, if you two will just keep quiet for a few minutes—"

"What do you want?" the girl demanded, determined to keep up her questions.

"Primarily, a rope of pearls. And incidentally, anything else in the way of jewelry that you have which is worth taking. You don't mind, I hope?"

"I do mind, indeed," she answered coldly. "This is a detective. You can't take them."

"In that case I shouldn't have come," the man answered. "But now that I'm here, detective or no detective, I'll just take the pearls and save us both the trouble of my returning. You don't mind, Mr. Detective?"

There is such a thing as professional pride, and at that crack I could have bit the end off that gat of his and spat it in his face. But I didn't. I decided that I would hold my temper, at least while he was holding that gun, but I did say to the girl, "I'll take the case, lady."

"You're getting in on the ground floor, all right," the burglar commented. That was while he was coming around in front of us and relieving me of my gun and slipping it into his pocket. Being unarmed, I had to hold my temper while he put adhesive tape on my mouth and bound my wrists together with some more of it.

Then he looked at the girl speculatively and said, "If you think you could keep quiet for a while—this tape takes all the paint off a lady when it's removed."

The girl promised. So the burglar led us into her bedroom and made her show him where she kept her jewel-box. She wasn't going to do it, but I saw the wisdom of her following his instructions and indicated that she should do what he said. I figured I didn't want to see her hurt, and that there was always a chance to get the stuff back.

So he didn't have much trouble finding



the pearls. It was a long rope of them, perfectly matched and as big as beans. He fondled them a moment and then dropped them into his pocket. Then he plowed through the rest of the stuff in the satin-lined box with the muzzle of his gun. He must have come to the conclusion that it wasn't worth taking, because he tossed the box aside and invited us to step into her clothes' closet.

We went into her wardrobe as gentle as lambs, and he closed and locked the door on us. We didn't breathe until we heard him walk out of the front door with a leisurely gait.

**I**T TOOK the girl five minutes to get the tape off my mouth and arms, and the process ruined a fine Clark Gable mustache that I'd spent months training. When I got my breath and knocked the door down and had a bracer of her brandy back out in the living-room, I broke down and told her I was sorry about the badger-game crack I'd made. "But I said I'd take the case, and I'll do it," I promised. Now that the man was gone, I'll admit that my temper was getting the best of me. I'm a bulldog when I get on the war-path.

"By the way," I asked her. "Now that I'm working for you, what's your name? If you told me, I've forgotten in the mass of detail that's been going on."

"Mrs. Arline Cooper," she said. "If that makes any difference."

"It sure does," I told her. "After all, I don't like the idea of being locked in a clothes' closet with a lady I haven't been formally presented to. And besides, when the police question us—"

All the color went out from under her rouge, and she cried quickly: "No, you can't do that. The police mustn't know anything about it."

Now I knew I was in a puddle up to my middle, and I demanded, "Why not?"

"Because"—she was dabbling at her

eyes with her tiny handkerchief and really crying—"that would ruin everything—ruin me forever. The police can't—mustn't find out about it!"

She was sitting on her divan and feeling terribly sorry for herself, right then. I was standing in front of her and trying to dope things out. And I thought I was beginning to see a vague something in the woodpile. But a weeping woman gets under my skin—that is, if she knows how to cry without spoiling her make-up, which so few of them do.

"Oh, I see," I told her with a lot of gruffness that I didn't feel. "The stuff's hot? Is that right?"

"You mean stolen?" she sobbed. "It's not. It was bought legitimately."

"I don't believe it," I shot at her. "And I'm not going on with this case unless you come clean and tell me the truth. No funny stories. Now, do you want to give, or do you want me to drop it?"

She sobbed along for a while and then finally picked up the great burden of her story. "I didn't tell you before," she said. "But, you see, my husband thinks those pearls are imitations. If it comes out that they were genuine—"

Well sir, I'd been doing a whole lot of guessing, but now the blinding light flooded into my brain. The whole plot was just an unraveled string in my hands. I downed my brandy the wrong way, as the figure in the woodpile began to take on visible color.

"Now," I told her, "two and two begin to add up to three. You and the poor husband and the rich boy-friend. You double-cross your husband and get a boy-friend to squander fifty grand for pearls for you. But you can't wear them unless your husband thinks they're a cheap string of imitations. Otherwise, he'd commit justifiable homicide on your fair body. Right?"

"He doesn't love me, but he's insanely jealous," she answered.

"So you can't let him know that you had real pearls. And you can't go to your boy-friend and let him know, because he would then learn that you were trying to double-cross him by hocking the pearls he gave you. You go to a crook to get money, he comes and robs you and you can't open your mouth. And if I got the pearls back for you you'd double-cross me out of my fee, and if you didn't there still wouldn't be any way I could collect it. I'm sorry, sister," I finished, "but I'm resigning. My blood-pressure's not what it used to be, anyway."

"But you promised," the girl said. She was pleading. "I can pay you for getting them back. I've got two thousand dollars, but not a cent more. I'd pay you that."

I was pretty disgusted with this angel who had the heart of a tramp. But after all, two thousand dollars ain't hay, as we say on the stem, and I'm in the business of recovering jewels with no questions asked—or invited. I'm not a supervisor of morals and ethics. Besides, I had a card up my sleeve which I hadn't mentioned to her. I'll tell you about that when it comes up. So I got up and said, "Let's see the dough."

You could have knocked me cold, but she actually dug it out. She peeled it out in fifties, and I counted it and shoved it into my pocket. "You'll get this back if I don't get your necklace," I promised her expansively.

Then I asked her suddenly: "That bird that stole the necklace. He's the one you talked to about hocking it, wasn't he?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"And they call him Chink Bernard? Right?"

That was him, all right. I guessed it by the peculiar slant of his eyes. I'd heard of him, but I hadn't seen him. He was a kind of hustler out in Chi who had joined the boys in our fair city so as to have a better outlet for his talents. No-

body knew just for what his talents were best suited, but it seemed that he would do about anything that had the scent of new or musty bills on it.

So, I knew who the thief was, and I had twenty-one hundred dollars burning the linings of my pockets. All I had to do was to dust off the job of getting those beads back to the two-timing lady without any public squawk. It sounded easy, but I wasn't kidding myself.

WELL sir, I went out of Arline Cooper's place doing a lot of heavyweight thinking. Now this business of keeping the cops out of it had me worried. I could find out where this Chink person hung out by making a few telephone calls at the nearest cigar-store. But then what?

I decided to give the Chink's place the double-O, so I got his address and moseyed over. And right here I'm afraid I'm going to have to break down and tell something that I usually keep to myself. I once served an apprenticeship in a safe factory, and then later for reasons that are my own business, I had a license in a western city, under a different name, as a professional safe-opener. I'm just mentioning the outlines of the matter. The details are all in the past.

You know how one thing leads to another. His apartment-house was dark so I let my curiosity lead me a little farther, and, before I really thought much about what I was doing, I had somehow wandered into Chink Bernard's apartment and there wasn't a soul in it.

Well, after I'd put a chair against the hall door I damned near laughed out loud when I saw that little apartment wall-safe back of a picture in the living-room.

As far as I was concerned it might just as well have been a sardine-can with the key already inserted. I had it open in less than ten minutes. I just had a curiosity to see if that sap was fool enough to leave hot goods in his own house.

And he was. There was that necklace, just as white as snow and as pearly as the gates of Heaven, and it didn't take me but one look to know that the pearls were the real McCoy. You can't fool me with imitations. I knew that the daddies of these pearls had not been pried open and had sand stuck in them but had really grown them to cure a case of the stomach ache.

Anyway, I slid the pearls into my pocket, gave one look at the rest of the leather cases of jewelry in the safe and closed the safe without taking anything else. If I had been a thief, I might have taken along the rest of the stuff for good measure. But I didn't even look inside the little leather cases. You see, I'm not a burglar, but sometimes a man that can open a safe can get back stolen jewels from real burglars without the disturbance and everything that occasionally goes with it. It's a kind of a game of hide-and-seek, even if the cops have sometimes squawked that a jewel detective played square with the thieves so they could stay out and keep the reward business going. That's just the way cops talk for publication.

Anyway, my conscience didn't hurt a bit, and I was really glad I had done it when I gave the marbles to the gal and she threw her arms around my neck and kissed me, she was so relieved. Not to mention the twenty-one hundred in my pocket.

Well, I finally got out on the street with the dough in my pockets. You'd think that rounded out a pretty busy evening, wouldn't you? You'd think I'd have sense enough to call it a night. But not me. Wait.

**I**T WASN'T much after one o'clock yet, so I figured that I could get back to the "99" and maybe run into Vito Moreno again. I'd kind of let him slip out of my mind for a while. Anyway, there was a hot number the third from the end in

the chorus-line, but that's something else again.

You think I'd had enough for one night? Well, listen. I caught a cab back to the club and got out at the curb. The club is in one of those converted brown-stone houses on Fifty-second Street, and the entrance is a long and inconspicuous kind of covered hallway, half a flight down. It's a hang-over from the old speakeasy days, having gone respectable and high-priced in spite of the dark entrance.

Maybe that's why I didn't realize that I had walked into the barrel of a pistol until I felt it sticking into my ribs. I was mourning the passing of prohibition, I suppose. And maybe I didn't almost choke on my tongue when I saw that considerable quantity of lady who was holding the gun. I don't mean volume, I mean quality—and determination.

Except that determination is a kind of mild word for it. It didn't show on the surface so much, but, underneath her velvet words, it was there in great quantities, just like the claw of a tiger's foot hid under the velvet pad. I recognized it at once. I had been married for a time.

"Call a taxi for us, please," she said with that surface velvet which I've just mentioned. "And of course, do it without attracting any attention. I've some business with you."

Having been married, I didn't argue with the lady. And besides, I was decidedly interested in her. She was the gal who had been sitting with Vito Moreno in the club earlier in the evening. Business was really picking up. So, on account of her gun, I decided to play along with her. "I should be very happy to get you a taxi," I told her.

"Not me—*us*," she corrected.

I let it go at that and went out to the sidewalk with her, and the doorman got us a car. He didn't see the little gun that was hardly concealed at all in her hand

with her bag and her handkerchief and the summer fur she was carrying.

"Through Central Park," she told the driver as we settled down, and the car started.

"My name's Chuck Ware," I told her. "What's yours?"

"My name is Elsa Bernard."

I sat up in surprise. "Not *the* Elsa Bernard?" I asked. "Surely not the wife of Chink Bernard, the distinguished new arrival in our city—"

She jabbed the gun in my ribs and passed off the irony that I was using to try to cover up my confusion. It seems that I only thought I was through for the evening.

"Yes, the wife of Chink Bernard, and also the lady from whom you stole a rope of pearls—"

"You're married to both of them?"

"I mean I am the wife of Bernard, and I *am* the lady from whom you stole the pearls. I saw you earlier tonight with the woman who hired you to steal them from my safe. I know all about you, and I know that my pearls are gone and that you got them for her. Now, you're going to get them back for me."

This was too much for me. Did this bunch of nuts think I was going to run around stealing a bunch of trinkets back and forth all night? And besides, I'd have one hell of a time trying to talk myself out of a nice lot of cop trouble if this business ever got out, no matter how deserving my client was.

Anyway, I could see that this gal wasn't any set-up for a tall story so I asked her: "Did it ever occur to you that maybe the pearls belonged to her, in the first place? Not admitting, of course, that I stole them from that thief of a husband of yours who held her up and got them, in the first place."

"It did not occur to me that the pearls were hers," she answered, "because they were mine. And what's mine certainly

doesn't belong to her just because she happens to want it and send a safe-cracker to get it."

MY HEAD was swimming by now, and I was just about ready to dive out of that taxi into the lake in the park. This whole night was getting screwier by the minute. Now, I didn't know who the pearls did belong to, and to tell you the truth, right then I didn't care. I was sick of the whole mess. So I called her hand, hoping that she wouldn't take me up on my suggestion.

"If they're yours, why not call the cops?"

"I've got a good reason not to want the police to know anything about it," she said. "That's why I'm making you get them back for me, just like you stole them from me, in the first place."

It was then that I caught a glimmer of light in my brain. It was kind of dull, but it was there, all right.

"Don't tell me why you don't want the cops," I said. "Let me guess." I knew there was something vaguely familiar about that fear of cops. The pearls were given to her. . . . "Here's my guess," I told her. "The pearls were given to you by a gentleman friend and you don't want your husband, Chink Bernard, to know you've got a gentleman friend because Chink would commit an act of justifiable homicide upon your lovely, double-crossing person. *Nessy paw?*"

Well, I can usually take my surprises with a straight face, but this one made me nearly swallow my cigarette. She looked as if I had been reading her love-letters over her shoulder and said: "Where'd you pick that up, mister?"

I knew I'd banged into the truth, and that served only to mix up the pieces in the puzzle. I slumped down in my corner of the cushion and I tell you I felt as dizzy as a two-day-old case of sea-sickness. But I did manage to throw out a

smoke-screen to cover my confusion. "I know the script by heart," I told her. "It has already been told me, scene by scene, and with all the variations. It seems to be running in cycles, like the movies. A good plot comes out, and everybody uses it at once. A lady just ran through the shooting-script of it with me."

Her guilty conscience or something must have been what made her misunderstand me, for she answered: "Well, no matter what that Cooper wench told you, you're still going to get those pearls back for me without any loud noise. What you don't know won't hurt you, and what you do know you'd better forget. The important point is that Chink doesn't know, and he's not going to find it out."

It was right then that the little light that had been nice and dim in the corner of my brain suddenly flared up into a blinding glare. When the idea hit me it made me weak all over.

I started to say, "You think your Chinky boy doesn't know—" but I cut it short as the pieces of the puzzle started to dropping into their proper slots. Then I just sat in my corner of the cab for five minutes and my mind was racing faster than the wheels of the taxi.

When I had got sort of calmed down I told her: "Yes. I believe you. I know now that you had that necklace all the time. She wanted it and put on a first-class song-and-dance number that resulted in me going to your house and getting it for her. It was a clever act and I fell for it like a ton of brick. We'll go get the necklace back—if it isn't too late,"

Did I want to get that necklace back, right then? I stuck my head up front and told the driver to step on it to the Vendome Apartments. I shoved a bill in his hand and sat on the drop-seat shoving him on until we screeched up in front of the address.

As we tumbled out I told Elsa Bernard: "You stick that gun of yours in the hall-

man's back while I get his pass-keys. Then we'll lock him in the broom closet." She was a determined little gal, as I said, and she was quite unhappy at the loss of her pearls to Cooper, so she helped me relieve the hallman and stow him away with an expert hand. She must have been a great help to Chink in his labors.

We got upstairs and listened at the hall door of the apartment. I felt disappointed when we didn't hear anything, but I used the pass-key and we let ourselves into the lighted living-room without making any noise.

Then we could hear voices, and we both froze. Two voices, Chink Bernard's and Arline Cooper's. They were packing bags, so we gathered, moving about pretty fast

**E**LSA BERNARD didn't say anything as we stood there in the living-room, but I watched her face, and right there I got some more of the story. I saw the corners of her mouth go down in a hard line and her nostrils quiver and the little crow's feet form around her eyes. She didn't have to say anything. I knew.

She was just getting verification of what she must have known all along. Arline Cooper had stolen her man and together they had stolen her string of pearls. I could hear the breath whistle through her nostrils, and I saw the muscles tense in her right arm.

I started to lay a detaining hand on her arm, but I was too late. She gave one bound into the next room, with me right behind her. They were packing clothes in a couple of striped airplane suitcases that lay open on the bed, already half-filled.

Elsa stopped just inside the room and said in a sharp voice that sent shivers up my spine: "All right, you!"

Arline Cooper whirled around and saw her, just as Chink Bernard did. Arline's eyes and mouth opened wide and she gave

went to a fully, gurgling kind of, "Oh!"

Then Elsa Bernard held that silvered .32 waist-high and pulled the trigger without batting an eye. The gun popped with a spiteful kind of a sound, and Arline Cooper shivered and then sank to the floor. She sat half upright for a moment, supported by the side of the bed, and then slid down and rolled partly under the bed.

Elsa Bernard watched her fall with narrowed eyes, then turned on the stunned Chink, said: "You, too, you dirty rat!"

Bernard broke out of his trance and dived for her, just as she pulled the trigger the second time. That dive saved his life, but the bullet caught him across the side of the head and he finished his dive with his head in the white bearskin rug.

To tell you the truth, I had been paralyzed myself. I couldn't help it. I couldn't get my eyes off that woman's hate-filled face.

That's how I happened to see her watching the unconscious Chink and saw the expression of hate slowly fade and another expression take its place. It was as if it had just suddenly dawned on her that she had shot her man. Then the gun slid out of her hand and bounced on the floor. She was suddenly crying. She fell down to her knees, took that thug's head in her lap, and started crying over him and plastering his face with lipstick marks. She was getting hysterical. She kept repeating over and over, "Oh, Chinkie, darling, I didn't mean to do it. Chinkie, I love you. Chinkie, Chinkie, I didn't mean to."

**W**ELL, that got me. I read newspapers and I know by the headlines that there was never a woman who shot her husband that didn't do it because she loved him. The race of husbands is just about extinct for that very reason.

But Chink Bernard wasn't extinct, and I didn't want to be. So I slid over and

picked up the girl's gun, and, while she was dabbing the blood off his temple, and he was groaning his way back to consciousness, I went through him and relieved him of his gun and the one he'd taken away from me earlier in this delightful evening of fun and amusement.

Then I went over and dumped out the traveling-cases and I came up with *two*—count them—*two* ropes of pearls. I thought so. It didn't take me more than a minute to spot the real one from the phony. I would have spotted the phony when I first saw it, but I never was close to it.

Elsa was sitting on the floor with Chink's head still in her lap, but she didn't miss seeing me handling those pearls. She held out her hand for them.

I stuck them in my pocket and said: "Forget 'em, Elsa. They don't belong to you, and they didn't belong to Vito, and they didn't belong to Cooper. Your husband knew that Vito had the loot stowed with you, and he wanted to get his claws into it, but you wouldn't let him. So he and Cooper framed me into looting your safe for them by letting me sit in on the little drama they'd arranged for me. Chink steals a phony set and I'm steered to your set to get the real ones, thinking I'm getting the ones that were stolen from Cooper in the little drama they arranged for my benefit."

"That only proves that I was right," she said. "So I'm the one that gets the pearls."

"No, sister. You missed part of what I said. You didn't know, for instance, that I was tailing Vito Moreno, who is the gentleman who gave you the stuff that you were so mysterious about. I saw you with him while I was trying to find out where he had hidden the haul he got out on Long Island last week. I took these pearls out of the whole cache of stuff in your apartment without bothering to look at the rest of the stuff. Which proves that

I'm honest, and accounts for the fact that I didn't recognize it as the stuff I was looking for.

"I didn't know, at that time, that it was Chink Bernard's wife that I saw with Vito. So now, while you nurse your husband back into good enough health for you to shoot him again, I'll drop by your house and pick up the stuff I left. And, in the meantime, I think you and Chink would feel a lot happier in Chicago where you came from. The air around here at this time a year is pretty bad for murderers, and from the looks of Arline I'd say you've got a slight case of homicide about to set in. But look me up if you come back to New York anytime."

**W**ELL, I went over to the apartment that the Bernards wouldn't be using for a while and picked up the rest of the stuff. Then I saw that it wasn't yet four o'clock and that I'd still have time to catch

the tail end of the last floor-show at the "99" Club. Maybe that third number from the end in the chorus would be free for the evening.

Vito Moreno was still there, trifling with a blond number while he was waiting for Elsa. I didn't bother to tell him that I thought she wouldn't be back. As a matter of fact, I didn't bother to give him another thought. I'd only been trying to get my hands on that stuff he'd lifted, and now I had that in my pocket. That meant ten grand to me from the insurance company in the morning. A cop probably would have taken him in, but that wasn't my business. It's possible that since he is still free he might rob another rich nest of jewelry. And it *could* accidentally happen that I might learn about it and be able to find it and get the reward. But of course all of that would just be coincidence.

Wouldn't it?



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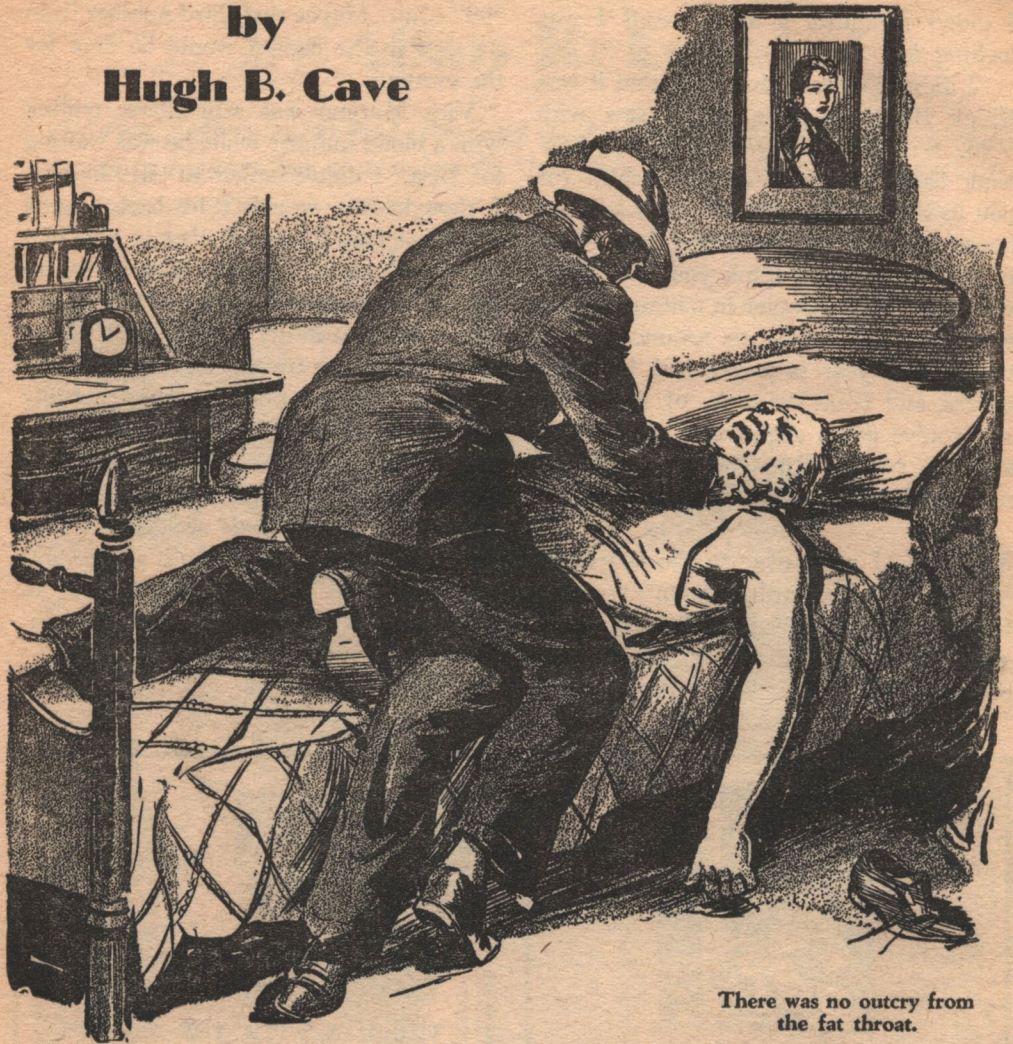
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# FOOTSTEPS TO A FINISH

by  
Hugh B. Cave



There was no outcry from  
the fat throat.

*Corday was perfectly satisfied to have his employer dictate his own death warrant. What upset the double-crossing young secretary was when the old fool tore it to bits a half hour after he died.*

“DAMN! Now I’ve dropped them!” Fumbling his broken spectacles out of the sawdust, Adolph Kepler straightened himself, breathing heavily from the exertion, and carefully placed the salvaged pieces on the bar, beside his beer glass.

The pale young man beside him said: “That’s too bad, Mr. Kepler. You’ve others, haven’t you?”

“Yes, yes, I’ve others at home. On my dressing-table.”

“I’ll take these down first thing in the morning, Mr. Kepler,” the pale young man said, “and have them repaired. The lenses aren’t broken, you see.”

“I don’t see! How can I see without my glasses?”

The pale young man shrugged his shoulders, and, with an expression of dis-



gust on his face, turned his attention to his drink. He and his employer were the only patrons at the bar. The bar-keep was polishing taps.

"Well," Adolph Kepler said, "I suppose I should go home. Got to write to Edith yet, and it's late. What time is it, Philip?"

The young man did not answer. His half-shut eyes were staring at the broken glasses. He was thinking.

"What time is it, I asked you!"

"Eh? Oh!" Philip Corday glanced quickly at the clock above the cash register. The clock read ten past one.

"It's after one-thirty," Philip said.

"That late?" Kepler blinked his watery eyes, scowled at his inability to see, then jerked his left arm up and tugged the sleeve back. But there was no watch on his wrist. Philip Corday had carefully noted that fact.

"Got to go. See you in the morning," Kepler said. "And don't be late."

He went out noisily, his fat little body wobbling like jelly as he put his flat, tender feet down on the floor. *Slap, slap, slap*. The sound made Philip Corday wince. *Slap, slap, slap*. Those damned noisy feet were always the same, always plopping along. Three years he had stood it. For three years he had listened to the old man's complaints, answered all his abuses with studied politeness, slaved for him, nursed him, endured him. Doctors had told Adolph Kepler that at the most he would live but six months. Three years ago they had told him that. He was more alive now than ever.

The door swung shut behind Kepler's slapping feet. Philip Corday finished his drink, drew a deep breath. "Night, Joe."

"Night Mr. Corday," the bar-keep said.

Without haste, Philip Corday strolled out. Up the street, Adolph Kepler was plopping along, *slap slap slap*, on his way home. It would take him a little longer than ten minutes to get there.

The street was deserted. Philip crossed

over, ducked into an alley and lengthened his stride. In less than five minutes, without having done any running that might have attracted attention, he was at the front door of Kepler's apartment house.

Strange, how calm he felt, how steady his hand when he put the key into the lock. Strange, for that matter, how utterly devoid of emotion he had been, back there in the barroom, when he had realized that here was his opportunity.

At least a score of plans had occurred to him during the past few months. Each of them he had pondered for days, examining every angle. Each of them he had discarded as too dangerous.

This one had come in a flash, and was the answer to his prayers. To Edith's prayers. This one was perfect.

CORDAY climbed the stairs quickly and let himself into Kepler's apartment. The door locked itself behind him. On tiptoes he paced down the hall to the bedroom.

The shades were down and the room was dark, but he needed no light. Every inch of the four-room apartment was as familiar to him as the four walls of his own shabby room at Mrs. Barry's. Hundreds of times he had spent whole days here, slaving while Kepler sprawled like a fat pig in bed, nursing sore feet and snarling orders.

First, the glasses. They were on the dressing-table. He found them, thrust them into his pocket. Now, the clock on the desk beside the bed.

He set the hands ahead half an hour, replaced the clock and tiptoed around the bed to the clothes-closet. Kepler would not use this closet. He would throw his clothes down on a chair, for the maid to pick up in the morning.

And Kepler was coming now, *slap slap slap*, up the stairs and along the hall.

Philip Corday held his breath while the key turned in the lock. His hands

clenched and moisture formed on his face while Kepler came plodding along to the bedroom. *Slap, slap, slap.* Damn the man! Damn him for a fat, ill-tempered slob. Damn his love for Edith!

*Slap, slap, slap.* No wonder Mrs. Browning, who lived in the apartment downstairs, was continually complaining to the janitor about that infernal clumping. At this time of night you could hear it all through the house.

Suddenly the light was on, and Corday's brief attack of nervousness subsided. From his hiding-place in the depths of the closet he peered through the inch-wide slit of the door, and flexed his fingers. It would be so ridiculously easy.

Adolph Kepler went to the dressing-table and fumbled for his spectacles. Not finding them, he began grumbling and kept up the muttering all the while he was tugging off his coat. He flung the coat at a chair, threw his tie and shirt after it, and plopped down on the bed.

"Got to write to Edith," he said aloud; and Corday, hearing it, smiled.

It was a routine, this nightly epistle to Edith. No matter what the hour, or how ill his temper, Kepler never forgot his wife. She had been in Miami more than a month now. A month of loneliness, more so for Corday than for Kepler himself—the unsuspecting fool!

What would the fat lummoX say if he knew that each of his love letters, when typed by his trusted secretary, went to Edith with an added line or two of endearment about which he knew nothing?

A sneer curled Corday's thin lips. He watched with narrowed eyes while Adolph Kepler leaned forward and pulled the dictating-machine closer. Then he listened.

"My darling . . ."

His darling! What a laugh! If the fool but knew that his precious Edith endured him solely because of his money.

"My darling . . . I am very tired tonight, but it would be wrong of me to

sleep without first telling you how much I long for you. It was a hard day, and the hour now is"— Kepler leaned forward to peer into the face of the clock—"the hour now is one-fifty."

Trust him to tell her the hour! How weary she must be of reading the exact time he did everything! At twelve-thirty, my darling, I had lunch. At two o'clock I put aside my work and looked at your photograph and felt so lonely for you. At five, I did so-and-so.

But Kepler was in a talkative mood tonight, damn him. There he was, rambling on and on, mumbling about his work and his loneliness and all the rest of it, while valuable minutes ticked away. Would he never get to the end of it?

There! He was finished now. He was fumbling with his shoes. One shoe was on the floor; the other was giving him trouble. Those tender flat feet of his!

Corday stepped from the closet, reached the bed in two swift strides. His strong, lean hands closed in a viselike grip around Kepler's fat throat. He jerked his victim flat, jammed a knee into the man's stomach and exerted pressure. There was no outcry. The whole job took less than three minutes.

The clock on the desk read one-fifty-nine when Corday stepped away from the bed. He corrected it, checked it with his watch. Actually, the time was one-thirty.

VERY quietly he closed the door of the apartment behind him and descended the stairs. In no hurry, he made sure the street was deserted before he stepped over the downstairs threshold. Five minutes later he entered the same bar-room he had so lately left and put a dime and a nickel in the cigarette machine.

"Glad you weren't closed, Joe," he said casually. I needed smokes."

The bar-keep, washing glasses, looked up. "Oh no, we don't close yet."

"What time do you?"

The bar-keep glanced at the clock above the cash register. It read twenty-five minutes to two. "Not for twenty-five minutes yet," he said.

"I'll have a beer, then."

Sipping the beer, Corday stared idly at the clock and wondered when the murder would be discovered, and who would be blamed for it. His hand did not even tremble when he raised the glass to his lips. Everything had been so easy.

They would find Adolph Kepler dead and they would know, by listening to Kepler's own voice on the dictating machine, that he had been murdered sometime after one-fifty. Naturally they would come straight to Philip Corday to ask questions. But he would have an alibi.

It was now twenty minutes to two. He would stay here, drinking beer, until Joe closed up. Then he would walk up the street with Joe and drop into the all-night restaurant at the corner of Barton and Main. It would be easy to find one or two companions there and keep them in tow around town until the police caught up with him to ask questions.

Every moment would then be accounted for. Even Edith would never know the whole truth. So easy, when you used your head!

"Another beer, Joe."

"Right, Mr. Corday."

So easy. Adolph Kepler had been dead now for quite some time, yet, according to the dictating machine, he was still alive. The police would eventually figure out a way to blame someone for the crime, and then . . .

Corday raised the glass to his lips and winked at the clock, then turned abruptly to stare at two policemen who had entered the barroom.

The clock said a quarter to two.

**A**T POLICE headquarters an hour later, Patrolman Ralph Fitzsimmons gently closed the door of the rear room

behind him and approached a desk where his superior sat waiting.

"It was him that did it, all right," Fitzsimmons said. "He admits it."

Captain Percy Bacon, at the desk, nodded and swung about to gaze at a woman who sat on a chair in the corner.

"You may go now, Mrs. Browning," he said quietly. "I'm sorry to have kept you, but I really thought we might have to question you further. We're very grateful to you—"

The woman stood up. "You don't need to thank me," she said crisply. "I knew that poor man lived all alone, and I knew something was wrong, so I merely called the janitor; that's all I did."

The captain frowned. "You haven't told us yet, Mrs. Browning—at least, you haven't told me—how you knew something was wrong."

"Haven't I? Then I will. You see, Captain, I've lived under Mr. Kepler for a long time, and I've listened to those flat feet of his until at times I thought he'd drive me insane. Night after night he would clump into his apartment and sit on the bed and take his shoes off. *Bang* would go the first shoe! *Bang* would go the other! And they weren't just ordinary shoes; they were extra heavy ones that he had made special for his sore feet.

"But last night, after he woke me up by clumping into his apartment, I heard only *one* shoe land on the floor. I waited a long time for the other one and didn't hear a sound, even, so then I said to myself: 'That poor man is too sick to put himself to bed properly.' So then I called the janitor."

The woman went out. From the rear room came sounds of a man sobbing.

"He's queer, that guy," Fitzsimmons said. "One minute he admits he did it, and the next minute he starts insistin' that Kepler ain't dead yet. Somethin' about a dictating-machine. He's nuts."

# REVERSE ENGLISH

by  
Brad Monroe



He brought the weight down with vicious force on his victim's head.

*Smoky was no pool shark or he'd have avoided a miscue with reverse English when he was behind the 8-ball.*

**S**MOKY celebrated his tenth day out of Sing Sing by deciding to pull another job. A small job this time.

Hell! Suppose the cops *were* watching him. Suppose they *were* suspicious of an ex-con. That didn't mean they'd catch him. They'd never expect him to pull a small job like robbing a fish store.

He'd picked the early morning, about seven o'clock, to pull the stick-up.

Just as he'd expected, the old man was at the back of the store marking the day's prices on a board which hung on the wall. Smoky shuddered as he walked slowly toward the old man. The smell of fish always made him a little sick.

The old man laid down his chalk. "Good morning. What will it be—"

"Skip it," Smoky snarled menacing him with a hand thrust deep into an empty coat-pocket. "This is a stick-up."

"I—I haven't anything here—"

"Hand over what you've got in your pocket. I know there's nothing in the register. Make it snappy."

"Yes, sir. Here is all I've got. About twenty dollars."

Just as Smoky reached for the bills, the old man lunged forward and knocked him back against the wall. Smoky recovered and got a headlock on the old man to prevent any possible outcry. "Cripes," Smoky grunted, "the old buzzard is tough."

Groping with one hand, he felt around on the counter. His fingers touched an old-fashioned balance-scale and then closed around a five-pound weight. That would fix him. He brought it down with vicious force on his victim's head.

"Phew," Smoky sighed. "Was he tough!" He looked down at the limp body lying on the floor. "I hit him too hard. He's dead, sure as hell."

Smoky collected the bills scattered on the floor and making sure the body was hidden behind the counter, strolled calmly out of the store.

For no reason at all he decided to walk the fifteen or so blocks to his room. After he had passed at least three people, each of whom had turned and laughed, he began to feel his nerves tightening up.

Then two young fellows standing on a corner. Smoky walked by; stopped to light a cigarette and heard one snicker: "Look at that sap!" If he hadn't been on the lam he'd have turned back and given the fresh kid a sock on the nose.

Even though he felt his temper rising, he was still nervous. He was just two blocks from where he lived when a large black sedan pulled up alongside him and someone called: "Hello Smoky."

He spun on his heels. He recognized them—dicks. What could they want?

One of the men got out of the car and put a heavy hand on Smoky's arm. "Someone just held up a fish store a few blocks from here. Slugged the old man and killed him."

"Got any idea who did it?"

"Sure—you."

"Me? Don't be dumb."

"Know where the store is? Elm and Fourteenth?"

"I know where it is but I haven't been down that way."

"That's what you say. Suppose you take off your coat."

There was alarm in Smoky's voice. "What's the idea? You can't beat me up for nothing."

"Come on," the detective growled.

Smoky removed his coat fully, expecting that he would receive a beating. "Here it is. But you can't—" His eyes bulged. The back of the blue serge was marked up with chalk.

"See what I see?" the dick asked. "The old man's grandson was standing on a corner and noticed how you were marked up. When he got back to the store we were there. He remembered you."

Smoky could make out letters written in reverse. It wasn't difficult to make out the words.



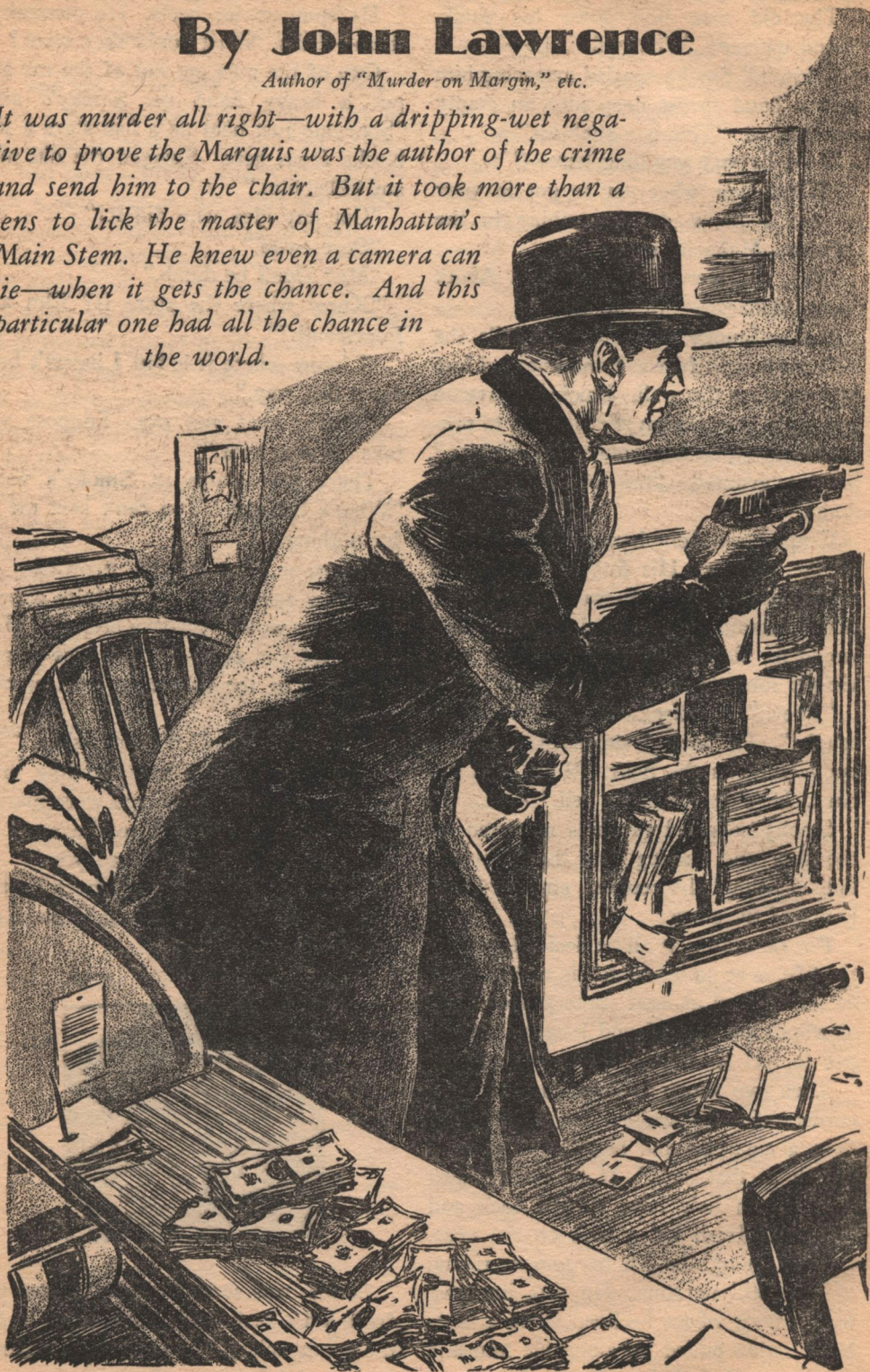
Smoky was sorry he hadn't given that fresh kid a sock on the nose when he had the opportunity. There wouldn't be much chance of doing it now!

# LIVE MAN'S SHOES

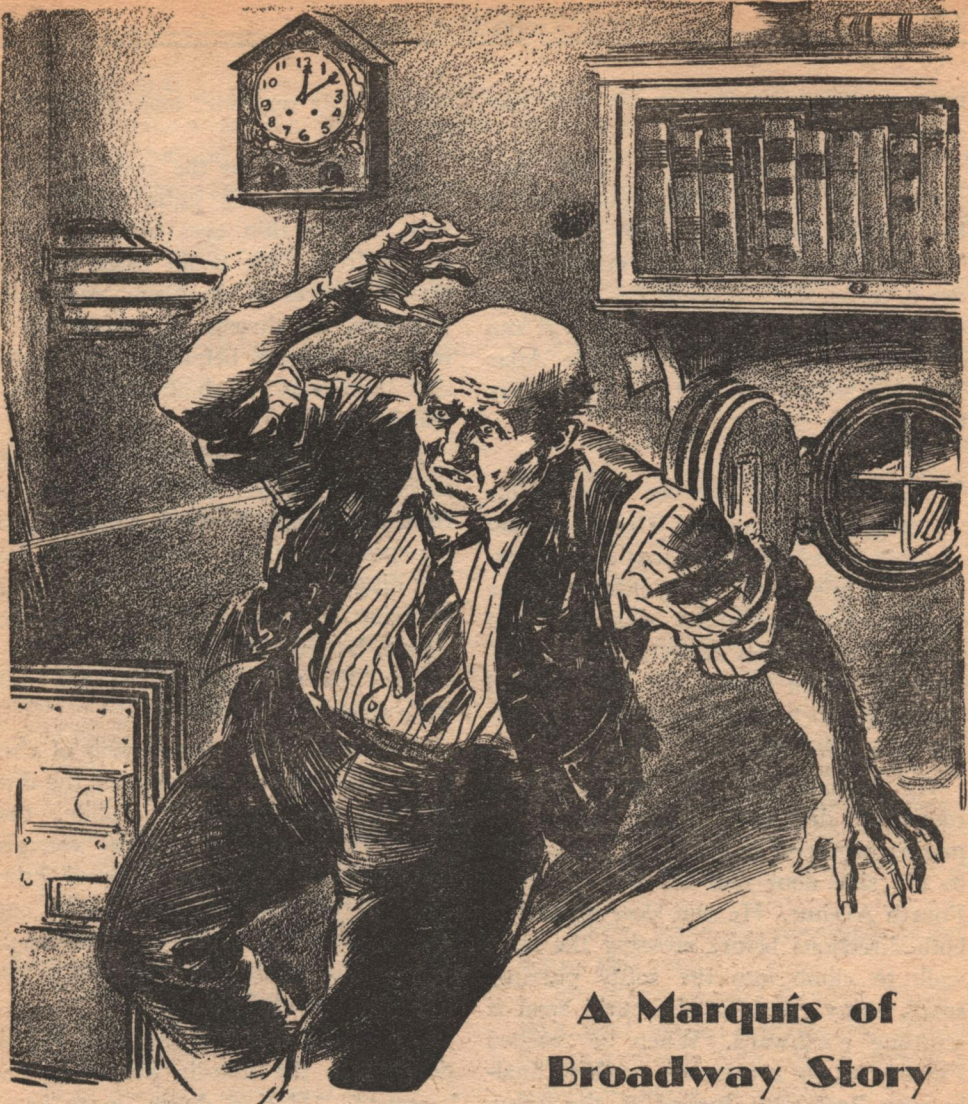
By John Lawrence

Author of "Murder on Margin," etc.

*It was murder all right—with a dripping-wet negative to prove the Marquis was the author of the crime and send him to the chair. But it took more than a lens to lick the master of Manhattan's Main Stem. He knew even a camera can lie—when it gets the chance. And this particular one had all the chance in the world.*



His eyes went frantic. "Marty! No—" The black gun spurted flame and roar.



## A Marquis of Broadway Story

### CHAPTER ONE

#### Marquis Murder

**T**HE mirror, for once, did the Marquis of Broadway full justice. The reflection that stared from it was trim, dapper, deceptively slight in smoothly tailored dark clothes. Round, weathered face and deep-set small blue eyes had clear color. The imported hard hat, the tight black silk scarf and black kid gloves were all new; gleaming small black shoes might have been. No wrinkle marred the smooth Chesterfield or knife-edged dark trousers.

Even Broadway Squad lieutenants must have vacations. The Marquis' had done wonders for him. This was his last night. He had left the Adirondacks behind that morning early, and they were now only pleasant memory—pleasant and miraculous. For the man who turned unhurriedly from the dingy drugstore's mirror to step into a phone booth was a different man from the hag-ridden officer of a month ago. He felt, acted, even looked, younger, and there was fresh live intensity in his small, bright eyes.

He glanced thoughtfully at a wristwatch, before he dialed. When, after a

moment, he got an answer, his voice was quiet, casual.

"Sid? Marty Marquis. . . Yeah. Just tonight, Sid. I . . . Well, what *would* it be? I need some quick money, Sid. . . . That's right. . . . No, I'd rather come down there, Sid. Though I'd prefer not to go barging in the front way if it can be helped. . . . Yes, through the Atlas Building behind you and . . . right. Say half an hour, Sid."

**T**HERE was a glowing light in his eyes as he hung up. The maelstrom of thought behind them was almost visible. He missed the hook entirely at the first attempt, then stood with one hand still on the pronged receiver for two full minutes. Then slowly his face molded into an apple-cheeked mask, his vermilion lips to a thin, flat line.

He stepped from the booth, looked round the drugstore. There seemed no patrons whatever in the place. He walked to the side door that let him out onto Fourth Avenue. He sent slow glances in both directions before crossing the sidewalk to climb into the softly purring, small, shiny coupe at the curb, send it scuttling northward. When he reached Fiftieth, he cut crosstown, rumbled finally onto Broadway, turned up the noisy, glaring thoroughfare.

Fall bite was in the air. It had evidently inspired New York to gaiety. Broadway was jammed tight, taxis honking, black crowds swarming, loudspeakers blating, lights blazing.

It took him ten minutes, moving by inches, before he could nose the little coupe into the curb directly before a darkened pawnshop.

He did not get out. He could not risk chance recognition. It was said that one person out of nine on Broadway knew the Marquis by sight and sight was very good here: The blazing marquee of a lofty two-a-day cathedral of the motion picture

was directly opposite, making the street like day.

He leaned across the seat, taking the hard hat from his tight, rubbly black hair, to run thin eyes over the pawnshop's front. He could catch only obscured glances of the black, steel-barred windows, as throngs streamed by. It was five minutes before he was content that there was no chink of light visible within.

He settled back, drove on to the next corner, turned right and then immediately right again onto Seventh, found a parking-spot that placed him fifty yards from the dingy entrance of the rickety Atlas Building, which backed up the pawnshop. Again, he left the car running, while he crossed the dark sidewalk to the building's uninviting entrance.

The Atlas was a honeycomb of cheap rehearsal halls. As he threaded the dirty, narrow, imitation-marble lobby, there were more than a dozen youngish, strained-looking people clustered grimly around the moth-eaten elevator cage. From overhead came the monotonous, dispiriting din of shuffling feet and a score of tinny, pounded pianos.

Stairs at the rear of the lobby led him down into the dim-lit slot of a dirty basement. Half a dozen doors in the walls were closed. No one was in sight. At the back of the basement, an iron door swung open and he was at the foot of six steps which led him up into the small, open court, directly behind the pawnshop.

The cement-paved court, hemmed on four sides, was fifteen feet wide by twenty-five deep. The rear wall of the pawnshop was a solid battlement of cement, with an oblong abutting backwards out of its middle. The oblong housed the office of the pawnshop. It was windowless, with a gray-painted steel door at one end of the abutting block.

His rubber-soled shoes were silent. He walked unhurriedly to the corner of the



abutment farthest from the gray door, knelt, taking a jack-knife from his pocket. He did not remove the black gloves from his small hands as he snapped open a small saw-blade on the knife. He groped in the angle the abutment made with the cement court, found a lead cable. The cable came out of the ground and bent at once into the back of the pawnshop. Some flaw of installation had left two inches of exposed surface.

The jack-knife chewed a little square mouth in the lead cable. He dropped the knife back into his pocket, took a small metal disk—brass covered with file-marks, ground to sharpness at the edges. He wrapped a handkerchief around his black glove, held the disk through that, inserted it in the little leaden mouth. He jammed it in, turning the disk to operate the cutting edge. Electricity bit quiveringly at his hand and arm.

He stood up again, looked at his watch, went slowly to the gray steel door. He knocked, hesitated, knocked five times, then twice more.

**P**RESENTLY, locks began to click back. The door swung open a few inches, obviously on a chain. Dim yellow light framed a saddle-colored, corrugated face and bald head. The face was mostly a huge, drooping nose, separating little leering brown eyes. The owner looked like an evil Punch. "Who is it?" There was an impediment in his throat. Everything he said sounded like a furtive whisper.

"Marty, Sid."

The chain was thrown off and he squeezed in, between the fat little shirt-sleeved man and a battered oak desk, sauntered over and stood with black-gloved hands in his Chesterfield pockets, while the pawnbroker relocked the door.

There was nothing in the room to indicate that Sid Lajoie was believed the richest man on Broadway. The walls

were cracked, brown plaster. A single dim bulb glowed sickly in the ceiling of the low-ceilinged room. There was no ventilation. The scarred desk and a swivel-chair crowded one end of the room, a greasy-looking cot with a standing, old-fashioned floor-safe, the other. The bare board floor was dirty. Midway the black wall hung a glass-fronted, hanging bookcase, above a yellowed wall-calendar. Facing it, in the front wall, was the closed door to the pawnshop proper with a cuckoo-clock above it.

"Well, how much, Marty?"

The squat little man turned back from the locked door, waddled over to the standing safe at the end of the cot, wiping hands on his shiny blue trousers. The safe-door was unlocked. He squatted down, pulling it open, looked up over his shoulder. "Hey—how much?"

"Ten thousand, Sid."

The pawnbroker's dirty hands flew up. He sat down on the floor with a bump, his mouth open. "Hey! I haven't got anything like—"

"Get it up, Sid."

The saddle face winced. There was agony in his little leering eyes. "Marty, be reasonable! If I should lose so much—Oy!" He clapped a dirty hand to his forehead.

"You think I'm not good for it?"

"Good for it? Yes, if nothing happens to you. But what if they should knock you off or something?"

"Who?"

"My God, who, he asks me! After eighteen years running Broadway with black jacks who, he asks me? *Liebchen*, if all the goniffs that would do it were laid end to end—"

"They will be, if they try it. Quit stalling, Sid. I'm in a rush now."

The pawnbroker, making as long a process of it as possible, got miserably to his feet, made a vague gesture toward the calendar under the hanging bookcase.

"Well—will you give me a note then?"

"Sure."

Still shaking his head, moving at snail's-pace, Sid pushed the calendar aside. A splayed, dirty thumb reluctantly pressed a spot in the plaster. A square door of plaster spurted open, and the round face of an ultra-modern wall-safe gleamed. The money-lender sighed, worked the combination, turned back presently, whisking bills from the top of a thick pile, between thumb and forefinger.

"Marty, y'unnerstan'. This should absolutely ruin me, if—"

His husked words got tangled in his throat. He went rigid, unmoving. Slowly, his bloodshot eyes crawled from the black gun that had quietly appeared in the other's black-gloved hand, crawled up the sleeve of the Chesterfield to the grim, thin lips, to the agate-hard eyes, now sunk almost out of sight.

He whispered: "Marty! You— For God's sake, you don't—don't need a gun on old Sid, Marty—"

"Don't get excited, Sid, and nobody'll be hurt. Just put the dough on the desk over there—what you have in your hand and what's in the other safe, as well."

**T**HERE was shocked, incredulous wonder in the old man's grotesque face. He whispered desperately: "Marty—you don't have to—give me no note. You don't have to give me none, at all."

"Get a move on, Sid."

Sweat stood out on the gnome-like, big-nosed pawnbroker's face as he crouched beside the wad of bills on the scarred oak desk.

"Now, take that swivel-chair and bring it over under the cuckoo-clock. Set the hands at ten minutes after twelve."

"Marty"—the choked whisper was strained, frightened—"Marty, have you blown your cork? Are—are you sick, Marty?"

"Sid, shut up. Do as I tell you, or else."

When the clock was set, he said: "Put the chair back. Now open the glass front of that hanging bookcase.

The hunched old man stiffened. His big eyes, terrified, bewildered, searched the other's shaded, small blue ones. He faltered once. He was like a man with a weight on each foot. He went to the bookcase, swung it open. What had appeared to be books were merely parts of bindings glued to the glass. The bookcase, itself, was filled with an immense camera, whose black snout pointed at the door to the pawnshop opposite.

"Does it work just as well through the glass as it does open?"

"Ye-es."

"Then close it."

The squat old man had to reach high up to refasten the catch.

"Now take one step sideways, Sid."

Something in the tone whipped the old man's head over his shoulder, even as he stepped aside. His eyes went frantic "Marty! No—"

The black gun spurted flame and roar.

The lead entered under his left ear, smacked his grotesque contorted face flat to the brown plaster. A huge gout of blood slapped the wall a foot away. He got a scream out—a macabre, retching squeal. He was bounced back as his knees collapsed, fell on his back, almost at the feet of the motionless killer, blood pouring from his blown-out face.

**T**HE killer moved like chain-lightning, in a series of obscure moves. He darted over and snapped the office into darkness, returned and groped open the connecting door to the looming pawnshop. Then he took up a position with his back to it, crouched over in the darkness, his gun covering the bookcase from the archway. He suddenly jumped a few inches backward, without changing his pose or savage look on his face. For the space of three heart-beats, he stayed there

in the silence, then jumped again into the dingy, dark little office, closed the connecting door, hastily snapped on the dim light again.

He dragged the swivel-chair back to the position under the cuckoo-clock, restored the hands of the clock to the correct time, swung the chair back to its place before the desk and slipped swiftly to the door. The still warm gun he jammed into a side pocket, the scooped-up wads of money down the front of his coat. His black-gloved fingers were none too steady as they snatched at the locks on the door.

When it swung open, he sent one flaming glance around the room, switched out the light and stepped out into the cement court, pulling the door closed after him. The court was still silent, peaceful. He ran across it, down the areaway. He re-entered the little dim-lit slot that was the Atlas Building's basement, retraced his steps up and through the lobby, made his parked, purring car again without being hailed.

He sent it shooting downtown, drew a sleeve across his wet forehead, angled crosstown and back, doubling and redoubling on himself, a dozen times before he finally brought up on a black little Greenwich Village Street, twenty-five minutes later. He left the motor running, while he whipped off the hard hat and set it on the seat beside him, struggled out of the tight black silk scarf and black Chesterfield.

Gun and money he dropped in the glove-compartment of the coupe, exchanging them for a squat bottle of colorless liquid and a soft rag.

The man whose reflection did full justice to the Marquis of Broadway began to disappear. As the rag scoured the red stain from his cheeks, he became more and *more* a different man from the hagridden police officer. And when he stripped the tight, black rubbly wig from his head, he looked a good many years

younger than the man whom one person in nine on Broadway knew by sight.

Swiftly, he made a bundle of the props, uncorked the squat bottle.

When he drove swiftly away, there was a brightly blazing thick mass in the gutter of the dark little street.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Man Who Followed Himself

IT was the first time the Marquis had been framed. Rage had him speechless—rage and cold, instant perception of what he was up against. This was cool, devastating challenge to the one thing that kept the Broadway squad alive—prestige. Someone had dared thumb his nose at the Marquis of Broadway. He had to smash the killer mercilessly enough so that snickers would have no chance to start along the Stem.

This was his unending headache. If he had had any nerves, he would have long ago gone crazy. Every case was tensely critical this way, till it was established that prestige was not involved. Not public prestige, nor newspaper, but a darker sort. He performed for ten thousand unseen pairs of eyes—the grifters of the Stem, thugs, cadets, black-mailers, thieves, murderers—the cleverest, most ruthless set of criminals in the world, drawn inevitably to the world's lushest sucker-mine, Broadway.

He had an almost impossible job, in the first place. With twenty-two men, he had to rule half the city's thieves. He did the impossible because his squad was feared like no other force in the country. He held his section under his thumb with the autocracy of a czar. He did not even attempt to operate under regular police rules—he couldn't. Actually, he hardly considered the squad as part of the force. His men were an isolated little group, virtually a law unto themselves.

They were a strange company. He had to have, at all costs, shrewd, ruthless, discreet men. He had a good proportion of the renegades of the department under him. Big Johnny Berthold, with him ten of the eighteen years, had almost been convicted of bribe-taking while on the homicide squad. Asa McGuire, chubby, red-headed Irishman and possessor of a camera-eye, had been caught driving a stolen automobile which had been used in a bank hold-up. Zeke Immerman, long-lashed, almost girlish-looking, little and plump, had almost beaten a speakeasy proprietor into insanity while head of one of the raiding squads, in an alleged attempt at extortion. Yet they were the kind of men he had to have. They were the only kind of men who could understand the credo of the squad—that thieves operated only within the limits permitted by the Marquis, that disasters considerably worse than those laid down in statute books happened suddenly to anyone who dared ignore the strictures imposed by the head of the Broadway squad.

He was no egoist. This was simply the only possible way to operate—by terror and driving the thought into crooked minds that he, and the squad, were almighty. In other words, by building and maintaining a prestige so extravagant that twenty-two men *could* crack the whip over ten thousand thieves.

And now someone had thumbed his nose at that prestige.

THE wet photograph lay on the scarred oak desk. Red flushed darkly in the Marquis' temples as he stared down at it with himself—for so the dripping photograph seemed—himself on the point of murder. Even the cuckoo-clock over his head was clear, the looming pawnshop behind. Framing his shoulders, the steel bars over the pawnshop show-windows shone and sparkled. He said, so quietly that only two of the five men in

the death-room could hear: "How does this happen?"

"That camera is a black-light camera," Unwin, of homicide said. "Black light covers the threshold of the door. Anybody coming in, even in the dark, gets took. When we got here, that picture was in the camera."

Sprackling, red-faced little dandy of the D. A.'s office, added: "Sid put it in only two weeks ago. The wiring didn't run in the same cable as the other alarms that the killer bugged."

The cuckoo-clock suddenly chirped twice.

The Marquis looked up at the cuckoo-clock, the open bookcase, the stiffened dead man, the rifled safes. His own men—swart, plump little Zeke Immerman and big Johnny Berthold—stood by the body, hollow-eyed. Black gloves flat in his Chesterfield pockets, he turned to walk round the scarred desk.

Sprackling, blocking the back door, started, dropped his pince-nez. His sly, green eyes jumped toward the big, raw-boned Unwin. "I—"

The Marquis' voice was like a knife. "This is a bad time to get in my way, mister."

Sprackling's eyes thinned, then he set his lips primly and stood aside, looking daggers.

The Marquis went out into the cement court, Unwin at his heels. Staring at the still noisy Atlas Building, he said: "That's a natural bolt-hole if ever there was one. No luck in the lobby of the building?"

"Not a soul saw him."

After a moment, as the Marquis stood motionless in the dark, Unwin turned on his flashlight. "You want to see the bug?"

"Thanks."

They went to the corner of the building. The Marquis squatted down, took Unwin's flashlight and held the beam on

the brass disk in the little leaden cable mouth. After a minute, he turned the flash beam around him in a wide circle over the cement court. He snapped it off, got to his feet.

"How much did he steal?"

Unwin shrugged, "Sid was supposed to carry fifty G's."

When they went back inside, the Marquis walked over and squatted down by the dead man, studied him with special reference to head, hands and wound. His small eyes were smoldering when he finally straightened slowly, black-gloved hands flat in his pockets.

The cuckoo-clock ticked restlessly, impatiently.

Sprackling's grating voice said with an air of exhausted patience, "Now have you covered everything, Mr. Marquis?"

"Yeah."

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Good God! Am I to assume that you cannot explain that photograph?"

The Marquis' blue eyes were flint. "Sure. It's a clown standing in that doorway."

"Possibly you noticed the clock above the doorway?"

"Right off."

"You couldn't say *what* clown, Mr. Marquis—or, putting it another way, where were *you* at twelve-ten, Mr. Marquis?"

The Marquis' eyes got narrow slowly. He opened his mouth, closed it. "I'll have to figure that out sometime. Who did you say you were?"

The prosecutor got fiery-colored. "Sprackling's the name. I represent the State of New York. I am conducting a murder inquiry—or hadn't you noticed?"

"Sprackling," the Marquis said thoughtfully. "There was a brainless louse named Sprackling put his nose in my district two years ago. He was a political climber trying to get somebody to notice him and

maybe put him in the money. He tried to raise a smell about a thug I killed resisting arrest. I dropped a word downtown and had that Sprackling's ears yanked back in line. I told him if I ever caught him on my beat again, I'd kick his teeth in. Maybe you've got a twin brother with the same name?"

Sprackling was purple. He spoke through clenched teeth. "If that is all you have to say—"

A patrolman opened the door, stuck his head in. "This gent wants to know—"

A MAN of about the Marquis' build, wearing a pork-pie hat with a red feather in it, belted camel's-hair overcoat, fawn spats and gloves, pushed the door fully open. His fifty-year-old face was red and irritated, his eyes worried behind beribboned pince-nez. The Marquis recognized him as a Doctor Welt who had abandoned medical practice five years before. He was now assistant director for the Lubins, producers of girl-shows.

"Marty, make this numskull let me go home, will you?"

Sprackling stepped forward. "You can save your breath, Doctor, Mr. Marquis has no authority here. He is present as a suspect—not as an officer!"

The doctor blinked.

The Marquis' soft voice said: "How do you get in this, Doc?"

"Why, I was the one who—that is, I had some business with Sid. I phoned him earlier in the evening and warned him I would drop in at around one. You may know that most of his business was—well, loaning money to regular clients, during the night?"

"Yeah."

"Well, when I did come here, at one, nobody answered the door. I finally called the precinct, and they eventually broke in and—well, found his body."

"Have you an alibi for twelve-ten?"

"Yes, yes! I've given it to *him* a dozen times. I was playing cards at the Astor since ten-thirty."

"Fine. Then you can go home."

"You cannot!" Sprackling roared. "I wish to question—"

The Marquis made a head-sign to Johnny Berthold. The big blond giant lunged at Sprackling. The prosecutor choked, stumbled back, white-faced sputtering.

"Another grunt and he goes in the alley," the Marquis said. "Immie, put the doctor in a cab. You're a sergeant and you outrank any of those gumshoes out there except Unwin. You don't want the doc, do you, Unwin?"

"Eh? Well—no."

"All right, Immie—*out*. I could use a couple tickets to that *Scanties'* opening next week, Doc."

"You—you shall have them, Marty."

The plump little long-lashed Immerman steered him out.

Sprackling's face was livid, his eyes wild. He yelled: "Very well! Then *you* are under arr—"

"Save it!" The Marquis' voice was like a whip.

Sprackling's forehead looked ready to burst. He almost screamed: "Save it for what? No, I won't save it. For once in your murderous, grafting career, you've slipped, Marquis. You're trapped. That picture will burn you, and all your blustering and grandstanding won't save you. I didn't think of it as anything but a fake, till I saw how it knocked you off your feet—startled you so that you couldn't even think of a lie to cover it."

"Listen, blockhead, I have an alibi."

"Ah, finally! Well, you thought too slowly. Not that I wonder. Must have been the shock of a lifetime finding that, during your vacation, all your plans had been torpedoed by that thief-trap that Lajoie—"

Johnny Berthold's blond face had been

getting redder. Now he reached big hands out and yanked the prosecutor's tie so tight that the other strangled, gulped, clawed to untie it. Berthold said: "Shut up. The boss is talking."

**T**HE Marquis' voice was cold, crisp. "If time was any less vital, I'd play that out—make you arrest me. Then I'd have your political hide if it was the last thing I did. You're just lucky that I can't waste time going through the motions. Get this—and get it the first time. This frame has blown a fuse. It was jobbed up to catch my original schedule. I was driving down from the Adirondacks, and I should have arrived home at eleven-thirty, been alone in my place at twelve. I wasn't. We burnt out some wiring and were delayed in Croton. We left Croton at twenty minutes past twelve. Shut up till I'm finished.

"The person that drove me down was Hugo Durig, with whom I spent my month's vacation. That's my alibi—and don't make yourself any more foolish by this grandstanding. Come on Johnny—Zeke."

Sprackling squealed in desperation: "Hugo Durig—a drunkard, a skirt-chaser, a playboy!"

"Yeah. And his father the Hall's third biggest campaign contributor. Try calling the boy a liar and see where you land."

For a minute Sprackling stood panting, fists clenched, eyes flaming, crazy. Then he bit shrilly: "Very well. I'll check your alibi. You may wait here."

Dark crimson was staining the Marquis' forehead again. "You're asking for it, Sprackling—and you're awfully liable to get it. I'm not waiting here, or any of that nonsense, and you know it. You have my alibi and I don't care a damn if you never check it! Furthermore, understand this. The Broadway squad is handling this murder, not you—or any-

one like you. If you get in my hair, in any way, shape or form, I'll have you beaten up. You haven't the brains to see what this means to us, so I'll have to leave it that way."

"You—you—"

THE Marquis walked out. Immerman and Berthold followed and also Unwin. At the street door, Unwin said worriedly, "Where can I get in touch with you, Marty?" His face was strained, baffled.

"Call my apartment, Charlie. There'll be someone there to take a message, at any rate."

"A Jap, I hear."

"Sure. The best is none too good, Charlie."

At the bar in Dave's Blue Room, Immerman's long-lashed black eyes were bewildered. "So we're putting the boots to the D. A.'s office. What is this?"

"That gent is a climber. He doesn't rate anywhere downtown. He bought his appointment, I guess, and he's been trying to figure how to make his money back ever since. I had to scare him off—he could be trouble right now. With something on me, he could talk pretty big. He—" He broke off abruptly, eyes narrowing reflectively. Say, I wonder if the little rat could have cooked this up himself, just to get his teeth in somewhere. He's about my build."

Immerman and Berthold exchanged glances. "No soap, Marty. He has an alibi—a beaut. He was with us."

"What?"

"He hunted me up around eleven, insisted I get hold of Johnny and we were all together till the alarm got to us. That was how he got in on it."

The Marquis' forehead wrinkled faintly. "That's a funny one. He deliberately looked you up?"

Immerman nodded. "Sure. We were working a case—one that happened while

you were away. He insisted we lay off and go for a couple of drinks with him at Lindy's."

The Marquis drank half his drink thoughtfully.

"Hey, you think the object of this whole killing was to job you?"

"No. Sid carried fifty thousand in his small safe. That was the object. Jobbing me was secondary, but maybe the party looked enough like me to give him the idea, or something. Immie, is this other case you're working very pressing?"

"Johnny can handle it."

"Then go and find out where Sprackling was between nine o'clock and the time he braced you."

"You think—O. K. Where will I find you?"

"Call my place and get or leave a message."

"You won't be there?"

"No." The Marquis took from his pocket the item that he had filched in the dark from the lead alarm cable behind the pawnshop—the brass disk. He laid it on the bar.

The other two blinked. "What the hell?"

"The gent who bugged that alarm was an amateur. He didn't have any materials for his little racket. He had to take what was at hand. Do you see the hole in the end?"

Berthold exclaimed: "Hell's bells. It's the tag off of a hotel key."

"Yeah, but it's all filed clean," Immerman said. "Half the hotels in town use those."

"Filing marks off metal isn't what it once was," said the Marquis. "I know a chemist claims to be able to bring them back to life."

"Oh-oh."

The Marquis finished his drink, set down the glass. "All right, gentlemen—let's hit it."

## CHAPTER THREE

## Death on the Stairs

IT was not till he was riding southward in a cab, he realized glumly, that he had a chance to think of little Sid Lajoie. He had been a pretty decent little guy—with a soft spot in his heart for Marty Marquis. It was devastating to ponder on the fact that the little money-lender had died because of that friendship. For Lajoie knew his Broadway—knew that only a fool trusted any of its denizens. It was doubtful if he would have allowed himself to be maneuvered into a position of danger by anybody, save one he thought to be the Marquis.

He was having plenty of trouble plunging back into harness. After a month among the elite, he had a nostalgic revulsion to the brutal, greedy roughnecks who made up his world—or so he put it.

This was the Marquis' one blind-spot. He liked to consider himself as a polished, quiet gentleman, directing this force of man-hunters with velvet words, himself above it all. This, of course, was not even close to the truth. Carefully, painfully, exhaustively, over a period of years, he had cultivated polish, a soft voice, quiet, immaculate appearance, good taste—but he was still a mugg from Avenue A. He always would be, though he would mayhem the man that said so. It never occurred to him that only a mugg could live in his shoes. It was his secret delight to be mistaken for a banker, a doctor, a stockbroker, or even a merchant—of the better class, of course.

Apart from that vagary, it is doubtful if there were a man with fewer illusions—or fewer friends. And the real truth was that the loss of one, who came as close as any to that category, at the hands of a thief, depressed him more than he would admit.

His black-gloved hand closed grimly on the little metal disk in his pocket. If

this slim clue would only disclose its secret!

For some reason, New York's expensively equipped crime laboratory does not seem to hold the respect of ranking officers. Most of them have connections with private scientists—police buffs—to whom they bring their problems. For six years, the Marquis had laid his riddles at the feet of an Italian, head of a commercial testing laboratory and private experimenter in forensics. He had, at his home in Greenwich Village, a well-equipped little laboratory of his own.

It was when they were exactly halfway there that the cabbie suddenly turned a concerned face over his shoulder and said: "Hey, Marty—would you be being tailed?"

The Marquis swung round in his seat. "Where?"

"That blue Buick sedan. It's been hanging back about a block and a half, all the way down."

THE Marquis saw the car, loping quietly in their wake—a three-year-old model. The streets were bare enough at this hour so that it stood out. It was too far back to make out the license number or the number of occupants.

"Watch me lose him," the hacker said.

"Do and I'll kill you."

"Huh?"

"I don't want to lose him. I want to catch him. Keep going."

They were on Seventh Avenue, rattling over the snarl of car tracks on Fourteenth. The blue Buick paced them stolidly, down to Greenwich.

When they were a block below Greenwich, the Marquis said: "Stop here and see what he does—"

As if the driver of the car behind had heard him, the blue Buick swung instantly left, went scooting across the side street with a long rattle of acceleration.

"He's gone to parallel us," the cabby



said excitedly. "He'll go down Sixth—"

"Fair enough. Cut over to Sixth and pin him."

They spurted. They angled swiftly through Waverly, nosed out onto Sixth expectantly—and the blue Buick had vanished. It did not show up again. They parked, motor running, for ten minutes, and there was no sign of the car.

"Something tells me you've been going to movies, Mac," the Marquis said. "Go on, get over to Barrow—the address I first gave you."

"I still think they was follyin' us!"

"All right. They were following us."

**T**HE house in which Brossi, the chemist, lived and had his laboratory, was an old, dreary-looking five stories of rococo gray stone. However, like many such in the Village, its interior had been renovated lavishly and tastefully. It was a fairly narrow house and Brossi leased the top two floors.

The street was utterly quiet and in thick blackness at this hour, of course, when the Marquis paid off his cab and went up the four or five flat, protruding stone steps. He had a key to the front door and this let him into a dimly lit vestibule where four brass mail-boxes surmounted bells. He gave a few jabs to the chemist's bell, while he fitted his key to the inner door, then stepped into a narrow, maroon-carpeted hall.

A dim, octagonal globe glowed in the ceiling. Half the hall was the flight of carpeted stairs, its curving, polished, dark-wood banister gleaming softly.

Before he had the door closed, he heard the sleepy tones of a man's voice, vaguely irritated, coming from a spot down the hall, behind the staircase: "Yeah, yeah. . . That's right. . . No, we got nobody by that name here. Spell it again."

There was a second of silence. The man was evidently talking to a telephone at the head of the cellar stairs. The Mar-

quis walked toward the flight leading upward, till the unseen voice said: "Marquis? No, never heard of him. What? Lieutenant Martin Marquis? No. What?"

The Marquis blinked. He turned aside, went down the hall, a line cutting his forehead.

He rounded the bulk of the staircase quickly, into the space between the staircase and the back wall of the hall.

Orange roar lashed from the shadows. His cheek went on fire, one ear went deaf. He staggered back, hit the wall—and the split-second was enough to snap his head clear, his muscles into action.

Almost the instant he hit the wall, he dived forward. He had one glimpse of the peaked-capped, masked man above the cellar stairs, the gun in one hand, the other holding open the board door to the descending staircase. The Marquis dived under the second thunderous explosion, brought a vicious uppercut from his toes that nearly ripped the man's head from his shoulders. The man yelled, fell backward, slipped on the top step and lost all footing, clutching crazily at the thin door as he fell.

The Marquis, grabbing savagely for him, ran face first into the edge of the door, saw ten thousand stars. He fell back, and the other's wild clutch yanked the door closed as he went headlong, thumping, crashing, marking his progress down the stairs.

The Marquis whipped a pistol from his hip, snatched at the door handle. Like most Village basement doors, it had a spring-lock on it, on the stair side. The Marquis raised a foot, slammed it at the lock, and thunder roared in the basement. A sliver of wood shot out of the door a foot from his face. The man below was still in action.

The Marquis jumped aside, swung hot eyes around. The wall ended in a blank plaster barrier. Then a door fifteen feet up the hall opened, and a sleepy, gray-

haired man poked out a curious alarmed face.

The Marquis swung on him. "Does your apartment run to the rear of the house?" He was running toward the open door even before the man stammered, "Ye-yes." He shoved him aside unceremoniously and raced through his living-room into a bedroom at the rear.

The windows at the back of the bedroom were open. He snapped off the light as he passed it, put his head through the open window. He was just in time to see a dark form whip over the fence at the back of the little court behind the house. The Marquis fired once—and then the blackness swallowed the fugitive.

The Marquis turned back, stony-eyed, repocketed his pistol. He walked on, gloved hands in Chesterfield pockets, met the apartment owner, wide-eyed in the hall and said, "Thank you—police." He stood grim-jawed, in the hall, for perhaps a minute before he went stolidly up.

CURIOUS faces peered from every doorway, as he mounted the three flights to Brossi's apartment and the giant Italian, too, was at his door as the Marquis trudged up. "What! You? What happened your face?"

"A little powder that'll wash off. Where's your phone?"

When he had reported to the precinct police, he turned back and gave the disk to the big, glowing-faced Latin, told him what he wanted.

"A cinch," the chemist said. "You wash up and wait here." He vanished up the inside stairway, as the Marquis walked into the bathroom.

He was startled, puzzled, furious. The fury was at himself for being caught in a mental fog. Only the deadness of the carpet downstairs had saved his life. The crouched killer had been unable to time exactly the moment to expect the Marquis under his gun. It was too obvious

now that the murderer had been following him, as the cabby had perceived—followed him till it became apparent where he was going, then speeded ahead to get there first. After eight years, everyone knew of the Marquis' connection with Brossi. It would take no master-mind to guess that he might be going there.

But why would the killer want him dead? There was something strange there. For, if the killer did happen to know the exact situation—that Sprackling was more than willing to pin the killing on the Marquis—certainly making a corpse of the Marquis would be one way of doing it easier. However, that would only be a logical thought, if the Marquis had no alibi.

Somehow, it didn't add up. He could hardly find anything that did add up—except that this had been a deliberate attempt to blow his brains out.

It was bad—and also good. Bad, because he would have to tread warily, watch every shadow from here in, till he could get some light on why his death was necessary. Good, because that necessity might, even if all else failed, bring the killer back within reach. Even if the brass disk—the only shred of a clue so far—did prove a dead end, there was the chance of the murderer coming back to try again for the Marquis. The Marquis made a gentle promise that the man would find him ready, next time.

The clue—the brass disk—even though he had identified it correctly, did seem to lead to a dead end, though an interesting one.

The Italian chemist presently came down again in his bathrobe, with an X-ray picture. "Right again, Sherlock," he told the Marquis. "Examine that."

"That" was an X-ray print in a clip. It showed a round disk with a hole in one end and, plainly visible, shadowy letters and figures. They read—*San Marlo Hotel :: 357.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

## She Married a Madman

WHEN a taxi dropped him on exclusive Fifty-seventh Street, and he walked into the quiet, expensive little lobby of the green-and-gold hotel, the first person he saw was big Johnny Berthold.

The hotel was one of the ten-dollar-a-day and up—mostly up—hostelries. Its low-ceilinged lobby was thickly carpeted. The green-marble, semi-circular desk was fronted by brass-barred little windows like bank-tellers' cages, save for the one modest space where the desk lay bare to the ceiling—the registration niche. Nothing so vulgar as a register, however, was in sight.

Coming up to that opening, the Marquis saw big Johnny back behind one of the closed grilles, his head propped on one big palm, gloomily sorting over a pile of registration cards, jotting down notations.

The Marquis said, "Hey," quietly and the big blond Newfoundland looked round. Simultaneously, from a half-open walnut door in the wall, a pointed-faced, shining-haired young man in short black coat and striped trousers stepped smartly out.

"Oh, hello, chief," Berthold said and dropped his pen. To the counter-jumper, he added, "Never mind, Waldo."

The brown eyes of the clerk looked shrewdly at the Marquis for a moment, then the man vanished again through the door. Big Johnny came over and grinned. "You like a nice room and bath?"

"What are you doing here?"

"We had a killing here a couple weeks ago, while you were away and I was just doing a little routine. What did you want me for, chief? Want I should get my hat?"

"I don't want you, you elephant. I

want to know who lives in Room Three Fifty-seven."

The big man's eyes widened. "There ain't nobody lives there now. That's where we had the killing. They moved his wife to another suite."

"What's the story on the killing?"

"Eh? Well, this Ludwig and his wife—he's a lumber man from Detroit—had a prowler come in their suite. Ludwig tried to fight with him and got a slug in the head for his pains. We ain't got a prayer yet."

"Was one of the keys missing to the suite?"

"Well, yeah. We figured the prowler must of took that from Ludwig's clothes, along with a handful of nice, fresh hundred-dollar bills and a jeweled watch that he got off the dead man."

"Before or after he killed him?"

"After. He tied the wife up and gagged her while he fanned the joint."

"Nobody heard the shot?"

"Not in this flea-bag, chief. The place is soundproofed within an inch of its life."

"Description?"

"Uh-uh. Masked. Except that he was about my size and had a lot of blond hair. He wore a cap and it spilled out from under and he was dirty-lookin'. Why?"

"I guess it was part of the same mob that tried to job me tonight. That brass disk they used to bug the alarm came off this Ludwig's key."

"No!"

The Marquis frowned thoughtfully for a minute. "You've got nowhere at all?"

"No. Immie told me to run back through the register and see who had that suite before. Maybe we'd get a break and find some fishy-smelling guy who could of had a key made way back. Immie got a piece of cloth that was stuck under Ludwig's lodge-pin—figured it caught on the prowler's sleeve when he

fanned him and jerked a little tuft off. He couldn't get anywhere with it. And we were lucky enough to get the serial numbers of the C-notes that was stole."

"This Mrs. Ludwig is still in the hotel?"

"Yes."

"Any reason why she didn't go home?"

"Well, to tell the truth, she said she was sticking around to help—to identify the prowler if we caught him. If you ask me she thinks we'll drop the whole thing, if she goes."

"If she's that helpful, maybe she'd stand for being got out of bed now."

"Maybe," Berthold conceded. He turned and yelled, "Oswald—I mean Waldo!" and the immaculate little room-clerk reappeared.

"You call her, Johnny, and tell her what's what."

OVER the clerk's disapproving head-shaking, Johnny insisted on being connected to Suite 212. Presently, he said into the phone, awkwardly: "This is Detective Berthold, ma'am. I sure am sorry to disturb you, but my chief is very anxious to see you in a hurry about that—well, about what happened to your husband. We was wondering if you'd mind if he came up now. Huh?" He listened intently, then hastily covered the transmitter with a big hand. "It's O. K. She just wants a minute to get dress—"

He hastily ducked back to the mouth-piece. "Well, that's very kind of you, ma'am. He'll be—No, not Mr. Immerman, ma'am. This is the real chief—Lieutenant Marquis, hisself. He just got back from—Eh?" The big man's face wrinkled ludicrously. Again he blocked the mouthpiece, whispered hoarsely. "Something screwy. Now she's decided she won't see—" He flushed, uncovered the instrument again. "Well, now, ma'am, it's kind of important, y'see. Well, sure, I know you don't care to be disturbed—"

The Marquis snapped, "Waldo!" and

the desk clerk came around the switch-board. "Give me a pass-key—quick!"

The clerk gasped. "But I couldn't—"

"Keep talking," the Marquis snapped at Johnny. "You—give me that key or I'll cram your ears down your throat."

The clerk swallowed, snaked a key from a peg under the desk. The Marquis snapped at Johnny: "Keep her talking. I want to hear her voice," and ran to the elevator.

On the second floor he went down green and flamingo corridors, softly lighted, soundless, till he was before the door of Suite 212.

Inside, he heard a woman's voice say in exasperation: "But I tell you, I refuse to see him tonight. I have retired and—"

There was a puzzled knot in his forehead. He did not recall ever having heard the voice before.

He got his key in the door soundlessly, turned it, holding the door tight. The woman was saying, "No! No!" in vehement fury as he eased it open a few inches and looked through a tiny foyer into a living-room. She was in his line of sight now.

HE saw a lovely blond girl of close to thirty in a white evening dress. This was of note, considering that she was urgently claiming to have retired. Still holding the French phone, she stamped a slipped foot and the movement turned her a little. Her blond, peach-like face was flushed, her velvet-blue eyes angry. The dress she wore fitted like wall-paper, cut breath-takingly low to show her full, firm breasts. She had a lovely figure. "Surely, I'll see him tomorrow," she said, "and not before!" She slammed the instrument into its cradle.

She sank down on a green armchair and pressed a handkerchief to her lips. Her white-ringed eyes were on the phone and her hand was shaking. She reached out

blindly to a coffee-table beside her and fumbled a cigarette from a box, snapped a lighter to flame and lit it, taking deep, long puffs. She sat like that for a full minute. Then she got up, throwing her head back, shaking her hair into place—and saw the Marquis.

He was in the living-room by now, having threaded the foyer, his hard hat held across his stomach, his blue eyes grim, searching, on the girl's face.

Every drop of color left her cheeks, left the disks of rouge pale and alone. She gasped: "What—what are you doing here?"

The Marquis said: "This is kind of painful, Alice."

Her eyes were terrified. She tried to draw herself up, choked: "You—you've made some mistake. My name is not Alice."

"It was in Detroit—the night the local law raided Silver-haired Elsie's to help me catch Red Dolan. Though I'll admit the girls weren't giving right names that night."

Years crowded her face. Her eyes wavered and fell before his pin-point regard. After a long minute, she said in a dead, beaten voice: "I was afraid you'd remember me. Oh, God."

The Marquis said: "This is kind of chair, stepped over and sat down, eyes intent on the girl's bowed head. "You're in a pretty bad spot, Alice. You can't lose a thing by telling me all about it."

Her eyes jerked up, dark with fear. "I swear it isn't *that*. I swear I didn't have anything to do with—"

"Was he your husband, Alice?"

"Yes."

"Did he know about Silver-haired Elsie's?"

Her cherry mouth was suddenly warped, queer. She said huskily: "He married me out of there."

The Marquis' eyes were foggy. He groped: "He must have been a pretty fair

sort of gent. Though I will say I don't think you ever belonged in a drum like that. He liked you pretty well, eh?"

She got suddenly to her feet, turned her back on the Marquis. He was surprised to see she was shaking terribly. Her voice came as a blurted husk: "He was crazy."

"Oh?"

"Not ordinarily crazy. He was loathsome—a bluenose and a hypocrite. He didn't marry me because he loved me. He—he had some queer complex. He wanted to feel superior. He felt he was saving me, and he never let me forget it a minute.

"When his family came to see us, I had to go upstairs, so they wouldn't be contaminated. He lectured me, every night before"—she shuddered—"before we went to bed. And he was never faithful to me from the week we were married.

The Marquis' eyebrows were up, his thin, vermilion lips pursed. "Like that, eh? So you got yourself a boy-friend and finished him off?"

"I didn't! I swear I had nothing to do—" She whirled to face him, but the hysterical intensity of her words, as well as the uneasy light in her eyes, made the Marquis shake his head slowly.

"We'll get nowhere with that sort of thing," he said quietly. "I'm trying to see if there's any way in which I can keep from burning you for murder. Would you believe me if I said I don't give a damn whether your husband's killing is ever cleared up or not?"

Her eyes became bright and wary. "No."

"Well, I don't—if I can find who did a certain other little job tonight. You can help me."

"How?"

"It was your boy-friend that did this job."

"Oh, it wasn't! He couldn't have—" She choked.

The Marquis was on his feet now, pin-points of fire deep in his eyes. "So there is a boy friend."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "He Promised to Kill Me!"

THE Marquis thought it all over. The room was still, when he spoke, finally. "I get it now. You fell for this outside gent. Maybe I don't blame you. You wanted your husband's money—and the other rat's body. So the two of you killed him together, cooked up that prowler yarn and—"

"No! I swear to God it wasn't like that!" she almost screamed. "He—he knew me from Detroit. He—threatened to put the heat on me." She checked herself, blurted in sudden shame. "And besides, I fell for him—at first."

"Whose idea was it to put the slug to your husband?"

"No one's." She wrung her hands, fairly poured breathless words at him. "I swear it was an accident. My husband went out. He was out nearly every night and didn't come in till three or four. He wouldn't let me go out, though. Raymond knew how to get in through the service entrance. He was here, and my husband came in. My husband tried to shoot him. He was the type who would, even though he stank of cheap perfume. Raymond wrestled with him, and it was my husband who got shot. We knew we couldn't tell the police the truth or they would pin it on us, so we—invented the story about the prowler."

"Why did you hang around here for two weeks? Why didn't you go home to Detroit, where there wouldn't be a chance of my recognizing you?"

She swallowed, put a hand to her throat. "He wouldn't let me. He threatened to cut my heart out if I ran away and left him to take the rap alone."

"You mean the boy-friend?"

She nodded tensely.

The Marquis stood measuring her, in decision in his small eyes. After a minute, he said: "He won't hurt you, Alice. I'll take care of him. Who is he?"

"An actor. He used to work with a stock company in Detroit. He came to see me, then."

"An actor, eh? Actors aren't very lethal.

"He is. Oh, he's bad, Marquis. He ran with a mob in Detroit for a while."

"What happened to this loot the prowler was supposed to have taken?"

"It's in my trunk."

"Let's get it." He swung toward the bedroom.

She croaked, "Wait!" and her hand flew out in a restraining gesture. "I—I haven't told you it all."

"No?"

She looked down at her clenched hands, twisted them. "No. I—I did something tonight."

She looked at his tight black scarf, her breasts heaving. "He called me before midnight. I had to go to *your* apartment building. He told me I had to wait a few doors down the street. That a blond man would be driving you home and that he was a playboy that hadn't a drink or a girl in a whole month. When he drove away again, I was to try and pick him up and—bring him here."

"Good Lord! Hugo Durig!"

"I—I didn't know who he was."

"Well, what happened?"

"I picked him up. I brought him up that service stairs and—"

The Marquis blinked. "He's *here*?"

"Yes." She ran at his heels as he strode toward the bedroom. "I—I gave him a Mickey Finn."

The Marquis took his gun quietly from his hip as he put a hand on the doorknob and explained illogically: "It's not that I don't trust you, Alice."

HE did not need the gun. Hugo Durig lay sprawled on the bed in the spacious, luxurious bedroom. His blond head was pale, damp, but he was breathing regularly, peacefully.

The Marquis shook his head. "Do you know who he is?"

"No."

"His father is one of the richest men in this town and one of the most powerful politically. If he finds this out, you'll be in the boob from now on."

She caught her breath.

"What were you supposed to do with him after you got him here? What was the set-up—"

"He—and another man—were coming to take him away."

"'He' meaning this Raymond? What's his last name?"

"Tracy."

"Do you know what they wanted him for?"

"They—they said it was a shakedown. That they'd take pictures of him here with me."

"That's very funny. Your boy-friend looks like me, doesn't he?"

"Why—why yes, I guess he does, in a way. I hadn't thought of—"

"Are you sure you didn't plan this whole thing—plan to job me by having him make up in my clothes, grab off Hugo Durig who was my alibi and put him out of the way so that I'd be in the grease?"

The shocked bewilderment on her face was too pointed to be faked.

"Never mind it," the Marquis said. "The point is that your boy-friend pulled a robbery—and a murder—tonight, impersonating me. Fortunately, I had an alibi. But if I hadn't caught up with you—if your friends had taken Hugo Durig out of here—I *wouldn't* have an alibi, I'll bet ten to one."

"My God, you mean they were going to kill that boy?"

"Why not? What can they lose now?"

She put her hands to her head. "Oh, my God."

"Who is this other gent he was bringing here to get Hugo?"

"I don't know."

The Marquis took a quick turn about the room. His eyes were thin, grim. Finally, he said: "You seem to be facing about three murder raps, a kidnaping and God knows what else. I don't see what I can do for you, Alice. You're in too deep. The best thing is for me to walk out and let your sweetheart kill you. It's easier than the chair."

There was no mistaking the terror in her face. She began to tremble again. Her voice was almost a whisper—a shaky, controlled whisper. "Marty, you can't leave me to that. If you can't help me—you can't. But don't leave me to him. I came clean with you, Marty—I would have given any other cop the run-around. If you don't want to help me, all right—but jug me, for God's sake! Don't leave me to him!"

"The only way I could help you," the Marquis said, "is to kill him for you." He hesitated, passed a badgered hand over his forehead. "I don't know if I can do that and get away with it. And certainly if I'm ever going to try, you've got to go all out for me, Alice."

"Oh, I will! I will! I'll do anything, Marty—anything!"

After a long minute, the Marquis said: "All right. I'll try it, but you've got to stall him from coming here. If I have to take him in this hotel, I can't save you. And I want his boy friend, too. Can you phone him?"

Her voice was a husk. "Yes."

"Then phone him and tell him that you have Durig in a cab and he's passed out—that you can't lug him up the service stairs. Ask him where you should take him."

She swallowed and she was seeing

frightening things. "All—all right."

"And give me those hundred-dollar bills and that jeweled watch that was supposed to have been taken from your husband."

SHE ran to a wardrobe trunk, fumbled with it and came back with a sheaf of twenty-five or thirty bills and the watch. She put a hand to her throat as she handed them to him. "Marquis, the bills are hot. The hotel cashed a travelers check for—for my husband and they happened to take—"

"They'll do me," the Marquis said. "Now, the phone call."

He lifted the receiver, himself, and told the room clerk to put Johnny Berthold on, and, to big Johnny Berthold, he said, "See that nobody listens on this wire."

"O.K., chief."

To the girl he said: "Pull yourself together, now. Will he be suspicious of your calling at all?"

"No. I had to call him at four, anyway to—to tell him what happened."

The Marquis looked at his watch. It was almost exactly on the hour.

The girl gave her number—and waited. Presently, she moaned and said: "He isn't there yet. No one answers."

"All right. Hang up," the Marquis said. "Maybe it's just as well. Where does he live?"

She blurted a number on West Sixty-fourth.

He picked up the instrument and got Johnny Berthold. "Get Asa MacGuire over here as fast as you can. Come up to this suite as soon as you've called him."

He hung up and put short, black-gloved hands in Chesterfield pockets. His round, apple-cheeked face was without expression but his deep-set china-blue eyes were a little kinder. After a full two minutes of silence, he said: "You haven't had the best breaks in the world, Alice," he said, "though if you get out of this,

you ought to call it square. You've got money?"

"Yes. I—I'll inherit."

"I mean ready money."

"I—I have a few hundred."

He was silent again for a long, long moment. "That's enough. I'm having a man sent over to guard you. I want you to pack up and be ready to blow. Either this thing will break so that I can let you duck—or we all go down together. If I can cover you, I'll call you—and I want you to be ready to run. Unless I say different, you better run to South America. And never say a copper didn't give you a break."

Her eyes filled with tears.

The Marquis made another call to his apartment. When his Jap answered, he said, "Has Mr. Immerman called yet?"

"Yes, sir—he just hung up. He said he'd call again in fifteen minutes."

"Good. Write this address down." He gave the Sixty-fourth Street number. "Tell him I need him there as fast as he can make it—Apartment Six."

"Asa is on the way," Berthold announced when he came in.

"You get the hotel to assign you another room. Hugo Durig is in that bedroom. Move him somewhere else. Then you stay here till Asa arrives. But the girl must not be out of sight for a moment, understand? And I don't want either of you—well, talking to her. The minute he gets here, you come on the fly to—" he repeated the address on Sixty-fourth.

To the girl, he said: "If he calls you—stall him, somehow. It's up to you to see he's at his place when I get there."

She nodded. "Marty"—she had to swallow, to choke it out—"let me come back and make this up to you—"

Berthold muttered, "Well, I'll be—"

The Marquis scowled. "Fine talk—when there's no assurance yet that you're not going to fry."



## CHAPTER SIX

## The Changeable Corpse

HE caught a cab down below, snarled for speed, was whirled up to the old-fashioned, white-stone house, immaculate, gleaming, its ornate veranda at street level. There was a light behind drawn blinds on the third floor.

For a second after his cab had gone, he stood in the shadows opposite. He knew the layout of these old-fashioned, roomy houses. Two apartments to a floor, two large rooms to an apartment, with a bath and a kitchenette slipped in somewhere, the fire-escapes behind, dropping into a yard. A fence separated that yard from the yard of the house fronting on the next street above.

A cab whirled around the corner, came racing up to drop Johnny Berthold almost at his feet. The big man was panting.

"Take your cab," the Marquis told him, "and go to the house above this one. Get through the house, somehow, and park yourself in the back yard. And get this into your head. If anybody comes out that back door—shoot to kill. Understand? Because no one *will* come out except the killer we want. Don't waste a second trying to find out who it is in the dark. The minute the back door opens—let him have it."

"But—but how, do you know?"

"Damn you, will you do as I say—now?"

The big man's cab rolled away. The Marquis crossed the street, taking a leather case from his pocket, his blue eyes flinty and thin on the lighted window above. Locks on these buildings are not very complicated, and the fourth master key he tried did the trick. He let himself into a darkened, miniature, old-fashioned foyer of maple, no more than ten feet

square. The staircase elbow-bent at a level lower than the ceiling, directly in front of him. He drew his gun.

He had one foot on the bottom step when the muffled shot came from above—and his heart turned to ice.

He was up the stairs like a tearing fury, his face congested. When he reached the third floor, he did not even try the knob of the door. He drove his shoulder against it, with all the weight of his chunky body. It sagged, held. He drew back, ran three steps and catapulted himself. The lock gave with a ripping, tearing, crash, flinging him into the high-ceilinged, octagonal living-room.

Lights were on in the bedroom, and he charged in.

Sweat sprang out on his forehead. A man of about his own build, with the same round, red-cheeked face and deep-set blue eyes lay on the rug at the end of the bed. There was no sign of hurt on him, but his face was bloodless, eyes unseeing, glazed, bewildered, and his head was sinking slowly to the floor as the Marquis came in.

Behind him, the breeze fluttered a curtain in the open window. The Marquis ran to it, oblivious of the target he was making of himself, jumped out onto the fire-escape and crouched, every sense twanging for the slightest sound below him.

There was no sound.

He suddenly let the strong beam of his pocket-torch rake the iron landings and steps below him—and then above him. There was no human in sight.

He dived back in the window, strode across to the side of the shot man. The man was now limp, completely unconscious. Under him, blood was seeping. He was still breathing. The Marquis guessed that he had been shot in the back.

Flinging trapped eyes about him, he saw a crinoline, fluffy-looking doll on a small end-table, jumped for it and

whipped the doll away. It was a telephone. He snaked a small, printed book from his pocket, thumbed it open, ran a finger down the page.

He got a break. The home address of one of the assistant medical-examiners was in almost the exact block in which he stood and he whipped the instrument from its cradle, barked the number.

With the medico's startled, "Right!" in his ears, he hung up, ran back to the wounded man.

**T**HE man's pulse was feebler and there was a little blood on his lips. The Marquis' eyes raced around the room, located a bottle of brandy on a dresser, uncorked it and slopped a few fingers in a water glass, forced it between the man's lips. He coughed, his eyelids fluttered. But he sank again.

Sweat was huge beads on the Marquis' forehead. In the seconds that he sat there, waiting, he thought as fast and as desperately as he had ever thought before in his life. He dared not move the shot man to examine the wound. He dared do nothing. For locked behind this man's lips was the secret of two murders—one of them the one that had put the Marquis in the shadow of peril. Not for one instant had he thought that this actor was the brains behind the careful, crafty thrust. But the actor knew who the brain was, worked for him. To move him might kill him. And if he should die without revealing the name—it would be almost impossible ever to get evidence as to who *was* the master-mind.

He ran to the window of the living-room, peered down at the street. Already, a small black crowd was forming, attracted up through the cement pavement, for all the Marquis knew. He pushed the window up as, down the street, he saw a man with a small black bag, running toward the house. And at that minute, a prowler whined around the

corner, came scudding toward the door.

The Marquis turned and ran down the stairs. Movement and excited conversation were audible in one or two occupied apartments of the house below, but so far no face had appeared in a doorway.

He flung open the front door, just as the radio cops came running up the steps, told them: "All right. Stay out here. I've got hold here. Block any more of your pals coming in, but let anybody else in that wants to come. But if anybody tries to get out, unless they're with me,—stop them at any cost. Got that? Doc, come on upstairs quickly—man shot."

The little doctor flew up the stairs, and the Marquis closed the front door on the swarming mob, outside. When he finally got back to the bedroom, the doctor was on his knees by the fallen man.

And in that instant, jagged, startling thoughts hit the Marquis between the eyes. He came to a dead stop, his eyes flaming crazily. He did not hear what the doctor, rising from his knees, said, or if he did, he made no answer.

For one instant, he stood poised there, then he swung his head round. An immense cupboard almost filled one wall of the bedroom. He darted to it, whipped it open. It was meagerly filled with the actor's wardrobe. He whipped the hangers all to one end, snapped, "Doc, in here, quick! Never mind why—I can save this situation. Move! And don't dare come out—no matter what happens—till I tell you. No matter *what* happens. You know me—I'm not a screwball. Never mind the patient. He's not important any more. I know,—I know—but get in here!"

He literally flung the protesting physician by the scruff of his neck, across the room at a run, jammed him into the cupboard, slammed it shut, found a key in the lock and turned it. Then he ran to the door, bit his lips, came back and knelt again by the wounded man, felt his pulse.

Then he reversed his gun and coolly

smashed it down across the unconscious man's forehead, ripping flesh. A little blood trickled down the man's cheek. The doctor, inside the cupboard, began to bang on the door.

The Marquis whirled and raved at him, "Another sound out of you, and I'll empty this gun through that door!"

From downstairs came the crash of plate-glass.

He ran out to the stairs. This would be Zeke Immerman—with his raiding-squad technique.

**T**HE DOOR burst open below, and he heard Immerman's harsh voice snap: "Get back there, you lugs. I'll shoot any man who follows me!" Then his feet were racing up the stairs, his voice calling inquiringly: "Marty! Marty!"

"Here, hurry it up!" the Marquis told him, and the chubby little dick whirled into the broken doorway.

The Marquis snapped: "Stand right here. Cover that lug on the floor. He isn't badly wounded. I had to conk him for safety's sake. And for God's sake don't let anybody plug him from that window, or let him plug you either. This is the pay-off. He knows all the answers—both to the shooting at the San Marlo Hotel and this thing tonight. If he so much as moves an eyebrow—jump him. Don't kill him, if you can help it. And don't get any closer to him. He's dynamite. Stay right there!"

He turned and ran down one flight of stairs—and stopped.

From the room he had just left, came Immerman's startled yell—and a shot.

The Marquis caught his breath, turned and ran up again.

Immerman still stood where he had left him but there was a thin wisp of smoke rising from the end of his pistol. The prone man lay where he had been, but there was a blue revolver clutched in his fingers now—and one of his eyes had been

blown in. From the corner of his own eye, the Marquis noted that the bottom drawer of the bureau, previously closed, now stood open a foot.

Immerman stammered: "Hell, I—I'm sorry, Marquis. I don't know where he got that gun. I turned to watch you go downstairs and when I turned back he had a bead on me. I had to shoot instantly to save—I didn't have a chance to choose my spot."

There was a second's silence. Then the Marquis said tonelessly: "It's all right, I guess. But there goes the last chance we had of getting the name of the man who engineered tonight's little doings—the man who knew my schedule for coming down from the mountains, the man who knew all about my friendship with Sid Lajoie—who knew about Sid installing that camera—in fact, the man who must be a mind-reader, to know us all so well."

Immerman stammered. "But—but the killer didn't know about that camera. He was taken—"

"That was the part of the frame that was supposed to be the crusher. Damn the luck—this gent might have mentioned Sprackling, after all."

"But Sprackling had an alibi!"

"Sure—but the picture wasn't taken at twelve-ten. Look at this." He took a print of the damning black-light photograph from his pocket, handed it to the bewildered-looking Italian.

Immerman tucked his gun under his arm, held it stupidly.

"See how those steel bars shine and glisten?" the Marquis said. "That's from the lights of the marquee of the Victoria theater across the street."

"Well, yeah, sure, but—"

"The Victoria is a two-a-day, Zeke. At twelve-ten, their marquee would have been long dark."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

The Marquis repocketed it. "Well, we

came awfully close to the answer."

He reached out suddenly and snaked Immerman's gun from under his arm.

The plump detective yelled, "Hey!"

The Marquis shot at him: "You have another, haven't you?"

"Well, yeah, but—" Immerman's hand went under his other armpit.

Then the Marquis' gun was suddenly steady on Immerman's throat. "Don't draw it, Immie."

The Marquis backed over quickly and unlocked the cupboard door. The doctor burst out, red-faced. "Doc," the Marquis said mildly, "what condition was that man on the floor in, when Zeke here shot him?"

"He was stone dead," the doctor said. "Dead before you locked me in there."

"Then he could hardly have reached a gun out of that bottom drawer there?"

"Gun? My God, no!"

The silence that held the room was awful, odorous, unending. Immerman's round face became grayish.

**T**HE MARQUIS' cold-blue eyes locked with Immerman's hollow, long-lashed brown ones. "When you came to my gang from the raiding-squad," the Marquis said gently, "I knew you were used to a lot more graft than you'd get from me. But I thought you'd have patience, work yourself up by degrees. It wasn't fast enough, eh? You thought you'd move the head man aside and step into the real gravy at once."

The Marquis shook his head. "I'm sorry, Zeke. You had the kind of brains that I could have used. The trick of solving that hotel murder—tying it to this Raymond Tracy and then realizing that he looked enough like me so that there was a racket in it, was no dead-head's brain wave.

Then the trick of setting the picture so it certainly looked like I'd killed old Sid, the rounding up of Sprackling,

both to give you an alibi, and so that he would be on hand to put his beak in the killing and make trouble for me—all very smooth. And there was nothing wrong with your gag of having the girl sent to pick up my alibi and hog-tie him, just for insurance.

"It's too bad that your attempt to snuff me out and get that brass disk didn't work. Naturally, you knew that when I tracked that down, I'd eventually come to Tracy here—so you beat it to close his mouth before I reached him. All very logical, Zeke.

"It's too bad that a bit of burnt-out wiring in Croton, and a bit of extra light in that carefully snapped picture, let me out from under."

He hesitated. "And it's too bad that you fell for my gag about this man. He was dead when you shot him in the back—almost as soon as you had ducked down that fire-escape, into the vacant apartment below and thence out—to return through the front door as if you'd just got my message and come racing. If you hadn't plugged him and stuck that gun in his hand, why, we never could have gotten the goods on you, Zeke. It's too bad you gave yourself away."

He hesitated again, sighed. "Immie, here's a little thought that you can take to your grave. I've been handling your sort for eighteen years. I've got to have them. I've got no illusions about the muggs on my squad. I've got to have them ruthless—and I've got to have them with imagination. The combination usually winds up into speculation about stepping into my shoes. Well, they're not dead man's shoes, yet, Immie. I can still think a step faster than you apes."

He was standing now on the far side of the dead man, having backed over to close the window while he was talking. He hefted the pistol lightly in his hand, his eyes never having left the other's crawling ones. Now, he stepped forward

## Live Man's Shoes

—and everything happened at once.

He tripped across one of the dead man's feet, was thrown heavily to his knees. He still kept his gun and eyes up, but there was a second when he was off balance.

That was enough for Immerman. He did not try to draw his other gun—even he knew that that was suicide. But his hand flashed out to the light-switch, just inside the open door, and he plunged the room into blackness. He dropped flat to the floor, in perfect timing. The Marquis' pistol cracked once. Then Immerman shot like a streak out into the hall.

The little doc yelled: "Catch him!

Catch him! That's an admission!" and as the Marquis snapped the lights back up, the doctor was snatching up the gun from beside the dead man.

The Marquis stood calmly, pocketing his gun. He snatched at the racing doctor, jerked him almost off his feet in stopping him. "Take it easy, Doc. Everything's under control." He suddenly raised his voice. "Hey down there in front—don't let Immerman get out!"

The doc gasped, "My God—there's other ways out—"

"I doubt it," the Marquis said.

He walked over to the telephone unhurriedly, dialed a number. As he waited, he said gloomily, "Damn the luck. He was a smart operator." Then he said into the mouthpiece: "Hello, San Marlo Hotel? I want to talk to Mrs. Ludwig in Twelve, Waldo, but don't ring her for a minute. Hold the wire."

He held the hand-set in his lap, and, as the doctor tried to speak, turned pained eyes toward him. "Now, be quiet, like a good fellow."

Downstairs, suddenly, there sounded a shot, at the rear of the house. Then a man's scream. Then a crash.

The Marquis looked at the hand-set telephone. Then he put it to his ear. "All right, Waldo," he said. "Put me on."

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## New Blood in Crime-Writing

WE don't know whether or not you've been conscious of the fact but the last few issues of DIME DETECTIVE have seen a lot of new names on the contents page. And rather more stories per issue, too, than you've been used to in the past. It hasn't been a question of "new blood for old"—just "new blood." A concentration on the policy the magazine has always had of maintaining an average of at least one new author per issue.

This is Volume 25 of the magazine, which means, with four numbers to the volume, that we've published over a hundred issues of DIME DETECTIVE since it started back in November 1931. And—believe it or not—we've published stories by well over a hundred authors in that time. Which, once again, gives us an opportunity to point the finger of scorn at those sore-heads who are always muttering in their beards about what a "closed corporation" the magazine is and how no one who "hasn't got an established reputation" can ever break into these pages.

We haven't an exact record of "first" published stories we've run but it's well up in two figures and we're willing to wager that our share of "discoveries" is comparable to that of any magazine as old, and a good many that are older.

And we're going to keep right on weeding hopefully through the stacks of manuscripts that come to our desk each day in the hope of picking another winner who hasn't yet found a publisher. It's these new names you see that we are particularly interested in hearing your comments on. We pretty well know what you think of your old favorites and while we always like to hear you say again that Daly or Nebel or Barrett or White are swell it's no news. Tell us once in a while what you think of the new faces in the swell, it's no news. Tell us once in a while parade, and we'll pass on your pats on the back post haste when they roll in!

# 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 letters to The Racket Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y.

**H**ERE'S a racket that's still being worked in various city stores and even by mail on rural residents in this country and Canada. Watch for it, be wary and *always* demand and retain samples of whatever goods you may order to be taylored up at bargain prices!

Glendale, Cal.

I'd like to relate an experience which happened to me some time ago in a large western city. At this time there seemed to be a number of firms who had resorted to misleading advertisements, particularly in the tailoring business. Complaints in the district attorney's office were numerous.

Up over the entrance to a certain tailor shop on a main business street of this city, appeared the following sign in large letters—

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\$2.00 A Leg—Seats Free  
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In order to further attract prospective customers, a very unique advertising scheme was set up. A Negro dressed in a bright red uniform with brass buttons drove an automobile through the downtown section. Behind the driver was the mammoth form of a man so arranged as to feature the trousers. On either side of the legs were the words that appeared on the above sign. Across the seat of the trousers were the words *SEATS FREE*. At night these words were illuminated and could be easily discerned at a great distance. The advertisement attracted me and I decided to get a pair of tailor-made trousers at this seemingly attractive price.

A few days later, while passing this place of business, I noted the remarkable display of fine woollens and flannels in large bolts partially unwound for window display. I noted, also, that this was the same concern whose unusual advertisement had attracted me. As I looked, this ran through my mind, "I wonder how they can do it for the money?" A few moments later I went into the store and was greeted by a salesman to whom I made known my wants. He

(Continued on page 126)

## Train for ELECTRICITY IN 12 WEEKS AT COYNE

The great Coyne Shops in Chicago have a world-wide reputation for training ambitious fellows for the big-pay field in only 12 weeks. Then you get **lifetime graduate employment service**. By my new plan YOU can take advantage of their wonderful method of learning-by-doing **NOW**—no need to lose time and money while you strive and save to raise the necessary tuition.



### I WILL FINANCE YOUR TRAINING

I have a plan where many get training first. Then they have over a year to pay for their training in easy monthly payments, starting 60 days after the regular 3-months training period is over, or 5 months from the day they start school. If you will write to me at once I will send you complete details of this sensational new plan, together with the **Big Free** illustrated Book telling all about COYNE and how many earn while learning and training you can get there without book study or useless theory.

*H. C. Lewis*

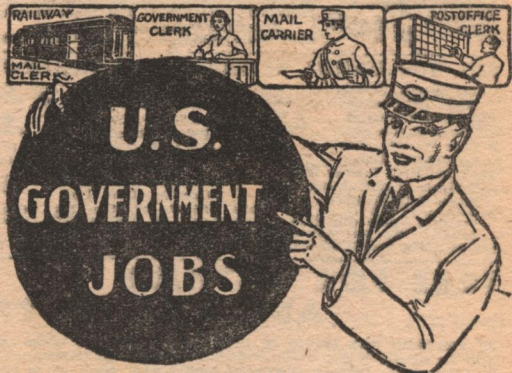
### COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL

500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. C7-76, Chicago, Illinois

MR. H. C. LEWIS, President  
Dept. C7-76, 500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Send me all details of your "pay-tuition-after-graduation" plan and your big FREE catalog.

NAME ..... AGE....  
ADDRESS.....  
CITY..... STATE.....



## START \$1260 to \$2100 YEAR MEN—WOMEN

Over 42,000 appointments last government year. Franklin Institute Dept. E174 Rochester, N. Y.

Common education usually sufficient. Gentlemen: Rush to me, FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay jobs. Send FREE 32-page book describing salaries, vacations, hours, work, etc. Tell me how to get one of these jobs.

Mail Coupon immediately. Do not delay.  
Name.....  
Address.....

**GUARANTEED TIRES!**  
**GOODYEAR·GOODRICH**  
**FIRESTONE·U.S. and**  
**Other Standard Makes**



**World's Lowest TIRE PRICES**  
 Tire users by the thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for the Long Hard Service of our Standard Brand tires reconditioned with high grade materials and latest methods by our tire experts. Our 21 years experience makes it possible to offer tires at lowest prices, with legal agreement to replace at 1/2 price any tire that fails to give 12 Mos. Service.

**FREE!**  
**LANTERN**  
 With Every 2 Tires ordered



Complete with batteries and newest type reflector bulb, Ready for instant use. Strong, steady light. Useful everywhere. Order now.

**EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED!**

BALLOON TIRES		REGULAR CORD TIRES		HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES	
Size	Price	Size	Price	Size	Price
20x4-40-21	\$2.15	30x3 1/2	\$2.95	30x8 1/2	\$3.45
20x4-50-20	2.15	31x4	2.95	30x4 1/2	3.45
20x4-50-21	2.40	32x4	2.95	30x5	3.65
20x4-75-19	2.45	33x4	2.95	30x5 1/2	3.75
20x4-75-20	2.50	34x4	2.95	30x6	3.95
20x4-00-19	2.65	32x4 1/2	3.15	30x5 1/2	3.95
20x4-00-20	2.85	<b>TRUCK BALLOON TIRES</b>			
20x4-00-21	2.90	30x6	\$4.25	34x7	\$10.95
20x4-25-18	2.90	30x6 1/2	\$4.25	34x7 1/2	\$10.95
20x4-25-19	2.90	30x7	3.95	34x8	10.95
20x4-25-20	2.95	30x7 1/2	3.95	34x8 1/2	11.45
20x4-25-21	3.25	30x8	3.95	34x9	11.45
20x4-50-17	3.35	30x8 1/2	3.95	34x9 1/2	11.45
20x4-50-18	3.35	30x9	3.95	34x10	11.45
20x4-50-19	3.35	<b>ALL OTHER SIZES</b>			
20x4-50-20	3.40	See Dealer for Prices			
20x4-50-21	3.40	See Dealer for Prices			
31x7-00-19	3.40	See Dealer for Prices			
31x7-00-20	3.45	See Dealer for Prices			
33x6-00-21	3.65	See Dealer for Prices			
33x6-00-22	3.75	See Dealer for Prices			
33x6-00-23	3.75	See Dealer for Prices			

**SEND ONLY \$1.00 DEPOSIT** on each tire ordered. (\$3.00 on each Truck Tire). We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct 5 per cent if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW - GUARANTEED - **PERRY-FIELD TIRE & RUBBER CO.** 2328-30 S. Michigan Av., Dept. 470-A, Chicago, Ill.

**Learn PHOTOGRAPHY at Home**

Splendid opportunities. Prepare in spare time. Easy plan. No previous experience needed, common school education sufficient. Send for free booklet "Opportunities in Photography", particulars and requirements. **American School of Photography** 3601 Michigan Ave., Dept. 141C, Chicago, Ill.

**SELL WHOLESALERS, RETAILERS.. SELL EVERYBODY**

- |  |        |  |        |
|--|--------|--|--------|
| Razor Blades, Double Edge, 100 Blades      | \$ .27 | Lotions and Creams                         | \$ .54 |
| Shaving and Dental Cream, Special, Gr.     | 4.75   | Shoe Laces, 27 in. Black                   | .33    |
| 1 Cake Wonder Soap Assortment, Box...      | .09    | Pair of Boxed, Gross Army & Navy Needles   | 1.15   |
| Perfume, Face Powder & Necktie Combination | .96    | Books, Groceries,.....                     |        |
| Dozen Sets Complete...                     |        | Vanilla Extract, Good Quality, 16 oz. Doz. | .84    |
- Deposit with All C. O. D. Orders, 1000's of Other Big Values. **POLICY: "Only One Shipping Point for Low Overhead and Lowest Prices." We Sell The World Over.** Buy a Lifetime. **UNIVERSAL WHOLESALERS, 901 Broadway, New York, N. Y.**

**FREE FOR ASTHMA AND HAY FEVER**

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma so terrible you choke and gasp for breath, if Hay Fever keeps you sneezing and snuffing while your eyes water and nose discharges continuously, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered for a life-time and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address **Frontier Asthma Co., 462 Niagara St., 242-B Frontier Bldg. Buffalo, N. Y.**

**AUTOMATICS BELOW COST**

**10 SHOT 32 CAL**

Military Model F-129. Extra large frame, fine blued finish; extra long barrel to give balance to large magazine. Hard shooting; new; imported; accurate; safety; length overall 6 1/2"; weight 30 oz. (reg. \$9.95) special \$7.95. 25 cal. 10 shot - \$7.95; 32 cal. 8 shot - \$6.85; 25 cal. Vest Pocket Model 7 shot - \$5.95. **\$7.95**

\$2 Deposit required on C.O.D.'s. Send M.O. in full and save charges. None sold to minors. *Burgain Catalog; S&W, Coats, Rifles, Air Guns, Telescopes, Knives, Police Goods, Badges, etc. Send \$2 stamp.*

**LEE SALES CO. (Dept. DG) 35 W. 32nd St., N. Y. City**

(Continued from page 125)

showed me many patterns of the finest materials. After examining several of these I selected a very fine piece of cloth for my proposed tailor-made trousers, still wondering in my own mind, "How can they do it?" The tailor was called to take my measurements. When this was done I asked when I should return for a fitting, to which the salesman replied, "Come in tomorrow."

I kept my appointment the following day. The same salesman greeted me and asked me to wait a moment until he called the tailor. In a few minutes, and to my utter surprise and amazement, the tailor came in with a pair of trousers completely made up but not of the material which I had selected. He said, "Here are your trousers."

I said, "You must be mistaken, these are not the trousers I ordered. It is not the same material." The salesman and the tailor became wrathful, declaring that these were exactly what I had ordered. I was getting plenty peeved and when they raised their voices, I did likewise. A short distance away another man was showing other prospective customers his wares. I soon learned that he was the proprietor because I could see that he was greatly perturbed. In a few moments he came over to where I was standing and asked me what was wrong. It did not take me long to tell my story after which I demanded a refund of the deposit. Without another word he went over to the cash register and refunded my money.

Well! I was much relieved and surprised at this, although I was greatly disappointed about the trousers. The mistake I made was in not getting a sample of the material. I'd always dealt with reliable firms, therefore, I had no suspicion of any wrong-doing on their part. However, common sense should have told me that it would have been impossible for them to fulfill their obligations for such a small amount of money.

It seems strange that these unscrupulous merchants are permitted to do business year after year, using false and misleading advertising to lure unsuspecting victims into their clutches. Perhaps they operate just within the law.

Lloyd Gomes, Postal Clerk.

**MASTER MUSICIANS**

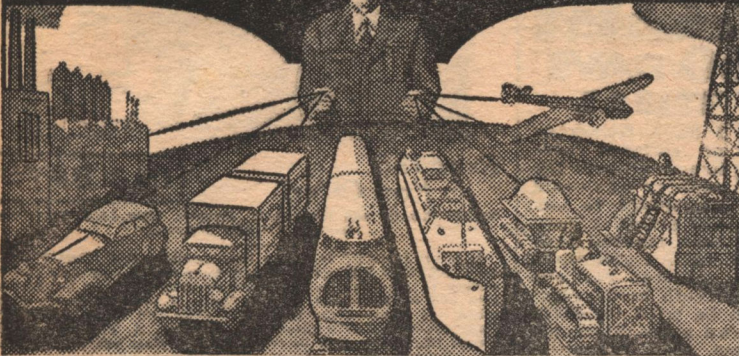
**TEACH YOU BY MAIL** Amazing home method—low cost—easy terms. New, quick way for beginners in Piano, Violin, Cornet, Trumpet, Mandolin, Guitar, Organ, Banjo, Accordion, Saxophone, Clarinet and other instruments. Wonderful results whether for pleasure, profit or both. 300,000 satisfied students. Your satisfaction guaranteed. Write for FREE CATALOG giving all details. **NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC** Dept. 807 1525 East 53rd Street, Chicago

**WANTED ORIGINAL POEMS, SONGS**

For Immediate Consideration Send Poems to **COLUMBIAN MUSIC PUBLISHERS, Dept. 14, TORONTO, CAN**



# The Diesel Engineer



## Is Your Job Safe?

Just as the gasoline engine changed or wiped out the jobs of thousands who depended on horse-drawn vehicles for their living—just as electricity changed the entire set-up in the fields of light and power—so now the Diesel engine is fast invading both the power and transportation fields, and threatening the present jobs of thousands of workers.

### To Men Over 18—Under 40:

This offer is NOT open to boys under 18 or men over 40. But if you are WITHIN these age limits, you owe it to yourself to investigate this unusual opportunity of acquainting yourself with a NEW field and a REAL future.

# 2 Diesel Lessons Free

## Diesel—The New, Fast-Growing Power

Diesel engines are replacing steam and gasoline engines in power plants, motor trucks and buses, locomotives and ships, aircraft, tractors, dredges, pumps, etc.—opening up well-paid jobs for Diesel-trained men. You get all the latest Diesel developments in our course. Special diagrams for quick understanding of this new power. If jobs in your line are steadily growing scarcer, you owe it to yourself to investigate this new, progressive, uncrowded line, that in our opinion will offer good openings for the next 25 years.

### Can You Learn Diesel?

If you are over 18 and under 40, we want to give you the opportunity of finding out. So, without obligation on your part, we will send you 2 beginning lessons. In your own home, look them over. See how clearly all is explained—how thoroughly you grasp every point—how definitely you progress step by step—so that your knowledge of Diesel grows constantly. This simple trial may be the turning point in your life—so write to us TODAY! State age.

American School, Dept. DC-49, Drexel Avenue at 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois

Test Yourself for a Good Pay Job—Steady Work

## LET ME SEND YOU THIS TAILORED SUIT

AND PAY YOU UP TO \$10.00 IN A DAY!

Amazing new ideal! Wear this splendid suit and I'll pay you for it if you follow my easy plan and quality. Choose suit from fine woolsens, Union tailored to your measure. Just show it to your friends. Make up to \$10 in a day—easy—representing big nationally-known tailoring house. No experience needed. ACTUAL SAMPLES FREE! Write today for details of sensational new plan and actual samples. SEND NO MONEY. H. J. Graves, Pres. STONE-FIELD CORP. 1300 W. Harrison Dept. W-796 Chicago



OTHER MEN have read and profited by our free books "Patent Protection" and "How to sell an invention." Fully explain many interesting points to inventors and illustrate important mechanical principles. With books we also send free "Evidence of Invention" form. Prompt service, reasonable fees, deferred payments arranged, thirty-seven years' experience. Avoid risk of delays. Write immediately to: VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., REGISTERED PATENT ATTORNEYS, 224-J VICTOR BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D. C.

## PATENT YOUR IDEA

### FOLLOW THIS MAN

Secret Service Operator No. 88 is on the job! Running down dangerous Counterfeit Gang. Tells finger prints in murdered girl's room.

Free The Confidential Report Operator No. 88 made to his chief. Write for 64.

Earn a Regular Monthly Salary

YOU can become a Finger Print Expert at home, in your spare time, at small cost. Write for confidential full report and details. Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE 1520 Sannyds Ave. Chicago, Ill. Dept. C-739

Operator No. 38



# NEURITIS Relieve Pain In Few Minutes

To relieve the torturing pain of Neuritis, Rheumatism, Neuralgia, Lumbago in few minutes, get NURITO, the Doctor's formula. No opiates, no narcotics. Does the work quickly—must relieve worst pain to your satisfaction in few minutes—or money back at Druggist's. Don't suffer. Get trustworthy NURITO on this guarantee. Don't wait.

## SOOTHE KIDNEYS with real santalwood oil

When the genito-urinary passages become irritated, don't use cheap drastic medicines. Tell your druggist you want genuine Santal Midy Capsules. Used by millions. They contain true East Indian santalwood oil.



AMAZING NEW BUSINESS Sell to Stores

## Get Set for Life!

Handle Big Pay Store Route. Place nationally-known Line 5c-10c Counter Goods. 200 products. Included is Laymon's Aspirin—advertised in Saturday Evening Post. All sold from Self-Help Counter Displays. Up to 112% profit. Earn up to \$65 weekly. No experience needed to start. Facts free.

WORLD'S PRODUCTS COMPANY Dept. 8869 Spencer, Indiana

# BE A RADIO EXPERT

## Learn at Home—Make Good Money

Many men I trained at home in spare time make \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many make \$5, \$10, \$15 a week in spare time while learning. Illustrated 64-page book describes Radio's opportunities and how you can become a Radio Expert through my practical home training. Television training is included. Money Back Agreement protects you. Mail coupon today for copy of book FREE.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7HS9 National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.  
Send me, without obligation, your 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio" FREE. (Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....  
Address.....  
City..... State.....

# FALSE TEETH



**60 DAYS TRIAL**

I have thousands of satisfied customers all over the country who could not afford to pay big prices. I have been making dental plates for many years, by mail. I guarantee you satisfaction or they do not cost you one cent, and I take your word. Teeth made especially for you personally can be tried for sixty days. In one Pennsylvania town alone, 91 people are wearing teeth made by me. They are satisfied and saved money.

## SEND NO MONEY

My plates are very beautiful to look at and are constructed to give life-long service and satisfaction. You can look younger at once. They are made with pearly white genuine porcelain teeth. Well fitting and guaranteed unbreakable. Remember you do not send one cent—just your **FREE** name and address, and we send free impression material and full detailed directions. Be sure to write today for my low prices and complete information. Don't put this off. Do it today.

**DR. S. B. HEININGER, D. D. S.**

440 W. Huron St., Dept. 872, Chicago, Illinois

## High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied—Diploma, Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and is really, Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation. American School, Dept. HC-49 Drexel at 58th, Chicago

# HAVE A NEW SKIN!



Read this Free Offer!

**IN 3 DAYS**

Visible Pimples and Blackheads, Freckles, Ugly Large Pores and Surface Wrinkles Disappear!

It is all explained in a new free treatise called "BEAUTIFUL NEW SKIN IN 3 DAYS" which is being mailed absolutely free to readers of this magazine. So worry no more over your humiliating skin and complexion or signs of aging if your outer skin looks soiled and worn. Write to MARVO BEAUTY LABORATORIES, Dept. 604-N, No. 1700 Broadway, New York, N. Y., and you will receive this new treatise by return mail in plain wrapper, postpaid and absolutely free. If pleased tell friends.

## STOP Scratching

RELIEVE Itching of Insect Bites

Even the most stubborn itching of insect bites, athlete's foot, hives, scales, eczema, and other externally caused skin afflictions quickly yields to cooling, antiseptic, liquid **D. D. D. PRESCRIPTION**. Greaseless and stainless. Soothes the irritation and quickly stops the most intense itching. A 35c trial bottle, at drug stores, proves it—or your money back. Ask for **D. D. D. PRESCRIPTION**.

## RAISE GIANT FROGS

FREE BOOK



GOOD MARKET!

Frog legs in big demand at good prices the year round! Easy to ship! **WE BUY!** Sell to us in addition to other waiting markets! Men & Women see what others are doing. Small pond starts you. Free book explains unusual offer to beginners. **AMERICAN FROG CANNING CO.** (Dept. 185-R) New Orleans, La.

**HAY FEVER or ASTHMA**  
TREATMENT ON TRIAL.  
If satisfied, send \$1; if not, it's FREE. Write for it today. State which.  
**W. K. STERLINE, 610 Ohio Ave., SIDNEY, OHIO**

# Classified Advertising

### Photo Finishing

20 Reprints 25c. Film developed, two prints each negative 25c. **SKRUDLAND, 4118-26 Overhill, Chicago.**

**ROLLS DEVELOPED**—Two Beautiful Double Weight Professional Enlargements, 8 Neverfade Prints, 25c. Century Photo Service, LaCrosse, Wis.

### Help Wanted—Instruction

**FOREST JOBS AVAILABLE** \$125-\$175 MONTH. Cabin, hunt, trap, patrol. Qualify immediately. Write Rayson Service, C-62, Denver, Colo.

**LEARN BARTENDING BY MAIL.** Professional mixers earn big money, travel everywhere. Free booklet, **BARTENDERS INSTITUTE, 20 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, New York.**

### Advertisers

This space is available for legitimate advertisers who are looking for profits at low cost. Write for rates to: Department F, Popular Publications, 205 East 42nd Street, New York.

### U. S. Stamps Wanted

CASH for unused U. S. Stamps at 90% face value. Plymouth, 152 West 42nd St., New York.

### Poem—Songwriters

**Songwriters: Interesting Proposition.** Write: **PARAMOUNT SONG-RECORDING STUDIO, L-13, Box 190, Hollywood, Calif.**

**SONG POEMS WANTED**—any subject. Send best poem today for offer. **RICHARD BROS., 30 Woods Bldg., Chicago.**

**SONGWRITERS: Send for Free Rhyming Dictionary and Writers' Guide.** **MMM Publishers, 636 Studio Bldg., Portland, Ore.**

**SONG POEMS WANTED TO BE SET TO MUSIC.** Free examination. Send poems to **McNeil, Bachelor of Music, 4153 A South Van Ness, Los Angeles, Calif.**

### Patents

**INVENTORS**—Write for New Free Book, "Patent Guide for the Inventor" and "Record of Invention" form. No charge for preliminary information. **Clarence A. O'Brien and Hyman Berman, Registered Patent Attorneys, 16-D Adams Building, Washington, D. C.**

### Headliners All!

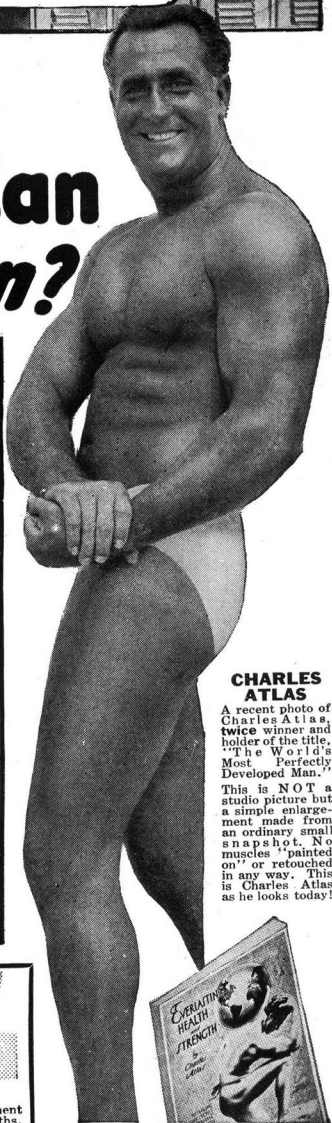
Stars of the diamond, the gridiron—plus stories by headline writers. That's what you'll find when you read **DIME SPORTS MAGAZINE.**



GEE what a build!  
Didn't it take a long  
time to get those muscles?

No SIR! - ATLAS  
Makes Muscles Grow  
Like Magic!

# Will You Give Me 7 Days to PROVE I Can Make YOU a *New Man*?



**CHARLES ATLAS**  
A recent photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." This is NOT a studio picture but a simple enlargement made from an ordinary small snapshot. No muscles "painted on" or retouched in any way. This is Charles Atlas as he looks today!

## LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE

**5 inches of new Muscle**

"After **ONE WEEK** my arms increased  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in., chest  $2\frac{1}{2}$  in., forearm  $\frac{7}{8}$  in., and I have gained 4 lbs."—C. S. W., Va.

**What a difference!**

"Started a week ago. Have put  $3\frac{1}{2}$  in. on chest (normal) and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  in. expanded."—F. S., N. Y.

**Here's what ATLAS did for ME!**

**John Jacobs BEFORE**      **John Jacobs AFTER**

**For quick results I recommend CHARLES ATLAS**

"Am sending snapshot of wonderful progress. Certainly recommend you for quick results!"—W. G., N. J.

**GAINED 29 POUNDS**

"Your method gives long, smooth muscle. When I started, weighed only 141. Now weigh 170!"—T. K., N. Y.

## 7-Day TRIAL OFFER

I could fill this whole magazine with enthusiastic reports from OTHERS. But what you want to know is—"What can Charles Atlas do for ME?"

Find out—at my risk! Right in first 7 days I'll start to PROVE I can turn YOU into a man of might and muscle. And it will be the kind of PROOF you (and anyone else) can SEE, FEEL, MEASURE with a tape!

My FREE BOOK tells about my amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER—an offer no other instructor as ever DARED make! If YOU want smashing strength, big muscles, glowing health—I'll show you results QUICK!

### FREE BOOK

I myself was once a 97-pound weakling—sickly, half-alive. Then I discovered "Dynamic Tension." And I twice won—against all comers—the title, "The World's Perfectly Developed Man"!

I have no use for apparatus. "Dynamic Tension" ALONE (right in your own home) will start new inches of massive power pushing out your chest—build up your shoulders to champion huskiness—put regular mountains of muscle on your biceps—free you of constipation, pimples—make those stomach muscles of yours hard ridges!

Make me PROVE it! Gamble a postage stamp. Send coupon for my FREE BOOK AT ONCE! Address me personally: Charles Atlas, Dept. 83X, 115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.



**Sterling Silver Cup Being Given Away**  
This valuable cup, of solid sterling silver, stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base. I will award it, engraved, to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.



**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83X,  
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.**

I want proof that DYNAMIC TENSION will make a new man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....  
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

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

# fun?

## SURE IT IS

—and mighty strenuous too!

"SPORT, even for the fun of it, can be tense and tiring," says Miss Gloria Wheeden, who is shown aquaplaning above and at left. "Like most of the folks who go in for water sports, I pride myself on my physical condition. Yes, I smoke. When I feel a bit let-down, I light up a Camel and get a 'lift' in energy." When an active day drains physical and nervous energy, Camels help you renew your flow of vim. And being mild, they never get on your nerves.

"MANY A TIME I've smoked a Camel to get a 'lift,'" says Harry Burmester printer, (left). "With Camels handy, I feel I can take the tough spots right in stride. Camels never tire my taste or irritate my throat—even smoking as much as I do."

Copyright, 1937,  
R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company  
Winston-Salem, N. C.

### COSTLIER TOBACCOS

Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—Turkish and Domestic—than any other popular brand.



Get a Lift with a Camel!

**1060 PARACHUTE JUMPS**—no mishaps! Floyd Stimson (right) started smoking Camels at his first parachute jump. "Camels are so mild I take healthy nerves for granted," says Floyd. "I've found what I want in Camels. Mildness — tastiness."

