ALL STORIES COMPLETE

POPULAR PUBLICATION

FEBRUARY

10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

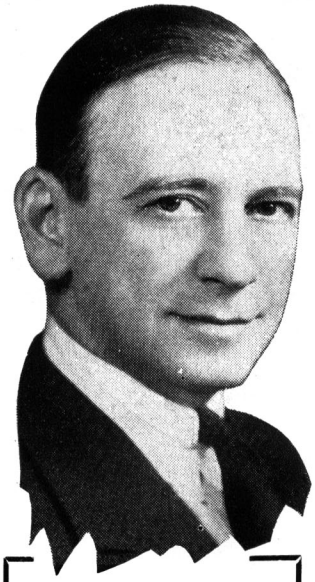
A NEEDLE MIKE THRILLER
by WILLIAM E. BARRETT

A RAMBLER NOVELETTE.
by FRED MacISAAC

A MARQUIS OF BROADWAY STORY
by JOHN LAWRENCE

DEAD MAN'S DEBT

A MURDER MYSTERY
by T. T. FLYNN



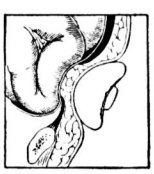
FREE TRIAL of my Rupture Invention

If It Doesn't Stop Your Rupture Worries It Doesn't Cost a Cent!

NO STEEL SPRINGS

NO HARD PADS

IN MY Brooks truss invention there are no steel springs — instead the pad is held in place by a soft body band that is just as comfortable as a glove. In my design there is no hard pad. Instead there is a soft, hollow AIR-CUSHION, firm enough to always hold the rupture just right, yet soft and flexible enough to give perfect comfort without gouging. If you look at the illustrations below you will see what I mean by gouging.



WRONG

A pad that presses into the opening absolutely prevents Nature from Healing. The opening cannot close up.

RIGHT

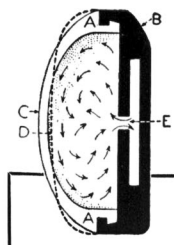
This second illustration shows how the Brooks Invention holds the rupture so that the edges of the ring are close together—close enough for Nature to strengthen and possibly heal.

I SEND you my Rupture Invention on trial because ruptured people have been fooled so many times by quack schemes and worthless "cure-alls" that they don't know what to believe. There are as many kinds of rupture trusses as there are blacksmiths. All of the makers CLAIM wonderful and unusual qualities for their products. But I say: "Seeing is believing." If you have a reducible rupture I KNOW what the Brooks will do for you — BUT I won't make any claims. I want you to try for yourself. I'll send it to you on trial. You keep it ten days —at my risk. Lay aside your old truss. Then see how the Brooks Invention gives you these three big advantages. Remember these are **not** claims. These are the benefits the Brooks MUST bring you before you decide to keep it.

1. Immediate restoration of normal physical activities. Walk, run, bend or stoop without fear of having the AIR-CUSHION pad slip and let your rupture down.

2. A Support so comfortable, so light in weight and inconspicuous, that you soon forget that you are wearing any support at all.

3. It Must hold your rupture in exactly the right position to give Nature the greatest chance to heal — to strengthen the muscles and close the opening. If the broken ends of a bone are not held together the bone will never knit. The same with rupture. If the rupture is not held properly Nature hasn't got a chance.



FLEXIBLE AIR-CUSHION

This is the patented, flexible Brooks AIR-CUSHION. It is made in two parts—the soft rubber bulb (A) which forms the pad which comes in contact with the body, and the light weight disc (B) which holds the pad. (C) shows the shape of the soft rubber pad before it is pressed against the body. The dotted line (D) shows how the pad flattens out under pressure expelling the air through the orifice (E) through which the pad figuratively breathes as it adjusts to conform to different body pressures.

• • •

REMEMBER, I don't promise a cure. I don't make any claims. You don't take my word for a thing. You see for yourself and then decide. Send your name quick for my Book and for my Trial order blank. All information is free. There is no charge now or at any other time for all the facts and the free trial plan of this world famous Rupture Invention that has come to thousands of people almost like the answer to a prayer. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate, for you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Send the coupon now and you will soon know what it is like to be Free of Rupture Worries.

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4939 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

10c DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

A POPULAR PUBLICATION

EVERY STORY COMPLETE — EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 26 — CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY, 1938 — No. 3

A SMASHING NOVEL-LENGTH MURDER MYSTERY

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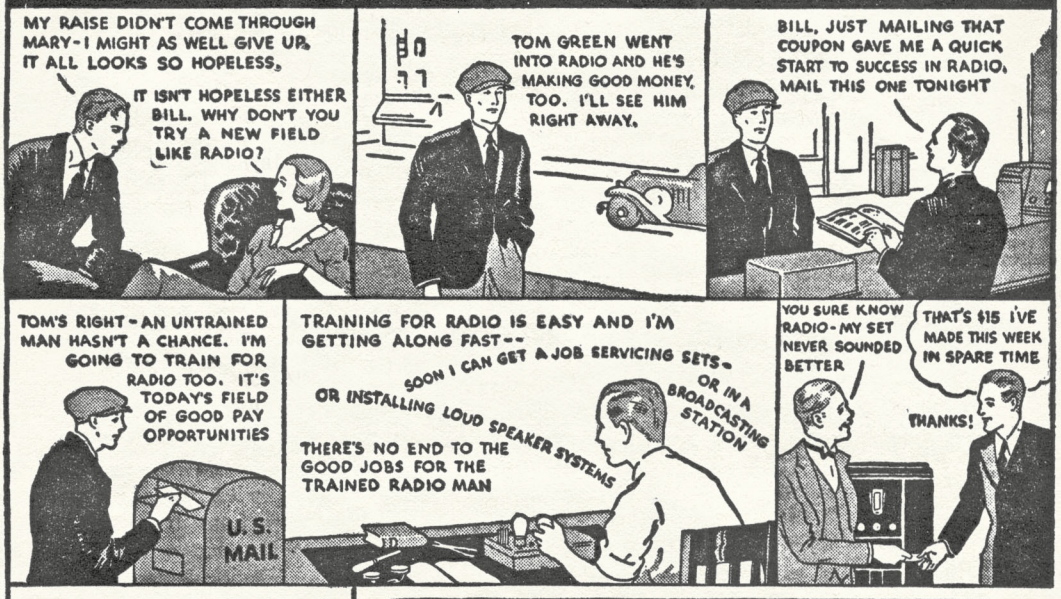
HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED-THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!



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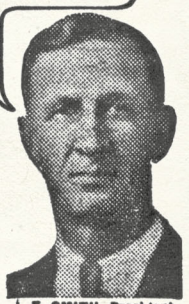

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The March Thrill Docket

EVERYONE knows the old gag—"Man bites dog—that's *news!*" In fact it's become so common—with variations—these days that it's lost about all the punch it had the first time it was pulled. It's high time, we believe, that an effective substitute was found for it and we want to offer the following as an even more apt definition of newsworthiness than its forbear ever was.

Race Williams reclines on a hospital cot through an entire Daly novelette!

If that doesn't carry a reverse-English kick that rates front-page, triple-column headlines we'll never know what news is.

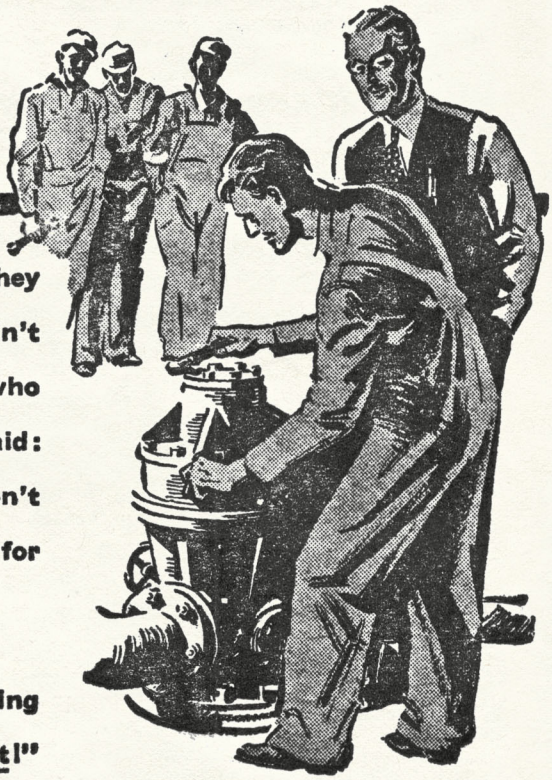
It was enough of a shock to have *A Corpse on the House*—that's the title of the new Daly-Williams yarn—open with old infallible Race taking lead in his carcass in broad daylight without even making a pass at the gunman, but when the author promptly put his lead character to bed with a trained nurse giving opiates, and then kept him there for the balance of the story, we practically dropped in our tracks and had to be quartered in a ward ourselves. Don't get the idea, though, that just because Race can't function on his feet in the first story of this smashing new series by Carroll John Daly, that you can afford to skip it. It's got more action crammed inside the white walls of that hospital room than most detective stories have spread over a country-wide canvas, and there's murder between every temperature-taking and forced-feeding.

A Corpse on the House is complete in the next issue—and that'd be news even without the unique set-up Daly has arranged to confound his favorite character—and yours!

Then, just to make the March issue a sure-fire hit, Raymond Chandler gives as the first story about a brand-new character who will alternate with *Dalmas. The King in Yellow* will introduce *Steve Grace,* ex-house dick of the Carlton Hotel, who matches wits with a murder-minded swing-band leader in a thrilling, complete, novel-length thriller that'll keep you guessing till the last page. Plus stories by Frederick C. Davis (Keyhole Kerry is back!) and William Edward Hayes.

The MARCH issue will be out on FEBRUARY 4th.

"My reputation as a trouble-shooter won a promotion for me"



"When something went wrong they called on me. The truth is, I didn't realize it until one day the boss, who happened to be looking on said: 'The boys always call on you, don't they? You are in direct line for promotion.'"

●

"P.S. The boss knew I was taking an I.C.S. Course. We both knew it!"

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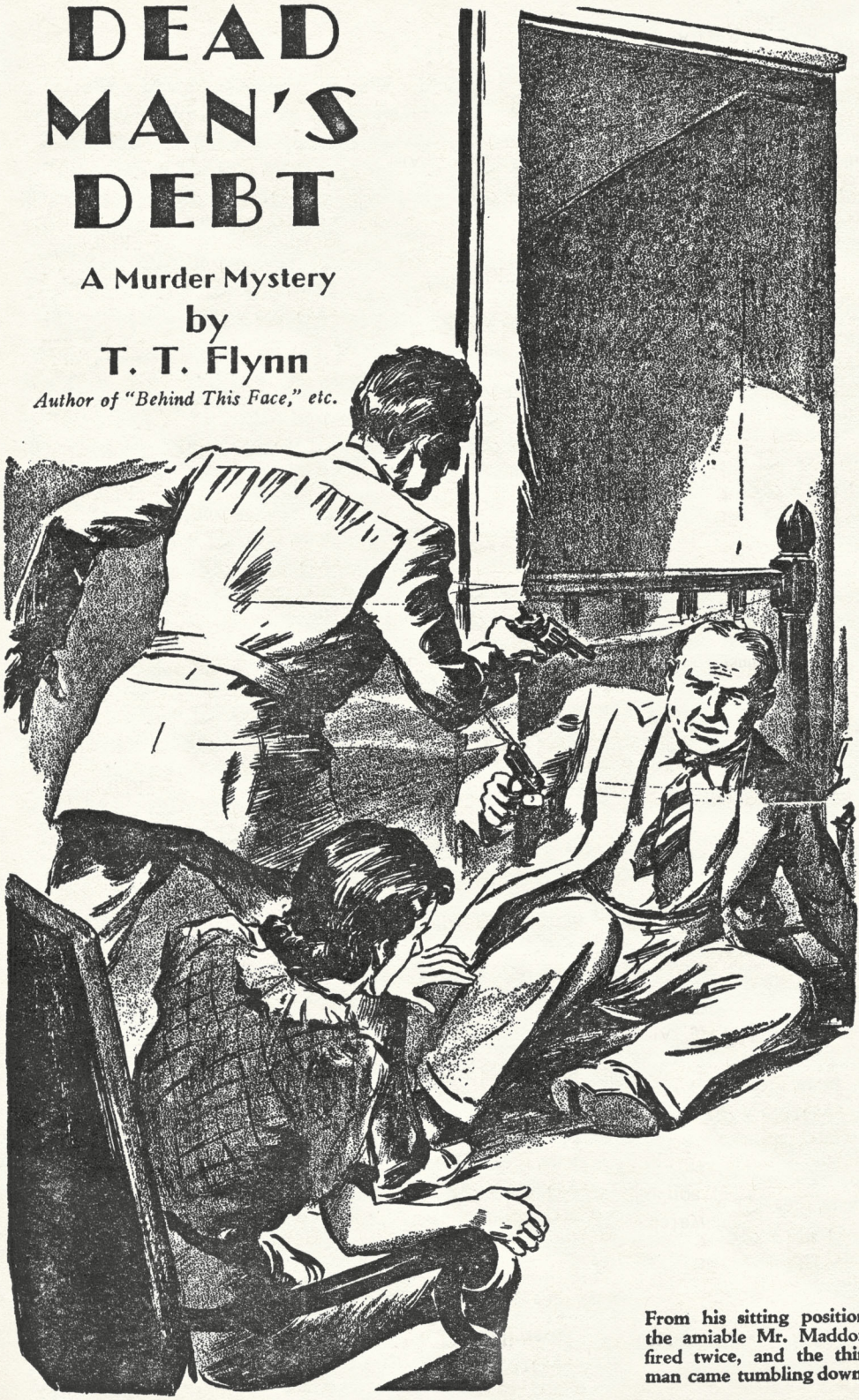
DEAD MAN'S DEBT

A Murder Mystery

by

T. T. Flynn

Author of "Behind This Face," etc.



From his sitting position the amiable Mr. Maddox fired twice, and the thin man came tumbling down.

Mr. Maddox may have been fat and old and have forgotten all about love but when it came to knowing the ins and outs of the race-racket, the wise-money machinations of the harpies that follow the bangtails, and the tricks of the vultures on the chisel-fringe of the underworld, he was tops. Even murder was up that bland Buddha's alley—as Brewster and his girl found when they got bogged down in a homicide swamp.

CHAPTER ONE

Meet Mr. Maddox

THE minutes dragged endlessly while Frank Brewster stood motionless before that open office window, six stories above New Orleans' broad, busy Canal Street. Only once did he move—when Miss Jenson, the briskly efficient secretary, entered quietly and paused on the threshold.

"A Mr. Maddox insists on seeing you," she said doubtfully.

Over his shoulder, Frank Brewster's

look was irritable. His voice snarled when he spoke.

"I told you not to bother me for the next hour, Miss Jenson."

"But he insists it's important—"

"I don't know him. Please get out."

This had never happened to Miss Jenson before. This haggard unhappy speaker was not the Frank Brewster she knew, who stayed smiling and lighthearted under any strain.

Miss Jenson reddened, and then her resentment died, and she was only helplessly puzzled as she retreated and closed the door.

Frank Brewster turned back to the window.

A street-car bell clanged impatiently below, horns sounded, a policeman's whistle shrilled, traffic weaved and crawled in the hot morning sunlight—but Brewster was oblivious to it all.

To the right, in the distance, the full-throated bellow of a steamer's whistle sounded — deep, powerful, sad. That would be the *Toyo Maru,* for Panama, Australia, Batavia and Singapore, carrying freight and passengers. . . . .

FRANK BREWSTER groped for a cigarette—and then did not light it. His fingers rolled it until the paper gave way and shredded tobacco drifted down by his foot.

The door opened again and Miss Jenson's agitated voice protested: "You can't see him! Mr. Brewster has given positive orders—"

"Cry it in your hanky, sister—I'm in now, ain't I?"

Brewster turned from the window, bleakly and without expression.

Miss Jenson spoke almost tearfully. "I tried to keep him out, Mr. Brewster. Shall I—shall I—"

The fat hand that patted her shrinking shoulder was set off boldly by a huge diamond ring. It must have been genuine. No man so obviously sure of himself, so prosperous and commanding in loose-fitting linen suit and wide-brimmed Panama, would be wearing an imitation diamond so large.

"Save it, sister, save it," Mr. Maddox advised. "He won't bite you. When Joe Maddox tells you it's all right, it's all right. You can lay your money on it."

Miss Jenson evidently did not believe it, for she stepped hastily away, as if the huge man's presence was a contamination and abomination, despite the wide, infectious smile on his broad and hearty face.

Infectious was the word. There was something about Mr. Maddox; something that grew and spread and radiated from that expansive smile. You did not dismiss Mr. Maddox without a second thought. You noticed him, your attention was riveted—and you knew that a personality was with you.

"Very well, Miss Jenson, I'll see the gentleman."

Not until she had again retired did Frank Brewster speak—coldly. "I ought to throw you out. Maybe I will anyway. Be a pleasure. What do you want?"

"Talk to you," said Mr. Maddox.

"I'm busy."

"Too busy to talk about Lia Hende?"

Mr. Maddox had taken a fat black cigar from the wide breast pocket of his linen coat. He softened it by rolling it slowly between vast fingers. The broad smile remained on his moon-like visage, and his eyes were bland and open as he watched Frank Brewster's haggard face tighten and harden.

"I expected something like this today," Brewster clipped out. "And now that you've forced your way in, out you're going—"

Maddox brought the black cigar up like a baton in a half warning gesture, and his smile did not abate.

"Tough, ain't it, young man? But

you're taking it harder than I thought. And what does it get you? A headache, eh? Nothing but a headache. When you get as old as I am, you won't champ at the bit."

Brewster's anger brought out the fine lines of his face, the sweep of jawline up into lean cheeks. His black hair was moist and disheveled above his forehead, and he rumpled it still more with a sudden stab of his fingers.

Mr. Maddox was correct, there was a difference in their ages, running to fifteen or twenty years. It was emphasized by the fine sprinkling of gray on Mr. Maddox's temples.

THE steamer's whistle boomed dully once again along Canal Street, overriding the dull cacophony of traffic. Brewster looked toward the window and a spasm of uncertainty passed across his face. For a moment he was again oblivious to the room.

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "That's the *Toyo Maru,* all right. Lia Hende's booked passage for the Orient on her, I hear. Clearing out for good. And too pretty to do it, if you ask me. She'll be wasted out there—even if she falls in love and gets married again."

"I don't know why I don't throw you out," Brewster muttered, his mind still beyond the open window.

"I didn't come here to be tossed out," said Mr. Maddox calmly. But he stopped smiling, puffed hard on the black cigar, squinted for a moment, and casually continued: "Lia Hende didn't kill her husband, if you ask me. She's sucker-betting to run out on it now—and you're a chump to let her."

Frank Brewster threw up his head. "What are you—a newspaperman?"

"Me? Nix. And I haven't got a record at the State Identification Bureau either," said Mr. Maddox genially. "All I've got's a bump of curiosity, mister, that gets me into trouble sometimes. Last night I decided it was time someone gave you an earful."

"Get to the point, please." Brewster moistened his lips. Blue shadows lay under his eyes. He had the look of a man close to desperation.

"The jury couldn't agree," said Mr. Maddox amiably. "The prosecutor evidently didn't think he'd have any better luck with a second trial so he let her go."

"And damned her with the guilt of her husband's death," said Brewster explosively. "She'll never have a chance to prove she didn't kill Bill Hende. . . . Why the devil are you interested in the matter?"

"Dough," said Mr. Maddox cheerfully.

"I don't understand."

"You will when you're broke, son."

"So you're broke?" Frank Brewster eyed the big diamond skeptically.

Mr. Maddox chuckled and lifted the vast hand on which the stone glinted.

"I'm busted as I'll ever get, son. The chunk of ice is good for three thousand—maybe a little more—and when it's gone, Joe Maddox is through. This is the headlight, the high-sign that Joe Maddox can pay off. Without it he's only small change."

"I still don't understand."

"Write your own ticket. I'm a bookie. Get it?"

"I'm afraid not."

"For a young lawyer," Mr. Maddox sighed, "you're missing your bets. Over at the Fairgrounds, the old Iron Man gobbles the mutuel money from the suckers. But that only keeps the horses running. That dough wouldn't buy bird seed. When you see the real customers laying it down in chunks, they aren't feeding the pari-mutuels. It'd murder the odds."

Mr. Maddox admired the big diamond.

"When I'm covering big money, I've got to look like important money. The

old headlight does the trick. Everybody knows Joe Maddox's ring. If I hock it, they're wise I'm broke. And if I don't hock it now, or raise a bankroll quick, I'm sunk. Lia Hende has got plenty and so have you. I'm going to nick you for twenty-five grand cash—and make you like it, son."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars?" Brewster repeated. "From me?" His laugh was short and hard. "Either you're crooked and should be arrested, or you think I'm a fool. Which makes you a fool. I haven't got twenty-five thousand. I'd keep it if I had."

"If you could prove Lia Hende innocent?" said Mr. Maddox persuasively.

"Why don't I throw him out?" Brewster's face wanted to know. "He's crooked and we both know it."

But Brewster knew why he didn't throw the man out—Mr. Maddox knew. Mr. Maddox was wrapped in self-assurance as enveloping as his loose linen coat, and his advice was genial.

"Don't blow your top, son. The public knows the lady and you are friends. It was brought out at the trial. I had it straight from one of the reporters that you advised the defense, and brought Lobitz here from New York because he'd never lost a big case. And when I add all that up—" Mr. Maddox broke off at what he saw on Frank Brewster's face. "Never mind," he said. "Are you good for a twenty-five-grand loan if I can help you prove the lady innocent?"

"A loan?"

Mr. Maddox reddened. "Think I'm trying to hi-jack you for twenty-five grand? This is business, son. Only a loan. Joe Maddox always pays off. But right now he's got to have a bankroll to keep going."

"I see," said Brewster, without conviction. "What do you know?"

"Will you deal?" asked Mr. Maddox bluntly. "Ten thousand by midnight, to get me by, and the other fifteen when you get proof that will hold up in court?"

THAT intangible radiation of assurance from Mr. Maddox enveloped Frank Brewster. He knew he was taking clever bait, and somehow it didn't matter. He didn't have ten thousand dollars, yet he was saying: "I'll advance you ten thousand by midnight if you can show me that much value. I'll have the other fifteen thousand the day Miss Hende is proved innocent. My word will have to do."

The faint, almost imperceptible strain which had gripped Mr. Maddox rolled away now, and the chuckle that followed was full-throated and infectious. "That's good enough for me, son. But don't forget I'm out to get that bankroll. I'm a has-been if I don't."

Mr. Maddox lighted the black cigar with a flourish, and the big diamond glinted coldly as he put the lighter away and started to speak.

"Jack Hende was a vice-president of Panama-American Fruit, and made plenty of money. He'd been married six years, and his wife had never looked at another man—that they could prove. But something was wrong. Hende had been losing weight, looking bad, acting like a man who was ready to blow his top because something was tearing him up inside. Friends knew he was quarreling with his wife. Eyewitnesses saw Hende corner you one night at the Parish Club and order you not to talk to his wife again."

"He was drunk," said Brewster stiffly.

"He'd been drinking," Mr. Maddox agreed cheerfully. "But things like that get around. People start wondering. And it did look funny when Hende was found with a bullet through his heart in a hotel room on the same floor where you were living at the time."

"I'm still living there," reminded Brewster sharply. "Please come to the point!"

"The point," said Mr. Maddox shrewdly, "is that you cashed in on fool luck

going to Shreveport that day, and returning all of thirty minutes after the body was found. You had a cast-iron alibi. You couldn't have killed Hende. Only people always will think there's something sour about an alibi. The police knew you couldn't have done it, so they let you alone. But the eyebrows stayed up. And when you were subpoenaed to the trial, and asked what Hende meant the night he told you not to speak to his wife, nobody much believed that your hands were lily-white.

"And it was just tough luck that Mrs. Hende got out of the elevator on that floor a short time before her husband was killed. And it was tougher luck she didn't have any witnesses to the fact that she walked back downstairs without speaking to anyone up there on the sixth floor. Everybody got a lousy break all around," said Mr. Maddox sympathetically. "And that's why I hate to see Mrs. Hende bolting away from the grandstand."

"The newspapers printed all that, Mr. Maddox. If that's all you know—"

Mr. Maddox spoke comfortably past the black cigar, which was filling the office with a poisonous odor.

"Hende played the horses as a sideline. That's what got me to watching the case. I've covered his money too often." Mr. Maddox shook his head. "He was a bad loser, son. I don't like 'em. So I wasn't surprised one day at the track to hear this red-headed girl say, 'You'll be there tonight—or else!' "

"What red-headed girl?"

The question leaped involuntarily from Frank Brewster. Startled, on fire with eagerness, he moved a step forward, and magic was at work on him. The haggard lines smoothed away from his face.

MR. MADDOX eyed him quizzically. "Her name," he said, "is Jenny Arnold. She's as pretty as a witch and as wise as that queen of Sheba who went back to her own people. The one who had the kingdom where King Solomon's mines were located, and took the gold and let King Solomon have his women.

"She's an old sweetheart of a politician so high his name had better be left out of this. And if there's a smarter little lady north of the Gulf of Mexico, I haven't heard about her."

"The Queen of Sheba and King Solomon's mines?" said Frank Brewster thoughtfully, eyeing his visitor.

Mr. Maddox looked embarrassed. "I read a little, son. Don't mind my fancy talk. Horses and betting odds are what I know."

"This Jenny Arnold? What was she to Jack Hende?"

"Maybe nothing," said Mr. Maddox.

"She wouldn't talk to him like that if they weren't close."

"I wondered myself," agreed Mr. Maddox.

"She wasn't mentioned at the trial. No newspaper printed a word about her," said Frank Brewster impatiently.

"I looked. That's right," agreed Mr. Maddox.

"You knew this during the trial. You knew what Lia Hende was up against. Why didn't you come forward and say something?"

Mr. Maddox chuckled again—a gargantuan chuckle that shook the loose-fitting linen suit. The big diamond winked and glinted like a coldly watchful eye on the fortunes of its wearer as Mr. Maddox tilted his wide-brimmed Panama to a rakish angle.

"Why didn't I stand up on the clubhouse veranda and make a speech about it?" countered Mr. Maddox. "It wasn't any of my business, son. Mrs. Hende had her money and famous lawyers and private detectives. I'd take her bets and cover her handicapping—but I wouldn't put old Joe Maddox on the front pages of

a mess like that, unless they had a rope around her neck and there was no more hope. It's dog eat dog, son, and a man has to look out for himself. But I went to the trial and wished her luck."

Frank Brewster's lip curled. "And did nothing about it until you needed money."

"Have it your way," said Mr. Maddox agreeably. "There's my openers for your money. Jenny Arnold — and you can't beat her—and what are you going to do?"

Frank Brewster returned to the window. His back was stiffly straight and the hand in his pocket was clenched. Behind him the quizzical Mr. Maddox would have been wise indeed could he have guessed all that was passing through his mind.

How could a stranger be trusted who came offering such a fantastic story for money in the thousands? How far could hope be stretched when hope already was an infinitesimal thread?

Once more, from its river dock half a mile down Canal Street, the *Toyo Maru's* whistle boomed in a quivering blast of farewell. Frank Brewster spun from the window.

"Wait here!" he said feverishly. "I'll be back."

CHAPTER TWO

A Ticket to the Races

MEN were waiting on the crowded dock to cast off the great looped mooring ropes. Watchful Japanese officers stood alertly in the bridge wing. Several last-minute visitors were hurrying ashore, where the gay crowd of spectators waited for the *Toyo Maru's* departure. Sailors were ready to move the gangplank and break the last contact with shore as Brewster plowed through the crowd, ducked under a restraining rope, elbowed aside a shrilly protesting little brown officer and went aboard the ship with long strides.

Passengers, mostly American it seemed, were crowding the rails of the upper decks. The neat 'tween-decks lounge just beyond the head of the gangway was almost deserted. A ship's officer, backed by two seamen, was watching at the gangway head.

"Plis—you passenger? Show proof, plis, quickly. Not time lose, plis."

Brewster turned so violently the worried little Jap fell back a step.

"I want Mrs. Hende! She's booked in B-sixteen. Where is it?"

"No visitors, plis! No time visit!"

"Damn you!" said Brewster. "Where's B-sixteen?"

And then she appeared—hurrying down from the deck above.

"Frank—what is it? I was at the rail when you came aboard."

She had been photographed and written about and the trial had put her on a cruel stage for all the world to see. Brewster winced when he saw the shadows under her eyes and the tragic soberness which had fallen like a cool mist over a face that once had seldom been without a smile. The story of her ordeal was there in the change that had left her fragile, delicate and heartbreakingly tragic to one who had known the gayety and bubbling spirits of the old Lia Hende.

Brewster waved the frantic little Jap officer away.

"Get your baggage put ashore, Lia, if there's time. If there isn't tell 'em to ship it back from Colon. You're coming ashore. You can't go now."

She was frightened, and it was a fright of the spirit, followed by quick rebellion.

"No, Frank! I didn't think you'd do this! We settled everything! You promised you wouldn't come to the ship. I'm going, of course—but if you hadn't come I'd have cried all the way down to the Gulf. I've been at the rail for an hour, hoping you'd weaken."

They stepped into the deserted lounge away from the curious crowd of passengers on deck.

"I didn't weaken. Something has come up. I've just been talking to a man in my office. He offered some hope. Not much —but it's something. There's a red-headed girl—Jenny Arnold. Did you ever hear Jack speak of her?"

"No. And this is insane, Frank. What about her? Was—was there an affair no one knew about?"

"I don't know. We've got to find out. You can't leave until we do know, Lia. I was a fool to agree that this was the best way."

She smiled faintly. "An understanding fool, Frank. The kind a woman never forgets."

Then the swift terror that shrinks from further hurt sprang into Lia Hende's dark eyes, under the darker lashes.

"I'm going, Frank. There's no other way. They'll always talk. I'll never get away from it. They're saying it now: I killed him because of you. It's almost made me hate you—to think that because we were friends *that* has to follow us—follow me always. I'm going—and I'll be forgotten—and I'll forget."

He was miserable and stubborn. "We know it's a lie! We know we're only casual friends. Running away won't prove it to anyone. But if you stay—if there's a chance of finding who killed Hende—why then you can go, and it won't be running. That's all I want now —a chance to prove the truth."

She searched his face. "Do you—is there a chance, Frank?"

"Of course! Would I be here if there weren't? You won't regret it, Lia." He was frantically urgent, convincing.

HER decision came in a breathless rush, like a blind plunge into shadows, terror of which would stop her if she paused to think.

"Have the bags in my stateroom put ashore," she ordered the frantic little Jap officer. "And my trunks, if they can be gotten out of the hold!"

"Plis, yes, can do now bags! Not trunks until Panama! You go ashore, plis? *Toyo Maru* leave! Captain so anger, yes! *Toyo Maru* going now, plis!"

He machine-gunned Japanese at one of the natty seamen, who dashed away. Then he herded them toward the gangway, bowing and chattering.

"They'll hold your bags on the dock," said Brewster. "You can send for them later. Let's get out of here before someone recognizes us."

The thought had come too late. When they stepped off the gangway they were the cynosure of all eyes. A young man ducked under the rope to intercept them and a second man thrust out a newspaper camera and got his picture.

"What happened, Mr. Brewster? Why isn't Mrs. Hende leaving as she planned? Is it a romance?"

Brewster's straight-arm jab knocked the reporter back into the rope.

Together they ran into the great shadowy interior of the dockshed, where there was quiet, and peace of a sort for the moment. But the thing they were running from could not be left outside, could not be downed by knocking a man back into the crowd. It followed them through the pungent dockshed, into the white sunlight on the other side, where Brewster's taxi was still waiting.

The sick pressure of it was on Lia Hende's face as she sank back in the cab, panting and white. She stared unseeingly at the driver's back as he rushed the taxi away.

"They found out I was leaving," she said woodenly. "They were on board for an hour trying to get an interview."

"You mustn't let it worry you, Lia."

"I know I shouldn't, Frank, but I—I can't help it. It's a nightmare that fol-

lows me everywhere. Even in bed, asleep. It's like invisible fingers pointing, accusing, insisting I'm guilty. I'll break if it doesn't stop. I can stand just so much—and I'm near the limit!"

Brewster reached for her hand; it was hot, feverish. He spoke huskily. "It's been too much—but there's hope now. Can't you think about that? Some hope—finally?"

Her stiff lips managed a smile. "I'm clutching it like someone in the death-house waiting for a reprieve. If I were really guilty, Frank, I'd be armored .... I don't know where to go now. I'll be hounded at the hotels, and I won't consider friends."

"My aunt Henrietta will be glad to have you. Intruders at her house will have a rude surprise. But first I want you to meet this man at my office. You'll feel better after talking to him."

WHILE they were being whisked aloft in the elevator Brewster experienced a moment of sudden uncertainty. Suppose the astonishing Mr. Maddox, whose presence radiated something close to hypnotism, had hoaxed him. Suppose it was all a trick, or that there was really no hope. Then this girl beside him would only be hurt further by her hasty flight off the *Toyo Maru*.

In the corridor outside the suite of law offices they met Tom Miller, second junior of the four partners in Brewster's firm.

"Er—how do you do?" said Miller, smiling to cover startled embarrassment. "Fine morning, isn't it?" he added hastily, and continued on down the hall.

Brewster's partners were all aware of the situation. They'd been decent, even to the point of refusing his resignation to save possible unfavorable publicity for the firm. They'd understood his friendship with Lia Hende which made her a prospective client, caught him up in her tragedy before her case had been accepted.

Quite correctly, with the trial ending in a hung jury and a dismissal, her decision to travel in the Orient made the other partners feel they had seen the end of the matter. Now Brewster couldn't blame Miller for being startled.

But that didn't matter now. Nothing mattered but Lia Hende and the startling Mr. Maddox, and the hope that Maddox was right.

Miss Jenson, in the reception-room, was too perfectly trained to reveal her thoughts. "Mr. Maddox left a note on your desk, Mr. Brewster," she said.

"Is he gone?"

Miss Jenson nodded. "I think he used the telephone. He seemed in a hurry."

"When did he leave?"

"About ten minutes after you went out."

"Did he say anything else?"

"He only mentioned the note," said Miss Jenson primly.

"I see. Er—very well."

Lia waited until they were in the office. "Is something wrong?"

"No, of course not. I did ask him to wait, but I shouldn't have been so certain he'd be here. Maybe this will explain."

The envelope on the blue desk blotter was addressed in firm strokes. Brewster used the letter opener, glanced at the note inside.

> Hope you were in time to coax the lady back. A ticket for the races will be at window No. 1 in your name. Use it this afternoon. Alone.
>
> Maddox.
>
> P.S. Ten by midnight.

Relief gave Brewster the quick lift of heady wine. He handed Lia the note. "There's a sample of the fellow."

She read the note. "What is he up to, Frank?"

"Well—"

"You don't know," said Lia, looking up.

"Not in detail."

"Who is he, Frank?"

Brewster hesitated, then told the truth. No less than the truth about Maddox would do now.

"He's a race-track bookmaker. The betting here is pari-mutuel, you know. Maddox must be operating illegally. He's probably a shifty character, but we've tried everything else. This may be the answer."

"You believe it's the answer, don't you, Frank?"

"I wouldn't have come to the boat if I hadn't been certain it was the right thing to do."

Lia nodded. "What does his postscript mean? *Ten by midnight?*"

"Maddox's humor, I suppose."

She returned the note with the ghost of a smile. "Sidestepped that one, didn't you?"

"Did I?" asked Brewster. "Let's go to Aunt Henrietta's. I'll have your bags sent there."

CHAPTER THREE

Mr. Maddox Lunches With the Law

ON THE broad sweep of Canal Street the midday sun was hot and bright. Royal Street, running off Canal into the old French Quarter, grimy with the patina of centuries, was narrow, shadowy, mellow, though noisy with the noontime rush.

Hurried clerks, absorbed businessmen, intent shoppers, gaping tourists jostled the commanding bulk of Mr. Maddox on the narrow sidewalk. Exhaust fumes from automobiles moving bumper to bumper in the street assaulted his nostrils. A large-bosomed lady with a red face jammed a cardboard box in his stomach as she elbowed to a taxi, and Mr. Maddox continued to smile as he plowed leisurely ahead.

A well-dressed, heavily tanned man stepped out and touched Mr. Maddox's arm. "I was just going to telephone you, Maddox. Will you take a thousand on Bulgar Jim in the fourth?"

"Two thousand if you like him, Hayden," said Mr. Maddox genially.

"A thousand is enough."

"You're on," said Mr. Maddox. "Bulgar Jim will have a heavy play. The price won't be so hot."

"I'll have a profit."

"Here's hoping you do, Hayden."

The big diamond glinted as Mr. Maddox lifted his hand in salute and walked on.

Two dozen steps away he was intercepted by a thin, nervous-looking young man whose straw hat was canted at a rakish angle.

"Hello, Joe. Just the guy I wanted to see. Here's seven C's hot for Bogart in the sixth."

A chill entered Mr. Maddox's bland blue eyes. The smile left his merry, moon-like face.

"There's rat poison out," said Mr. Maddox coldly. "Better scuttle back into your hole, Kilburn."

"Now listen, pal, is that any way to treat seven C's? Take a look. It's good in any bank. Are you out for business or ain't you?"

"If it was gold," said Mr. Maddox, "and I could spend it around the corner, I wouldn't take it from you or that bunch of gonofs you hang with. Scram, you little shyster, before I'm seen talking to you and have to be disinfected!"

Red with indignation, Mr. Maddox stalked on, but he was quickly smiling again when he paused at the doorway of Dirk's Oyster Bar and fumbled in his pocket for one of the thick black cigars.

A wizened little man with a lavender-striped collar and rainbow necktie was loitering at one side of the doorway. His glance crossed Mr. Maddox's face. He winked, and walked away.

Mr. Maddox was only smiling as he entered the Oyster Bar, but he was positively beaming as he paused by the booth where Detective-lieutenant Kraft was leisurely finishing a dozen on the half-shell.

"The same," said Mr. Maddox to a waiter who paused. He eased his bulk into the booth with some difficulty. "And the check is on me, Herman. How are you?"

LIEUTENANT KRAFT speared his tenth oyster with the fork and paused to eye the big glinting diamond on Mr. Maddox's vast hand.

"The nerve of you," said Lieutenant Kraft. "Trying to bribe the law with an oyster, are you? The checks are Dutch. How are you, Joe? Still in the money, I see. I suppose I'll have to go after you again this year."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Are you making insinuations to the legit owner of one of the better racing-stables?"

Lieutenant Kraft swallowed the oyster and grimaced. "I heard you still owned Lulu Belle and Kopper King this year, Joe, but don't brag about it. Those two platers aren't race-horses. They're four-legged oat-bags that would break the heart of every handicapper in the grandstand if they ever did better than fourth."

"Kopper King," said Mr. Maddox severely, "is only three sires away from War King. That rates him all the oats he can eat."

"And so does the fact that his owner can wear an owner's badge at the track," grinned Lieutenant Kraft. "But that'll boomerang on you one of these days, Joe, when you're caught making a book. By me, I hope. And what jail grub will do to that waistline of yours is a crying shame."

The waiter brought a platter of opened oysters. Mr. Maddox beamed at them. "Have your little joke, Herman. How many years have you been insulting me?"

"Since we went mutuel down here," said Lieutenant Kraft wryly. "But your luck can't last, Joe."

"Luck," said Mr. Maddox wistfully as he dashed pepper sauce into the cocktail sauce. "Luck is a beautiful thing, Herman. And that reminds me of a funny dream I had last night. I dreamed that a nag named Bulgar Jim was due to start at a mile this afternoon at odds so short they'd probably be criminal."

"Yeah?" said Lieutenant Kraft sarcastically. "Bulgar Jim goes the favorite in the fourth today at a mile. Are you sure you weren't talking your book over in your sleep and wondering where you could lay off some of the heavy money?"

Mr. Maddox closed his eyes and savored the first bivalve. His eyes were blue and bland when they opened.

"I dreamed, Herman, that the jockey was all right and the stable was all right, but if Bulgar Jim won at those bob-tailed odds he'd have to have something besides a sudden shortage of wind. Hell

of a funny dream, wasn't it, Herman?"

"Short wind?" repeated Lieutenant Kraft alertly.

Lieutenant Kraft drummed blunt finger-ends lightly on the table. "Somebody sponging, Joe?" he questioned softly.

Mr. Maddox shrugged. "I haven't seen any sponges. But you know, Herman, how I'd feel about any rats who'd put a sponge up a good horse's nostrils to cut off his wind when he needs it most in a hard race."

Lieutenant Kraft cursed eloquently under his breath. "Some of the dirtiest skunks God ever let loose on the world get around this racing-game. And rub elbows with some of the whitest men."

"Speaking of skunks," said Mr. Maddox casually. "I saw a first-class skunk last night. Fellow by the name of Rube Johnson."

"Is that grifter in town?" asked Lieutenant Kraft ominously. "Where'd you see him?"

"I heard," murmured Mr. Maddox, lifting the second oyster, "that Rube was staying at the Montpelier Hotel under the name of Atkins . . . . *Mmmmmmm.* Marvelous oysters, Herman."

Lieutenant Kraft picked up his check and slid out of the booth. "I'll be seeing you, Joe."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Good luck, Herman.

THE noon editions had it in headlines, with the trial details rehashed, further interest in the case whipped up by clever writing, and a new mystery created around the sudden change in Lia Hende's plans.

MRS. HENDE FLEES SHIP

LAWYER RUSHES DEFENDANT ASHORE

Spectacular renewal of interest in the Hende trial occurred just before noon when the sailing of the *Toyo Maru* was delayed by the last-minute decision of Mrs. Hende to remain in the United States.

Frank Brewster, local attorney, who was cross-examined at the Hende trial regarding an alleged friendship with Mr. Hende, rushed aboard the *Toyo Maru* just before the gangplank was withdrawn. After a hurried conversation, Mrs. Hende accompanied Brewster ashore. Both seemed to be laboring under strain. On the deck Brewster assaulted a reporter who attempted to question him. The couple fled in a waiting taxi. New developments in the Hende case are expected, including revived rumors of a romance. . . .

Brewster sighed, folded the paper, walked around the corner to the Gulf Exchange Bank, and had himself admitted to the steel fortress where his modest safe-deposit box was tiered with hundreds of others like it. He opened the receptacle, inspected a thin sheaf of stock certificates in a manila envelope, and took them upstairs to the glassed-in office where old Peter J. Brewster sat in tight-lipped judgment behind a door marked *Vice President.*

Old Peter J's bushy gray hair was challenging and his smile held an element of ominous humor as he adjusted his nose-glasses and spoke across the big rosewood desk.

"I'm surprised you found time to drop in today, nephew. Flattered, I might say. Everything going nicely?"

"Er—couldn't be better, sir."

"No nerves?" remarked Peter J. critically. "*Hmmm*—you're holding up quite well."

Brewster grinned wryly. "I see you've seen the newspapers."

"Yes," said Peter J. dryly.

"Most unfair. Quite uncalled for—"

"Delightful publicity for the Brewsters, young man."

"Uh—"

"Well?"

"Sorry to bother you, sir. I need a bit of help."

"I should say you need a mental exam-

ination," said Peter J. frankly. "I suppose it's about this Hende woman."

"I didn't say so."

"My error, nephew. What is it?"

"These shares in the bank—seventy-three hundred dollars' worth at today's quotations. I've got to sell them."

"Sell them?" exclaimed Peter J. shocked into removing his glasses and staring. "Selling out of the bank?"

"It's necessary."

"Hmmm—" Peter J. polished the glasses. "You won't have any trouble. The market is strong. Offer them through your broker."

"I've got to have ten thousand."

Peter J. replaced the glasses deliberately. "Care to tell me about it?"

"You'd only say I was a fool."

"You probably are," said Peter J., opening a drawer and taking out his checkbook. "No woman's worth what you're evidently letting yourself in for. And don't bother to tell me to mind my own business. I'm not a fool even if I am an old fossil. Here's your ten thousand—and put those shares back into the vault. I'll ask you for them when I want them."

"Thank you, sir."

"Who asked for thanks?" snapped Peter J. "When am I going to hear all about this?"

"Perhaps tonight—by midnight."

"Won't stay up that late for any woman's troubles. Good-day, young man."

Brewster cashed the check on his way out, stuck the ten one-thousand-dollar bills in his wallet and drove out to the race-track.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bangtail Boomerang

IT WAS two years since Brewster had been to the races. He found himself oddly stimulated by the hurrying noisy crowd that was streaming into the clubhouse and grandstand, for in that crowd was anonymity and escape.

At the ticket window there was a box seat in his name. Save for himself the box was empty. The other seats in it remained unoccupied as the rest of the grandstand rapidly filled.

The thoroughbreds in the first race paraded before the grandstand, filed leisurely toward the starting-stalls halfway around the track. Brewster caught himself watching the young woman in the adjoining box. Her level, estimating glance had studied his face for a moment without a trace of expression to acknowledge his presence.

Half a dozen different people had stopped to speak to her. She had smiled, exchanged greetings, invited no one to remain in the box. Her self-possession was extraordinary. She was piquant, stunning, in a small hat, a smart suit.

"They're off!"

The young woman remained seated as thousands came to their feet. She seemed bored. As the leaders raced into the stretch and drove for the finish, she covered a slight yawn and studied her program.

The finish was clean. Results were quickly posted. The girl in the next box tore up several tickets and looked at her program again as the horses straggled back for unsaddling.

A chuckle announced Mr. Maddox easing his bulk into the chair next to Brewster.

"Sandyman takes it," said Mr. Maddox. "And that ought to show the customers what some goats can do when the price is right."

The big diamond flashed as he dropped his hand on the box-railing and spoke to the young woman. "Billy Doyle around today, Miss Arnold?"

Her hair was red, but somehow it hadn't registered. Startled, Brewster tried to

visualize her as a party to Jack Hende's death, as the Jenny Arnold who had warned Hende, "Tonight, or else." It was easier to link her with Maddox, to wonder if she were not working with Maddox in some intricate swindle built about Lia Hende. She shook her head to the question, and smiled. When she smiled she was as pretty as a witch, as Maddox had said.

"Why don't you introduce your friend?" she questioned.

"I was wondering," chuckled Maddox and performed the amenities.

Jenny Arnold's eyes were dancing. "Mr. Frank Brewster?" she inquiried.

"You've been reading the newspapers," Brewster charged.

"Guilty," assented Jenny Arnold. "You're a celebrity. And I'm curious as to why you brought Mrs. Hende off that ship."

"New evidence," said Mr. Maddox casually.

"Oh, I hope so! I thought she was innocent." The enthusiasm seemed spontaneous. "I'm bored," said Jenny Arnold with engaging frankness. "Come over in my box and talk. I'll not ask questions about Mrs. Hende."

"Horses," said Mr. Maddox as they made the change, "are safer. Don't waste your time trying to pump Brewster. What do you like in the second?"

"Nothing," said Jenny Arnold.

"What does Billy Doyle like?"

"If I knew I wouldn't tell you."

"They call him Lucky Doyle," explained Mr. Maddox to Brewster. "The horses he backs have a way of winning." Maddox sounded faintly ironical.

Jenny Arnold was merry about it. "Why back anything but a winner?"

"Tell me some day," said Mr. Maddox. "And that reminds me I have to see a man who thinks he knows a winner. Watch your step, Brewster. Miss Arnold will have all your secrets."

THE bugle blew as the horses in the second race left the paddock. Brewster wondered what his companion was thinking. He knew now that Maddox had put him in the next box so he could casually meet this girl. But it was too elaborately successful. Her prompt invitation had been too pat. If they were working as a team, they were clumsy about it. He waited for a cue.

She asked: "Are you betting on this race?"

"I don't know enough about them."

"And you're a friend of Joe Maddox?"

"Just an acquaintance."

She nodded understandingly. "He seems to know everyone. I've heard he can show up at any large track in the country with that big diamond ring and wide smile and have old friends ready to do business with him the first day. They say he's covered a quarter of a million without blinking an eye. And that, in case you don't know, Mr. Brewster, is big play for any man who always works alone."

"You seem to like him."

"More than he likes me, I have an idea," said Jenny Arnold with a reminiscent smile. "I don't think Joe Maddox approves of me."

Behind them the crowded grandstand erupted once more as the horses broke from the barrier. Mr. Maddox did not return.

They talked through the third race and if there was anything suspicious about Jenny Arnold, it was in the increasing frequency with which she glanced at the exquisite little platinum watch on her slender wrist.

The horses paraded for the fourth race, and Mr. Maddox's face was beaming and moon-like as he returned. "They've run Bulgar Jim down under even money," he remarked, studying the odds board. "And if he wins, I still take it on the chin. Pick me another to root for, Miss Arnold."

"Try Sir David."

"He's as good as any, I suppose," said Maddox with resignation. "But he hasn't got a chance against Bulgar Jim . . . . Look at that Balkan rascal bully the starter. He's full of fire today."

"I like Sir David," insisted Jenny Arnold.

"Not a chance," said Mr. Maddox again.

"Three thousand says he has," said Jenny Arnold suddenly.

"Kidding me?"

"Will you take it?"

"Are you serious?"

"Of course."

"It's a bet," said Mr. Maddox.

He made a memorandum in a little notebook, and the line of thoroughbreds broke suddenly from the barrier. They leaned forward intently to watch the rush around the turn.

The announcer's voice rasped through the amplifying horns: "It's Sir David by a length at the quarter, Clarewood second by half a length, Jellicoe third, Bulgar Jim fourth. . . There comes Jellicoe into second place. . . . Bulgar Jim is moving up. . . . It's still Sir David by a length and a half. . . . Now it's Sir David, Clarewood and Bulgar Jim on the turn. . . . Jellicoe fourth by three lengths coming into the stretch. . . . Bulgar Jim is moving up. . . . It's Bulgar Jim in second place by a length and a half . . . "

A hoarse roar began to roll out of the grandstand for the favorite.

"Bulgar Jim. . . Come on, you Bulgar Jim. . . . "

Brewster was on his feet also, watching with fascination the beautiful sight of a trim, game thoroughbred coming from behind in the punishing stretch-run. Sir David's jockey was using the whip. But now his triumphant run to the front had stopped. He was imperceptibly dropping back.

Brewster stole a look at Jenny Arnold. Her face was pale. Her lower lip was caught tightly between her teeth, and her small hands were clenched as she stood rigidly beside him, eyes fixed intently on the track.

A fourth man stepped into the box. Brewster's quick glance over his shoulder saw a slender handsome man with a small waxed mustache, who was biting hard on a dead cigar as he stared past them at the stretch. Brewster looked back at the track.

The announcer had stopped. The massed roar of a thousand voices was sweeping out of the grandstand. That drive of Bulgar Jim was a sight to catch at the heart, to tighten the throat.

His legs were short and his chest not overly thick, so that he lacked the long clean lines of the usual thoroughbred, yet he was running now like a brown ghost, lightly, cleanly, without a great show of effort. Instant by instant he was running faster, some inner reservoir of power pouring increasing speed that seemed to have no limit. . . . Now his nose drew up by Sir David's tail, then moved up to the saddle. . . .

SIR DAVID'S jockey was whipping furiously. Bulgar Jim had not felt the touch of a whip. But the wire was close now, uncomfortably close. The whip came down lightly on Bulgar Jim, and it was as if a powerful spring had been released, as if that hidden reservoir of power boiled suddenly out in a blinding cascade of speed that brushed Sir David aside, catapulted the little brown horse toward the finish line.

Bulgar Jim was half a length in the lead and going away fast as they flashed under the wire. Jenny Arnold's shoulders slumped and the life and fire that had been behind her boredom was suddenly gone. She turned, saw the man who had entered the box, and her look was stricken.

"Well, Billy," she said, "that—that cost me three grand."

Mr. Maddox smilingly saluted the newcomer. "Hello, Doyle. Great race, wasn't it? You can't beat that little fellow for a stretch-runner."

Doyle nodded silently. His eyes were on Jenny Arnold, and his face had the set wooden look of a man used to bottling up his emotions. But his voice was wire-hard with strain.

"You lost three grand?" he asked Jenny Arnold.

"Maddox carried me for three thousand on Sir David just before the race started."

A little muscle was jumping in the right side of Doyle's jaw. It might have meant anything. His face remained wooden as his eyes went to the broad smiling face of Mr. Maddox.

"Not worried about your money, are you, Maddox?"

"Any time at all," said Mr. Maddox genially.

Doyle's glance flicked to Brewster. His eyes were glassy-blue and expressionless, like an opaque window over the emotions behind. "I don't place your friend," he said.

Another of those gargantuan chuckles welled from the depths of Mr. Maddox's ample frame.

"You must have been too busy to read the news at lunch, Doyle. Brewster's the lawyer who brought Mrs. Hende off the *Toyo Maru* boat just before she sailed today. You know the lady—she got a hung jury the other day. The story was plastered all over the front pages at noon."

Doyle nodded. "I read it. Is the Hende case going to be reopened, Mr. Brewster?"

"It's hard to say."

"Go to the races often?"

"I'm usually too busy," said Brewster truthfully.

Doyle looked at his wrist watch. "Better come along with me, Jenny, and get that three grand for Maddox. I'm due back downtown."

She was almost meek about it, meek and troubled as she nodded agreement. As they were leaving the box Doyle turned to Mr. Maddox. "Just before I came out to the track I heard the cops had pinched Rube Johnson for something. Heard anything about it?"

"I'll have a drink to celebrate," said Maddox promptly. "They should give that low-down solitary. He's worse than the plague. I wondered if Johnson was around town when a heel named Kilburn tried to place a bet with me at noon. Kilburn didn't know it, but I saw him palling with Rube Johnson at Bowie last fall."

Doyle grinned thinly. "Johnson must have burned you."

"Plenty."

"I'll be seeing you," said Doyle, following Jenny Arnold.

WHEN Doyle was beyond earshot, Maddox said: "Never mind sitting down, son, you can leave now."

Brewster regarded him irritably. "Who said I wanted to leave? What good did all this do?"

Mr. Maddox squinted. He was smiling. His good humor was a vast and enveloping aura that put suspicion to shame. If the past minutes had been acting, the acting had been done by experts so skillful that no false note could be detected.

"What good did it do, son?" said Mr. Maddox. "It's all to the good, all to the good. I couldn't have asked for a better break—and three grand profit on top. I'll bet Billy Doyle could cut her pretty throat."

"Are you going to collect three thousand dollars from her just on the strength of that idle bet?" asked Brewster skeptically.

"I've paid out better than a hundred

thousand with no more to go on," said Mr. Maddox casually. "I don't deal with welchers, son. Jenny Arnold will pay up. It'll have to come from Doyle, I guess. She must be busted or she'd have dealt me a check and laughed it off. And by the looks of Doyle's face, it's going to come hard to hand it out. But he can't afford not to come through."

Mr. Maddox seemed vastly amused about something.

"Who is this man Doyle? What is he to Miss Arnold?" asked Brewster suspiciously.

Maddox glowed at him. "Nice fellow, isn't he, son?"

"He seemed all right. There's something about him though."

"Aye," said Mr. Maddox with quick sobriety. "Something about him. His father was a wealthy man, and still has his millions, for what good they do him. But not his racing-stable. It's gone, to the last sweet yearling, and the barns themselves that were torn down and hauled away, and two thousand acres of bluegrass pasture around them plowed up and sewn in wheat the month Doyle was first caught pulling a crooked trick with his father's horses.

"Doyle was a wonder with horses," said Mr. Maddox, "like his father before him and the grandfather who died before his heart could be broken like the heart of Doyle's father was. They knew horses, son. It was in the blood. From the cradle they had it drilled into them that men were put on this earth to love horses and honor women. Doyle had it all, and through it the rotten streak nobody suspected, until he was caught taking the honor away from good horses to use in his own dirty schemes. He was rotten when he didn't have to be rotten, and crooked when there was no cause for it, and the day his father realized the truth, he broke up the racing-stable, and cut Doyle off with ten thousand on condition that he never use his right name again. The father's in New York now in his offices and clubs, and he never speaks about a horse or the son he once had.

"You'll find Doyle, sooner or later, around every big track in the country, and when he isn't in sight, he's apt to be near. He's still living with the ponies and using them for his own dirty ends. Some of the money he makes comes from his knowledge of horses, but most of it comes from the clever scheming side of him that would rather do a dirty trick than an honest one. That's Billy Doyle, son. There's no shame in his heart and dirt where he walks. And today some of his dirtiness blackened his own face, and his bankroll is hurt badly if I know anything about the man. If I never make another dollar again I'll have the joy of it to roll under my tongue for the rest of my mortal life."

MR. MADDOX jerked one of the thick cigars from his breast pocket and bit off the end with a savage twist, scowling with the turn of his thoughts. Frank Brewster took a deep breath and his last suspicion of Mr. Maddox vanished. No man who could speak like that could be suspected.

"That's quite a history," Brewster said. "Do many people know it?"

"No," said Mr. Maddox. "But I've been around tracks a long time, son. I know it, and Doyle doesn't know I know it."

"What happened today? Does Doyle have any connection with this man Johnson who was arrested?"

"I couldn't prove it," said Mr. Maddox. "And neither could you, and neither can the police. But Rube Johnson is one of the smoothest horse-wreckers in the game, son. He can hypo a plater and make a stake-horse out of him so neatly that the saliva tests will miss it half the time. Johnson looks like a weasel, and he's as

cunning as a weasel, and he can get to a horse in an honest stable and wreck him so that the trainer himself won't have any idea what's happened until the race is lost. And Doyle makes his money betting on sure things. And if he can lay out money all over the country on a horse that doesn't rate a win, and will pay big on a win, and then make sure no other good horse in the race stands a chance of coming in ahead, then he collects heavy."

A great light broke over Brewster. "Bulgar Jim wasn't supposed to win the last race," he said. "Doyle was betting on Sir David to win—and Miss Arnold was so certain Sir David would win, she couldn't resist the chance to bet with you. And something happened and Bulgar Jim unexpectedly won—and Doyle lost heavily."

Maddox nodded approvingly. "Now you're catching on, son. Bulgar Jim was the favorite. No horse in the race could take him honestly. But a veterinary found Bulgar Jim's nostrils plugged with sponges that would have blocked his breathing and brought him in at the end of the field. Bulgar Jim should have been disqualified. The sponges were removed and nothing was said, and he went in to win. All the dough that had been laid off around the country on Sir David went down the drain pipe." Maddox half closed his eyes. "And Doyle is out scouting for money to cover Jenny Arnold's bet."

"So she's crooked too?"

"Don't blame her too much, son. She's looking out for herself, and half mad over Doyle, and they've made big money since they met. The rich suckers she's brought in for Doyle to pluck would bring a shine to the eyes of every con-man in the country."

"You had something to do with Bulgar Jim's winning that race and with Johnson's arrest," Brewster guessed.

"Did I?" said Mr. Maddox blandly. "What about that ten grand Bulgar Jim's win cost me? Too many of my customers knew he'd win."

"I have the money—if you can earn it."

"Rube Johnson's been arrested," said Mr. Maddox. "Doyle was cleaned on Bulgar Jim. Mrs. Hende gave up her trip abroad. Her lawyer came to the track and met Jenny Arnold. All that means something."

"What does it mean?"

Mr. Maddox was not worried about money. You could see that he had all the prosperity and assurance in the world. "We can't do all this in an hour, son. Let me know where I can get you after your office closes."

"I'll go to my aunt's home. Mrs. Hende is there. Here's the telephone number and address." Brewster wrote on the back of a card. "Where can I get you if I want you?"

"Call my name on Royal Street just off Canal, and someone will probably tell you," chuckled Mr. Maddox. "Or telephone the Montpelier."

Brewster suspected as he left that he ought to feel foolish. He had come as ordered and been blandly dismissed. He had no idea whatever of what was happening behind Mr. Maddox's broad smiling face.

The man was of another world, where torts and briefs and a knowledge of the law and courts were little help. But he knew every nook and cranny of that stratum where sleek nervous thoroughbreds, wealthy sportsmen, gamblers, touts, hangers-on were at home. Apparently it was in that sphere the solution to Brewster's problem was going to lie.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Hour of Murder

THE fifth race was coming up. Lines were forming at the mutuel windows under the grandstand. No one paid any

attention to Brewster as he walked through the deserted grandstand toward the long ranks of parked automobiles. He was thinking of Lia Hende and the question that would be in her eyes when he returned. Then he saw Jenny Arnold and Lia Hende left his thoughts.

She was sitting in a cream-colored roadster trimmed with gleaming chromium. The lowered top added sleekness to the smooth luxury of the expensive car. She was bareheaded now, and the waning sun caught reddish-gold tints in the boyish curls that had been half concealed under her hat.

She looked very small in the big seat, very smart and dashing, but the handkerchief she was dabbing at her eyes was damp as Brewster approached.

She balled the handkerchief out of sight in her hand as he said: "This is luck. I thought you were gone for good."

The tears were betrayed by the damp red of her eyes—and some of the reason for tears was visible in the angry red fingermarks on her left wrist. Those marks had not been there in the grandstand. Someone had gripped her wrist cruelly until the pain must have been intense. Doyle, of course. Brewster remembered the threat that had lain back of the man's strained voice and glassy eyes.

But Jenny Arnold's hurt now was deeper than those visible marks. She said: "This isn't luck. I was just leaving. I'm sorry. It was nice to have seen you, Mr. Brewster. Good-bye."

She reached for the ignition key.

"Wait," said Brewster. "You're afraid of Doyle, aren't you? Afraid to be seen talking to me. Why?"

He saw the fear then. It passed like a dark shadow over her face. But she did not deny it—merely paused, watching him.

"Where is Doyle?" asked Brewster.

"Gone," she said, "to get three thousand dollars."

NEVER had he realized one sentence could hold so much contempt. This was a gift from the gods, this girl hurt, humiliated, shaken in her feeling for the man.

Like a good lawyer Brewster pressed the advantage.

"You knew Jack Hende."

She hesitated, and nodded.

"You knew him very well."

"No," she denied, "not very well."

"I believe otherwise."

"Why?" she challenged.

"I can't tell you everything I know."

She smiled with an edge of bitterness. "You think I know something about Mr. Hende?"

"Don't you?"

"Then you did have a ticket in that box next to mine for some reason," she said.

Brewster smiled slightly and said nothing.

"I wondered—but what could be the reason?" She frowned, looking at him. "It's about Mrs. Hende, of course. But what were you trying to do?"

Even teeth caught down on her lower lip as she studied him.

"Joe Maddox had something to do with it," she guessed. "He appeared just in time to introduce you. And—and Maddox felt that Bulgar Jim would win.... Why didn't I think of that? I might have known—he's a fat, chuckling Buddha who can outguess most people."

"Really—" said Brewster vaguely.

Her smile was wry. "Even Doyle didn't suspect it. If he thought Joe Maddox was responsible, he'd—he'd— Never mind. You want something from me. What is it?"

"You don't believe Mrs. Hende killed her husband?" said Brewster.

"No."

"Why?"

"I—I just don't."

"Suppose I could prove that you know

who did kill Hende, and why the man was murdered?"

Her laugh had an edge. "You can't do the impossible. I don't know who killed him. I don't know why he was killed. But I don't think Mrs. Hende did it. Now what can you do about that?"

"You might have helped her—and you didn't."

"I couldn't have helped her," said Jenny Arnold.

"I'm afraid you could have," said Brewster. "You knew Jack Hende well enough to threaten him."

That startled her, just as a rapier-like stab from an unexpected quarter in cross-examination at the bar so often tricked a wary witness into revealing the truth.

She said: "Did Hende tell his wife that? . . . No, of course not! She would have tried to use it at the trial! Someone would have tried to question me! You're —you're guessing!"

"Am I?" said Brewster. "You don't have to talk to me. But it might be better if you do—now."

"Are you threatening me?"

"I might be, just a trifle."

"It won't work," said Jenny Arnold calmly. "I can't tell you answers that I don't know myself. But for reasons of my own I will tell you something. Find out why a man named Emile got ten thousand dollars from Billy Doyle the week after Hende was murdered. I think it was ten thousand—at least it was enough to open Emile's night-club on Bourbon Street immediately. And if you mention my name to Emile, he probably won't know whom you're talking about. Certainly it will not do you any good. And where can I find Mrs. Hende if I want to talk to her?"

"I can take you there now."

"I don't want to see her now."

"You can telephone the residence of Miss Henrietta Brewster and ask for Mrs. Hende."

"Thank you," said Jenny Arnold.

She swung the long roadster deftly out of the line and shot away without a backward look. There was almost a sense of victory in her departure, certainly no trace of defeat in the lift of her head.

Brewster thoughtfully lighted a cigarette and walked on to his own car. Things were suddenly looking up without the help of Mr. Maddox.

BOURBON Street was a block over from Royal in the old French Quarter. Sunlight had left the narrow streets by the time Brewster arrived at Emile's place. It was flush with the flagstone

sidewalk. Only the door was new, and that was wide open when Brewster walked in.

The cavernous interior was sober without the garish lights, the music and filled tables one would find later in the evening. The checkroom window to the left of the door was deserted. A white-coated bartender polished glasses at the short bar, behind which the mirror reflected an empty dance floor and made it seem twice as large.

Several customers were idling over drinks at the bar, and at the back a hatless young man was practicing song-scores on the piano. As Brewster turned toward the bar his name was spoken by a pudgy bouncing man with full red lips and a ready smile who emerged from a small office adjoining the checkrooom.

"How do you do, Mr. Brewster. Are you still living at the St. Anthony?"

The familiar face eluded memory for a moment. Then Brewster placed him as a former waiter at the St. Anthony. Calls for room-service had brought him many times. There had never been occasion to use his name. This was Emile of course —the Emile who had received money from Doyle after Jack Hende was murdered.

The shock of the discovery held Brewster to a mechanical smile and greeting.

"A drink, Mr. Brewster? Here, at this table. Will you try Emile's Special? A little different, and better than a Ramos Fizz, we think."

"Dry sherry will do," said Brewster as he let Emile seat him at one of the front tables.

"Waiter!" called Emile, snapping his fingers. "Dry sherry, ice water, napkin!" Emile turned solicitously. "A bit of cheese and crackers to set it off, Mr. Brewster?" Emile deftly struck a match, held it to Brewster's cigarette. "Not many of the St. Anthony's clientele have come here so far, Mr. Brewster. We'd like to have them."

"You've done very well for yourself," Brewster commented, looking about.

Emile was not a Frenchman, not a Creole. He was, Brewster suspected, an American who was pleased to be regarded as French.

"It would be a compliment and a favor," suggested Emile, "to come with a party of friends as guests of the management."

Brewster nodded. The ice water, napkin and wine were brought by the white-coated bartender. Brewster lifted the sherry. "Success," he said.

Emile beamed. Where his thinning hair was parted neatly in the middle, and below the hairline, little drops of nervous perspiration were appearing. His full red lips were a shade deeper and added color was in his cheeks.

NORMALLY a quick-witted young man, save for the fog of helplessness and trouble into which Mr. Maddox had amazingly intruded, Brewster sipped the sherry and let the facts fall into a pattern.

After Hende's death, Emile had received money from Doyle. Emile had been on duty at the St. Anthony when Hende was murdered there, probably on room service as usual. It would be interesting to know in what part of the St. Anthony Emile had been in the hour when Hende was murdered.

"You left the hotel rather suddenly, didn't you?" questioned Brewster idly.

Emile patted his forehead with a handkerchief and smiled agreement.

"I had been thinking about it for some time, Mr. Brewster. For almost a year I had been wanting to get this location."

"It must cost considerable to open a place like this," guessed Brewster.

Emile patted his forehead again.

"A great deal," he said. "A great deal, Mr. Brewster, for a man like me whose earnings were never large. Would you believe I have already spent nine thou-

sand dollars, and will need more before I can say the place is a success." Emile shrugged, still smiling. "I could not have saved it. I inherited a little and was lucky betting on the horses."

"The races?" said Brewster, lifting his eyebrows.

"In hotel service one occasionally overhears valuable information," explained Emile. He was still smiling but he looked uncomfortable, and a third time he patted moisture from his forehead.

Brewster finished the sherry, produced a billfold, put it away again at Emile's quick protest.

"Thank you, Emile. I'll remember you."

As he stood up, Brewster's glance crossed the look of a thin nervous-looking young man whose stiff-brimmed straw hat was canted back off his high forehead. Brewster had noticed the man staring at his table. And he noted now that Emile seemed to lose some of his vitality on seeing the young man watching them. A mistake, perhaps. That fleeting look of trouble on Emile's face might be due to other reasons. He must have read the noon papers, know that fresh developments were anticipated in the Hende case, and that Brewster was Mrs. Hende's lawyer.

Brewster smiled grimly to himself as he drove across Canal toward the St. Anthony hotel.

VASALY, the manager of the St. Anthony, was in his office. He was a squarely built, polite, leisurely man whose manifold duties seemed to run around the clock without any great strain on Vasaly himself.

"I want some information," said Brewster, taking a chair by Vasaly's small mahogany desk. "Some time ago you had a waiter here in room-service by the name of Emile. His last name I don't know. He used to answer my calls quite frequently. Now he is running a night-club on Bourbon Street."

Vasaly nodded. "Yes. Emile Andres. I understand he's doing fairly well."

"About how long after Mr. Hende was killed did Emile leave?"

"Offhand, without consulting the records, I'd say three weeks," said Vasaly. His glance was abruptly penetrating. "Three weeks after Mr. Hende was killed, eh? That is a very leading question under the circumstances, Mr. Brewster."

"I'd like to know all about Emile. He told me this afternoon that he opened his place on a small inheritance which he increased by betting on the horses."

Vasaly tapped his fingers lightly on the desk. "As I recall it, Emile gave proper notice before leaving. He was no more than a name to me until I heard he'd gone into business for himself. I'll make some inquiries," said Vasaly, getting up. "The captain of waiters and the man in charge of room-service knew him better."

It was almost a quarter of an hour later when Vasaly returned.

"I wasn't able to get hold of everyone I wanted immediately. Emile was with us a little over three years. He's married, has three children, came to us from the Hallway House in Chicago. Before that he'd worked in New York and Boston. An old experienced hotel man you see. I questioned some of the men who worked with him. None of them had ever heard of an expected legacy. In fact, Emile often borrowed small sums between paydays. He never talked about the races, never seemed interested in them."

Vasaly offered a cigarette, and leaned back in his chair, staring. "Does that help you any?"

"I'd like to know exactly where Emile was in the hour in which Hende was murdered."

"I thought you might be leading up to that," said Vasaly, smiling slightly. "The room-service records for that day will be here in a few minutes. But I doubt if they will connect Emile with Hende's death. The police and Mrs. Hende's detectives have studied all those records exhaustively."

A young man in shell-rimmed spectacles entered quietly, put several sheets of paper on Vasaly's desk and went out. The hotel manager scanned them.

"Hende's room was on the fourth floor. That afternoon Emile was on the second floor, the fifth, sixth and seventh floors. He was on the fifth floor in the hour before Hende's body was discovered." Vasaly looked up. "Emile's name was not even brought into the case, you remember."

"I remember well enough," Brewster agreed. "But yet—is there any way of checking on how Emile got downstairs from that fifth-floor call that afternoon?"

"I'm afraid not," regretted Vasaly. He regarded his visitor shrewdly. "I see in the papers that Mrs. Hende is remaining in town. Is the case to be reopened?"

"We'd like to reopen it," said Brewster. "Mrs. Hende didn't kill her husband. She deserves to be proved innocent beyond any doubt."

"Naturally," agreed Vasaly. "My sympathies are with her even though we deplore any further unfavorable publicity. These things are serious to a hotel, you know. Hotels have gone into bankruptcy over things not half so important as the Hende case."

"Between a hotel's balance-sheet and an innocent woman's future, I'm afraid I'll have to clear the woman no matter what the cost," said Brewster.

"I agree with you, of course." said Vasaly heartily, accompanying Brewster to the door. "Good luck to you, Mr. Brewster."

CHAPTER SIX

Telephone Trouble

THE telephone directory gave the home address of Emile Andres as an apartment across town. Brewster debated with himself, and then stepped into a telephone booth and called the number. A child answered.

Brewster asked for the mother. She came on the wire a few moments later, a nervous inquiring voice.

Casually Brewster said: "This is the *Times-Ledger,* Mrs. Andres. We're doing an article on Emile and his new place and need a few human interest touches. Who is the relative who left him some money recently?"

She was not suspicious and Brewster had a twinge of conscience for the deception.

"Emile didn't inherit any money," she told him. "He was lucky at the races. But you can say he has stopped playing the races, and is one man who is keeping his winnings and making good use of them."

"Emile is an expert bettor, then, Mrs. Andres?"

"Emile never bet on the horses before," she said. "He just hit a lucky streak for several weeks and quit in time."

"Thank you," said Brewster politely. "I believe that will do."

"Wait," she said hurriedly, "here's Emile coming into the apartment now. You can talk to him."

Brewster broke the connection without replying and left the booth. Emile would be hearing about it now. He would not be sure, but he would probably guess who was behind the call.

Brewster telephoned the Montpelier Hotel next, but Mr. Maddox was not in. He drove to his Aunt Henrietta's house to find her and Lia Hende playing cribbage. Lia had changed to a cool after-

noon dress and looked prettier than ever.

"Luck?" Lia asked as she got up to meet him.

"Better than I expected!"

"Oh, tell me!"

"Secret."

Aunt Henrietta said tartly: "I see there's no more cribbage this afternoon. I don't believe that woman's ever going to come. I'll have tea served now." She slipped tactfully out of the room.

"What woman?" Brewster asked.

Lia was not so tragically sober now. Hope had given her new life and spirit, and yet there was a frightened uncertainty in her face when she answered.

"That woman called, that Jenny Arnold. About half an hour ago. She wants to talk to me. She said she would come here to the house if I would see her."

Brewster whistled softly. "So she's really coming? I met her this afternoon. She had the adjoining box at the races. It was Maddox's scheming."

"Do you still believe in that man, Frank?"

Brewster smiled at the memory of Mr. Maddox and the new hopes building bit by bit for this girl before him. "He's a triple-tested, dyed-in-the-wool, infallible wonder."

Laughing, Lia said: "Who could want any more? Frank, I'm getting excited! I'm almost believing everything's going to be all right after all!"

"Of course it is!" Brewster laughed and the telephone rang.

Lia's face sobered instantly. She stood still, head cocked slightly as the colored maid patted across the hall to the instrument.

Brewster watched Lia's face. The shadows were still under her eyes, and he realized how transient was this new hope, how close to further tragedy Lia was if this new storm of publicity broke fruitlessly about them.

"Foah you, Miz Hende," said the maid.

"Is it a man or a woman?"

"A lady, ma'am. Sound lak de lady who called while ago."

"She evidently isn't coming," said Lia in a low voice. "And I want so to see her. Frank, come to the telephone with me."

LIA was nervous as she said into the phone: "This is Mrs. Hende." She started visibly and turned. "Frank," she cried out, she sounded as—as if she were hurt! Listen!"

Brewster snatched the instrument. All he heard was a faint wire-hum. He thumbed the hook for the operator.

"What did it sound like, Lia?"

"She didn't say anything to me," said Lia. "But she was there. She cried out. Not a scream. And there were sounds—scuffling sounds."

The operator came on the wire.

"I'm speaking for the police," said Brewster hurriedly. "Do you understand me? The police! Get me the number and the address of the telephone that asked for this connection. Don't ring them. Just get me that information quickly!"

Lia was biting her lower lip. She was pale. "What do you think, Frank?"

"Trouble," said Brewster briefly.

Seconds dragged before the operator cut in again. "What is your name, please?" she asked.

"I'll get the wire-chief and have that office turned inside out!" Brewster snarled. "Give me that information! It's important!"

The operator told him and he hung up.

"The Grantly Apartments. Make a note of it, Lia!"

He was on the sidewalk, unlocking his car, when Lia caught up.

"I'm going too, Frank!"

"You delightful imbecile! This is no business for you!"

"It's all my business," said Lia.

"Whose trouble is it? I want to see that girl!"

TEN minutes of fast driving brought them to the Grantly, a new brick apartment building set back behind a narrow strip of grass. Lia would have gone in, but Brewster managed to persuade her to remain in the car.

He found the name he wanted in the letter-boxes in the foyer and took the stairs instead of the little automatic elevator.

The door-buzzer sounded faintly inside as Brewster pressed the button. He could feel the pull and crawl of his nerves as he waited a moment, then rang again. Anything might be inside. Those sounds over the telephone might indicate anything.

No one answered the door. He rang twice more, then tried the doorknob without much hope. Surprisingly the door swung in, let him into a tiny shadowy foyer where a small straw hat lay carelessly on the tapestry seat of a spindle-legged chair in the corner.

Jenny Arnold had worn that saucy little hat at the racetrack. In the adjoining living-room, where a single floor-lamp gave light, a small leather purse she had carried lay on the rug beside the telephone-stand.

That was all.

Jenny Arnold herself was not in the apartment. Brewster called her name, looked for her, afraid of what he might find.

She was gone, and only the purse was a mute reminder of trouble. The telephone-receiver was quite properly on the hook. You could look at it and feel that everything was peaceful about this apartment, that Jenny Arnold had probably stepped out somewhere for a few minutes.

But Brewster knew that his eyes lied. Everything was not all right. One who lived in an apartment so neatly feminine would not step out on an errand and leave that purse on the floor. Something unexpected, frightening, had happened to Jenny Arnold that couldn't be laughed off or put off.

The ringing telephone made Brewster jump, started his pulses hammering. Brewster looked at the little black instrument with fascination. It rang again and he picked it up, lifted the receiver.

A worried male voice said: "Hello, hello, Doyle there?"

Brewster spoke through his fingers into the mouthpiece. "This is Doyle."

"The hell it is! It don't sound much like you. Got a mouthful of something or is it a bum connection?"

"Connection."

"Well, look—everything all right there?"

"Yes."

"Got any dope about this sappy lawyer?"

"No," said Brewster through his fingers.

"We got that lousy little swipe an' he just split. Joe Maddox was the guy who queered that race. What do you wanna do about it? Knock off the fat slug?"

"Where's Maddox?" Brewster asked.

"One of the boys is out tryin' to get a line on him. Rube's wild. He says Maddox musta had him pinched too, and if he wasn't out on a piece of bail, he'd take a rod and go after Maddox himself. What do you want done about it?"

"Leave Maddox alone right now," said Brewster. "Where are you?"

And then Brewster stood very still as something hard nudged him in the ribs and a soft voice said: "Never mind. Reach up an' he can tell me."

A thin hand reached around for the receiver and dragged the telephone-base off the stand as Brewster lifted his hands.

"Who the hell's this talking? . . . Uh-huh, it's Spots. Know who you were blasting off to? Brewster! . . . Yeah, damn

you, Brewster! He was picking you clean and you fell for it. What'd you tell him, sucker?"

SOFT, that voice, smooth and quiet. Not once did the smoothness break. Brewster could feel the hair-roots in his scalp prickle and chill from the quiet threat in it.

By turning his head slightly he caught a blurred glimpse of the side of a lean face, of a stiff-brimmed hat canted back from a high forehead. And he understood why Emile Andres had suddenly looked uncomfortable when this thin, nervous-looking stranger had turned at Emile's bar and stared at them.

The man had seemed nervous in Emile's. He was shifting nervously now as his soft, unhurried voice cursed the man at the other end of the line. That combination of nervousness and perfect control put a dryness in Brewster's throat that had not been there for years. A fragile bottle of nitroglycerine ready to shatter and explode at the slightest jar was no more dangerous than this unsteady temperament held down by amazing control. There must be a point where that control would snap—and the thought of what the gently gouging gun-muzzle and nervous trigger-finger would do in that event put cold prickly feeling at Brewster's hair-roots.

"I've got him. I'll take care of him. Tell Doyle about it when you see him."

A jerk flipped the telephone-base up and one-handed the receiver in the cradle. The telephone went back on the stand.

"He ain't so bright or he'd have spotted you," said the soft voice. "You were lucky. I don't like lucky guys. They upset the percentages. And I don't like nosey guys, mister. Who asked you in here?"

"Who told you my name?" countered Brewster.

"Full of questions like all damn lawyers, aren't you? But I know how to fix that. Stand still while I frisk you."

"I haven't a gun," said Brewster calmly.

"I'll tell you about that in a minute."

The thin hand went over him swiftly, slipped around inside his coat and took his wallet. A low whistle of amazement followed.

"Ten grand! Who'd have thought it! Walking around like a sap with a bankroll rattling in your pocket. . . . Say, you grabbed this betting on a horse today, didn't you?"

"I drew it out of the bank today."

"Yeah? Never mind the mulligan. You were with Maddox today, I hear. That's enough."

Brewster wondered what Mr. Maddox would say about this. He wondered what Mr. Maddox would do if Maddox learned in time that the deft bit of business about the horse, Bulgar Jim, was known.

Suddenly Brewster remembered Lia Hende sitting down there alone in his car. He'd been an idiot to let her come.

"It's a good thing you were packing this dough instead of a rod," said the quiet voice at his back. "I was getting ready to muss you up a little. This dough gets you off. Now look, I don't want any trouble out of you. We're going down to my car. Down the stairs. And we'll take it nice an' easy with our mitts in our pockets an' there won't be any trouble. Get it?"

"You can spare the details," said Brewster. "Look, my hands are coming down slowly. In my pockets like this. And where are we going?"

"You never can tell where a nosey guy who won't let well enough alone is going," was the reply. "Just do what I tell you and we'll get along all right."

Their steps sounded deliberate and loud on the ribbed-metal treads of the stairs as they went down to the ground floor. Outside the fresh, damp, night air struck against the hot flush on Brewster's face.

They were never more than a step apart. They looked like two casual friends out for a leisurely stroll, but the strain of it brought a sick feeling to the pit of Brewster's stomach. A large part of that feeling was for Lia Hende, sitting out there defenseless and unprotected in the automobile.

If Lia saw him she would probably get out and say something—and what would happen then was on the knees of the gods.

The car was gone!

"Looking for the lady, fellow?"

"Where is she?"

"Let's go look for her. Across the street there to the blue sedan."

AUTOMOBILES were passing, pedestrians were on the sidewalks, a block away a street-car bell clanged, and its lights were clearly visible.

It would have been simple, perhaps, to dive away to right or left toward a passing automobile, or bolt toward a lighted house or friendly shadows on some lawn. A brave man might try it, and perhaps escape cleanly. It took a meek man or a cowardly man—or a braver man—to walk steadily across to that blue sedan and step from the curb into the front seat as ordered, slide over behind the steering-wheel with every nerve taut and waiting.

But Lia Hende was not in this blue sedan after all, as had seemed possible, and now, perhaps, the only chance to escape had been thrown away. The gun was visible again as the soft-speaking stranger slid into the front seat. He reached back with the gun-hand to close the door. That was a mistake.

"I'll tell you where to drive," he was saying when Brewster hit him a backhanded chop to the jaw and lunged over toward the gun.

The blow against cheek and jawbone snapped the man's head over. Brewster's lunge from behind the steering-wheel drove them both over in the seat.

An elbow hit Brewster's middle, a fist glanced along his cheek and the body under him whipped over with surprising speed and strength. But Brewster had the gun-wrist, checking the surge of the gun-muzzle toward him. His right hand followed to the wrist a second later and he twisted.

Fingers clawed over his face, digging at his eyes. Brewster threw his head up saving the eyes for the moment, and the muscles of his arms and wrists strained to the cracking point as he twisted the gun-hand. The muzzle was away from him, and it bent around and down, down. . . .

The trigger had not been pulled in a useless shot. Neither man said anything but they both gasped between clenched teeth as they fought.

A half-sob, half-groan, and the gun-hand went limp. The revolver tumbled out the half-open door and rolled down under the car. Then Brewster's antagonist went berserk. All twisting strength and fury he drove an elbow into Brew-

ster's throat. Brewster slammed a fist in his face, driving his head against the door-frame. Then they were out of the car in a scrambling heap on the curbside grass.

Brewster was sick to the point of retching, weak, dizzy from that elbow blow against his throat. Half his strength had drained away. But when the other man rolled clear and jumped up, Brewster came up after him.

Two women had stopped fearfully on the sidewalk. The struggle had been seen from a passing automobile that jolted to a stop with a shrill of brakes. The man who'd called himself Spots made his decision between two swift breaths and bolted across the sidewalk into the black shadows beside the nearest house.

Brewster groped under the car for the gun, and as he slipped it in his pocket and stood up, the women moved on. Two men came running from the automobile that had stopped.

"Trouble here, buddy?"

Spots was gone. A radio patrol-car might yet pick him up—and start an avalanche of publicity.

"No trouble," said Brewster.

"Where's that guy you were fighting with?" The two men wore overalls, looked like mechanics coming from work.

"Who said we were fighting?" asked Brewster.

"Hell—there's blood on your cheek!"

Brewster's hand went to his face, came away with a smear of blood on the fingers. He could feel the furrows where Spots' nails had clawed down viciously. He shrugged.

"It's over now. Care to give me your license number in case I need it?"

Their enthusiasm cooled abruptly at the prospect of profitless hours spent in court as witnesses.

"We didn't see anything. Sorry we can't help you, buddy," said the shorter of the two hastily.

Brewster grinned as they hurried back to their automobile and started off.

The blue sedan lacked an ignition key. Brewster noted down the license and dabbing at his cheek with a handkerchief, walked toward Canal Street. Within two blocks he flagged a passing taxicab.

"Montpelier Hotel," he ordered the driver.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Too Many Angles

MR. MADDOX was not in his room. Brewster went to one of the lobby telephones and called Aunt Henrietta.

"Has Mrs. Hende returned?" he asked.

"She has not," said Aunt Henrietta. "And I have my opinion of the way you two flew out of here. A Mr. Maddox telephoned for you about fifteen minutes ago. He wanted you to come to the Montpelier Hotel in half an hour."

"I'm at the Montpelier now. Thank you, Aunt Henrietta."

Brewster went downstairs to the washroom. A tip to the porter secured towel, soap, clothes-brush and a small bottle of rubbing alcohol to disinfect the scratches on his face. In five minutes most of the damage was repaired. When he returned to the lobby the clerk recognized him and said: "Mr. Maddox went up to his room several minutes ago, sir. Shall I ring him?"

"Just give me his room-number."

Maddox was on the sixth floor. His loud off-key whistle and the sound of running water were audible as Brewster knocked

A stocky, square-faced man opened the door, squinted, jerked his head. "Come in . . . Maddox!" he called.

Brewster entered, and the broad, shirtless figure of Maddox loomed in the bathroom doorway, looked over a towel at Brewster's face.

"Lord help us!" exclaimed Mr. Maddox. "What woman clawed you up, son?"

"It was a man called Spots. He got away with ten thousand dollars I was carrying in my pocket, and—"

Mr. Maddox charged into the room, ignoring Brewster's doubtful look at the stranger. "Ten grand!" he said hoarsely. "*My* ten grand?"

"Yes."

Mr. Maddox slammed the towel to the floor and cursed fluently. "I knew it was too good to be true! I had a hunch I was going to get caught out on a limb! Were you carrying that ten grand around in your *pocket?*"

"I'd almost forgotten it was there," confessed Brewster.

"You forgot!" groaned Mr. Maddox. "You forgot ten grand! Herman, d'you hear that?"

The square-faced stranger was about Mr. Maddox's age. He grinned faintly and without much sympathy.

"Remember, Joe, if it's some of your damned bookmaking, I may have to use any information against you."

"It should be used against me!" groaned Mr. Maddox. "I should have made sure he had that dough parked safely after bank hours. But this isn't a bookie deal, Herman, so you can sit in on it. Brewster was going to lend me the money tonight."

"Brewster? The lawyer?"

"I didn't tell you, did I? He's the one. We've been poking into the Hende case. That horse, Bulgar Jim, was an angle. Brewster, this is Lieutenant Kraft, from headquarters. He's assigned to racetrack business during the racing season. Herman has had an idea for years that I'm doing an illegal booking business in this state and it's his duty to catch me by the heels when I'm in town. Outside of that Herman's regular and you can talk to him."

"Unless you can give me some evidence against Joe," said Lieutenant Kraft dryly.

"I'm not interested in bookmaking," said Brewster. "But I am interested in the fact that Mrs. Hende has appparently been kidnaped and something seems to have happened to Miss Arnold."

"Jenny Arnold?" said Lieutenant Kraft.

"Yes."

Mr. Maddox had dodged back into the bathroom. He emerged now struggling into a shirt. "Tell us what happened, Brewster."

A FEW sentences covered the hurried drive to Jenny Arnold's apartment and the swift sequence of events that had followed.

"It was Spots Kincaid!" said Mr. Maddox violently. "One of the lousiest little rats I've ever run across! He must be working with Billy Doyle this year. D'you hear that, Herman? He's grabbed that ten grand—and I've got to have it by midnight tonight! And they've evidently snatched Mrs. Hende too, as well as grabbed that stable-boy who let Rube Johnson get to Bulgar Jim. God knows what they'll do to him."

"Or what they'll do to you, from what Brewster says," said Lieutenant Kraft with a grin. "You're hot, Joe. Maybe I'd better detail a couple of the boys to stay with you day and night while you're around town."

"I'm used to your flatfooted dicks keeping an eye on me," said Mr. Maddox disagreeably. "I'll take care of myself, Herman. It'll take more than Doyle and the bunch of rats he's gathered around him to make me lose much sleep. That goes for Rube Johnson too, and the shyster lawyer who sprung him. Brewster, have you reported this to the police?"

"Not yet. I came straight here hoping there was some way I could keep it out of the newspapers."

"Try and keep a kidnaping out of the newspapers!"

"There's a chance she hasn't been kidnaped."

"With that set-up? With Spots Kin-

caid and Billy Doyle back of it? It's a toss-up whether they've got Jenny Arnold too, or whether she's working with them. Herman, think fast!"

"What do you want me to do, send out a general alarm, Joe?"

"I asked you to think!" said Mr. Maddox heatedly. "We can go down on the corner and yell murder and have every copper in town turned out. But we want Mrs. Hende back without any publicity. We want Billy Doyle caught in a corner so he'll come through with the truth about the Hende murder. He's got the answer. This Jenny Arnold has got the answer. I knew I could smoke them out in the open by this evening."

Mr. Maddox groaned again as his big fingers knotted his necktie.

"But I didn't think they'd get my ten thousand first! If they jump town with it, I'll be caught without a bankroll!"

"And unable to pay off," guessed Lieutenant Kraft. "Can't you hock your ring?"

"It won't bring enough," said Mr. Maddox glumly. "Who said anything about paying off? Ten thousand I was going to borrow is gone, and we've got to get it back, and get Mrs. Hende, and clear up the Hende case while we're doing it."

"Outside of that," remarked Lieutenant Kraft sarcastically, "there's nothing else to do. All right, Joe, you figured all this out. You don't want any publicity. You know all the angles. Start feeding the answers."

Mr. Maddox had opened a leather kitbag and unscrewed the cap of a quart whiskey bottle. The big diamond ring winked and flashed as he drank. Belatedly he offered it to Brewster. "Sorry, son, my mind was on this other."

Mr. Maddox paced the length of the room and spoke aloud as Brewster took a drink.

"Doyle paid me some money about two hours ago. He'd seen Brewster at the track with me and he asked a lot of questions about Brewster, and how well I knew him and what Brewster was doing at the track, and he brought up the Hende case and wanted to know if Brewster had said anything about it.

"I told him that Brewster had said they were on the track of enough evidence to reopen the Hende case. He looked worried when he left. My man, Ike Coston, tailed him, and telephoned back that Doyle had made a couple of calls from a pay-station, and then gone to his hotel. That's the last I've heard from Ike—and now everything has splattered wide open in our faces."

Brewster said: "This is the gun Kincaid dropped. And hadn't the license of that blue sedan better be checked? It's an Illinois tag."

Lieutenant Kraft examined the revolver. "The number's been ground off. We can bring it out again. Give me the license number and that of your car and I'll get to work on them. Chances are the tags don't match the blue sedan, and that we'll find your car tonight."

MR. MADDOX was fingering his chin. He spoke suddenly. "You want sympathy for Mrs. Hende, don't you? If she got a break like this in the papers—helpless woman kidnaped—wouldn't it hit you right on the nose?"

Brewster pushed fingers through his rumpled black hair and stared at them. "I thought of that," Brewster admitted. "But hysterical sympathy isn't the answer. All we want is the truth about her husband's death. The right kind of sympathy will follow. After the publicity we got today, another barrage of headlines will make her a notorious character. She's not that kind of a woman."

"Got you out on a limb, son, hasn't it?" said Mr. Maddox. "I see your point. Only"— Mr. Maddox swore under his breath—"I wish we had that Arnold girl here!"

"I met her as I left the racetrack," said Brewster. "We talked. I don't think she knows who killed Jack Hende. I think she's in trouble herself now."

Mr. Maddox slammed a big fist into a big palm. "Billy Doyle is the one! He's got the answers! And Spots Kincaid! Pick 'em up and sweat it out of them. They've got that stable-boy somewhere too. God knows what they'll do to him."

Brewster had started to say something. He remained silent and dubious as Lieutenant Kraft dropped the revolver in his coat pocket and turned to the door.

"I'll have Doyle and Kincaid picked up on an open charge," said Kraft. "You two sit tight before you ball things up worse than they are."

When they were alone, Mr. Maddox spoke with a new awkwardness. "Hits you hard, doesn't it, son?"

Brewster nodded with the blind look of a man who was sick at heart. "It should," he said. "I've never told her I loved her. There's never been anything between us. But there could have been someday, I think. There was no love between her and Hende. He wanted a divorce but wouldn't get it because he would have to divide his property. He thought I was advising her to get a divorce. In a drunken moment he warned me to stay away from her. He must have rented that room at the St. Anthony to watch me.

"As a matter of fact," said Brewster dully, "she was trying to see me the afternoon Hende died. She wanted a divorce quickly. She'd called my office, learned I was due in on the train, and guessed I'd go to the hotel first. And his murder trapped her. The way facts were presented at the trial corked everything. So it's just been good friends and nothing more to ever count on. Have you ever been without hope, Maddox, and had hope offered you—and then fear hit you like a sledge? I can't think of anything but what may be happening to her now."

"She's all right, son. Take it easy."

"You're old and fat and you've forgotten how such things can be," said Brewster with an explosion of resentment. "The devil with you and your ideas and the money you need tonight. I know something that can be done—and I'll do it now!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mr. Maddox Pays Off

THEY were dining, talking, dancing—a full score and a half of patrons in Emile's place on Bourbon Street. At the bar Brewster downed a whiskey and Mr. Maddox reached for the bottle a second time.

"Here we are," said Mr. Maddox mildly. "And you haven't said three words, but if you're as wild inside as the look in your eye, you're not safe to be out alone."

"Shut up!" said Brewster.

The office door was standing open but Emile Andres was not inside. The hat-check girl did not know where he was.

"My private opinion—" said Mr. Maddox.

"Shut up!" said Brewster again. "Your private opinions don't interest me."

Mr. Maddox sighed. His aura of commanding assurance had suffered greatly in the last half-hour. He was worried, but at the same time indulgent. Mr. Maddox had reached that stage where experience was translated into understanding, and he saw in Brewster the hot blood of youth seething against itself when patience and a cool head were best. But because he had the understanding, Mr. Maddox waited silently.

A pudgy figure passed the checkroom entrance and stepped into the office. Brewster left the bar like a runner off the mark. He was oblivious that Mr. Maddox was only a step behind him.

"I've been looking for you!" said Brewster harshly.

Emile Andres stood by his desk with his mouth open and a sudden haunted look in his eyes. The smile that followed was as false as the artificial flowers on the side walls of the big room outside.

"Shut the door," said Brewster as he saw Mr. Maddox.

"You have a party for dinner?" said Emile hopefully.

"I'm looking for Doyle," said Brewster.

"Who?"

"Billy Doyle," said Brewster. "Don't bother to tell me you don't know him."

The smile left Emile's face like the sun vanishing in the swift upthrust of a thunder storm. The well-fed, pudgy build of the man changed to the dead slack look of a deflated toy balloon.

"I don't understand," he said weakly.

"Some things are hard to understand," said Brewster. "And some things are easy. Shall I tell you how you opened this place, Andres? Or do you still insist you won the money on the horses?"

The sweat was out on Emile's forehead again.

"Was ten thousand all you got for keeping your mouth shut?" said Brewster.

The breath Emile drew and exhaled was like a sigh torn from the quivering inner soul of the man.

"*You* telephoned my apartment," he said dully.

"Right," said Brewster. "And before I tell you what may happen to you, will you tell me where to find Doyle? Or that man Kincaid who was standing at the bar when I was in here before dark?"

Emile had the dumb look of a steer in a slaughter pen.

"I can't tell you," he said, and there seemed to be cotton in his mouth. "I can't tell you anything, Mr. Brewster."

"I'll tell him, Andres."

A REAR door had opened noiselessly. Kincaid was in the room as he spoke, with a red, angry cut on his puffed cheek as a reminder of that savage tussle in the automobile. And the look on Kincaid's face and the way his thin hand twitched around the big automatic carried a warning beyond any spoken threat.

Kincaid's jumpy nerves were cracking.

Mr. Maddox, standing beside a filing-case, put his hands up. What he thought was not visible on his moonlike face. But Brewster, slowly lifting his hands, let his feelings burst out in his features. The violence of the two men leaped out at each other inaudibly like the clash of hard steel blades.

"I thought we'd meet again," said Brewster. "Damn you, where is Mrs. Hende?"

Kincaid spoke to Emile Andres. "Stop looking like a sick fish. What have they said?"

Andres turned his neck inside his collar as if the starched band were choking him. "He—he wanted to know where Doyle was."

"What else?"

"That's all."

"Anyone else here with them?"

"Probably," said Andres, and it was almost a moan. "I've known something like this would happen. All I wanted was to be left alone—but it's too late now."

"What about Mrs. Hende?" repeated Brewster huskily.

"I'll kill you if you ask me that again!" Kincaid warned through tight lips. "Andres, damn you, step out and see if they brought anyone!"

Andres had aged years in minutes. His movements seemed loose and slow as he left the office.

Kincaid was chewing his lower lip. Mr. Maddox gazed at him like a solemn Buddha. It seemed to irritate Kincaid.

"Don't stand there like a fat fool, Maddox!"

"Tell me how I'm to stand," said Mr. Maddox blandly.

"I'll tell you plenty before we're

through! That was a dirty play you put over on Bulgar Jim!"

"A first-class rat like you should know, Kincaid," said Mr. Maddox, placidly.

Kincaid grinned whitely with the fury that was in him. "I'm going to save you for myself, Maddox!"

Mr. Maddox chuckled so that his huge body inside the loose-fitting linen suit shook in a paroxysm of enjoyment. He spoke toward the door through which Kincaid had entered. "Did you hear that, Doyle?"

Kincaid's glance flicked toward the spot —and Brewster's eyes had just found the empty doorway when he heard a sudden smack, like a ripe tomato hitting a wall.

The jump that Mr. Maddox made was unbelievably fast and destructive.

Kincaid's gagging cry, an object falling on the floor, Mr. Maddox manhandling the thin gunman as a mastiff might a weasel, were all part of the next split second.

A vast hand had clamped over Kincaid's automatic and was twisting the wrist as if it were dough. Mr. Maddox's other big hand was around Kincaid's throat—and Kincaid's face was a frantic red as his head was forced back—back.

The object on the floor was a metal paper-fastener that had been on top of the file-case. A great gash over Kincaid's eye was pouring blood.

Mr. Maddox shook Kincaid. The gun dropped and Brewster snatched it up. Mr. Maddox grabbed Kincaid by the back of the neck and held him up as the man's knees buckled.

"That was insane—and magnificent, you almighty fool!" gulped Brewster.

"I'm getting old," said Mr. Maddox regretfully. "Ten years ago I'd have nailed him on the side of his jaw. Get that Emile, son."

"He'll be back," said Brewster. "You don't need my help. I've something else to do!"

BEYOND the door where Kincaid had entered was a narrow, high-ceilinged hall with a solid door to the sidewalk. The door was padlocked inside. Stairs led up to the second-floor landing where a small light-bulb grudgingly attacked the shadows.

Mr. Maddox crowded into the passage, holding Kincaid up by the neck. "The ten grand isn't on him," said Mr. Maddox.

Kincaid's bloody face was a death mask, and he was biting hard on his lip. His eyes were black buttons in the pallor of his face as Brewster brushed by to the stairs.

"They're around here somewhere," said Brewster. "I've got to find her."

A slight flurry of movement made Brewster look down from the stairs. Kincaid was huddled on the floor and Mr. Maddox was massaging the broad knuckles of his big fist as he started up the steps with an astounding light-footed ease.

The gay beat of the dance music sifted up through walls and floors like something alien and strange and far away, and it seemed to Brewster that his heart would burst from his chest as he listened at one of the two doors and heard Jenny Arnold speaking scornfully.

"Let her alone, Billy! You're not fit to touch her. If she doesn't know anything about new evidence, she doesn't. Pick on me. I can take it, after knowing you as long as I have."

Brewster softly tried the knob and the door was locked. He moved back to assault it with his shoulder.

The fat arm that pushed him over against the wall had the solid feeling of an oak beam.

"I've got the weight, son," breathed Mr. Maddox. "If that ten grand is in there, I don't want it to get away while you bounce off the door. Give me that gun."

The thin panels of the door split, the lock tore out in the crash as Mr. Maddox struck it. There was light on the other

side, and a long, sparsely furnished living-room with fading paint on the plaster wall. Jenny Arnold was sitting on the edge of a day-bed and Lia Hende was in a chair, Doyle, confronting her in his shirt sleeves.

Doyle leaped back. But nearer the door a long-waisted, angular man came out of a chair as if propelled by a spring. His hand dived into his coat pocket and the blast of the gunshot in the pocket drove Mr. Maddox staggering. The room trembled as he struck the wall and fell like a miniature earthquake to a sitting position on the floor.

A second hurried shot from the pocket slammed into the wall by Mr. Maddox, and from his sitting position Mr. Maddox fired twice. The angular man fell as Brewster plunged past them.

Doyle had snatched a coat off a chair and dived toward an open doorway at the left. A third man was ahead of him, just vanishing through a doorway on the other side of the bedroom they had entered. Doyle slammed the door. Brewster wrenched it open, and the two men were just escaping through another door in a little hall. They had reached the stair-landing. They were racing down the stairs when Brewster reached the landing.

Brewster caught the stair bannister loosely and hurled himself down.

Kincaid was stirring weakly on the lower floor, and Doyle was only a step ahead as Brewster came after him through Andres' office.

They burst out into the big room where the music was valiantly playing to cover a subdued excitement running from table to table and over the dance floor. Doyle plunged past two couples at the cloakroom window. The man ahead of Doyle was already running out into Bourbon Street as Brewster made a flying tackle.

He got Doyle's legs. They crashed down together as women screamed, chairs scraped back from tables and Emile's place was in a sudden uproar.

DOYLE dropped the coat he had been carrying and fought wildly. It seemed to Brewster that contact with the man gave him double strength. Doyle's face contorted spasmodically as they fought there inside the entrance.

His fist struck Brewster's face, and Brewster shook the blow off and smashed furiously at the thin handsome features behind the waxed mustache.

No one interfered—or helped. A crowd was forming behind them, but all that was only a blur before Brewster's eyes. Doyle's face was all he could see. He had to smash and batter it until there was no chance of the man's escaping.

A woman screamed suddenly: "Look out!"

Instinctive reaction made Brewster throw himself to one side. The blow from above scraped his head, tore at his ear, smashed painfully against his shoulder. He glimpsed Kincaid recovering balance with the heavy paper-fastener in one hand. His blood-smeared face was murderous.

Brewster threw himself toward Kincaid's legs and brought the man down on him fighting and striking. He tried to protect his head, and a savage blow glanced off his arm, struck his scalp and he seemed to fall into a void away from the screams of strange women and the desperate fight he had been winning.

Then a voice was saying: "Outside, boys. You can't see them. . . . Yes, that fellow Kincaid is the one who killed Hende. And this Emile Andres who lost his nerve and telephoned headquarters was a waiter at the St. Anthony. Coming down the stairs from the floor above he heard the shot and spotted Kincaid coming out of Hende's room. Andres blackmailed Kincaid and Doyle and the rest of their bunch, telling them he had a sworn statement filed away where the police would get it if anything happened to him. They set him up in business here, and

used the rooms upstairs when they needed them.

"They've been fixing races at the track here and collecting heavy from bookies all over the country. We found a stableboy upstairs they were getting ready to knock off. Hende got tangled up in some of their betting coups and lost a lot of money and wouldn't pay. Kincaid followed him to the St. Anthony to collect, and they had a fight and Kincaid grabbed a gun Hende snatched out of a drawer and shot Hende. They let Mrs. Hende take the rap, and today when they saw in the papers that the Hende case was to be reopened they got jittery and collared Mrs. Hende to see what new evidence her attorneys had uncovered. . . . Yes, Mrs. Hende's in here, but you can't see her. You'll have to ask her about taking pictures later."

That sounded like Lieutenant Kraft talking, and as the door closed, a strange voice begged: "Will you be quiet, Mr. Maddox, until the ambulance gets here? A bad flesh wound and a broken rib can be dangerous, you know."

"Letting that ten grand out of my sight again will hurt my health worse, Doc," replied Mr. Maddox cheerfully. "I still get cold when I think how near Doyle came to getting away with that coat which held the money. Mrs. Hende, if you'll just stay in the office here with that billfold until Brewster gets over that crack on the head, I'll be able to sit here without looking around at you."

Lia laughed. She had not laughed that way since long before Hende's death. "Do you think I'd get very far away from him until I know he's all right?"

"I don't think you'll ever get very far away from him again," said Mr. Maddox's bland voice.

Brewster's head hurt, and he didn't care as he kept his eyes closed tightly and eavesdropped on Lia's reply, which came after a moment of hesitation.

"I hope not," said Lia.

Brewster opened his eyes then, and she was standing there with her profile smiling and tender as she looked down at his billfold in her slim hand.

Brewster got up unsteadily from the floor where they had stretched him.

Lieutenant Kraft was there to help him, and the fussy professional-looking doctor sprang to the other arm to steady him. Brewster shook them off.

"Lia," he said, "Lia, give that money to Mr. Maddox and step back in the passage with me. I—I want to talk to you."

Mr. Maddox's great understanding chuckle followed them out of the room and his remarks came through the closing door that was shutting out the world.

"You're old and dried up, Doc, and I'm old and fat and we've forgotten how such things can be," said Mr. Maddox. "Here's something we can understand. Did you ever see ten grand? Take a look, Doc."

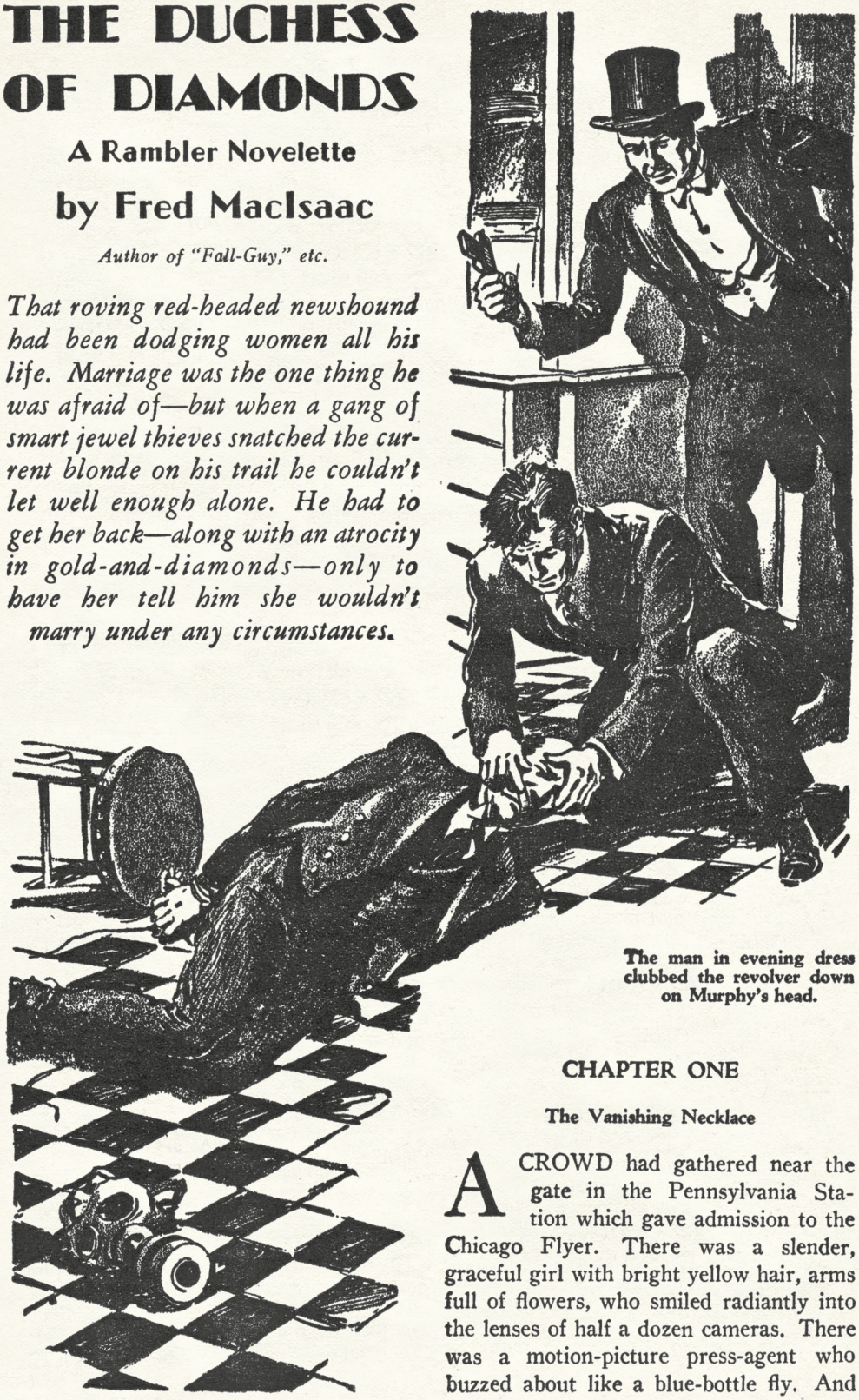
THE DUCHESS OF DIAMONDS

A Rambler Novelette

by Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Fall-Guy," etc.

That roving red-headed newshound had been dodging women all his life. Marriage was the one thing he was afraid of—but when a gang of smart jewel thieves snatched the current blonde on his trail he couldn't let well enough alone. He had to get her back—along with an atrocity in gold-and-diamonds—only to have her tell him she wouldn't marry under any circumstances.



The man in evening dress clubbed the revolver down on Murphy's head.

CHAPTER ONE

The Vanishing Necklace

A CROWD had gathered near the gate in the Pennsylvania Station which gave admission to the Chicago Flyer. There was a slender, graceful girl with bright yellow hair, arms full of flowers, who smiled radiantly into the lenses of half a dozen cameras. There was a motion-picture press-agent who buzzed about like a blue-bottle fly. And

there was a young man named Addison Francis Murphy, there to say good-bye to Miss Enid Andrews, who was going to Hollywood.

The beautiful and talented Miss Andrews had just won a contract with a film company because of her performance as ingénue in a recent Broadway success.

A well-dressed, dark, young man carrying a small suitcase pushed through the crowd toward the gate. His progress was slow and he gave vent to an angry expletive, stared at the radiant blond girl about whom attention centered. "Who is she?" he asked of a man standing beside him.

The fellow chuckled. "Broadway chicken flying to Hollywood. Probably she'll have to walk back."

The dark young man edged closer and stood beside the porter who was waiting with the young actress' hand-luggage until the picture-making was over. A moment later he walked to the gate and displayed a Pullman ticket to the gateman.

"Just a minute, Randall," requested a solid-looking man in a hard hat who was standing by the gateman. "Papa wants to see you."

The man called Randall shrugged his shoulders, stepped aside with Hard-hat, who proceeded to run his hands over Randall's figure. He patted all his pockets. "Where's your luggage?" he demanded of the dark young man.

"Got none. Only going as far as Philly," stated Randall.

"On your way then," growled the other who was a police sergeant in plainclothes. Randall passed through and went down the steps, boarded a Pullman on the Chicago Flyer.

Addison Francis Murphy saw Miss Enid Andrews to her compartment in the Pullman car and the film star in embryo permitted him to kiss her on the forehead.

"Wish me success," she requested.

"You know I do," he replied. "It's funny, though."

"What's funny?" she demanded.

"Well—er—your getting a contract and beating it out of town so all of a sudden,' he said unsteadily.

"A girl has to take what she can get," she replied in a manner which somewhat embarrassed Murphy.

IN a cab on the way back to the office of the *New York Globe* Addison Francis Murphy was greatly depressed. He had just said good-bye to the swellest girl he could remember ever having known.

Murphy, known all over the United States as the "Rambler," was a tall, thin, red-headed young man, who, by no stretch of the imagination, could be called good-looking. He was a reporter by profession but actually he was a drifter. One of the last of the tramp reporters, he was a news hound of remarkable scent and a criminal investigator of great ability. For some reason unknown to him, he was attractive to women. Periodically, when he threw up a job and started for parts unknown, he'd be be credited with being just a hobo, but more often he left places in a hurry because of some girl whom he liked enough to be on the verge of becoming seriously involved.

Marriage, to Addison Francis Murphy, meant living in a cottage in a suburb and pushing a baby carriage. And Murphy was afraid that if he ever found himself pushing a baby carriage, he might murder the baby.

He had been working steadily on the *New York Globe* for six months now. He'd met Enid Andrews at a cocktail party to which he had been dragged—and Miss Andrews had everything. She had become violently "interested" in Murphy, and his state of mind regarding her had begun to terrify him. The next thing he knew he'd be proposing to Enid—then would come marriage, biscuits you could

use for cannon balls—and babies. It was high time he went somewhere—anywhere—all by himself.

While he was ~~succ~~ening under a barrage of bright blue eyes and contemplating a hasty retreat, along had come Hollywood and secured Enid's signature to a contract. Now, as a result, he had been down to see her off instead of Enid being at the depot to witness his own departure for parts unknown. Perversely, it seemed most unfair to Rambler Murphy. In his heart there was a dull pain. Her last words rang dolefully in his ears. Maybe, if he had spoken—but he hadn't wanted to speak. Yet, how he was going to miss her!

When he reached the *Globe* office and looked in his mail box he found a curt communication from Graham, the managing editor.

It said: *See me pronto.*

Murphy pushed open the door of Graham's office. The M. E. had the most untidy desk in the establishment. It was piled high with papers to such an extent that Joe Graham had to turn his back to it and work at a table. He was a small, gray-headed man with spectacles, and an old-young face. Nobody knew how old Graham was, but he had been around Park Row longer than the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

He looked up from a mess of copy paper and grinned at Addison Francis Murphy. "Rambler," he said, "I've heard rumblings that you were about to blow the town."

Murphy shook his head. "I think I'll stick around awhile," he replied.

"That's fine. You've heard of the Duchess of Tranmore. Well, her diamond necklace has been lifted. It's worth three-hundred-thousand dollars."

Murphy smiled cynically. "She had it coming," he stated. "She had no business to bring the trinket to America. She shouldn't have showed it to the ship-news reporters when she arrived. The customs people would have kept quiet. She was a fool to wear it to the opera and a triple fool to supply the newspapers with a picture of herself wearing it. I'm not surprised that it was stolen."

"O. K. You go out and find out who stole it."

"Just like that," observed Rambler Murphy. "I suppose I get the info' from the morning papers."

"On account of the circumstances surrounding the theft, it was hushed up last night. The duchess lost the necklace while having dinner at Westley Rutledge's house last night. She had it on when she sat down at the table and, when she got up, she discovered that it was gone. There were ten people at the dinner. All social register. Servants are all old family retainers."

"They would be. Did the lights fail at any time during the dinner?"

"They did not."

MURPHY began to drum upon his chief's desk with his fingers. "The necklace must have been heavy," he remarked. "She would have missed the feel of it the instant it was taken. That much ice'd weigh pretty near half a pound, wouldn't it?"

"Six ounces. It's one of the historic jewel pieces of England. The duchess wears a high-neck dress, even at dinner parties, when she wears it. Says the necklace chafes her skin. She says she hasn't any notion when it vanished."

"Have you a list of those present?"

Graham handed him a slip of paper and Murphy read what was typed on it aloud. "Mr. and Mrs. Burton Bray, Mr. and Mrs. R. Morton Magnam, Mr. and Mrs. John Huff, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Gannon, the Rutledges and Her Grace." He chuckled. "All prominent tax-dodgers but they all reek with lucre. Get our correspondent in England to cable us the

low-down on the Duchess of Tranmore."

Graham laughed. "You think she dropped it down her own neck?"

"It's possible," said Murphy.

"Then let me inform you that Her Grace insisted she be the first to be searched, so that the servants would not make a fuss when they were frisked."

"Huh! Who searched them?"

"All the men, including the Rutledge servants went into one room, and all the women guests with the women servants went into another. Everybody stripped to the skin in the presence of everybody else."

"Very democratic," commented Murphy. "Nobody objected, eh?"

"Nobody. After that, they all collected in the dining-room and waited until the police arrived."

"Servants must have been coming and going. One of them could have dropped the necklace out a window to a waiting confederate. It might have gone out to the kitchen in a soup tureen."

"The Rutledges state that all the servants in their house have been with them for years."

"Just the same, either a guest or a servant stole it. Probably a guest. Millionaires have been known to steal works of art for the pleasure of possession, if not display. This gadget is world famous. Disposal of it by a thief would be difficult."

Graham shook his head. "There are two hundred fifty diamonds in the necklace, ranging in size from a fifty-carat headlight to one carat. If the duchess had brought it in as a permanent resident she would have had to pay a duty of fifty thousand dollars, so the thief starts off that much to the good. If he takes the stones out of the gold settings and sells them separately, they will bring much more than the necklace would bring in toto. You understand that every one of these stones could be sold for forty per-cent less than the American market price on account of non-payment of duty. The intrinsic value of the gold setting is insignificant. Here is a picture of the necklace."

The Rambler inspected it. The thing might be an heirloom, one of the most valuable pieces of jewelry in the world, but, in his opinion, it was hideous, a marvel of eighteenth-century bad taste. The setting was four inches at its widest, its carving was conventional and its stones arranged inartistically. There was one gigantic stone, a triple circle of smaller, but not very much smaller stones around it, tapering off with smaller stones toward the clasp which had fastened it around the plump neck of the Duchess of Tranmore.

Its ugliness made it identifiable at a glance. For that reason it would be broken up the sooner.

"All right, boss," Murphy said cheerfully, "I'll see what I can do."

FROM Graham's office the Rambler went into the morgue, that department of the newspaper where thousands of envelopes containing clippings about prominent people were stored. It is from such files that the reporters who write obituaries get most of their material.

He learned that the necklace was not the personal property of Her Grace, but was entailed like her real estate, and the pictures in the ducal town house and the manor in Devonshire and the shooting-lodge in Scotland. She could not sell it nor pawn it and technically, she had no right to bring it with her to America. From her pictures, she appeared to be a dull sort of peeress. Her face was long, narrow and unbeautiful, her figure bony and ungraceful. Her feet were especially large.

Murphy found most of the Rutledge guests filed among the clippings. He knew slightly both Mr. and Mrs. Burton Bray, an elderly couple. He had a bowing ac-

quaintance with John Huff. R. Morton Magnam was a man in his thirties, who two years ago, had married an English actress, Clara Carleton. The wedding had been in London and the Magnam envelope contained excellent pictures of the bride and groom from *The Tatler* and other English illustrated magazines. The young woman was beautiful, but there was something about her face Murphy didn't like. He wondered how happy she made Mr. Magnam. Mr. Edgar Gannon was a middle-aged textile manufacturer..

If any of these people were art collectors their clippings did not say so. Murphy had heard, somewhere, however, that Rutledge paid large sums for pictures and had purchased a Swiss castle, years before, taken it apart and had it set up in the Adirondacks.

That any of these correct but rather stodgy guests had been able to remove that "hunk of junk" from around the neck of Her Grace without her being aware of it, seemed impossible. She could not have taken it off herself without lifting her arms and fumbling with the clasp at the back of her neck. As the necklace must have been the center of all eyes, such an action would have been observed. The servants, serving from the rear, had probably had the best opportunity. Old family retainers indeed! They would have to prove it.

What were the seating arrangements at table? The police would tell him that.

CHAPTER TWO

California, Back I Come!

LATER that afternoon Rambler Murphy climbed the steps of a tomb-like structure off Fifth Avenue in the Seventies which was the town house of Mr. R. Morton Magnam. A butler opened the door to his ring and lifted polite English eyebrows.

"I represent Allied Insurance. Name of Murphy," lied the Rambler. "It's about the Duchess of Tranmore affair. I should like to speak with Mrs. Magnam."

As he was speaking he heard the sound of a piano, very well played, coming from a salon which opened at the left of the spacious hall.

"I shall inquire," said the butler. "Step in, please." He vanished through the music-room door. There was a discordant crash as the music stopped. Then Murphy heard a high-pitched female voice saying: "I won't be annoyed. Tell this person I've already talked with the police and send him away."

The Rambler, who had advanced into the hall, found himself almost on the threshold of an exquisite room done in white and gold. A golden-haired woman had risen from the bench of a concert-grand piano. She turned as she spoke, spied Murphy and her manner changed. She smiled brilliantly at him. There was something about Murphy's whimsical features and stalwart figure which, apparently, revised Mrs. Magnam's instructions regarding his eviction.

"Perhaps I will see him," she said to the butler. "Why not?"

The butler returned to the visitor. "Madam will see you," he said unnecessarily. "This way."

The woman was tall and when she had married Mr. Magnam her figure must have been perfection. It had been so in the photographs. Now she was a trifle plump—and obviously bored.

"Come in and sit down, Mr. What's-your-name," she called in a hoarse contralto. "Sit on the couch, please."

"The name is Murphy," the Rambler told her. "You are very kind."

"Of the Westchester Murphys?"

"A sprig," he said untruthfully.

She laughed loudly. "Well, I'm glad I let you in. I've been playing the piano till my hands ache."

"Regarding the Tranmore necklace—"

She made an impatient gesture. "I've talked to ill-bred policemen. I submitted to being stripped stark naked in the presence of serving maids. Of course all the women did that. I don't give a damn what became of that old fool's necklace. Tell me about you. Why are you ringing doorbells? You'd look well on a polo pony."

She had thrown herself into an easy chair, crossed her legs carelessly and reached for a cigarette. Murphy rose and lighted it for her. She had almost black eyes, incongruous with her yellow hair, which, probably, was dyed. They were hard eyes which didn't smile in harmony with her lips. She had a high color and good features, a trifle too large. Murphy suspected she was a passionate young woman with a bad temper.

"I have to work for my living," he told her.

"So did I, but Morton likes to soft-pedal it. I was on the stage in London. A dog's life, but it had its moments. What I hate is dinners like that one last night. My husband's friends are dull as dish-water. One cocktail before dinner. No wine till bad champagne comes with the dessert. And one of the reasons I came to America was not to have to look over footlights at ugly duchesses dressed up like horses."

"You saw the necklace, of course?"

"Yes. It's barbaric."

"It would be helpful if you remembered when you saw it last. I mean how far along during dinner did you notice it."

"Oh, I didn't see it after we took our places. I was one removed from her. Mr. Gannon sat on my right and her left .... How would you like a Scotch and soda?"

"I'd like it," he admitted.

It was a break that she was so sociable. He had not really expected to be admitted. What he wanted was to learn if, in the flesh, she inspired the same distrust he had felt at looking at her picture. He had an idea she was troubled with few scruples, but that did not mean she had stolen the necklace. Her husband was a millionaire. However, she was probably more observant and more intelligent than the other women present.

She rang for whiskey and soda for two.

"Mrs. Magnam," Murphy said, "I should think you would be interested in discussing a case where a very valuable piece of jewelry vanishes off a woman's neck at a dinner party."

"Well," she said with a laugh, "it was peculiar. I have wondered about it."

"During the dinner did anything unusual happen?"

"Why, no. Such as what?"

"Well, sometimes a servant breaks a dish."

"He only does it once in my house," she stated grimly. "It was a thoroughly dull, humdrum party until the duchess gave a squawk and bleated, 'My necklace. It's gone'!"

"That was at the dessert?"

"Yes." She smiled suddenly. "Nobody broke a dish but a clumsy footman almost tripped over his own feet when he was bringing in the roast on a gold platter. He juggled it. It was the only laugh of the dinner."

THE DRINKS had come and they sampled them.

"Just where was he in the room—close to the table?"

"No. He had entered from the pantry and was carrying the platter to the buffet where the butler stood ready to carve the roast." She laughed loudly. "It bounced right off the platter, but he caught it like a fielder in the major-leagues. I was hoping he'd drop it just to embarrass that Rutledge woman, but he didn't. The butler looked as if he could have slain him."

"And everybody looked around?"

"Oh, yes. I say, do you think that was the time when the necklace was taken?"

"Possibly. Was anybody behind your chairs—on your side of the table, I mean?"

"No. The other footman had cleared the table of the preceding course and was out of the room and the butler was at the buffet. After he carved, the footman brought the roast course to the table."

"Pardon me, but did you notice any movement on the part of Mr. Gannon?"

"No. I was watching the juggling footman."

"I suppose you mentioned the incident to the police?"

"No—I'd forgotten all about it. Besides they were rude fellows. Not at all like Scotland Yard men. . . . How about another drink?"

"Thank you, no."

"Well, I'll have one." She rang, then gazed at him amiably.

"You know, you intrigue me. I'm simply mad about detective novels. I'd like to know how you get along with the investigation."

"I'll be pleased to call—"

She shook her head. "No don't call. Tell you what. I'll lunch with you in a couple of days. I suppose you are discreet—you look it."

Murphy was annoyed to feel himself blushing.

"You look like good fun," she assured him. "This is Wednesday. Say, Friday—at some West-side place."

"Luigi's on West Fiftieth. I don't think your friends would be likely to go there."

She smiled significantly. "You know your book," she commented. . . . "Oh, don't go, yet."

"I have to make another call regarding an insurance loss," he lied. "Good-bye and thanks for the refreshment."

"Don't stand me up," she called after him as he was leaving the room.

As the butler opened the front door for Murphy, a heavily built, rather good-looking man of middle age was coming up the front steps. He glanced casually at the Rambler, then his gaze sharpened. Murphy passed him swiftly. He was somebody he had seen somewhere, but the newshound couldn't place him. It wasn't Magnam. Possibly someone she went lunching with in out of the way places. She seemed to be a free and easy lady who, if she wasn't careful, might easily find herself in a divorce court. The Rambler had no intention of keeping the date she had made so casually unless he needed further information regarding what had happened at the Rutledge dinner table.

THE TRAIN bearing Miss Enid Andrews pulled into Pittsburg in the early evening. Miss Andrews sat in a corner of the club-car and occasionally pinched herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming that she had a film contract and was on her way to Hollywood. She wondered just how much Addison Francis Murphy would miss her. She had never met anybody she had liked as much as the Rambler, but his nickname had been a warning signal to a girl as intelligent as Enid. She had weighed alternatives and Hollywood had won. But she'd miss Murphy nevertheless.

The train was within a couple of minutes of leaving Pittsburg when a breathless young man came into the club-car. He spied her, hastened up the aisle.

"Found you," he gasped. "I'm the local representative of Mammoth Films. You have to go back to New York."

She turned pale. "They've canceled my contract?" she faltered.

He grinned. "Hardly. Here's the telegram." He read it aloud.

"Bronson, Pittsburg Mammoth Exchange. Meet train number nine for Chicago. Take Enid Andrews off train and put her on night plane for New York. She goes into short subject in our Long Island studio tomorrow morning, replacing Gladys Gay."

"Hurry up, we have only a few minutes," urged the young man.

"But my luggage! It's in my compartment away up front."

"It's on the platform," he told her. "I had a porter take everything out while I hunted through the train for you."

"In a minute, bare-headed and cloakless, Enid stood on the platform. A porter with her numerous suitcases, was waiting. He handed the girl her hat and coat and trundled off the luggage. With somewhat mixed emotions she followed with the film representative.

"We have an hour to get to the air field," the young man told her. "Your trunk will have to go by train, but I'll put your hand-luggage on the plane. Accommodations for you at the Pennfield Hotel. You're to report at the Long Island studio at nine A. M."

It was a rather long ride to the air field and when they arrived passengers were already entering the tri-motor plane. Enid went aboard, thrilled. It would be her first plane ride. After a long period of hard luck, she was getting marvelous breaks. She smiled to think of the surprise of Rambler Murphy, who had put her on the Chicago train in the morning, to find her back in New York. If it wasn't too late she would phone him when she arrived.

IT WAS not much after eleven P. M. when the telephone in the small apartment on the East Side where Addison Francis Murphy resided, tinkled insistently. Murphy heard it as he was putting his key in the door. He had been working on the Tranmore case from a chair in a small, cheap film theater, which is not to be considered a paradox. Some of the Rambler's best ideas came to him when he was staring at a bad motion picture. The worse a film was, the better Mr. Murphy liked it.

He answered the phone and stiffened with astonishment when he heard Enid's voice.

"Where are you?" he demanded. "Has there been a train wreck?"

"Back in New York to pester you some more," she told him gaily. "They yanked me off the train at Pittsburg and sent me back by plane to take a girl's place in a film at their Long Island studio. Isn't that marvelous?"

"Sure," he said dubiously. "He had been missing her so much he was afraid he might propose to her in the excitement of seeing her again.

"And," she added, "a queer thing has happened. I've found a week-end case with my luggage which doesn't belong to me."

"Well, the owner will claim it," he said. "Say, how about my calling for you and taking you to supper?"

"Can't. Got to get up at the crack of dawn. Rambler, there isn't anything in the suitcase except a diamond necklace." She laughed loudly.

"What?" he shouted.

"It's a fake, of course, but the diamonds are amazingly brilliant and positively gigantic—"

"Enid," he demanded excitedly, "is it an old English setting—heavy and ugly?"

"How did you know? Did you play a trick on me? I don't get the point."

"Where are you—what hotel?" he demanded tensely.

"The Pennfield near the Pennsylvania Station. Room Six Forty-nine. Did you put—"

"No," he shouted. "I'm coming right over. Lock your door. Open it to no one until you hear my voice. And don't phone anybody. Sit tight. I'll be there in ten minutes."

He hung up on the bewildered girl, rushed out of the apartment, fretted at the slowness of the elevator, fretted more because no taxi was visible. He ran at top speed to the corner, caught a cab

there, thrust a five-dollar bill into the hands of the astonished taximan and said excitedly: "Break all records to the Pennfield Hotel."

He was oblivious to the bouncing of the cab as the driver tried to earn his tip. Two astounding things had happened. Enid was back in New York on the same day she had started for California, and she had in her possession a necklace which resembled that stolen from the Duchess of Tranmore.

Probably it was theatrical jewelry. Things like this just didn't happen. And if it was the real thing, how had it happened?

Crash! Murphy was slammed against the partition of the cab. The taxi man, approaching a red light, had tried to squeeze between the curb and a motor car in order to make a right turn. He had crashed into the side of another car with the same idea, almost overturning it. A patrolman appeared suddenly. "You done it," he told Murphy's driver. "What's the idea?"

The chauffeur jerked his thumb toward the interior of the cab. "This guy gave me five bucks to break records to the Hotel Pennfield."

The officer jumped on the running-board and peered inside. "He'll learn something," he said grimly. "Back up, feller, and drive round to the precinct house."

IT was forty minutes instead of ten before Murphy entered the lobby of the Pennfield. He did not phone up, but took the elevator to the sixth floor, hastened down the corridor and knocked on the door of 649.

"Enid, it's Murph," he said. There was no answer for a second and then Enid called: "Come in."

"I told you to lock the door," he was saying as he turned the knob, pushed it open and stepped across the threshold. He broke off.

Enid stood in the middle of the room, dressed to go out and there was a man behind her, holding her, pinning her arms to her side. His face was concealed by a black mask.

The Rambler went wild. "Let her go, you—" he bellowed.

A crushing blow descended on the back of his head as a second man stepped from behind the open door and hit the newspaperman with the butt end of a heavy revolver.

As the girl opened her mouth to scream, a big hand covered it.

The man who had knocked out the reporter stepped in front of the girl. "Who is he?" he asked harshly.

"He's a newspaper reporter—his name is Murphy. Oh, you may have killed him!"

"He's a hard-headed Mick," the gunman said with a callous laugh. "We've got to take her with us," he told the other. "She had a look at me. Now, young woman, a yip out of you and you'll get a bullet in you. If you'd behaved and hadn't torn my mask off, we'd have tied you up and left you here. We go down in the elevator and you talk as if we were friends. One false move and we plug you and run for it."

"You've hurt him terribly," she exclaimed pitifully.

"Unless you agree to go and make no trouble, I'll finish him off here and now," He addressed the other man. "You tie him up and gag him, if she promises to go quietly."

The girl was pale, trembling. "All right, I promise," she said faintly.

CHAPTER THREE

Black Hairs—and Blond

RAMBLER MURPHY came back to his senses in a locked closet. His feet were bound with a rolled bed sheet and

another fastened his arms to his sides. A handkerchief had been used as a gag. He was standing upright. The closet was shallow. He hurled himself against the door but it held. Finally he slid down until he was in a sitting position, drew his knees up to his chin and lashed out at the door. It did not give but his heavy boots made considerable noise. He continued to drum upon the door for five or six minutes, then he heard voices. At last the door was unlocked and he was dragged from his place of confinement by the hotel night manager and the house detective.

The startled men removed his gag and his bonds and Murphy rose unsteadily to his feet.

"What happened? Who are you? This is a young lady's room. Where is she?" demanded the manager.

"Say, boss," said the squat, square-jawed house dick, "I know this mug. He's a reporter on the *Globe*."

"Just the same an explanation is in order," the manager said sternly.

Murphy's mind was now working clearly. The thieves who had taken the duchess' necklace had come after their booty. The delay at the precinct house had enabled them to arrive at Enid's room ahead of him.

"Miss Enid Andrews, who is a motion-picture actress, has been kidnaped," he told the manager. "She just arrived by plane from Pittsburg and had phoned me. I called to take her to supper. I knocked, she answered, 'Come in,' and when I entered, she was struggling with a masked man. A second man must have been behind the door as it opened for I was slugged on the head. Next thing I knew I was in that closet."

"Why should she have been kidnaped?" demanded the manager. "You are a newspaperman, it seems. She's a film actress. I object to this hotel being given undesirable publicity. Obviously, this is a trumped-up story, a press stunt."

Murphy ruefully put his hand on top of his head. He grinned at the house detective. Murphy knew a great many hotel dicks. "You think so, Cassidy?" he demanded.

Cassidy grinned back. "Bet you couldn't get your own paper to print the yarn."

"Feel of my head."

Cassidy felt. He became serious. "He's been slugged all right."

The manager still looked incredulous. "I'm engaged to the young lady," Murphy asserted. "I'm calling the police. Would I do that if it was a press stunt? Miss Andrews told me on the phone that she had found a strange suitcase in her luggage. It probably contained stolen goods and the pair who were in here came after it. That means that somebody on your switchboard tipped them, Mr. Manager. Now do I get co-operation?"

"Well, yes, of course."

Murphy stepped to the telephone and called police headquarters. He asked for Captain Laughlin, a friend of his.

"I've been slugged, bound and gagged and my fiancée, Miss Enid Andrews, has been kidnaped from Room Six Forty-nine at the Pennfield Hotel. Can you get a good man up here? . . . You'll come yourself? That's great, old man."

MURPHY hung up and keenly inspected the room. Five suitcases were visible from his chair. A small one, a black week-end case, lay open and empty in front of the bed, on the floor. The others were in a neat row against the wall. He inspected the door. The key lay on the floor, inside. The bolt was undamaged. Enid, following his instructions, had locked the door but had not thought to shoot the bolt. The intruders had pushed the key out of the lock by means of pincers designed for that purpose and entered with a pass key.

Murphy crossed and examined the week-end case while the manager and the

house detective watched him curiously. Its being open meant that the intruders had examined it. There was a possibility of fingerprints on its handle. He wrapped a handkerchief around the handle, stood up. Why hadn't she heard fumbling at the door? Why hadn't she phoned him or the office below? Perhaps, because she had been in the bathroom.

He went into the bathroom and examined the wash basin. It was still wet and a few soap bubbles were visible at the drain pipe. A tooth brush, a nail file, a manicure scissors and a rouge-pot rested upon the shelf above the basin. He looked carefully about. In the far corner of the bathroom lay a hairbrush. He picked it up. It was an English brush made of pig's bristles. There were several golden hairs from Enid's lovely head clinging to them. Murphy stared, took a small magnifying-glass from his vest pocket and inspected two or three red spots on the bristles. Spots so faint as to be almost invisible to the naked eye.

Blood!

He grew tense. Near the blood spots were two short black hairs.

From these Murphy reconstructed the scene which had taken place in the bathroom. She had been before the mirror brushing her hair and had not heard the intruders enter. A man came into the bathroom. She had struck at him with the hairbrush, hit him on top of the head and the sharp bristles had drawn blood from his scalp, and two of his hairs had attached themselves to the brush.

These hairs were important. He wrapped the brush in a towel and thrust it into his jacket pocket.

Fingerprints aren't the only way to identify a criminal nowadays. It's possible to identify a person by hairs from his head. Unfortunately, arrested criminals are not always required to submit hairs for such purpose.

"Please come with me," he requested the manager and the hotel dick, "while I question the elevator men, bellboys and doormen."

"I'll lock the door with the special key we use when we lock out delinquent guests," stated the manager. "It's what we call 'sealing up.'"

The departure of Enid was not so mysterious as had been the vanishing of the duchess' necklace from the dinner party at the Rutledges'. Apparently she and her captors had descended from the sixth to the second floor by the service stairs and then walked down the main staircase. Then they'd merely crossed the lobby, gone out by the front entrance and departed in a private car—a sedan.

Two bellboys, from their bench, had seen a young woman in black accompanied by two men, one in evening dress, come down the stairs and cross the lobby. One of the boys had carried Miss Andrews' bags up to her room when she'd checked in. He had ridden up in the elevator with her. He was sure she was the young woman. Neither had paid the slightest attention to the appearance of the men. The doorman, too, remembered the party. He had a good look at the girl. He said she looked as if she had been crying, but it was none of his business. No, he hadn't taken the number of the car. At the Pennfield it was customary to note the numbers of both taxis and private cars in which guests drove away, but somebody had asked him a question and, just as he had answered it, the sedan had driven off. Sure, he missed a lot of cars. All doormen did.

The Rambler knew, of course, that Enid had been terrorized into accompanying the pair. Perhaps they had given her a jab with the needle, enough dope to numb her but not cause unconsciousness.

CAPTAIN LAUGHLIN arrived in a cab as Murphy was questioning the doorman. He was a short, solid, compe-

tent-looking man, who wore a brush mustache and whose small blue eyes were sharp as needles. He insisted upon returning to the room recently occupied by Enid Andrews. He asked the hotel manager and the house detective to leave him alone with Murphy. After they had gone, he lighted a cigar, gazed penetratingly at the reporter and asked: "Now, what's it about? Why did they carry her off and what were they after?"

"Captain," Murphy said earnestly, "Enid left this morning for Chicago. I saw her off. She was taken off the train at Pittsburg and sent back to New York to substitute for a girl in a film being made on Long Island—she's a film actress, you know. She phoned me upon arrival. She found a strange suitcase in her luggage for she told me what it contained."

"Well, what?"

"A diamond necklace. She supposed it was theatrical jewelry but, from her description, I'm convinced it was the necklace of the Duchess of Tranmore."

Laughlin jumped up. "Holy cats!" he ejaculated. "Murphy, the British Ambassador is raising hell. So's Washington. They're applying the heat to the Department. Don't you know how she got the necklace?"

"No. I told her not to let anybody in, that I'd be right over. I got pinched for bribing a taxi-driver to break through traffic lights, was delayed, and when I arrived here—" He explained what had happened.

"It must have been the necklace. That explains her snatch. She could identify these fellows," said the captain. "Now Murphy, we had word, very early this morning, about the theft of the necklace. We stationed men at all trains, and stopped as many motor buses and cars leaving town as we could.

"The necklace is so hot they think they have to send it out of New York. Your girl was going through to Hollywood. Did she have any sort of send-off?"

The Rambler nodded. "Motion-picture cameras and reporters."

"Suppose the fellow with the necklace recognized a dick at the train gate. He'd be searched. His luggage would be searched if he was a known crook. But here is this girl being photographed. He finds out she's a through passenger. Suppose he puts this suitcase with her luggage—the porters must have been standing by with her bags till the photographing was finished. Maybe they took her off the train and sent her back before the crook could get his bag back from among hers. But he finds out and telephones back to his principal. Follow me?"

Murphy nodded. "It sounds plausible. So the criminals came right down here to recover the necklace."

"And carried her off because she could identify them. I'll find out if any known crook was seen boarding the Chicago Flyer. Let you know in the morning."

"But Enid—suppose they—er—" His voice broke.

The captain leaned forward and patted his knee. "The men who worked this necklace job aren't gangsters—they're high-class crooks. That type doesn't commit murder unless it's absolutely necessary. They'll just hold your girl until they've made everything safe for themselves. They won't kill her unless they have to."

"Maybe so, but just the same it's driving me crazy."

"I'll take that hairbrush and examine the black hairs on it. Of course we haven't many specimens with which to compare it—identification by human hairs is a recent wrinkle."

Murphy picked up the phone. "Please report any out-calls from this apartment in the last hour." He smiled forlornly at the captain when he received the report. "Only one—my apartment—poor kid."

WHEN Murphy entered the office of the *Globe's* managing editor next morning at nine o'clock, his face was white and there were unaccustomed lines in it. He had had, practically, no sleep. The managing editor, who had been dictating to his secretary, dismissed her. He scowled at the reporter. "I assigned you to the Tranmore necklace case," he complained. "And you occupy yourself arranging a publicity stunt for this girl of yours."

"She's not my girl and I didn't arrange any stunt. She's been kidnaped."

"Yeah? By the film people. Not a line gets into this paper. It's too raw."

"Let it pass," said Murphy wearily. "Get a cable from London about the duchess?"

The managing editor nodded. "Yep. she's broke. Taxes on entailed property, which include the necklace, gobble up all her income. She probably brought the necklace to New York to have it stolen. It's fully insured. Here's something. All the guests at the dinner party were Americans. The butler and the second footman are English. I think the plot was hatched in England. Go up and talk turkey to the duchess—"

"Been up," said Murphy dryly. "Her Grace has left her hotel. No address. Friends are hiding her until she recovers from this frightful shock. I'll try to locate said friends."

"Well," declared Graham, "I agree with you that it was impossible for anybody to unhitch that horse collar from the old woman's neck without her knowing it. It had a new, patent, safety catch."

"There was a moment," said Murphy, "when everybody's attention was drawn from the table. The footman stumbled and almost fell while bringing the roast from the pantry door to the buffet. Everybody looked and laughed or smiled. At that moment, it was possible for her to remove the necklace and hand it to somebody."

Graham looked astounded. "I didn't hear that."

"You didn't talk to the right person."

"O. K. But everybody including the duchess, stripped to the skin."

"True." He looked thoughtful. "I hadn't considered the significance of the fact that it was an amateur search, a formality, since all the guests were above suspicion and submitted merely out of courtesy. It wasn't as if police matrons had searched the women. No doubt they considered one another's modesty and politely looked aside while they were undressing."

"Rambler," exclaimed the editor, "you hit it. Why, the duchess could have had it inside her chemise and when she took off her chemise just wrapped the necklace in it and laid it on top of her other clothes. But the men were searched, too."

"In the same perfunctory manner."

"Right!" exclaimed Graham. "When the police came they were overpowered by all the big-wigs and when Rutledge told them that everybody had been searched they didn't dare subject them to a second frisking."

"I should tell you," said Murphy, "that Magnam's wife isn't American. She's an English actress."

"She is? Well, go after her."

"What I'm doing is getting Miss Andrews out of the kidnapers' hands. When I do that I'll have the necklace thieves. Chew on that, boss."

WITH Enid in the hands of criminals for two days, Rambler Murphy was waiting in the ante-room at Luigi's for Mrs. R. Morton Magnam. He was there because of an item in the dossier of Mrs. Magnam, which had come in response to a cable to London. Mrs. Magnam had been a girl of good family—Rathburn was her maiden name—but she had taken another when she went on the stage. She had never been a star, just a good comedienne. The thing which interested the

reporter was that she had been a house guest on several occasions of the Duchess of Tranmore in Devonshire and had met her husband at the Tranmore home. That, of course, explained her presence at the Rutledge dinner, not that her husband was a business associate of Rutledge, as the police and Murphy had taken for granted.

But, in their conversation at the Magnam residence, she had spoken scoffingly of duchesses in general and this one in particular. Another item also interested him. The Magnams had been in London only two months back. Mrs. Magnam was the only person at that dinner whom Murphy had decided could possibly be a confederate of the duchess in the necklace plot. On the other hand she was wealthy and, for her to risk wealth and social position to join hands with thieves and murderers, seemed incredible.

He was nervous as he waited, lest she fail to come. Possibly she had forgotten the engagement. If something better turned up there was no question she would let the supposed insurance man cool his heels. No—she was entering the place.

She was strikingly handsome in a tailor-made suit of white and black checks with a white, mannish, felt hat. Her black eyes spied him instantly. He hastened to her, forcing a smile.

"How are you?" she asked, indifferent to his reply. "A stool at the bar first, I'm parched."

It took three bacardi cocktails to quench her thirst. Murphy contented himself with one. They were the only ones at the bar.

"Let me pay," she said carelessly. "I know you have no money."

"I can manage."

"In London, when a woman takes a boy out, she pays her share, and, if he's stony, the whole chit," she told him.

"I'm not very stony," he said as he paid. "Shall we lunch?"

She glanced nervously round and nodded with satisfaction. There were only four other guests—all frumps.

"A topping hide-away," she remarked. "I must make a note of this place."

WHEN they were seated and had ordered, her bold eyes appraised him. What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "You look done in. I suppose you have a mistress—probably several."

"I do a lot of reading at night, too much, sometimes," he said evasively. "I don't happen to have any women friends."

"How nice for me. Ever met my husband?"

He shook his head.

"He's the biggest bore on two continents. Filthy rich, but stingy. He distrusts me and won't give me an allowance. Of course I can charge things, and how I do! Now, tell me all about yourself."

"How is the duchess taking her great loss?" he evaded.

"How should I know?" she asked indifferently.

"I thought you might have seen her since the dinner party. You knew her in London, didn't you?"

"Actresses and duchesses aren't apt to be acquainted. Did I hear you order champagne?"

"You will." He ordered a bottle. She laughed. "Champagne is one of my vices. Good-looking and naive young men are another."

Why did she deny acquaintance with the noblewoman at whose house she had met her husband, Murphy wondered. He answered her remark lightly, and tried to cope with her line of airy persiflage. In the middle of luncheon he asked permission to leave her to telephone.

"Hurry back, dear boy," she said cheerfully.

He phoned Captain Laughlin, who was waiting for the call at his office.

"She showed up," Murphy said. "Send up Adams of the gem squad to hang around outside until we come out. Have him look her over carefully and find out if he's ever seen her with any jewel thief of his acquaintance. I think she circulates a lot."

Mrs. Magnam drank most of the bottle of champagne and lingered over her lunch.

"I've had a lovely time," she said at length. "People are calling at my place about four and I must go home and change my costume. I wish I could invite you to the house but it's impossible. At our next luncheon you will be my guest. I insist."

"Well, if you insist. Must you go?"

She was drawing on her gloves. "Really I must, dear boy."

"Can I take you home?"

"Better not. I'll call a taxi outside."

He escorted her to the curb. He saw Lieutenant Adams, the jewel expert, a dapper little man wearing gold pince-nez who suggested, in no respect, a police official. Adams was leaning against the low iron fence of the areaway of the converted residence occupied by Luigi. A taxi came rolling up.

Murphy placed the great lady in the cab, lifted his hat and stood politely until the car had driven off. Adams stepped to his side.

"Seen her before?" Murphy asked eagerly of the lieutenant.

"Yes," replied Adams. "I've seen her having tea at the Ritz with Ralph Jervis but he's not on the 'suspect' list. He operated a chain of second-class jewelry stores extending across the country, or did. They went into a receiver's hands a year ago."

"Is he an Englishman?"

"American, but he used to travel a lot. The customs watched him closely but they never actually caught him trying to smuggle."

"Know where he lives?"

"Sure. At the Blitz Towers."

The Rambler looked thoughtful. "His shops are in a receiver's hands, but he still lives at the Blitz."

Adams laughed. "Those fellows never give their creditors a break but that's not police business."

"Think he ever bought stolen goods?"

"Well, a lot of supposedly reputable jewelers do. It's so easy to take gems out of stolen settings and reset them, and they can't resist bargain prices. Going downtown?"

"No, I think I'll go over to the East Side."

CHAPTER FOUR

Murphy Burgles the Blitz

ADDISON FRANCIS MURPHY sat in his apartment an hour later. He was biting his nails when the doorbell rang and he was surprised to find Captain Laughlin on the threshold.

"I've a bit of information, Murphy," the captain said, seating himself on the sofa, handy to a bottle of Scotch which stood on a low table beside it. "The taxi which drove away with the Magnam woman had a plainclothesman disguised as the chauffeur. We're in a jam on this case and when you told me this woman had been an English actress and had known the duchess abroad, I thought it might be well to keep an eye on her. I know she's rich as mud but she's the only possible suspect aside from the servants. Their records are good, by the way. All of them."

"Well?"

"She gave the driver her home address but, when crossing Fifty-seventh Street, changed it to the Blitz Towers. She paid off the cab there and went in. After a few minutes my man entered and said to the clerk, 'I just brought a lady here and,

after she left I found a glove on the seat. Know her name and where she went?' The clerk told him she went to Seven Seventy-four and phoned up.

"She said she hadn't lost a glove. The dick went outside and asked the doorman the name of the party in Seven Seventy-four. He explained that he was supposed to call back after a lady who had gone up there and had forgotten the name he was to call. The doorman told him a Mr. Jervis lives in that suite."

"Jervis, the jeweler!" exclaimed Murphy. "Lieutenant Adams said he had seen her lunching with him."

"Yep," assented the captain. "He reported that to me. Now here's a stolen necklace and one of the guests is very chummy with a jeweler."

"And one whose business is in a receiver's hands," added Murphy.

"If she's one of the crooks," remarked the captain, "it's funny she made a date with you when you told her you were connected with the insurance company that insured the necklace."

Murphy grinned. "Maybe she wanted to find out how much or how little I knew, Captain Laughlin. If this Jervis has the necklace, it was he or his hirelings who kidnaped Enid Andrews. I'm going up and throttle the truth out of him. Suppose he's keeping Enid a prisoner in the Blitz Towers—the last place anybody would think to look for her."

"Cool off," suggested the police captain. "The Blitz is the best-protected apartment hotel in New York. It's a cinch she's not there. He couldn't get her in."

Murphy brooded. "You're probably right. She isn't there, but he is. And that's where the necklace is. If I get it, he'll have to produce Enid."

"Old man," said Laughlin warmly, "I know how you feel, but listen. I worked on a case at the Blitz Towers a year ago. Nobody can get to an apartment without being invited up. All visitors are closely watched. Why, a delivery man with a package has to be announced. He is accompanied by a bellboy who goes with him to the apartment door. The elevator is stopped on the floor and the elevator man keeps his eye on them. He watches until both the delivery man and the bellboy come back. If they remain more than a minute or two, he touches an alarm button and the whole establishment, which includes a few strong arms, are warned to stand by. Those tenants pay for protection and they get it."

"Nevertheless, I'm going to get into that apartment."

"Inside every apartment door is an alarm. Try to get in."

"All right. I'll wait until tonight."

Murphy crossed to the telephone, opened the phone book and looked up a number. He dialed it.

"Blitz Towers?" he asked. "This is Mr. Ashton speaking. I am looking for an apartment. Have you any vacancies? . . . What size? . . . Well, not too large . . . Yes, three rooms would be all right. I don't want to go above the seventh or eighth floors. I'd like to move in early this evening. Three hundred a month? I can't take a year's lease. Yes, I'd sign up for six months. Certainly, I'll have references. I'll drop round in an hour or two."

He hung up, grinned at his friend. "I'll show you how to get into the Blitz Towers."

"You'll pay eighteen hundred dollars," marveled the police captain. "And suppose you're a tenant—that won't admit you to Jervis's apartment. And we're only guessing that he has anything to do with this case."

"I'd spend my last cent," Murphy said grimly. "Man, I've got to have action or go stark mad. I admit we have nothing at all on Jervis, but I've a hunch I'll get something. As a tenant, at least I won't have flunkies pursuing me while I study the lay of the land."

He grinned at the police official. "You'll have to cook up the references."

AT the Blitz Murphy was received by the renting-agent in an ornate office. Floor plans were produced. As he inspected them he look for the "twenty-four" apartments, which were located on the south side of the building on the side street. That of Jervis, on the seventh floor, was the third apartment from the front of the building. It was a three-room apartment with a kitchen. In addition to the master's entrance there was a service door which opened into the kitchen.

"Our clerk, in talking with you on the phone, made a mistake," the agent told Murphy. "There is nothing vacant on the sixth, seventh and eighth. There is a three-room apartment on the ninth. It's very attractive and gets the sun, being on the south side of the building."

"I'll take it."

A clerk accompanied "Mr. Ashton" from the lobby of the Blitz Towers to his apartment.

"Now, that you are one of guests, sir," he said, "I must explain our system of apartment protection. Some of the richest people in America live here and every precaution is taken to prevent robbery or intrusion. We ask our guests never to open their doors at an unannounced ring. See here." He pointed to a perforated disk beside the front door. "You can converse with anybody without opening the door, by the loud-speaker system.

"Now, this way, sir."

He led the new tenant into the bed chamber and opened a narrow closet door. Two feet within was a large wall-safe. He revealed a cleverly masked push-button. "Opening the door causes a photo-electric eye device to function it. If you have something valuable in the safe, touch this button before entering, otherwise an alarm will ring in the office. If you have nothing in the safe of importance, turn this switch to shut off the radio beam."

He led the reporter about the apartment and revealed a dozen spots where an alarm could be given in case of trouble—a fourth pedal on the piano, a carved protuberance on the bedstead, a button on the base of the telephone. Murphy carefully noted all these gadgets.

"A rise in the room temperature, in case of fire, gives the alarm," he added. "Everything is automatic. Since this place has been built, there has never been a robbery. Now, I'll give you the combination of your safe."

"I bet you get a lot of false alarms," remarked the new tenant. The clerk smiled. "Between ourselves, the system is a nuisance, but a great selling argument. No unauthorized person could get above the lobby, anyway."

After he had gone Murphy went about further familiarizing himself with the system of protection of Blitz Towers apartments. He was grateful to the management for explaining them. Without the information thus received, his effort to break into the apartment of another tenant would inevitably fail.

He had observed that on the front door there was a small panel which opened and served as a peep-hole through which those within could inspect a caller before opening the door. There was no peep-hole on the service door. The doors were very stout, the walls solid, and almost sound proof. Murphy was sure he was not hungry, but he phoned downstairs, ordered dinner sent up and forced himself to eat a little. Then he went out and did an errand.

AT nine o'clock, minus his hat, Murphy left his apartment. There was a bulge inside his jacket. The steel fire-escape-staircase entrance was almost opposite the door of his apartment. He descended to the seventh floor, opened the door a few inches and made certain that nobody was

in the corridor before he stepped out of the fire-escape landing. He moved swiftly, passed the row of elevator entrances and paused before the service entrance of 774. He pressed the bell with one of the fingers of his left hand and waited.

A male voice, speaking it seemed almost at his ear, demanded: "Who's there and what's wanted?"

"Radiogram for Mr. Jervis."

"Just a minute," came through the loud speaker from the person inside the closed door.

Murphy heard a chain being removed, then the door was opened six inches. A serving man's suspicious face was visible. The Rambler's right hand had drawn what resembled somewhat an old fashioned horse-pistol from inside his coat, while his left hand went to his face. He threw his left shoulder against the partly opened door as he pulled the trigger. There was no report but something like fine spume poured out of the muzzle. Before he staggered back, both hands pressed against his eyes, the servant glimpsed a hideous false face—it was actually a gas mask.

Murphy had secured from Laughlin a new police invention, a pocket tear-gas gun, quite unlike the bulky weapons in general police use.

The unfortunate servant was overpowered, his face twisting with distress, his eyes streaming, his hands endeavoring to protect them. And, to make use of any of the protective devices, was the last thing which occurred to him.

The reporter was inside, the door closed, his back against it. He thrust the now useless gas pistol in the waistband of his trousers, and drew a small automatic.

"Where's Jervis?" he demanded.

"He's out to dinner," blundered the victim of tear gas.

"You alone in the apartment?"

"Yes," sobbed the man. "I'm going blind, I am."

"You'll be all right presently. Lie down on the floor."

The man hastened to place himself flat on his back. The Rambler pulled from his back pocket a ball of almost unbreakable fishline and proceeded to bind the poor devil hand and foot.

"Let out one yip and I'll gag you," he said harshly. To be gagged, when he was already in agony, was a frightful threat. The servant made no outcry.

LAUGHLIN had not believed Murphy could get into the Jervis apartment. Well, he was in. Question, would it do him any good, and could he get out? He passed from the kitchen through a pantry into a small but beautifully appointed dining-room. This opened into the living-room. There was a desk in a corner. He seated himself at it and removed the gas mask. Already the small dose of tear gas had been absorbed and destroyed by the atmosphere. He carefully inspected the contents of the unlocked desk.

He found a note from Mrs. Magnam inviting Jervis to tea, dated a week back. There was little correspondence and no other private papers in the desk. After a close inspection of the room he went into the bedroom. On the bureau stood a photograph in a silver frame, of a man whose face looked familiar. He was puzzled but suddenly remembered. It was the man who had been going into the Magnam house the other day as he was leaving and who had eyed him sharply. It was Jervis's photograph, of course. But it and the note in the desk only proved that he and Mrs. Magnam were friends, and Murphy was already aware of that fact.

Taking due precautions, he opened the door of the safe closet. Like his own upstairs, it was a very modern safe, and could be opened only by an expert box man.

Behind that steel door, he would have wagered his all, reposed the diamond

necklace of the Duchess of Tranmore, as much beyond his reach as though in the moon. He returned to the bureau and inspected a set of gold toilet articles, including a gold-backed brush and comb. He found what he was looking for and uttered a pleased ejaculation.

It was time to attend to the tear-gassed servant. He went back to the kitchen and saw that the man was no longer suffering. He gazed pitifully up at the intruder.

"Let me up, will you?" he pleaded.

"Where did you and Jervis take that girl after you left the Hotel Pennfield?" Murphy demanded.

"Eh? I don't know what you're talking about. I'm just the valet here. Say, these cords hurt my wrist."

"How does this feel?" The Rambler grasped a thin lock of his jet-black hair and the fellow howled in pain. "What's the idea of that?" he demanded.

Instead of replying, the reporter inspected five or six hairs, picked a slip of scrap-paper out of the kitchen waste basket and carefully wrapped them in it, after which he put the little package in his left waistcoat pocket.

"Since you won't talk," he said significantly.

He produced a role of adhesive tape, picked up a knife from the sink where the man evidently had been washing dishes, clipped off a three-inch piece of tape. He then knelt at the man's head and despite his fierce protests fastened his lips together with the tape.

In his kneeling position, his back was toward the open pantry door. While talking with the servant he was sufficiently distant from the front door of the apartment so that he did not hear it open and shut. A man in evening dress had admitted himself with a key and listened intently when he heard the hum of voices. He closed the door noiselessly, tiptoed through the living-room and dining-room into the pantry. Without a sound he crept close to the kneeling man. From his breast pocket came a .38 caliber revolver. He clubbed it and brought it down fiercely upon the top of the head of the presumptive burglar. The Rambler rolled off the body of the servant and lay on his back on the kitchen floor. Ralph Jervis stared at the face of the unconscious man.

"I'll be damned," he ejaculated. "The reporter!"

WHEN the Rambler came to, he was lying on one of the twin beds in the chamber, bound hand and foot with cords from the ball of fishline he had brought with him and used to tie up the servant. Standing beside the bed was the recently trussed-up servant. He had Murphy's automatic in his hand.

"Your turn, eh?" he remarked with a nasty grin.

Murphy didn't answer. He was in the depths of abasement. After his ingenuity in obtaining entrance to this place, he had permitted himself to be caught napping. Of course it was Jervis who had knocked him out. If he had gagged the servant in the beginning, this wouldn't have happened. But the fellow was suffering from tear gas. It had seemed too brutal to gag him then.

A minute or two passed and the man in evening clothes, whom Murphy recognized as Jervis, came into the room.

"I have phoned for the police," he said grimly. "You'll get twenty years for breaking and entering."

"It won't wash," the Rambler retorted. "You know who I am and why I'm here."

"I have no words to bandy with a burglar," said Jervis stiffly. He went back into the living-room but left the door open. A quarter of an hour passed. A ring sounded at the front door. Jervis personally opened it. He led into the chamber two burly, hard-featured plainclothesmen.

"A burglar. Broke in and gagged and

bound my servant. I captured him. We both will appear against him. Take him away," instructed the jeweler.

One of them drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket while the other cut the Rambler's bonds. The bracelets were immediately slipped upon his wrists. He was roughly dragged to his feet.

As there was nothing to say, Murphy said nothing. At headquarters, of course, his newspaper influence would get him out of a bad mess. It was entirely possible that Jervis thought he had caught a common burglar at work. It was even possible that Jervis had no more to do with the theft of the necklace and the kidnaping of Enid than the Duke of Windsor. The Rambler, however, was only strengthened in his conviction of the man's guilt by what had happened. An ordinary citizen would not have risked creeping up on a burglar—or if the citizen had a gun, he would have let fly at him from a safe distance. More likely than attempting a personal capture, he would have made use of the establishment's vaunted alarm system.

There were two house attendants in the corridor. They conducted the officers and their prisoner to the service elevator and led them out of the building by the service door.

A taxicab was waiting. They roughly pushed the prisoner into it. The cab started off at a rapid clip. At the end of ten minutes Addison Francis Murphy understood. They had traveled three times as far as was necessary to reach a police precinct house and they were not going to headquarters because they were headed uptown.

CHAPTER FIVE

Padded Cell

THE Rambler extended compliments and applause to Ralph Jervis. He had phoned to a couple of his henchmen to impersonate officers, then notified the management of the hotel that he had caught a burglar and was holding him for the police. The two yeggs had been escorted to the apartment by the exceedingly careful management. As Murphy had been taken out by the service exit from the building, the management was unaware that the burglar was the new tenant from the ninth floor. The trick was so clever that it had even deceived the astute reporter.

No word was spoken. By and by, the car crossed the new Triborough Bridge. Murphy was greatly concerned. It was highly propable, that when the destination was reached, he was due to be knocked on the head.

They passed through thickly settled sections into open suburbs and drew up finally before a large house set back from the road and masked by oak trees. The car stopped.

"Get out," commanded his taciturn captors.

The Rambler stepped out. There was a sign beside the deep front entrance—a small sign. *Dr. Walter's Private Asylum.*

His heart gave a leap. This was where Enid had been taken. He would be under the same roof. But he protested for form's take. "What's this?" he demanded. He was hit in the face by a big fist, then rushed into the doorway.

A crafty-looking, brown-mustached man, in a white uniform, met them.

"So this is the padded-cell case," he said, smiling sardonically. "Does he need a strait-jacket?"

Both Murphy's captors laughed. One of them said: "It's up to you, Doc."

"Well, we'll see how he behaves. Bring him this way."

The Rambler's captors followed the doctor into a small room, equipped as an office, at the right side of the hall. The doctor tapped the prisoner's pockets, removed his wallet, his keys and drew two

letters from his breast pocket. They were business letters, of no importance.

"All right," he said. "We'll lock him up." Murphy had not wasted his breath in protest. Actually he was in high spirits. He had not let himself believe that they had killed Enid, but there had been a gnawing fear. Discovery of this place fully persuaded him that the girl was alive, and an inmate. And, if she were alive, there was hope.

They left the office and, in the hall, were joined by an orderly, a huge, red-faced, broad-shouldered brute, in a dirty white uniform, who looked as if beating up "nuts" would give him pleasure. He carried a policeman's club in his right hand.

"You men wait here," he instructed the men who had brought Murphy.

"Well, so long, bozo," said one of the alleged officers with a hearty laugh. "You're in for a long stretch."

MURPHY followed the doctor, and the orderly trailed after, up a flight of stairs along a corridor towards the rear of the house. They went up a back staircase and the doctor unlocked a door, whereupon the man behind him pushed the reporter into a small room, the four walls of which were heavily padded. There was a small window, which was barred, and the bars, also, were padded. The furnishings consisted of a narrow cot, a commode with a crockery washbowl and pitcher. There were two filthy towels on a rack. The door was closed and locked and he was left in the dark.

He sat down on the cot. He wondered why they bothered to incarcerate him when they could have shot him in the taxi and thrown his body in the river. He had had no expectation, after discovering that the cab was not headed for a police station, of being alive as long as this.

It meant that Jervis did not have the "killer" instinct. And, if Enid and himself were kept here for a year or two and then escaped, what would be the consequences to Jervis? He would have had time to cash in on the necklace and thoroughly cover his tracks. In all probability he would have vanished from the New York scene and be living comfortably in hiding abroad.

There had been no thought of murder or violence originally. The duchess would have kept her mouth shut, collected her insurance and gone back to England. But the loss of the necklace had caused the fox to become a wolf.

The problem now was to get out of here.

Murphy did not think of sleep but sat up all night considering methods of escape and discarding them. The dawn had come some time before he was aware of it, because the window was boarded up and light entered only through cracks between the boards.

They had left him his fountain pen and a pencil after a rather perfunctory search. His gun was back in Jervis's apartment. On his person was nothing of value in this emergency. His eyes roamed around the room. It was filthy dirty. Whoever had swept it had merely broomed the dust into corners and left it there. The padding on the wall was almost black with dirt.

He crossed and picked up the pitcher standing on the washstand. This was well-speckled with dirt, also, and was empty. He gazed at it in an abstracted fashion, then carried it with him back to the cot and sat down with it between his knees, its bottom uppermost.

What he did then would have persuaded an alienist that a padded cell was exactly where Addison Francis Murphy belonged. He unscrewed the top of his fountain pen—it had been filled recently—emptied its contents upon the bottom of the water pitcher and proceeded to smear the ink with his fingers over the surface of the pitcher.

AT EIGHT o'clock a key turned in the lock of the prisoner's door. The room was still in semi-darkness because of the boarded window. The burly orderly thrust the door open with his knee. He had in his right hand a revolver and in his left a tin tray upon which was a soup plate of oatmeal and milk and a cup of black coffee. The inmate lay on the cot, his bed clothes pulled up so only the upper part of his head was visible.

"Wake up, you," growled the orderly. The prisoner did not stir. The man stooped and poked at the form in the bed with the muzzle of his revolver. And the Rambler stepped out from behind the door and brought the heavy wash bowl down on top of his head with such force that it smashed into smithereens. The tray dropped to the floor, the attendant pitched forward on top of the figure in the bed and Murphy snatched the revolver from his relaxing grip.

What the orderly thought was the back of his head, was the bulging lower part of the water pitcher, which Murphy had stained with ink and dust until, in the murk, it looked like hair. He had pushed the flat bottom against the pillow and had placed two commode drawers, end to end, beneath the blanket to suggest a human form.

Murphy darted into the hall, closed and locked the door. There was nobody on this floor. He sped down the back stairs. Coming down the corridor of the second floor was a bulky, hard-visaged nurse. She emitted a piercing scream. There were answering howls from female inmates of some of the rooms opening off the corridor. Murphy menaced the nurse with the revolver as he rushed past, and then he was plunging down the front stairs. A man, standing at the foot of the stairs, pulled a revolver from his pocket and fired at the escaping prisoner. Murphy's answering shot hit him in the right shoulder—the guard's bullet had gone wide. He dropped his revolver with a bellow of pain and ran bleeding down the corridor out of reach of another shot.

The proprietor of the asylum rushed out of his office, in his hand an automatic pistol. The reporter was almost upon him, his weapon leveled, and, with a horrified squeak, the doctor dropped his pistol to the floor. Murphy grasped him by the throat with his left hand and pressed the muzzle of the revolver against his forehead.

"Now where's the girl, you rat, quick," he snarled.

"I'll release her—for God's sake don't shoot," squealed the doctor.

With a gasp of relief, Murphy removed his hand from the throat of the scoundrel and stepped back. "Have her brought here," he commanded.

The doctor lifted a shrill, frightened voice. "Nurse Brown!" he cried. "Bring Number Fourteen down here immediately. Hurry! Hurry!"

Murphy, with the proprietor of the place, stood just outside the office door and about fifteen feet from the foot of the staircase. He was now in an agony of anticipation. He said hoarsely: "If you've drugged her or hurt her, I swear I'll put a bullet in you!"

"No, no," whined the terrified doctor. "She's all right—she hasn't been hurt."

A couple of minutes passed. Footsteps above. And then, at the head of the stairs —Enid Andrews! She was pale and frightened but, when she saw him, a glorious smile appeared upon her lovely face.

"Oh, Enid, my dear!" he cried. Beside himself with joy he rushed to the stairs and began to ascend.

"Look behind!" she screamed. The Rambler whirled. The doctor had snatched up his pistol and was taking aim. Murphy fired from the hip before the blast from the automatic could begin. His bullet hit the doctor in the chest and he fell on his face. Enid screamed again and then

she was at the Rambler's side. Together they ran to the front door, unbolted it, pulled it open and ran outside. As they raced toward the road, a shot was fired at them from a second-story window. It missed and no more shots followed. There was no pursuit.

As they reached the highway a car was approaching.

"Lift your thumb, darling," Murphy commanded. "They'll stop for you."

And the spectacle of the lovely blond creature with her thumb lifted was irresistible. The car stopped.

THEY sat in Captain Laughlin's office at headquarters two hours later in the morning and Murphy had told his tale.

"You had Jervis cold if you hadn't shot the doctor through the heart," Laughlin said. "Now we can't prove Jervis sent both you and the girl to the asylum. He'll claim he turned you over to men he supposed were officers and it's going to be hard to beat that. And it's only her word against his that he is the man who kidnaped her from the hotel. He'll have an alibi. And we still have no evidence that he has the necklace. Or, for that matter, that she had the necklace."

"That's what you think," retorted Murphy, laughing softly. He was in a happy mood. Enid had not been ill-treated at the asylum; she had had a nervous reaction but a doctor had given her a sleeping-potion and she was sound asleep in her bed at the Pennfield. It was not yet ten A. M. "Where's Jervis?"

"He returned to the Blitz about four A. M."

"Probably asleep. I think it unlikely anybody except the doctor knew of his connection with the asylum and the doctor is dead." He drew from his vest pocket two folded bits of paper. "This," he said, handing one to Laughlin, "contains hairs from his servant's head. This package contains hair I took from Jervis's comb and brush. If either of them prove to be identical with the hairs on Enid's brush, we have ample corroboration of her charge of having been kidnaped."

"Yes, but—"

"As the punishment for kidnaping is life, and for grand theft fifteen years or so, I expect Jervis will prefer to stand trial for theft and hope to get a few years off by turning in the necklace. You rush up there and make the pinch."

Laughlin hesitated and made his decision. "Right," he declared.

Murphy waited at headquarters until the captain telephoned in.

"Caught the weasel asleep," he declared. "He doesn't know yet that you and the girl escaped. He doesn't think we have a thing on him, and he's sure we can't make the warrant hold."

"That's great. I'm starting uptown on another angle of this case and I expect to be back here in an hour or two at the most."

"O. K. Your charge will be sufficient to hold him, but let's hope the hair tests turn out the way we want them."

Murphy hastened uptown and, in half an hour, was ringing the bell at the residence of R. Morton Magnam. The butler, this time, was decidedly unfriendly.

"Mrs. Magnam is asleep, sir," he said with heat. "Certainly I won't wake her."

"All right if you want to get her in trouble with her husband. Tell her Mr. Murphy is here with a terribly important message from Mr. Jervis."

The butler hesitated, looked worried and finally said: "Well, I'll see if she is awake."

In less than five minutes Mrs. Magnam, her blond hair awry, came down the stairs swiftly. Her face was flushed and her black eyes flashed angrily.

"Just what is this? Who do you think you are?" she asked furiously. "If you're presuming on certain things, you'll dis-

cover—" As she spoke she came close to him, one hand clasping the folds of a blue satin robe, which she had not taken time to fasten.

"The jig is up, Mrs. Magnam," he said softly. "Better take me where we can talk privately."

She opened the door of a small room at the right, then faced him, flaming. "I don't understand you," she faltered. "But come in here. Is this some blackmail scheme—"

"Mr. Jervis is in jail at headquarters, charged with the theft of the Tranmore necklace," he said sternly. "He says you stole it for him."

Her lips came together in a thin straight line. "Why, you—"

"I'll call headquarters on that phone there and let you talk with the captain in charge of the case if you like," he said quietly.

She sank into a chair. "This is a trick. And I liked you—I thought we were friends."

"The actual thief will be punished more heavily than the receiver of stolen goods," he told her. "If, on the other hand, he instigated the crime and you were merely his agent, your punishment will be lighter. That's why I'm giving you a chance."

She stared at him hard. "I believe you. All right, he made me do it."

"How could he?"

"I'm being blackmailed, Mr. Murphy," she said pitifully. "I could get no money from my husband. I'd known Jervis for years in England. I asked him for a loan. He refused but offered me twenty thousand dollars to steal the necklace at the Rutledge dinner. That's God's truth."

"Naturally the duchess was in the plot."

"I don't know," she said sullenly.

"How did you manage it? Of course the footman was one of his tools."

"No, Jervis didn't plan anything. He said it was up to me if I wanted the money. Before dinner, the necklace was passed from hand to hand and then the duchess asked me to fasten it on her neck once more. It had two fastenings—the original and a patent clasp. I didn't fasten the patent clasp. I thought I'd get a chance, later—of course I couldn't take it then."

"So when the footman created a diversion, you reached in back of Mr. Gannon and unfastened it and whisked it off."

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Guessed it. Why did the duchess ask you, particularly, to fasten it?"

"Well, I know her better than the others."

"But you told me at lunch that you didn't know her."

"Well, I wasn't admitting anything then."

"Of course it was easy for you to conceal it during the search."

"No trouble at all," she said with a nervous laugh. "Will I be arrested?"

"I would like to have you come to headquarters with me. I may be able to arrange your geting off easy if you'll testify against Jervis."

"I shall," she said harshly. "The brute would turn on me like a flash."

"Don't you think it rather probable that Her Grace knew the necklace was due to be stolen?"

"Look here, I know nothing except that I took the necklace and delivered it to Jervis in the lobby of the St. Regis."

"Will you come downtown with me?"

She sighed. "I suppose I must. What a fool I've been."

WHEN Murphy arrived with Mrs. Magnam at headquarters, the police experts had already decided that the hairs on Enid's hairbrush and those taken from Jervis's comb and brush were identical with hair pulled from the head of the suspect.

Confronted with Mrs. Magnam's statement as well as the scientific evidence of

the hair identity, Ralph Jervis quickly decided to return the necklace and take the rap for grand theft instead of kidnaping. In his confession he declared that the theft had been arranged with the duchess in England—that Her Grace deliberately had given Mrs. Magnam the opportunity to leave the patent clasp unfastened and had been fully aware of the removal of the necklace from her neck. He insisted that the footman had not been in his pay—that, if he hadn't slipped, the two women would have arranged a way to make the necklace disappear.

Powerful influences started to work at once. Jervis went into court and pleaded guilty so that the possibility of ducal complicity was not brought out at a trial. And the State accepted Mrs. Magnam as a witness instead of a fellow conspirator—more powerful influence. The woman lost her social position and her husband, but Jervis's confession saved her from going on the stand and admitting her own share in the crime.

Jervis's confession explained the strange incident of the week-end case containing the necklace, turning up in Enid's luggage.

A confederate of the jeweler named Walter Randall was taking the necklace to a former employee of Jervis's in Chicago to be broken up. Randall had a police record and found at the gate to the Chicago train a police sergeant of his acquaintance. He had placed the week-end case with Enid's luggage, having learned that she was going all the way West, and then boarded the train after submitting to search at the gate. To his dismay he found a detective on the train who stuck close to him and made it impossible for him to enter the girl's compartment and retrieve the suitcase. He had phoned Jervis long distance that she had left the train to return to New York and Jervis was forced to personally recover the necklace.

Jervis had been the man behind the door of Enid's room when Murphy entered so the reporter had no sight of him. His valet had been the masked man who held Enid's arms and had forced her to invite the reporter into a trap.

It came out at the trial that Doctor Walter's real name was Farqueson. With Enid Andrews on his hands, Jervis, who needed time to realize upon the necklace and who shrank from actual murder, had taken her out to Walters' Asylum and induced Walters, against whom Jervis had evidence of malpractice, to incarcerate her.

The *New York Globe,* of course, had an exclusive story upon the capture of the thief and the recovery of the necklace and Her Grace, the Duchess of Tranmore, took the next boat for home.

ADDISON FRANCIS MURPHY and Enid Andrews sat in her quarters at the Pennfield two evenings after the dramatic climax of the Tranmore investigation. She smiled at the Rambler very sweetly and there were tears in her eyes.

"I know you like me very much, Rambler," she said. "I'm sure you'd try to be a good husband but you wouldn't succeed."

"Enid," he said earnestly, "I'll settle down. I suffered tortures when they carried you off—"

"And you took desperate chances to rescue me," she told him gratefully. "You know I'm terrifically appreciative. As a rescuer of ladies in distress you have no equal, but, as a commuter—it won't do, Rambler. I figured it out before I signed the picture contract. I hope we'll always be friends, though."

"Oh, sure," he said sullenly.

"I have a chance to be a film star," she continued. "I'll finish this short subject and go to Hollywood. You'll go on being a wonderful newspaperman, but you'll keep on drifting. Now won't you?"

He grinned sheepishly. "I suppose so," he confessed.

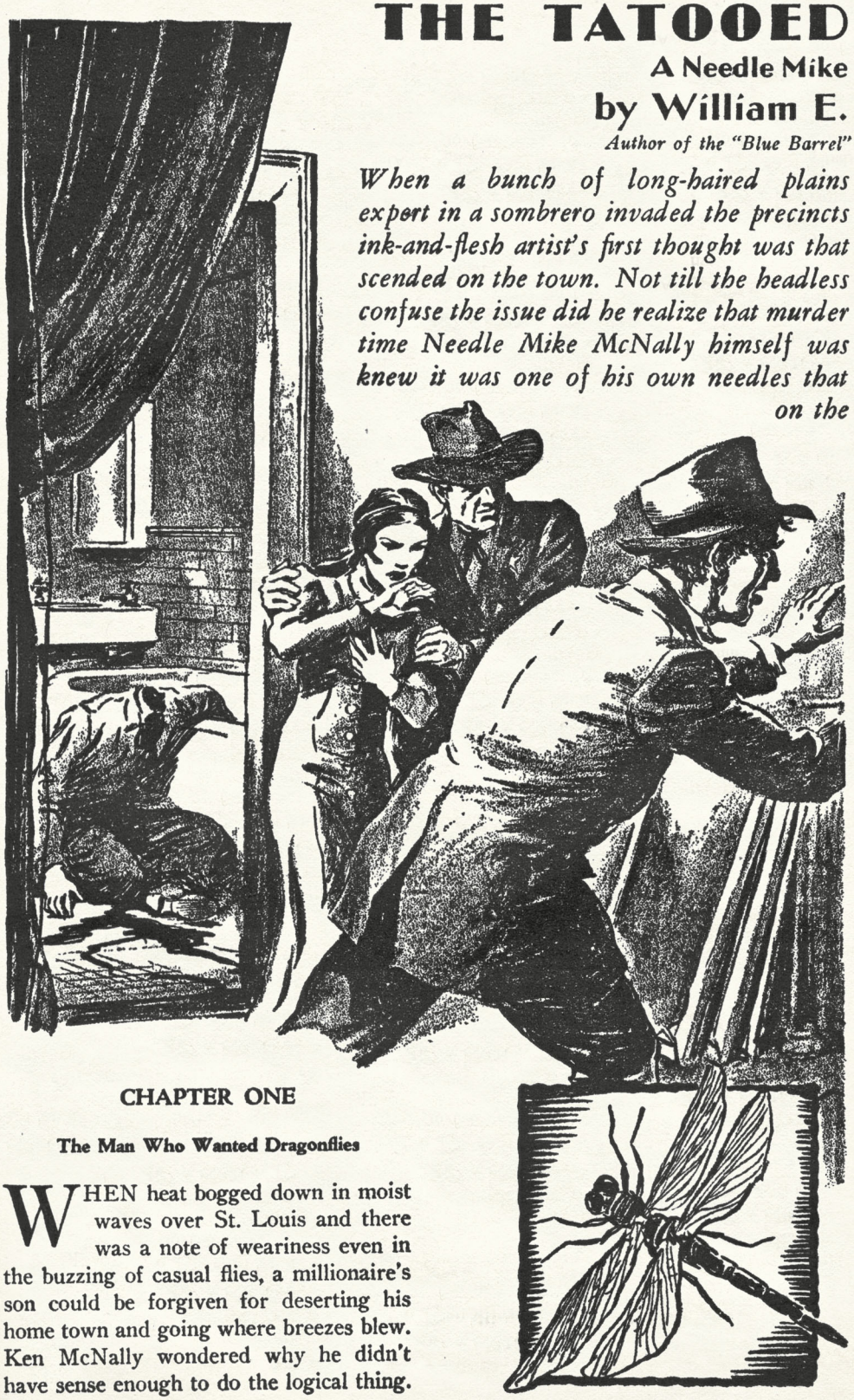
THE TATOOED

A Needle Mike

by William E.

Author of the "Blue Barrel"

When a bunch of long-haired plains expert in a sombrero invaded the precincts ink-and-flesh artist's first thought was that scended on the town. Not till the headless confuse the issue did he realize that murder time Needle Mike McNally himself was knew it was one of his own needles that on the



CHAPTER ONE

The Man Who Wanted Dragonflies

WHEN heat bogged down in moist waves over St. Louis and there was a note of weariness even in the buzzing of casual flies, a millionaire's son could be forgiven for deserting his home town and going where breezes blew. Ken McNally wondered why he didn't have sense enough to do the logical thing.

CHIEF

Story

Barrett

Stories, etc.

Indians and a trick-shot of South Broadway, the a wild-west show had de-red man popped up to was rampant. And by that on the spot—for the police had tattooed a dragonfly corpse.

The weather-beaten old stoic slashed the canvas to ribbons.

He was swatting flies instead of whipping them across a mountain stream, and he was living in a grimy South Broadway shop instead of at a luxurious summer resort. He wasn't even Ken McNally.

It was a game that he played with the gods of adventure.

Down on the fringe of the St. Louis underworld, he had long ago become a character indigenous to his surroundings —Needle Mike, tattoo artist, locksmith and reputed drunkard. He had taken on a ready-made appearance to fit his ready-made reputation. His measle scars became powder-burns, his dark hair was touseled and chemically streaked with gray, the

even white line of his teeth broken by a gleaming gold cap held in place by a specially made dental clip. The tan of his face had been chemically rinsed to a dirty yellow. A whiskey breath was easy to get and he had it, to bolster his reputation as a periodical drunkard and explain his long absences from the shop, when he was compelled to live for a time in the world to which he'd been born.

But now he was Needle Mike. He could never forget it down here. There was the grimy neighborhood and the grimier shop, his instruments spread upon a cracked marble table-top, his inks on open shelves, lurid design posters on the walls. There was, too, his limp.

Needle Mike was known along South Broadway as a gimp. He was lame and his lameness destroyed the characteristic walk of Ken McNally. McNally could never forget the limp because he had not left it to chance. He wore an ovular device of cork and rubber fastened about his right knee. It fitted snugly, and was responsible for the halt in his gait.

TONIGHT the city sweltered. Not a breeze stirred along the length of the Mississippi Valley. No one would be fool enough to submit to tattooing in such weather. It was a good time to take Needle Mike off on another "periodical drunk" and let Ken McNally get out of town.

He was considering the exodus when the door of the shop opened. A man stood for a moment on the threshold. McNally had not heard his step on the steaming pavement outside nor sensed his approach. It was as though he had materialized out of a heat wave.

"I have a job for you," he said.

He came into the room—a dark, tall, graceful man who moved without effort and whose voice carried a faint, scarcely perceptible accent. McNally grunted in the surly fashion of the old tattoo artist and sized his man up.

His first guess was, "a Mexican," but he knew that he was wrong almost as soon as he made it. The dark complexion of the man and the straight dull-black hair below the brim of his straw hat suggested the area south of the Rio Grande, but something in the jaw-line, the cheek-bones, and the flow of body movement said "Indian."

McNally hobbled across the room, took a pad from the drawer of his instrument table and spread it flat. He moistened the point of a stubby pencil with his tongue.

"Well, what's your name?" he said grumpily.

The stranger hesitated, pushed his hat slightly back from his forehead. He was immaculately clad in a gray tropical worsted, cream-colored shirt, gray-green necktie and white oxfords.

"What difference does my name make?"

"None to me, guy. The cops require it. It's the law. Lately, I keep records like a pawnbroker, see."

"O.K. The name is Jones. John Jones."

McNally grunted. "And you live at the same place, huh?"

For a moment the Indian grew tense. "What do you mean, same place?"

"Where all the Jones boys live—at a fictitious address."

"Sure. That's right."

"O.K. I don't know any different. What do you want needled into your hide?"

"A dragonfly. Like this."

The Indian reached for the pencil, frowned at the thick, wet point and then drew swiftly with sharp dexterous strokes that made McNally's eyes narrow thoughtfully. The dragonfly that appeared on the pad was perfect, a slender biplane insect with protruding eyes and small antennae. The man who had sketched it stepped back. McNally nodded his head.

"You can draw, mister."

"I can paint."

There was more than a correction in

the statement, there was pride. McNally shrugged. "I'll take your word for that. Where do you want the bug?"

"My forearm. Maybe, too, my shoulder."

McNally rose. He was no longer feeling the deadly moist heat of the night. There was a scent of mystery in the air, a hint of the unknown, the kind of thing that had lured him into this fantastic existence just as the steaming jungles of the tropics had lured other sons of wealthy fathers. He might never know the answer to this riddle, but it was amusing to speculate upon the possible reasons for a well-dressed, educated Indian's visit to his shop, for his assumed name and for the meaning of the dragonfly. Men who came in for a definite design that was not on the posters or in the catalogues, usually had definite reasons for being tattooed.

McNALLY spread his instruments on the table, laid out the cotton and the gauze that he used. He could feel the Indian's sharp eyes following every move.

The man seated himself, shifted uncomfortably. "How about the needle? It hurts?" he said.

"Sure it hurts." McNally looked up sharply. "You're an Indian aren't you?"

"Indians are human. They feel pain."

The man's answer slipped out, as though he had answered without taking thought. But he had admitted that he was Indian. McNally let his eyes drop again to the table. What, he wondered, had become of the stoicism that was supposed to be a part of Indian nature.

"I've had young kids take it without a grunt," he said. "It isn't any killing pain, you know."

"O.K." The Indian took a bottle from his hip pocket and tilted it. McNally looked up at the sound of the gurgle and the smell of whiskey. He saw the man lower the bottle and wipe his lips. For all of his desert tan, with its surface impression of physical fitness beneath, this Indian had traveled far from the hard trails of his fathers. There was a slackness about his lips and a sag in his features that were not chargeable to the years. McNally spat at the tin cuspidor beside the table.

"Maybe you need an anaesthetic, too," he growled.

The Indian put the bottle away slowly. "Maybe you get to work damn quick or you need an anaesthetic," he said.

The atmosphere was suddenly surcharged with hostility and the Indian was no longer a casual customer. With the whiskey in his stomach, he had become grim and vaguely menacing.

McNally nodded. "Lay your arm on the table."

The Indian complied and McNally went to work. He sketched the dragonfly lightly, then picked up his needle. The Indian didn't flinch when the point bit, nor did he change expression while McNally worked. He seemed more interested in the work itself and in McNally's skill than in any pain that it caused him. It was something to ponder on. The anticipation of a painful experience bothered him, the experience did not. McNally wondered if the white man had taught this Indian to fear where his ancestors had taught him to endure. It was an idea.

When the job was finished, McNally straightened. "Do you want the shoulder now?"

"No. Do the other forearm."

"The same design?"

"Just the same." The man laid his left arm on the table, his forearm bared.

McNally was finishing the sketch when the front door opened. The Indian's arm twitched and he jerked his head around to look over his shoulder.

The intruder was a professional at the business of intrusion. Short, excessively thin, his blurry features split by an assured, insolent grin, Skeeter was a perennial pest. Whether he was in rags and re-

duced to selling papers for "coffee-and" or riding some chiseling racket and vastly overdressed, Skeeter made a hangout of Needle Mike's. He was impervious to hints, oblivious of moral issues and never apologetic. The idea that anyone might prize privacy never occurred to him.

"Harya, Mike?" he said.

The Indian looked sharply across the table. "Tell him to go to hell," he growled.

"He won't go. I've told him." McNally frowned at the doorway, his thumb jerking a command. "Scram!" he said. "I'm busy."

Skeeter rocked back and forth, looked at the customer and saw nothing very interesting. Forearm jobs, as he had discovered long ago, were likely to run anywhere from half a dollar to two bucks. Skeeter never wasted his talents within such ranges.

"Sure," he said. "I just came in to tell you there's a cowboy up the block that's shooting the Greek out of all the cigars in the place. It's a good show, Mike—"

"Scram!"

"O.K."

SKEETER banged the door behind him, drifted out into the current of drowsy life that was South Broadway. The muscles were ridged hard in the Indian's arm.

"Lock that door," he said.

"Why? I lose customers if I do."

"You lock it. I pay you double."

McNally shrugged. He always bargained with his customers, never admitted anything or conceded anything, and was never cheerful. It was by such behavior that he had gained acceptance for Needle Mike. A man who is invariably crusty, insulting and disagreeable can get away with much that a man with just an occasional grouch would get slapped down for attempting.

"You ain't taking that cowboy stuff seriously?" he said. "Anybody that shoots a gun is a cowboy to Skeeter."

"What do I care about cowboys?"

"I can't even guess."

They settled down to work again, but not until after the Indian had insisted on the wide green shade being drawn low on the front window. McNally worked deftly with the needle and the Indian watched him, but there was greater tension in the red man now than had been present during the tattooing of the first design. He seemed anxious to get it over and get away. Whether the intrusion of Skeeter accounted for his anxiety or whether the expert marksman at the shooting-gallery up the block was responsible for his nervousness, McNally didn't know. He did know that the legend of Indian stoicism was taking an awful beating. There was damn little of the stoic in the man with the dragonflies.

"That's all." McNally rose from his chair. "You get some cloverine salve at a drug store and rub it every night. It will be pretty clear inside of a week."

"Sure." The Indian rolled down his sleeve and reached for his coat. He paused with his coat in his hand. "You tear up that card you made out," he said suddenly.

"Huh? Why should I do that?"

"It's no good. The name is Long Wolf."

McNally looked at the man's face. The Indian met his eyes and McNally had a hunch that this time the name was correct. It was something to think about on a hot night. Between the time that he came in and the completion of the job, Long Wolf had decided against following his original plan of covering his identity with a phoney name.

"Long Wolf sounds better. I've got too many Jones cards. The cops get sarcastic."

Long Wolf shrugged into his coat. "Show me another way out of here," he said.

"Why?"

"My business."

"O.K."

McNally picked up the bill that the In-

dian dropped on his table and wadded it into his hip pocket. He did have other ways out of the shop and the fact was apparent to anyone. One door led into the locksmithing-shop next door where McNally carried on a sideline business to tattooing. Another door led into the rear room where he had a bed and a dresser and an old surgical table which he used when he tattooed elaborate designs which took hours in the doing. A third door led into a narrow hallway from which stairs ascended to furnished apartments on the floors above. McNally crossed the room and drew the heavy bolt on the side door into the hallway.

"There you are," he said, "and take your pick. To your left and you come out on Broadway, to your right and you come out on an alley."

Long Wolf grunted and turned to the right. McNally closed the door slowly and stepped back into the room. He liked puzzles and he didn't like to see doors close on possible solutions. A jittery Indian was intriguing enough but the dragonflies, and the seemingly impulsive shift in names from Jones to Long Wolf, suggested backstage drama in the Indian's life.

McNally pushed his work table against the wall without bothering to clean up. He was conscious of the heat again and in his effort to dispel the irritation caused by the unsolved riddle of the Indian his mind turned to Skeeter. It might be interesting to stroll up the block to the shooting-gallery and see what kind of darned fool was burning powder on a night like this.

THE pavements literally steamed, but there was a knot of people three doors down the block and the muffled bang of shots. McNally joined the group and elbowed his way forward in the fashion of one to whom the rights of others mean little or nothing. He stopped close by Skeeter's elbow and Skeeter grinned.

"The fathead has stopped taking cigars and is shooting for love," he said.

McNally looked at the "fathead". He saw a young, broad-shouldered, bronzed man of medium height who wore store clothes in a way that made them seem out of place. He held a pistol in each hand and fired without seeming to take aim, but he was cracking pipes with monotonous regularity off a revolving wheel with one gun, while he sank moving ducks with the other.

"He never misses. I don't see where a guy like that gets his money's worth," Skeeter mumbled, shaking his head.

McNally grunted. "He's probably homesick, mug. This is the only place that makes him think of where he's from."

"Uh-huh . . . Guy needs a haircut, too."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"He'll probably bring that head full of hair into my place and I'll lose money on him."

"Your place?"

"Sure. It's a racket. Come on. I'll tell you about it."

McNally shrugged, elbowed his way back through the crowd. He wasn't finding the man with the guns as interesting as the others seemed to find him. The man just banged away and there was no showmanship in him. He acted as though he were completely unaware of the gawking crowd.

"O.K.," McNally said. "Spill it."

"It's a college, Mike. I'm head of it." Skeeter grinned lopsidedly. He was dressed in loud but dapper fashion and there was an odor of money about him.

"A college? You?"

"Sure. Barber college. Guys pay me money to learn how to be barbers and other guys pay me money to get barbered. I just mingle them together and collect two ways."

"You would. And who teaches the barber trade?"

"I do. What I don't know, I can guess. All a guy needs anyway is a lot of practice. I give it to him."

McNally sighed. This was on a par with some of Skeeter's previous efforts. Skeeter had sought wealth and opportunity in chain letters and mail-order schemes, in cult promotion, matrimonial bureaus and marijuana, as well as in blackmail, larceny and lush-rolling. A barber college was new but not startling.

Skeeter lit a cigarette. "They got a lot of practice today. More than they'll get out of that guy with the guns even. An Indian came in. Long hair like wire and full of sand."

"An Indian?" McNally stopped short.

Skeeter's eyes narrowed. "Mean anything to you, Mike?"

"Not a thing."

"O. K. We won't talk about him then. If you're interested, we talk about him for two bucks."

McNally cursed. He should have known better than to show interest in anything that Skeeter said. There was a price even on a comment about the weather if the comment rested with Skeeter and anyone else wanted to hear it.

"You won't say anything worth two bucks in the next two years," McNally growled.

He turned into his own shop with Skeeter's derisive laugh ringing in his ears. He had been forced too often to buy information from Skeeter, and Skeeter could well afford to laugh. McNally wasn't, however, thinking about the little chiseler.

Long Wolf had been too well dressed and too fastidious to be a barber-college customer. That meant that there was at least one other Indian in the vicinity of South Broadway. And down the block there was a man with a couple of guns in his fists who had never learned trigger-work in a shooting-gallery.

McNally shook his head. "A regular wild-west show," he said. "Now, I wonder. . . ."

CHAPTER TWO

The Riddle of the Headless Red Man

THE lights along South Broadway were extinguished early when King Humidity reigned. People who lived in small, furnace-like rooms or worked in dingy, airless shops gave up the struggle and sought the roofs or the levee. McNally sat in a rickety chair, his feet resting on another equally shaky. He made occasional passes with a rolled newspaper at the flies.

"Why in blazes don't I blow out of here?"

He asked the question of himself irritably but did nothing. Some hunch held him. The heat was too intense to last. It would break eventually with a couple of blasts of thunder and a wild beating of the elements. Before it broke, however, human passions and emotions would let go. There was always crime and violence at the peak of weather like this and—

Sharp, hard-hitting heels tapped along the all-but-deserted pavement and McNally squinted out into the pool of light from the nearest street-lamp. The shadowy form of a woman hesitated there for a moment as though scanning store fronts, then came straight to McNally's door.

McNally's feet came down from the chair as the door opened. His eyes widened momentarily, then narrowed. His visitor had closed the door and was standing against it, her breath not quite even, the muscles of her face taut as though from strain.

In the pale light of the forty-watt drop-lamp, the girl's face glowed with warm color. She appeared to be no more than twenty—slender, intense, dark-eyed. Standing there, she gave the impression of holding herself erect by sheer muscular force. McNally had an idea that if Nature had not given her a skin of rich

tint, she would be deathly pale. Her clothes were city clothes, trim, neat, stylish—but beneath the badge of civilized conformity, there beat the heart of an Indian. She epitomized her race at its best—erect, straight-shouldered, fine-featured.

"You did work this afternoon? Two tattooes. . . ." Her voice had a slight hesitation in it, like the voice of a child remembering words. The words themselves were without accent.

McNally frowned. "This evening, it was. Three hours or so ago. Two dragonflies."

"For whom?"

"He called himself Long Wolf."

The girl took a half-step, swayed gently, then backed to the door again for support. Her facial muscles were still tautly drawn but she did not break.

"You would know your work? There must be no mistake . . . ."

She was clutching at a straw of some kind and McNally had a premonition of grim tragedy. "What do you mean, mistake?"

"Come with me, please. I will show you."

She was fumbling with her purse, undecided whether the occasion called for the offer of money. McNally shook his head. He had to play Needle Mike to the hilt and never deviate from the demands of the role.

"I can't go places with strange women," he growled, "It's no dice."

"You must. I must know." She stopped suddenly and stepped away from the door. "You'll be in trouble over that tattoo if you don't come. I promise you."

Her fierceness was in contrast to her desperation. There was sudden fire in her eyes and McNally knew that he was not only listening to a threat, but to a threat that was backed up. This girl held the key to big trouble, somehow, and she was desperate enough to use it.

McNally shrugged his shoulders. "I don't get in trouble over jobs I do," he growled. "They're clean jobs."

She stood straight, without speaking, but her eyes were eloquent, power concentrated behind the warm light in them.

McNally lifted his coat from the back of a chair. "Well, I'll go along," he said. "I'm trusting you—see."

It was ungracious, as Needle Mike would be ungracious. But Ken McNally would not have passed up the opportunity of following this story through under any circumstances. It might still be a wild-west show but it was no longer mere blood-and-thunder. This beautiful girl invested it with something else.

PATIENTLY she waited while McNally turned out his light and locked the door. Once outside, she started up the block. She moved with effortless grace but she was a hard pace-setter for a man with a stiff leg. McNally tried to slow her down with his voice.

"That fellow's name was Long Wolf," he said. "What's yours?"

"Golden Veil," she said quickly. Almost as swiftly, she stopped and turned. "Forget that. My American name is Rose Vale. You spell it V-a-l-e."

"O.K."

McNally paced along with her. They turned a corner off South Broadway and headed toward the Mississippi levee. There was a two-story house just a couple of doors from the corner—a house with a shoemaker's shop on the ground floor and living quarters on the floor above. The cobbler's shop was closed and dark.

The girl's feet slowed as though reluctant to continue, then she stepped through the doorway and started up a flight of narrow stairs to a dim-lit landing on which a feeble gas jet burned.

At the head of the stairs she paused again with a marked stiffening of her body that conveyed, once more, an impression of muscular effort. She turned her head

to make sure that McNally was following her, then gripped the knob of a time-scarred door and stepped into a room that was rosy with light from a single floor lamp. McNally crossed the threshold warily, conscious of the fact that his heart was pounding against his ribs.

The room was quiet, orderly. One broken chair set carefully against a wall and a broken picture with the glass fragments piled tidily beside it on a low table, gave testimony to the fact that the room might not always have been as neat, but there was nothing else. McNally let the air escape from his lungs in a relieved sigh. He had been prepared for almost anything but this.

The room was furnished as a studio. There were a few flimsy wicker pieces scattered about—a table cluttered with odds and ends of brushes, pencils and tubes of paint—two Navajo rugs and a large canvas set upon an easel.

McNally's eyes riveted to the canvas. The light from the pink-shaded floor lamp touched it softly and no stage director could have planned the presentation better. On a rock overlooking a blue-shrouded valley stood a nude Indian maiden, her hands raised above shoulder level in the traditional gesture of prayer. Above her were white clouds, beneath her the gray of the rock merging into yellow soil, behind her the black shadow where the rock lay beneath concealing brush.

Poised above her and slightly behind her was a dragonfly!

McNally's brow furrowed. He had been in the Southwest and he had seen the sand paintings of the desert dwellers. There was no sand in this painting but the symbolism of the sand workers was in it. The color arrangement was no accident. Blue was the South and black the North, white the East and yellow the West. It had always been thus with the desert tribes.

"This way—please. . . ."

The girl was standing at a door that opened in the rear wall. McNally crossed to her. He felt strangely subdued and out of place in the role of Needle Mike. He had studied art and he had done a little painting of his own. He knew that he had just looked upon a fine piece of work. The girl pushed the door slightly and it gave under her touch. She did not go in.

"Look!" she said.

McNally took one step and stopped. He was looking into a bathroom that was a welter of blood. The body of a man slumped against the tub with one arm hooked over the rim as an anchor. He wore a shirt that had been cream-colored before his life blood stained it red, gray trousers and white oxfords.

The stump of his neck was an ugly crimson blot. He had no head.

McNally could hear his own breath rasping. It was hard to breathe in that atmosphere of ruthless slaughter. He turned his head away and found the wide eyes of the girl fixed on his face.

"Tell me . . . Be sure . . . Is it he?"

She seemed to be struggling against acceptance of the inevitable.

McNALLY fought down the feeling of nausea and turned again to the room. The left arm of the corpse was folded across the body and McNally could see through the streaks of blood a raw mark such as appears when a tattoo design is new. He looked again at the cream-colored shirt and the gray trousers. Wadded into a heap in a corner of the room was a crimson-splotched green necktie.

McNally grunted. "That's Long Wolf," he said huskily. "I can only see one arm but it's enough."

The girl rocked back on her heels, then turned and took two unsteady steps to a wicker chair. She sat down in it with her hands clasped together and locked between her knees. She did not weep nor cry out—just stared into space.

McNally turned his back on the hor-

rible bathroom. He stared across the room and found himself looking at the big painting from a different angle than before. Viewed from this point, the girl's body seemed to take on another dimension, its curved, perfectly proportioned beauty almost assuming the semblance of life. With that new dimension he became aware of a feature not apparent before—a golden veil that dropped gently between the figure and the beholder, a shimmering veil such as one finds in clear air on certain days—a veil of showering pollen.

There was a spell to it and McNally shook his shoulders. Never had beauty and horror been more weirdly wedded—the painting in this room with the girl who posed for it, the headless corpse in the other.

"He was my husband."

The girl's voice broke the spell. She had her eyes on McNally's face now and he flushed despite the demands of his hard-boiled role. He had been staring at the picture for which she had posed in the nude and she had interrupted him. He met her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I've got to do something. I had to know first. Maybe you know what to do." Her voice was strained, harsh with effort.

"All you can do is call the cops."

McNally made the statement reluctantly. He was in a bad spot himself. He had to skirt direct encounters with violent trouble because of his disguise. He had had too much difficulty with the police already, but thus far he had kept out of the hot light that they turn on suspects, and had avoided the third degree which would inevitably break down his disguise. A slaughter such as this, with the corpse freshly tattooed, would be a tough proposition.

"If you know anything about it, it might help." He spoke gently.

The girl shook her head. "I don't know anything."

"Did he have enemies?"

"Here? No. We knew no one."

"Did he have enemies where you came from?"

"Perhaps." She looked away.

McNally was frowning. "I know some tribes scalp. I didn't know that any of them took heads. . . ."

"They never do. Except—"

"Except what?"

The girl looked at the floor "His head had lain upon my pillow," she said slowly.

McNally grunted. A man's head had been hacked off because it had lain on this girl's pillow? Here was jealousy—the age-old breeder of trouble—in a new role. McNally suddenly realized how little he—or any other white-skinned American—really knew about these people who were Americans before the white man came.

"There was somebody else in love with you?" he said gruffly.

The girl shuddered slightly. "Black Horn. My father promised me to him."

"And you think that he did this—this killing?"

"I don't know. He was very strong, very fierce. . . ."

The girl's voice trailed off and McNally knew that terror had smothered it. An Indian man or woman could not break under emotion as could a white man, but they could tremble inside. This girl was shaken to her soul with horror and with fear. There wasn't anything, either, that McNally could do for her. He turned to the door.

"You better sit tight," he said gruffly. "I've got to get the cops."

He had his hand on the knob when a challenging voice stopped him. "Just a minute, *hombre*. I reckon I'd better do that."

McNally wheeled to the voice. The girl had half risen from the chair upon which she'd been sitting.

The young man who stepped from behind a big canvas in a corner of the room

had his thumb hooked in his belt, four fingers wide against his hip. He was the same man who had put on the exhibition of two-gun marksmanship at the shooting-gallery.

THE girl stared at him, one hand gripping hard upon the back of her chair. "Dave!"

"Sorry, Rose. I had to see who came in with you."

"You—you know?"

"I saw the body, Rose. I waited for you when I saw you go to the picture show. I didn't know where you lived. I followed you here and hung around. When you came bouncing out there was trouble in your face and I came up for a look. I saw him." He gestured toward the bathroom.

The girl's shoulders slumped.

"You don't know who, Rose?"

"No. He was alive when I left. He made me go to a show. He was drinking. He'd been tattooed. He showed me."

The broad-shouldered man frowned. "I don't get that. How about it, *hombre?*"

McNally was back in his role. "How should I know. He wanted two dragonflies and he got them—one on each forearm."

"Dragonflies?"

"That's right."

The eyes of man and girl met significantly but neither spoke.

The man turned back to McNally. He flipped his coat lapel around and a star gleamed dully. "My name's Dave Whaley," he said. "I'm deputy-sheriff down in our country. These are friends of mine."

"You're maybe a better guy to talk to cops than I am. I'll blow—" McNally turned the knob.

Dave Whaley raised his hand. "Nope. Can't do it. This isn't my bailiwick. You come back with the cops or wait for them. I can't turn anyone loose."

The girl raised her head from moody contemplation of the floor. "There's a phone, a pay phone, in the back hall downstairs."

McNally hesitated. He was in something up to his neck, but with Whaley on the job, he would be no more than a minor witness. He could probably talk his way out. At any rate, there was no other way to get out. He'd see the cops at his shop if he didn't see them here—and this spot promised to be more interesting.

"I'll call 'em and come back," he said.

He stepped out into the hall, closed the door behind him and went down the dark stairs. He had to fumble around in the lower hall and it took three matches to find the phone near the rear door of the shoe-repair shop. His nickel scraped loudly in the slot.

"Police Department? . . . Gimme Homicide . . . Yeah. Homicide . . . Corbin? . . . This is Needle Mike. There's a dirty slaughter down here at . . ." He rattled off the address and his own voice sounded strange.

Corbin was growling questions but McNally was in no mood to answer them. "Come and see for yourself," he snarled. "I'm just telling you. There's a hick cop here already."

He banged the receiver into place and turned back up the dim stairs. When he rapped at the door and entered, Dave Whaley was standing by the girl, clumsily patting her shoulder and whispering to her quietly. McNally pushed the door to behind him and somebody pushed in from the hallway. When he turned, an aged Indian in a faded brown suit brushed him out of the way and stepped into the room.

He was amazingly wrinkled and the old suit hung loosely on his thin frame, but he was straight and dignity walked with him. His hair hung to his shoulders and the shears of no barber college had touched it. Within the room, he stopped, his arms folded across his chest.

The girl had risen swiftly from her

chair, her eyes wide. The old man, however, was not looking at her. He was looking at the big painting. On his grim features many things were written—stern things—hatred, contempt and a harshly controlled fury.

CHAPTER THREE

Smoke-that-Rises

THE rose-shaded lamp glowed steadily and its radiance spread indiscriminately over Indian and white, portrait and living flesh. The aged red man stood like something carved from hard, enduring wood, his unblinking eyes upon the painting. The girl sank slowly to her knees.

"My father." Her voice was low, choked with emotion.

"What was he to you when he make picture?" The voice was heavy, guttural and it hung in the room.

The girl's head was bowed. "My husband."

"Law marriage?"

"Law marriage."

"With paper?"

"With paper."

The old man stood for seconds without moving as though he were digesting a fact that he half disbelieved. Then his hand came out of his armpit with uncannny speed and he reached the painting with two long steps. His hand rose and the girl cried out as though she had been struck.

With three fast strokes, the old man stripped the nude figure to ribbons which fell forward from the canvas. "Not good for men to see," he said and put the hunting-knife back in its sheath.

McNally felt his own face go white. A beautiful thing had been ruined in a matter of seconds and the man who had painted it would paint no more. The old fanatic had ignored the sacred symbolism of his people that had been worked into the painting, ignored everything save the fact that his daughter's nude form had dominated the canvas. Yet, as he turned, he still wore dignity like an enfolding cloak—dignity such as no prudish bigot can ever wear.

McNally shook his head.

He knew then that it was not nudity that had shocked the old man, nudity which the Indian mind divorced from shame. The wrinkled stoic had slashed his protest against the picturization of a living person, believing, as many races of men believe, that the thoughts of the beholder are directed by some mysterious force against the person pictured.

The girl was sobbing quietly and some of the sternness melted from the face of the old Indian. He reached down and patted her head. Dave Whaley opened his mouth twice as though to speak but there was awe in his eyes when he looked at the father of Rose Vale.

The old man's nose wrinkled. Without speaking, he crossed the room to the bathroom door, opened it and looked in. He stood frozen for a moment and outside the police siren shrieked. The old man turned and folded his arms. He did not believe that what he saw required comment. He was merely waiting.

Heavy feet pounded on the stairs and McNally set himself. He did not know what the next few minutes might bring, but they were likely to be tough minutes.

Detective-sergeant Pete Corbin was the first one through the door. He was a short, squat, red-faced man with a bay window that no belt could hold in line. He had a two-fisted, intimidating manner that assumed everyone's guilt of everything on the book at first sight. He was followed by Hayes and Wilson of the Homicide Squad who didn't count except on detail when Corbin was running a show. Corbin's eyes swept the room, photographed all they saw, then came to hard, stabbing rest on McNally's face.

"Spit it out! Who was killed and who did it?"

McNally jerked his thumb toward the bathroom. "He's in there. I don't know who did it."

Corbin crossed to the bathroom, took a long grim look and turned, his thumb pressing his lower lip, his eyes level beneath heavy brows. Behind him the other two men were moving into swift, efficient action Hayes stepped into the bathroom. Wilson came back and took out a notebook and a pencil. Corbin was staring at McNally.

"You first!" he growled, "Tell me who these people are and how you know."

HE WAVED Whaley back with a thick hand when Whaley would have spoken. McNally braced himself and looked around the room. "Left to right," he said sullenly, "you've got Whaley who's a hick cop and Rose Vale who was married to the guy that's dead and Rose Vale's father."

Corbin stopped him and turned sharply to the aged Indian. "What's your name?"

The old man stood like a statue. "Smoke-that-Rises," he said.

Corbin grunted deep in his chest, looked at the old man for a moment and swung back to McNally. "O.K. You, Mike, are messed up in another slaughter. Sing straight or I'll crucify you. How about it?"

"I'm not mixed up in a thing. An Indian came to me for dragonflies on his arms. I put 'em on. He said his name was Long Wolf. I took his word for it. His wife came down and asked me about it. I came up here because she asked me to. I didn't know he was dead till I got here."

"Yeah? Maybe that will check. How about you, Mrs. Long Wolf?"

The girl hesitated and looked at Whaley. Corbin waved Whaley down again when the deputy would have spoken. He had his hard, direct stare fixed on the girl. She spoke with difficulty, her voice husky.

"We eloped and were married," she said. "Jim, that's my name for him, was an artist. He had been to college. So had I. But—but he drank too much sometimes. He was drinking tonight. He told me he had been tattooed, then he made me go to a movie. When I came back—"

She gestured vaguely toward the bathroom and her voice failed. Corbin didn't press the point. Whaley stepped forward, flashed his star and presented his papers. The homicide dick glanced at the credentials.

"What do you know?"

Whaley quite obviously didn't like his role. He was about Corbin's height, but lean. There was not much expression on his face except for what the wind and sun had carved in the tough leather of his skin—grim, dogged endurance and a fierce will.

"It's a long story," he said. "Long Wolf is the son of a chief. He would be chief some day. Most of the tribe work hard—railroad shops and highway work. The tribe paid for his education. They wanted him to be a good chief. He used their money but he wanted to be an artist."

"Yeah? Then what?"

"He got a job with the railroad. Assistant paymaster. Indians won't take checks. He knew them all personally and paid them off in cash. Three weeks ago, he packed up two thousand dollars and went away with it."

Rose Vale uttered a choked cry of protest. "He didn't!"

"I'm sorry, Rose. He did." Whaley's voice was soft. He turned back to Corbin. "The girl didn't know. She thought they were just eloping. They left a trail that a blind man could have followed."

Corbin was rocking back and forth with his hands locked behind his back. He rocked slowly forward and stopped, his chin out. "Yeah. Who else followed it?"

"I don't know." Whaley looked pityingly at the girl. She was slumped de-

jectedly. "They told me at the shooting-gallery that there was another Indian in town. I did some shooting over there. I figured people would talk to me and volunteer information."

McNally looked at the man sharply. It hadn't occurred to him that there might be purpose in the man's shooting exhibition. His respect for Whaley increased. His own mind had swung to the idea of a wild-west show. Others would feel similarly, of course, and what would be more natural than to mention any Indians that they had seen.

The girl was staring at Whaley. Corbin, aware of her interest, turned on her swiftly and his voice slashed. "Who was the other Indian?"

She hesitated, fear in her expression, then looked toward her father. Corbin didn't follow her eyes. He looked at Whaley. Whaley shook his head regretfully.

"Another young Indian," he said.

"Who?"

The question was directed once more at Rose Vale. She shook her head. "I don't know. I don't know. I saw no one."

WHALEY was rolling a cigarette. "This hurts me, mister," he said to Corbin, "but I'm shooting straight with you on everything I know. The description that I got sounded like a lad named Black Horn."

Rose Vale had risen out of her chair. Whaley ignored Corbin and took the girl's arm. His eyes were eloquent. "The law has a right to him, Rose."

He spoke as one Indian to another. The words seemed strangely slurred, oddly phrased and they sounded like an appeal to tribal pride and courage in a crisis. The light from the shaded lamp flowed over the two of them and McNally had a strange profile view of Dave Whaley for a moment, a view that was partly pink highlight and partly shadow. In that moment, he knew that Whaley, too, was Indian—not full-blooded, certainly, but with the instincts of savage ancestors warring with white tradition in his soul and in his blood. There was, moreover, a strange bond between man and woman, a warm sympathy that ignored strangers.

Corbin, who was a good detective and trained to notice such things, was aware of the situation, too. He had his lower lip pinched between his thumb and his first finger. He was balancing his weight aggressively forward.

"O.K." he growled. "This Black Horn was in love with you—and jealous. How about you? How did you feel?"

"No import! I kill Long Wolf."

The words fell majestically upon the room—reasoned words that were uttered with dignity by a man who had weighed their significance before speaking. Corbin, for all of his bulk, wheeled like a cat.

Smoke-that-Rises was standing with folded arms where he had stood through all of the questioning. His face showed neither regret nor fear of consequences. He was not looking at anyone in the room. Like a sublimely indifferent image, he had his beady eyes fixed upon the incredibly distant horizon of an old man's thoughts. Corbin's chin moved slowly, grimly forward.

"Why didn't you say so at first?" he snarled.

"Hear you talk first. Get much education."

The Indian didn't appear sarcastic. His face did not change expression. Rose Vale took two steps that placed her beside him. "He didn't," she said. "I know that he didn't."

"Who did, then? Black Horn?"

The old man's fingers touched her wrist. "I kill him," he repeated. "He take my daughter. Nobody tell me of marriage. I kill him."

As though the unfolding of his arms

released him from some rite requiring aloof dignity, he gestured expressively with his left hand. "I am old man. Have seen many summers."

He released his daughter's wrist without looking at her and stepped to the side of Pete Corbin. "I go," he said.

Hayes of the Homicide Squad was standing in the bathroom door. "Ask him where he put the guy's head?" he said. "It ain't here."

Smoke-that-Rises walked solemnly to the door. "You find-um," he said.

McNally joined Hayes at the bathroom door. He was hunch-driven and he had to see the corpse once more. He looked at it long and solemnly in all its bloody horror, then turned away. There was a peculiar expression in his eyes.

"In good plain Indian lingo," he murmured, "old Smoke-that-Rises is a liar."

CHAPTER FOUR

Skeeter Chisels in—and Out

DAVE WHALEY walked back with McNally to the shop. He was smoking one of his home-rolled cigarettes and he did not seem in a mood for conversation. McNally wasn't feeling talkative himself and Needle Mike was not the type of person who would indulge in loose speculation with an officer of the law, be that officer from a small town or a large one.

Corbin had returned to headquarters. He had taken Rose Vale and her father with him. He had respected Dave Whaley's credentials and had let him go with a promise to call him. He had respected nothing about Needle Mike, and had dared him to be any place where he couldn't be found if and when the police might want him.

In silence, McNally unlocked the shop. He sensed that Whaley had something to say to him and he waited, flipping the switch that brought the drop-light to life, then sitting down heavily in one of the rickety chairs. Whaley dropped his cigarette and screwed his heel down hard on it.

"Black Horn is all Indian," he growled. "The old men in the tribe like him. He would like to go on the war path against the whites today. Long Wolf was different."

"Yeah. He was pretty soft for an Indian." McNally was thinking of the man's aversion to pain, his drinking of liquor before the ordeal of tattoo.

Dave Whaley shrugged. "Not very soft, *hombre.*" He looked at his own clenched fist. "Black Horn was always crazy about Rose," he said.

"How did she feel?"

"She was afraid of him. At best, maybe, she just kind of liked him."

They were silent again in common understanding of a situation. It was always tough when a man loved a woman and she merely liked him, always better if she had no use for him whatsoever.

Whaley ground his hands together, palm to palm. "The old man never killed Long Wolf."

"I didn't think he did."

"But it's tough . . . ."

Whaley walked up and down. McNally watched him.

There were angles in this case that the deputy would not discuss with Needle Mike, or anyone else. The angle, for instance, of his own feelings. McNally hadn't missed the significance of the way in which the man patted the girl's shoulder, his gentleness to her in speech, the way in which he tried to protect her even while facing the duty that he had to perform as a law officer. Whaley came from the girl's own country and McNally had a hunch that Whaley was in the same boat with the missing Black Horn. The girl had liked Whaley, too—merely liked him. Suddenly the man stopped pacing.

"I can't leave Rose down there, *hombre.* Who's a good lawyer—a damn good

one? I don't want any two-bit shyster."

"Let me think."

McNally fumbled around with an old black pipe that was as disreputable as any other fixture in this life of his below the line. His brow was furrowed. As Needle Mike, he did not know a single lawyer who wasn't a chiseling, two-timing heel. As Kenneth McNally he knew a dozen men who rated high in influence and who were a credit to their profession. He tried to keep connecting links out of his double life, but this was a situation that called for the straining of points.

"Daniel C. Powell is your man," he said. "Square as a die and probably won't want the case. Say you got his name confidential-like, see, but don't mention me. Maybe he'll get curious."

Dave Whaley was rolling a cigarette again. His eyes studied McNally shrewdly. McNally didn't blink. Powell was a good lawyer and one that a man didn't have to apologize for. Whaley nodded his head. "Thanks," he said. "I'll see him."

He flipped his tongue along the paper cylinder, twisted the end and lighted up. He went out without further comment and McNally put his feet up on his other chair.

WHEN the man from the West went out, the heat seemed to pour in. There wasn't even one fly with energy to buzz around now, and the street outside was unnaturally quiet.

Eight or ten blocks away, a bunch of cops would be shooting questions at a grim old Indian.

There were a lot of questions that McNally himself would like to hear answered. He had neglected to ask Whaley about the significance of dragonflies. They had been used for a tattoo design and there had been one hovering above the girl in the painting. It might have been mere atmosphere but there might be no more to it than that.

And why should a man who was practically on his honeymoon want to be tattooed when he had never been tattooed before? Why, particularly, should an artist risk anything that would make his arms stiff and that might, on a long shot, result in infection of some kind? None of the usual reasons applied in this case. It wasn't a prank or a lark or a juvenile impulse to toughness. There was no lodge or secret-society significance apparent, no masochistic craving for pain, no addiction to the art. Long Wolf had merely come in with a pretty definite notion about having tow dragonflies tattooed on his hide. After coming in, he had abandoned a half-formed determination to have one of the insects on his shoulder, switching to the other forearm in preference.

Capping the whole illogical performance, Long Wolf had given an assumed name in all seriousness and had then changed his mind about that.

McNally got up and prowled restlessly. Rose Vale had gone through a horrible ordeal of bloody discovery, of shock and grief and dismay. She had heard her own father assume the blame for her husband's murder, and she had been taken to the station-house. The worst, however, lay ahead of her. She was the innocent bystander and she couldn't win.

"I wonder if she really believes that she is a widow."

McNally had come to a dead stop and for the first time he put in words the hunch that had swung him back to the bathroom for a second look at the headless corpse.

A man had died horribly, but he did not believe that the man was Long Wolf.

The role of identifying witness was suddenly important and dangerous. Once that corpse was identified as Long Wolf, a man could be prosecuted for murder. A motive for killing Long Wolf could be proved on Smoke-that-Rises and they could hang him for it. But they would

have no motive and only a worthless confession to a murder that hadn't happened, if the corpse was not the corpse of Long Wolf.

"Black Horn was probably the old man's choice as a son-in-law and he's ready to take the rap for him, but—I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong."

McNally hadn't dared to show too great an interest in the body and it is hard to tell much about a freshly tattooed design. It is pretty blurry while the needling is new. A man, however, has a feeling about his own work. There was something wrong about that fresh marking on the murdered man's arm, something that the tattoo artist in McNally did not feel to be his own.

"If the body is not Long Wolf's, then it is Black Horn's."

McNally pondered the implications of that, and he could see a picture in which the murder of one man was no longer a matter of the greatest interest. There were lives left behind by the life that had perished, and it was those lives that would be affected forever by whatever truth might be arrived at in the case of the headless Indian.

McNally moved restlessly and his muscles worked instinctively without consicous guidance. He busied himself with the straightening of instruments and bottles on his work table. Suddenly his hand stopped in mid-motion and his mind leaped to awareness as he bent over the table.

His handy pocket case of instruments was missing!

Hurriedly he searched the floor, the two drawers and the low bottle shelf. In the back room, there was a sudden harsh, grating sound.

McNALLY stood rooted for several seconds before he whirled and made for the disturbance. His nerves felt like stretched wires beneath his skin, for there was nothing in that back room that could move of its own power. He flung the door open and stopped.

There was just enough light flowing in from the bulb in the front room to enable him to recognize the man who was half in, half out the window that opened on the alley. With a wide, embarrassed grin, Skeeter abandoned his attempt to make a stealthy exit and stepped back into the room.

"I was just stealing a nap in your bunk, Mike. I've been sleeping in my college and a barber chair makes a guy round-shouldered."

"It isn't the first time you've slept here," he growled.

"I know, Mike—"

Skeeter was abnormally meek. McNally didn't like it. Whenever Skeeter was humble, Skeeter was putting on an act. Neither did McNally like the idea that Skeeter was sneaking out through a window rather than have it found out that he had been making unauthorized use of the sleeping facilities. Skeeter didn't have that kind of a conscience. A sleep was something that you couldn't take away from a man once he had it, and if Skeeter got away with something that couldn't be taken from him, Skeeter would be damned impudent about it. There was some other reason why the little chiseler was trying to conceal the fact that he had forced his way into Needle Mike's and hidden himself.

McNally's shoulders bunched and he took a swift, limping stride, locked his strong fingers in Skeeter's collar. "You dirty, ungrateful little rat!" he growled. "You swiped my instruments."

Skeeter was merely a couple of folds of skin on a set of bones and McNally shook him like a rag. The perennial newsboy's eyes bogged. "You—been—chewing—stuff, Mike. Or taking it in the arm," he said. "Let go o' me."

McNally had slowed down the shaking process when his captive started to speak. Skeeter's lopsided features bore a look

of startled astonishment that looked genuine, but McNally took no chances. He went through Skeeter's pockets methodically. There was nothing that even remotely resembled the missing instruments.

"You got away with them earlier," he growled. "What did you do with them, mug?"

Skeeter shook himself and there was an air of conscious virtue about him. "You know damned well, Mike," he said, "that I don't ever swipe stuff when I've got money. What's the matter with you?"

McNally continued to stare at him. He knew that it was a peculiar, but dead-level fact that Skeeter never did carry away portable objects when he was in funds. And Skeeter had money now—"college money." The presence of cash in Skeeter's pocket meant that he was chiseling, not stealing; the absence of it indicated the opposite—and the facts of life were just that simple along South Broadway. McNally shook his head.

"You were up to something, you dirty little tramp," he said grimly. "And when I find out what it was, I'll turn you inside out."

Skeeter grinned. "You're getting old, Mike. And nervous like a woman or a rookie cop."

McNally didn't pay any attention to the grin. He had known Skeeter for a long time and just before the grin broke, he had seen something dawn behind Skeeter's eyes. Something that had narrowed the eyes and brought a fleeting look of concentration to the narrow, fox-like face. Skeeter had sniffed an angle.

"Those instruments, Mike? Was that an act or did you lose some?"

"I lost some."

McNally tried to tie the question to something of significance. He couldn't do it.

Skeeter straightened his necktie and moved to the window. "I started out this way, Mike, and that's how it is," he said.

"No you don't! I nailed up that back door to keep things from coming in out of alleys."

"I'm sorry, Mike. I came in this way. It's a jinx to cross my luck. I've got to. Mike."

SKEETER had stopped by the window, He wasn't arguing, he was standing on a right. McNally cursed. It was one of the unwritten laws in this crazy corner of the world that a man was entitled to his luck. Only a complete heel ever interfered with another man's harmless superstitions. If Skeeter insisted that his luck depended upon his going out the way that he came in, then he was entitled to go out that way. After all, it was a small matter. McNally waved his hand.

"Scram!" he said. "I'm fed up with you."

Skeeter grinned again and eased his thin frame over the windowsill. McNally slammed the window down and turned back toward the big room. Skeeter had been the fly in Needle Mike's ointment too many times in the past to be considered calmly when things were upset. He was on the way to being a pest again, but McNally couldn't see just where.

"He never mentioned the murder and he must have known about it. He knows everything," McNally was muttering as he entered the front room. Suddenly he stopped dead. Two facts hit him simultaneously. He could see his work table from where he stood and there was ink missing as well as instruments. That was fact number one. Fact number two sent him whirling back toward the other room.

As clearly as though he had a moving picture in sound of the events, he could see Skeeter's whole line of action for the past hour. Skeeter had learned about the murder, of course, and Skeeter had hung around the murder scene. Skeeter had

seen him come out with Dave Whaley and Skeeter had beaten him in the race back to the shop. Skeeter had been hidden back there while he talked to Whaley and that explained why Skeeter was trying to sneak out without being observed.

Skeeter knew that Whaley was going after a lawyer for Rose Vale. And Skeeter, naturally, would be conscious of a fact which no one else had emphasized as yet, the fact that Long Wolf had embezzled a payroll. There was money on the loose somewhere.

"The dirty little chiseler will try to spring the girl out of the can through some shyster and work information out of her."

McNally was racing through the rear room, regardless of the stiff leg. He didn't believe that Skeeter would linger in the alley but there was a chance that he might hover close by until he made sure that McNally hadn't tumbled to his scheme. He wouldn't expect Needle Mike to come out of a rear window. If he were watching his own back trail, he'd do it from a point of vantage where he could observe the front of the shop. Coming out this way, there was a chance of flanking him—a bare chance.

The alley was pitch dark. The single lamp that usually glowed in a pot-hook fixture over the entrance of a tin garage was out tonight.

McNally moved to the right, as swiftly and silently as the stiff leg would permit. Suddenly his left foot touched something that yielded under his weight and he twisted his leg instinctively, his hands seeking purchase on the rough brick of the alley's wall.

He struggled a second to regain his balance, then dropped to one knee. He felt the soft outline of a human body and hazarded a match. In the swift flare he bent over the inert figure.

The match fell from his fingers as he stared into the bloody face of Skeeter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Killer in the Dark

SKEETER was breathing hoarsely when McNally carried him back down the alley and hoisted him through the window. McNally snapped on the rear-room lamp and laid Skeeter on the cot. The barber-college maestro had been struck a savage blow that had opened a gash along the side of his head, but his pulse was strong and he was muttering when McNally laid a cold towel against his head.

McNally turned slowly. It was the kind of night that magnifies sound, and his sensitive ears told him someone was moving around furtively in his front office. He moved to the door and caught a swift photographic flash of a black-haired man who bent above his work table. Then the man sensed the intrusion and quickly made a pass at the light. McNally slammed the door behind him and twisted to one side as the center droplight went out. He crouched against the wall.

The other man, evidently, was doing the same thing on the opposite side of the room. The shade on the front window was drawn three quarters of the way down and the reflected light from the none too bright street seeped under it. It would have been possible to see the legs of a man who moved against it, just as it would be possible to see the legs, from the knee down, of a person who stopped outside.

McNally held his breath. He hadn't seen the face of the man who bent above the table, but he knew that he was an Indian. For some peculiar reason of his own, he had taken the chance of burgling Needle Mike's shop—and there was only one Indian on the loose, an Indian who had already committed one murder and who might be expected to commit another in a pinch.

McNally was weaponless and he had an

idea that there were keener ears than his own opposed to him. He couldn't stay where he was indefinitely, of course, but it was unnerving to know that a patient stalker waited in the shadows for the sound that would locate him. Across the room near the table on which the instruments were spread there was an upholstered chair. McNally, a chronic chair-balancer, scarcely ever sat in it, but it had been prepared for the savage emergencies of a life on the fringe of danger. Tucked down beside the cushions was a .38 revolver.

McNally's nerves crawled under his skin. He had to cross the room, and fast, to reach that gun. His muscles loosened and he started a swift gliding charge for the chair. He stumbled awkwardly and cursed. He had been so intensely himself at the moment that he had forgotten Needle Mike's lameness, forgotten the damning handicap of the leg clamp.

There was a sudden rush of movement out of the darkness, a piling in of shadows that became substance and that hit McNally with pile-driver force. McNally shifted his weight too slowly. A set of steel-strong fingers fastened to his windpipe, forced his head back with neck-cracking force. He felt himself wheeled around and brought his arms up in the position of a swimmer performing the breast-stroke.

His fingers locked against the hands of the Indian and he brought his grip to bear on the man's little fingers. The other winced as McNally forced the fingers back and the throttling grip relaxed. McNally reeled backward and the chair checked him.

The Indian leaped again. "Damn fool!" he growled. "I don't want to kill you. Keep silent!"

With one hand, he gripped McNally's hair. The point of a knife pricked McNally's skin and the two men fell off balance. The cushions of the chair sank under their combined weight and McNally's hand slipped down beside the cushions. The Indian had his knee pressed against McNally's belt buckle.

"I just tie you up and gag you if you keep still," he said hoarsely. There was desperation rather than savagery in his voice. McNally's fingers closed over cold metal and he brought the gun up slowly, conscious of the knife point that scratched the skin above his heart.

"You just won't," he said grimly. "Guess what this is."

His hair felt as though it were literally standing on end as his vivid imagination pictured to him the speed with which the blade could find his heart. The muzzle of the gun pressed soft flesh in the Indian's midriff.

THE Indian was silent save for his hoarse, uneven breathing. Then the pressure of his knee relaxed slightly. He still held the knife blade hard against McNally, but he had hesitated. The chill left McNally's spine.

"I'll blow your guts out of your ears if you don't get off me," he growled.

The knife blade made a long scratch as it wavered, then the Indian drew it back. His leg straightened and McNally rose with him, the pistol still held against the belt-line fat of a man gone soft. In the annals of civilization, it had been written in blood that the gun is mightier than the blade—and this was a civilized Indian. He could have killed as swiftly as McNally, or perhaps even faster, but his will had failed him in his consciousness that he had the inferior weapon.

"Let me go," he said. "I'll drop the knife. I was hungry. I came in looking for something I could sell. I . . ."

"You're a lousy liar. You're Long Wolf!"

McNally was ready for the man's sudden desperate lunge. He could have fired, but he brought the pistol up fast instead

and cracked the barrel across the red man's forehead. He hit just once and backed away, his hand reaching for the light-switch cord.

The yellow light of the old bulb flowed over the room. Beside the table where he had been tattooed earlier in the evening stood Long Wolf, one hand raised to his bleeding forehead. He blinked at the light, looked at the gun and straightened.

There was dignity in the way he sheathed his knife. It had not been menacing enough to serve his need but he returned it to its place beneath his shirt with unhurried calm. The blood flowed freely down his face now from the gash in his forehead, but he did not deign to wipe it away.

"What do you want to do with me?" he said.

He had made a pitiful plea for release while he thought the darkness hid his identity. Now, known as Long Wolf, he was facing his alternatives. His eyes glowed strangely but he held himself well.

McNally gestured commandingly with the pistol. "Sit down. Why did you kill Black Horn?"

Long Wolf sat in the upholstered chair. He was wearing rough clothing now instead of the dudish attire he had worn on his first visit, but he looked a little bit more the man in it.

"He followed me to kill me."

"Bunk. You planned that in cold blood, mug. The only reason you were tattooed was so you could palm off that other body as your own."

"That's right." Again there was a strange air of dignity about Long Wolf, the dignity of a man who had lost a great gamble and who is determined to lose without complaint.

"I found I was being trailed. The law trails me easily. Black Horn trails me easily. It is because I have a bride. The law means disgrace. Black Horn means death. In either, my wife suffers—but in death, less." His eyes were fixed on distance. "I did not look ahead. I stole money because I could not be a bookkeeper nor a chief. I could have been a painter."

He folded his arms and McNally remembered that Smoke-that-Rises had used the same gesture. It seemed one of resignation, a good-bye to dreams. "I must kill Black Horn or he kills me. He does not seek me for the law. I know. If I die, it is better for my wife. If Black Horn dies, I will not be both murderer and thief in her eyes. I prepare for Black Horn's death but I do not know which one of us will die."

The room was very still and very hot. McNally was staring at a murderer and seeing a soul in torment. He could understand now why Long Wolf had used whiskey this afternoon, why he wavered between his own name and an alias, why he was morbid on the subject of pain. Long Wolf's lips moved but his expression did not change. The blood ran down from his forehead and dripped from his chin.

"I sent my wife away and I let him find me," he said simply. "He had a fair chance and he died. I tried to send my identity into the grave with him and I failed."

McNally nodded. "You took a long chance just to bring back those instruments of mine you stole."

"I had to. When you missed them, you would have been suspicious."

McNALLY didn't speak. There was no use in telling the man that he would have been suspicious anyway, and that if he hadn't been the police would probably have tumbled to the trick. Long Wolf had tried too hard. He had tried to come in the back way and he had had to knock out Skeeter. When he came in

the front way, he had run into McNally.

"Do you call the police?" he said.

McNally stared back at him. It was the thing to do, but he wondered if the interests of the many might not be better served by sending the identity of Long Wolf into the grave with the body of Black Horn just as Long Wolf had planned. If both he and the girl stuck to the identification of the body, there was little that the police could do. There was, of course, a charge of murder against Smoke-that-Rises, but a good lawyer could smash the thin circumstantial case against an old man who hadn't actually committed murder. Kenneth McNally had the money for good lawyers.

"You were going to desert your wife and let her grieve," he said grimly.

Long Wolf nodded. "I was. It was kinder to her—harder on me than death."

Silence pressed down on the room again, silence in which emotion seemed to writhe and squirm. The power of life and death, of destiny and retribution, had been placed in McNally's hands and he did not want it.

THE cot in the next room creaked and McNally's nerves grew tighter as heels hit against the floor and a whiney voice called "Mike!" Skeeter, evil genius of McNally's every adventure, was conscious again and at a time when he should be out cold.

Feet scuffed along the sidewalk outside like an echo to Skeeter's faltering steps in the other room. The muffled voices of a man and woman rode the humid air.

"Come with me—fast," McNally said.

He rose, gripping the gun hard, and backed to the door which led into the locksmithing shop. It was a cul-de-sac, a room with a heavy locked door opening on the street and no other means of exit save this one door through the tattoo shop. He held the gun against the Indian and closed the connecting door.

They were barely in time. The back-room door creaked and Skeeter called "Mike!" once more. His stumbling steps crossed the big room, then the street door opened and Dave Whaley's booming voice said: "Hey, there! Where's Mike?"

McNally could hear Skeeter take a deep breath. It was a sudden situation but Skeeter was a fast thinker. "He stepped out a minute. I bumped my head. Come on in. He told me about you."

McNally felt the Indian's body grow rigid against him. The man knew Whaley's voice, of course, and he knew that the woman with him would naturally be Rose Vale.

"What did he tell you about me?"

"You're the fellow that he sent to see Dan Powell."

McNally grinned wryly. Despite the tension of his position, he could feel the humor in a born chiseler's glib artistry. Even as Kenneth McNally and with the prestige of the McNally name and money, he had never broken down the Powell dignity to the point of calling Daniel C. Powell, "Dan." Whaley, of course, wouldn't know that any more than Skeeter. There was a creak of chairs.

"That's right," he said, "but I got to thinking it over when I left. I figured that maybe I didn't need a lawyer. I figured that there wasn't any charge against Rose and that maybe the cops would let me put her in a good hotel. I figured dead right, too."

Skeeter coughed. "Sure. That was quick thinking. It saved you important money. Mike will be back after a while but it's a shame to keep a lady out of bed. Anything I can do?"

It was brazen, the kind of brazenness natural to Skeeter. People in trouble always suggested opportunity to him and he was still trying to sniff out a trail to embezzled money. He would fish laboriously for stray scraps of information and fit the pieces together in his own way.

McNALLY kept the gun hard on Long Wolf. The darkness might serve the man if he became reckless enough and McNally knew that he was fast.

In the other room, Dave Whaley was working himself up to a decision under Skeeter's smooth sympathy.

"I don't blame you if you want to wait for Mike," Skeeter said. "Some people mess up messages—"

"I wasn't thinking about that. It's just that I wanted to tell Mike something."

There was a strain in Whaley's voice that McNally could not quite account for. He wondered about the girl, too. She was in there but she hadn't spoken. He couldn't think of anything that would justify Whaley and the girl risking a stop to see him, and he mistrusted Skeeter. Something was on the verge of coming out, something that oughtn't to be trusted to Skeeter's keeping—and there wasn't a thing McNally could do to interrupt. And the girl deserved a better break than to have a husband come suddenly back to life and into the shadow of the noose.

Whaley cleared his throat. "You're a friend of Mike's?"

There was challenge and authority in the question. McNally could picture the hard, measuring stare that would accompany it. But he could also picture the Skeeter's bland look of innocence.

Skeeter laughed. "He told me what he told you about Dan Powell. He lets me sleep in his back room and watch his shop for him. He's been like a father to me—"

"I'll take a chance on you, *hombre,*" Whaley cut in. "And you better be as straight as you rate yourself. I can't wait any longer. Mike played square with us and he's in danger."

"Let me tell him." Rose Vale spoke for the first time. "I found something just before I left the apartment. Tell him please. I can't explain it, but I found it and there must be an explanation. The police didn't see it. I pushed it under the rug with my foot. They'll find it. It was a needle with a handle—a tattoo needle."

Skeeter's whistle was eloquent.

Whaley's deep voice cut in. "The cops don't like Mike. We saw that. But we know our own people. A white man wouldn't cut an Indian's head off."

"Why would a white man kill him even?"

"Long Wolf had the better part of two thousand dollars on him. He came in here and was tattooed. When the cops find that needle, they'll figure that Mike followed him home and killed him for the money. Right now they don't believe Rose's father had a thing to do with the kill, even if he did confess."

"How about the money?"

"I don't know. It's gone. The killer has it. Rose and I both saw Mike. Rose saw him when he first looked at the body. We don't believe that he did it. That's all. But tell Mike about that needle."

"I sure will. Thanks, pal."

McNally heard the note of finality in Skeeter's voice with a sinking sensation in his stomach. He was up against a fatal decision. Far back in his mind he had known all along that there was only one solution to this case, only one way that it could work out. He had fought that solution out of his mind but it came back now.

He would never have found it easy to call in the police and hand Long Wolf over to them—not after he had heard Long Wolf's story. Now, when he was under suspicion himself and the surrender of Long Wolf would save his own skin, it was all but impossible.

His fingers moved in the darkness. As Long Wolf felt the weapon relax its pressure against his body, he whirled fiercely and his right hand came up. McNally stepped into him with a hard left-hand blow, but the Indian's fingers found the gun and wrenched it from McNally's hand. "Now!" he said.

CHAPTER SIX

Another Redskin—

THE footsteps of three people crossed the other room toward the door that led to the street. McNally got his body between the Indian and the connecting door. "Wait just a minute," he said.

"Get out of the way."

"No. Listen. She's not your wife any more. She's your widow. You made it that way. Whaley has a right to fall in love with her."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just that. My guess is that he was always in love with her. It's the way he looks at her."

"I don't care."

"Yes, you do. You were going to shoot her and shoot yourself. I could feel it."

The Indian's eyes gleamed in the darkness like an animal's. "Now I shoot Whaley, too. Thanks."

The man had been pushed pretty far. He'd run to the end of a losing game. A born artist, his talent had been scorned by his people who had educated him so that he would be a great chief. He had stolen because his painting had made him forget his honor—and he had taken the girl he loved down the dishonor trail because he wanted her and he couldn't see the trail's end.

Long Wolf had painted a sorry picture with the stuff of his own life and he had already daubed it with blood. He was ready to crimson it further now and his mind no longer thought except in terms of annihilation.

The outer door of the tattooing-shop opened and closed. Skeeter had seen the others to the pavement and had stepped back into the outer room again. McNally had to talk fast.

"You messed up her life enough. She'll marry Whaley and be happy, probably. She's got a right—"

The Indian's hand flashed with the speed of a snake's head. The pistol barrel cracked against McNally's head and he felt the rubber in his knees as his muscles went slack. The Indian hurdled his body, flung the door open impatiently and light poured into the locksmith shop.

Skeeter turned a white face to the noise and his jaw went slack. Long Wolf gestured with the gun. "You! Call that man back. Tell him that Mike came in!"

Long Wolf was suddenly confident, commanding. He did not even warn Skeeter against trying to run away or against betrayal. He knew that Skeeter had an awful headache and that Skeeter realized who had given it to him.

McNally rose to his knees. Long Wolf backed up two paces and stood spread-legged where he could watch McNally out of the corner of his eye while he held the gun on the door. He no longer worried McNally.

Skeeter walked to the door like a man condemned and shouted up the block. He stepped outside and waved, then he turned and for once he was no opportunist. His lips trembled with fright.

"They're coming back," he said.

McNally felt his own facial muscles grow taut. In a few moments, he—McNally—would pull down the curtain on this drama, helpless though he seemed. He was going to kill a man and kill him as surely as if he pressed a trigger.

Against that death, McNally had weighed the pride of a lost people. There were few Indians where once there had been a mighty host. The few were trying to stand firm to the traditions of a day that was done. They had been a great people. They had bound up their own wounds and buried their own dead. When the conquering whites forced them to drink the cup of humiliation, they drank—but they drank proudly.

One of the few that were left—the son of a chief—had stolen and killed. That was a wound to pride that should not

needlessly be kept open. There should be no disgraceful trial, no living reminder of shame in a penitentiary, no offering upon a white man's gallows. It was better that a man die swiftly and that a shameful story die swiftly with him.

FOOTSTEPS sounded on the pavement. Long Wolf drew himself up, the gun in his hand. His eyes were not seeing life, but death. He had no out but he wasn't going to go alone.

McNally spoke softly. "The gun is empty," he said. "I fixed that before I let you take it from me."

Long Wolf stiffened. He looked down at the gun in quick, startled panic. McNally nodded toward the back room.

"There's an open window there and an alley."

Long Wolf met his eyes. He read challenge there, the challenge of a white man to the courage of the red. A bitter smile curled across his lips and he lowered the gun slowly, then put it in his hip pocket.

The steps sounded right outside. McNally found himself counting them. Whaley would be a little in advance of the girl. He would open the door. The footsteps slowed and a hand touched the knob. It was deadly quiet and the heat hung in the room. Long Wolf was standing with his legs wide apart.

Then the door opened.

Whaley threw one startled look across the room to the man who stood facing the door—and Long Wolf's hand flashed to his hip.

McNally's breath left his lungs in an explosive sigh. He had seen Dave Whaley shoot in the gallery and he knew how fast he was, how brutally accurate.

Long Wolf's gun came out of his hip pocket and there was thunder in the room.

Dave Whaley stood in the doorway with his own gun in his fist and Long Wolf went up on his toes. For a moment the Indian poised there, then his body crumpled and he went down. Dave Whaley was staring unbelievingly at the man he had shot. He stretched his left hand behind him to keep the girl out of the room. Her voice was full of frightened concern.

"Dave! Dave! You're all right!"

"Sure. Stay back, please, Rose."

McNally had dropped to his knees beside the body of Long Wolf. He rose to his feet. "Between the eyes," he said. "Keep the girl outside, Skeeter."

"No. I want to come in."

"You mustn't, Rose." Whaley's voice was boyishly kind.

McNally's eyes met Whaley's. "It's better this way. Be good to the girl, Whaley."

Whaley flushed. He was still staring at Long Wolf and his eyes betrayed the fact that he had not suspected the substitution of corpses.

"If she'll let me, *hombre,* I'll be good to her," he said. "If—" He shook himself. "In our country, they call dragonflies the bearers of news, bearers of new life. They carry the pollen. . . ."

He looked away from the death on the floor and his eyes sought the door where life waited for him beyond the shadow of a tribe's dishonor.

People were stirring themselves in the street now and a police car ground its tires against the curb. In the glare from the headlights, McNally could see the face of Skeeter whose adventure in hair-trimming had brought him in contact with a people who had once taken scalps. Skeeter looked actually pleased at the arrival of the police—and that was something for history to record among the great oddities.

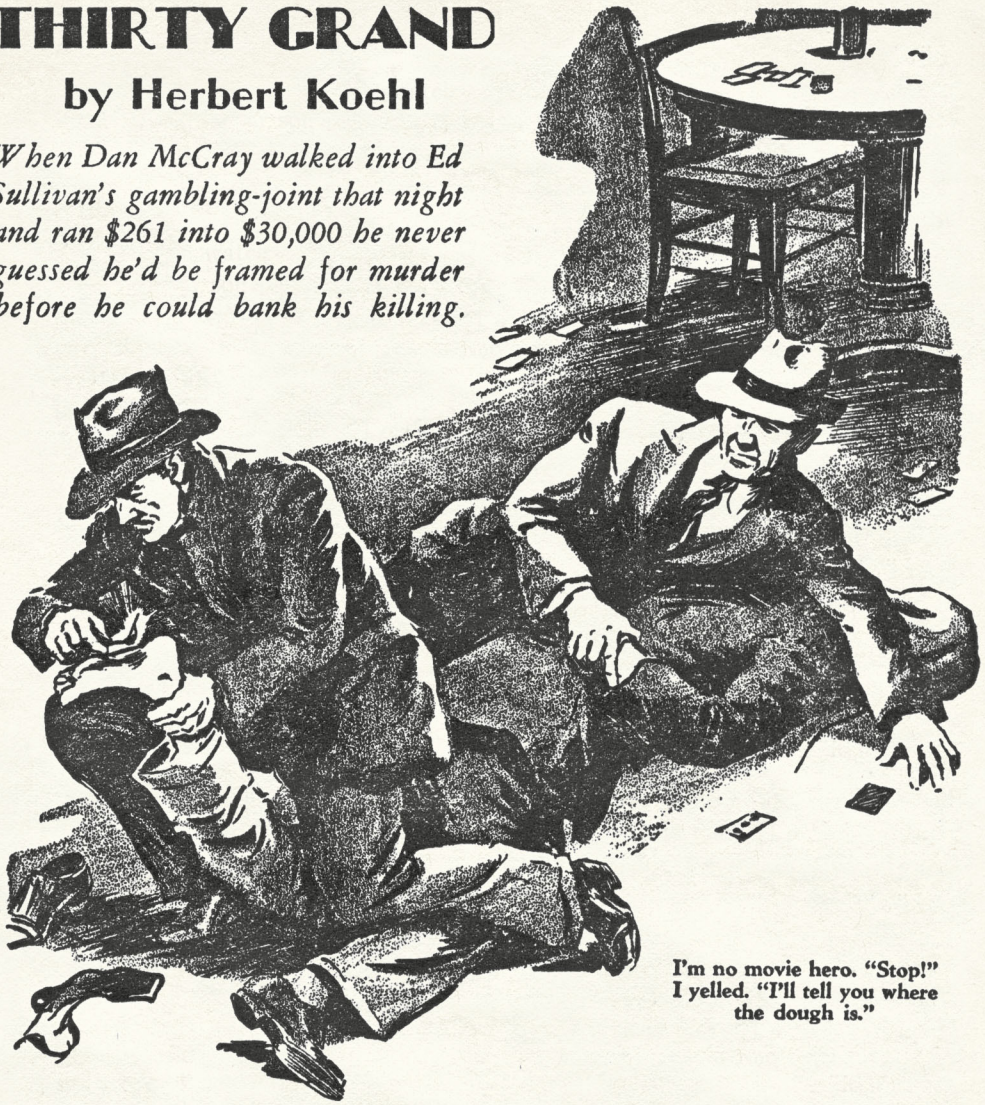
McNally took a handkerchief from his pocket and dropped it over the face of Long Wolf. "Rest softly, old man," he said solemnly. "You died like a chief."

He was hoping that Dave Whaley would never learn about that empty gun—but a little sorry Rose Vale didn't know.

THIRTY GRAND

by Herbert Koehl

When Dan McCray walked into Ed Sullivan's gambling-joint that night and ran $261 into $30,000 he never guessed he'd be framed for murder before he could bank his killing.



I'm no movie hero. "Stop!" I yelled. "I'll tell you where the dough is."

I SAID, "Yes," balanced the cradle-phone against my ear with my shoulder and put a match to a cigarette. The phone-receiver kept on crackling. I glanced at my wrist watch. I'd been catching it now for fourteen minutes. Edna paused to take a breath.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Now listen—"

The crackling started again. I did the listening.

Finally I got another chance. "Please!" I shouted. "Let me talk, kid. I admit I was out to Sullivan's last night. I admit I dropped a couple hundred. So what? I won't do it again. I'm off of it for life. When we get married I'll be a model husband. I'll . . . What you laughing about?"

I had to laugh myself, then pushed my advantage. "I'm awful busy, right now, but tonight we're going to a dance. See you at eight sharp. How's that? O.K. Good-bye."

I hung up and collapsed in my seat. Just as I was beginning to recover, George Harbison stuck his head in the door. He was my partner in the alleged real-estate business. Just now he looked a little sick—either that or just plain sore I couldn't be sure of which.

"If it's another anti-gambling lecture,"

I grumbled, "I don't want to hear any. I just had some."

HE CAME in slowly and parked in a chair on the other side of the desk. A closer inspection showed he wasn't sore —he was sick. He was naturally a sort of horse-faced guy anyhow and now his map was longer than ever and sort of chalky-white. His eyes looked like it had been a hard night. He didn't look at me.

"I'd be a fine one to lecture anybody," he said in a low voice.

"How come?"

He leaned forward but still kept his eyes away from mine. "I've been putting it off," he said, "but now I've got to tell you. Tomorrow's the last day."

"You mean the end of the world?"

"The same thing. You see, we're wiped out!"

"Where do you get that 'we' stuff?"

"That's it. It wouldn't be so bad if I'd just lost everything myself. But I've lost everything of yours too."

"You must be nuts. How could you lose anything of mine?"

"The plat is half yours."

I jumped like I'd been roosting on a spike. "You're not trying to tell me you've lost the plat!"

He nodded, still keeping his eyes away. "That's what it amounts to. I borrowed money on it, and—and lost the money."

"Jumping Jupiter! How did you do it? The horses?"

"No. The stock market. I didn't think it was gambling, but it seems I was wrong."

"Yeah. Just a little error. How much did you borrow on the plat?"

"Twenty thousand."

"That's nice. It's only worth about a hundred thousand."

"I know. But that's all I could get."

"And the note's due tomorrow?"

"That's right. And I haven't got a dime. I don't suppose you—"

"You guessed it. I should have a few grand saved, but—you know how it is with us gamblers."

I must have sounded bitter. His blood-streaked eyes met mine. They had a look like a dog has when he knows he should be kicked in the slats but hopes he won't be.

"I'm terribly sorry, Dan. When I think how we fought to hold on to that hundred acres even when it wasn't worth the taxes— And now when people are crying for building lots and we should clean up, why I—" He dropped his head in his hands and his shoulders quivered.

"Where's your wife?" I asked. "Still visiting her folks?"

"Yes." He didn't raise his head.

I just looked at him. Finally he looked up.

"I haven't been able to sleep for a week," he whispered. "I've even thought of suicide."

"You're nuts to talk like that," I snapped. I walked around the desk and put a hand on his shoulder. "I ought to take a poke at that long snoot of yours, but that wouldn't get us anywhere."

He got to his feet. "I'll pay you back somehow," he muttered.

I patted his back. "Brace up, George. We can always go to work, can't we? You go home and get some sleep. Maybe I can do something about this mess."

When he had gone I opened my top right-hand drawer, reached way back and pulled out a little black box. I pressed it in the right place and the lid flew open. There was a little stack of banknotes inside and I counted them. Two hundred and thirteen smackers. "Good old gambling-fund," I said. "I didn't know you amounted to so much."

I took out my billfold and counted the money in it. Forty-eight bucks. I stuffed the money from the box into the billfold and put it in my pocket, then I reached for the phone and dialed Edna's number.

When I heard her voice I made it short and snappy. "Listen. Our date's off. Something important is going to keep me busy tonight. If I'm lucky I'll see you tomorrow night. If I'm not—"

The receiver began making a lot of unpleasant noises. "Wait a minute," I yelled, and the noises stopped. "I'm sorry, but I can't help it. Good-bye." I slammed the phone down and reached for my hat.

THINGS were humming at Sullivan's when I got there, even though it wasn't much past eight o'clock. There was a good crowd ganged around both crap tables and only a few vacant seats at the roulette wheel. I was headed for one of the empty chairs when a big red-faced fellow with iron-gray hair and a loud voice stopped me.

"Back for more punishment, Dan?" he boomed. "The trouble with you," he added, loud enough for the lookout man outside the place to hear, "you don't know when to quit."

"We'll see about that. I feel lucky tonight. You got plenty of dough on hand?"

"Plenty," he laughed, "and I'll have more when you get through."

I dropped into a chair, counted out two hundred dollars and invested it in two blue chips. That was pretty steep for me. Usually I played the yellows. They only cost a ten-spot and I could last a little longer with them. But this night was different. It was either a quick killing or a fast death.

I sat back and watched Slick Collins spin the wheel. He was a short slim bird with a yellowish face and oily-looking black hair. He wore a green eyeshade and his face never had any more expression than a store-window dummy. I watched about ten minutes without betting, waiting for that inner voice a gambler listens for—the voice that says, "Shoot the works; you can't lose." Most of the time the voice is a cockeyed liar, but every once in a while it's handing out the truth. It's sort of a hunch and many a man is walking the streets broke because he fell for it at one time or another.

Anyway, I got the hunch I was waiting for and shoved my two chips onto the space marked *13 to 24*. Collins looked around the table and then turned the wheel. The little white ball danced around a little and then dropped. "Nineteen," said Collins. He turned his fishy eyes on me a second, then tossed over four blues. I let them all ride on the same space.

The next number was twenty-three. It looked like the beginning of a streak. Collins passed over twelve more blues. I hesitated a second and then shoved them all on the 25 to 36 square. Big Ed Sullivan was standing right behind me. I turned around and looked at him. He wagged a finger at me and whispered: Naughty, naughty. Shouldn't switch."

I said: "Nuts."

He was wrong. Twenty-nine hit. Everyone was staring at me and whispering to each other, but Collins' dead pan didn't change. He just counted out chips. He had long slim fingers and they moved so fast you couldn't follow them. He could count out a stack of twenty with one motion. He shoved my winnings over and waited for the bets. This time I went back to the middle twelve numbers, playing all my chips again. All around me, the folks were shaking their heads and *tsk tsking* like a lot of sympathetic hens. But there was just one explosive gasp when the ball clicked into Number Thirteen.

My original two chips had been increased now by eight stacks of twenty each. In money, that meant sixteen thousand, two hundred dollars. I turned around to Sullivan. His cigar was in the corner of his mouth and he was grinning like he meant it.

"Any limit, Ed?" I asked.

"Just the sky, Dan."

I pushed three of my stacks and the two

extra chips onto the 1 to 12 space. But the winner was twenty. There was a long drawn out sigh around the table like air coming out of a tire. A peroxide blonde across from me let out a little shriek. "His streak's broken," she yelped in a shrill voice.

My hands were getting moist and my heart was acting like I had a grandfather's clock stowed away in my chest. I took the five stacks I had left and shoved them back on the 1 to 12 spot, then turned and tried to wink at Big Ed.

"Easy come, easy go," I said. My voice sounded like it came from across the room. He nodded and grinned and kept his eyes pasted on the wheel.

Even Collins looked faintly interested as the little ivory ball put on its dance. All around the table people were standing up stretching their necks. The crap tables weren't going now. The word had gone around and they had rushed over to see the show. I was the only one in the room sitting down and the reason was I couldn't trust my legs. They were shaking like a couple of trees in a gale.

NOBODY heard Collins call the winning number. Everyone who could see the wheel let out a yell as though the home-town slugger had just smacked one over the fence with the bases full. Because the little white ball had stopped at Number Seven.

I turned around and pulled myself to my feet, gripping the back of my chair hard. "That's all for me, Ed," I gasped. "I'm done gambling for good."

He nodded and bit hard on his cigar. "You had a real streak, son. How many you got there?"

My hands were trembling so I couldn't count. "Should be three hundred. You count 'em."

He went through them quick, then straightened up. "That's right. Come with me, Dan."

I stopped in front of the little booth where the pay phone nestled. "Be with you in a minute, Ed," I said. "Want to make a call." I stepped into the booth and dialed George Harbison's number. He answered in a hurry and his voice sounded strained.

"You can forget your troubles and go to sleep, George," I told him.

"Oh, it's you, Dan," he said. "What do you mean?"

"I've just cleaned up thirty grand here at Sullivan's. We'll have plenty to meet that note and more besides. Who said gambling was a vice?"

There was a long pause. Finally his voice came across the wire. "You're not kidding me, are you?"

"Certainly not. And I haven't been drinking, either."

"Great heavens, Dan! That's wonderful! I—I don't know what to say."

"Never mind. Just hit the hay and get some shut-eye."

"Boy! Will I!"

I hung up and walked into Sullivan's cubby hole of a private office. Sullivan came over, locked the door behind us, went back and sat down at his desk. He pulled a bottle and a couple of little glasses out of a drawer.

"You look as though you could stand a drink."

"It wouldn't hurt me."

He poured them out. "Here's luck," he said and tossed his down. "You've had plenty of it tonight."

I'm almost a teetotaler myself, but that was one drink that hit the spot. It seemed to clear the fog away.

"Can you give me a check, Ed?"

He shook his head. "No can do. It's bad business. Income-tax agents and such. You'll have to take cash."

He got up, walked over to a corner of the room and stood fiddling at the wall with his back toward me. He was so big I couldn't see what he was doing, but

when he turned around he had some bills in his hand. He pushed them across the desk to me.

"I guess you haven't seen many of these in your life," he said. "Ten-thousand-dollar bills. I keep them for emergencies. First emergency I've had for a long time." He sighed. "Oh well, I'll get it back."

I laughed. "Not from me, you won't."

"Maybe not, maybe yes. Once a gambler, always a gambler. Anyway, it's good advertising, even if it is expensive. There'll be a lot of boys and girls out there now who'll try to do the same thing."

I put the three crisp bills in my wallet and walked to the door. Sullivan put his hand on the doorknob and looked at me.

"Don't you think you'd better let a couple of my boys see you home?" he said. "That's a lot of dough you're carrying."

I shook my head. "No thanks, Ed. I'll be all right."

He shrugged. "You're the doctor." He unlocked the door and opened it. "Come back again, Dan, when you don't feel so lucky."

"No, I meant what I said. I'm done with gambling."

Everybody in the place turned to stare as I walked through the room. I gave the checkroom girl a dollar bill for my hat and went out and climbed into my car.

SULLIVAN'S place was about ten miles from the city limits. The only roads that reached it were dirt or gravel and not much traveled. I had gone a little more than a mile when I spotted a car about a quarter-mile behind. Forty was all I was doing then, so I stepped it up to sixty. The other car hung on, the same distance back, and I slowed down. My shadow did the same.

Driving with one hand, I unscrewed the horn button in the center of the steering-wheel and laid it in my lap. Then I took the three crisp bills out of my billfold, wadded them up and stuffed them into the little space around the steering rod and put the horn button back on. With that done, I tramped the accelerator down to the floorboard.

I was doing around eighty, but the other car was faster. Gradually it pulled up to about ten yards behind, swung to the left and started to go around. There was a deep ditch on the right. If I went into that at the speed I was going—well, the time of the funeral would depend on how fast they could assemble the body.

The other car was even with me now. Slowly it began to pull ahead, edging to the right at the same time. There wasn't anything for me to do, if I wanted to live, but take my foot off the gas and use it on the brake. So I came to a skidding stop at the edge of the ditch. The other car pulled up a few feet ahead and two men piled out.

"Get out of there," the first one yelled. I could tell he had something in his hand and I guessed it was a gun, but I couldn't be sure. I climbed out.

"Keep your hands up," the fellow barked. The other walked around him and started going through my pockets. Their hats were pulled low over the eyes. It was so dark I could hardly have seen their faces anyway. He took out my billfold, turned his back toward me and struck a match. He flipped the match away, came over and stuck the billfold back in my pocket.

"It ain't on him," he yelled over his shoulder.

A deep voice came from the car ahead. "Tie him up and bring him in." The big sedan roared away.

The lad who had searched me took what looked like a sizable rag out of his pocket. It turned out to be a sack. It must have had a string around the open end, because he put it over my head and tied it loosely around my neck. Then he tied my hands behind my back with what felt like a handkerchief. With a gun in my ribs I

was helped into my coupe and we started off.

How far we drove I couldn't tell. I know that the roads were bumpy and I could hear loose gravel spinning away from the tires. We made a lot of turns. Finally we stopped and I was led across what seemed a fairly smooth lawn, up three steps and onto what felt like linoleum floor. I heard a door slam shut behind me. Somebody shoved a chair under me without trying to be polite about it and I sat down hard.

The same deep voice I'd heard out on the road spoke up now. "McCray," it boomed, "the situation is simple, so don't try to make it complicated. You've got thirty thousand bucks. We want it. That's all there is to it. So—where is it?"

"I haven't got it."

"Baloney. We know you got it. You lugs go out and search that jalopy of his."

I heard heavy footsteps and the sound of the door opening and then closing.

"You don't want to take this hard, McCray," the deep voice went on. "You took that dough from Big Ed Sullivan. We're taking it from you. You used a roulette wheel. We're using force—brute force they call it in the story books. Anyway, we're taking it."

"I tell you I haven't got it."

"Never mind that song and dance. We know you wouldn't let Sullivan keep it for you."

"That's what I did."

"Oh, sure! You'd trust a gambler with that many marbles. You would not! He could close up and skip out before you knew what happened. You better try another line."

"It's the truth."

"Phooey."

AFTER a while I heard more footsteps and then a voice that sounded kind of disgusted. "It ain't in the car, so help us. We went through that can with a fine-tooth comb. And it just ain't there."

"Oh, yes it is," the deep voice came back. "You lugs just don't know where to look. Well, this baby is going to tell us."

Somebody pulled me out of the chair and pushed me a few steps back against the wall.

"I didn't want to get rough with you, sonny boy," the deep voice growled," but it looks like I'll have to. You goin to talk?"

"I haven't got it."

Something hard struck me under the jaw, bouncing my head back hard against the wall. My legs gave way. Two hands grabbed my arms just under the shoulders and straightened me up. The fingers felt like metal prongs. Another blow caught me just above the right eye and I felt a warm fluid streaming down my face.

"Let me thock him, let me thock him," a shrill voice yelped.

"Shut up, you."

Another punch landed squarely on the right eye. The soggy cloth of the sack stuck to my face. Something hit me hard in the midsection. I fell on my knees fighting for breath, then rolled over on my back. A shoe connected with my ribs. I felt very sick.

Right in my ear the deep voice boomed: "You had enough, McCray? You ready to talk yet?"

I moved my lips. They were sticky and had a salty taste. "I haven't got it," I managed to gasp.

"O. K. Take off one of his shoes."

Somebody fumbled around with my left shoe, slipped it off and then yanked off the sock.

I heard the scratching sound of a match being struck and caught a faint whiff of sulphur. The sole of my foot felt warm and then suddenly unbearably hot. I kicked and squirmed. Somebody grabbed my left leg and held it straight. Another match was scratched and again I had the feeling of a red hot poker being held against my foot. Maybe I should have

gritted my teeth and laughed scornfully like I've seen 'em do in the movies. Only I'm no movie hero and I know when I can't take it any more.

"Stop!" I yelled. "Don't burn me any more. I'll tell you where it is."

"Now you're showing sense," the deep voice grumbled. "You better talk straight too, boy. We got lots of matches."

"Unscrew the horn button on the steering wheel. It's—it's in there."

Somebody ran out of the room. I lay on the floor, breathing hard. One side of my face was throbbing, my ribs ached and my foot still felt like someone was playfully sticking needles in it.

Pretty soon I heard someone running back. "It was there, all right. I got it."

"O. K.," the deep voice said. "Now get his sock and shoe back on and get rid of him."

It could have been ten minutes later or maybe twenty when they brought my coupe to a stop and piled out. "You oughta be able to work yourself loose in an hour or two," one of them said. "So long."

Maybe it was an hour, but as things turned out it was probably much less, before I worked my hands loose. Then I untied the sack and took it painfully off my head. I got out a cigarette, found a match, struck it and took a long drag. I felt a little better. As I started the motor and put the car into gear I promised myself those rats would see me again.

Nearly twenty minutes later I limped into my apartment, switched on the lights and went directly to the bathroom. I was a pretty sight. One eye was swollen almost shut and that side of my face looked like one big purple bruise. The cut over my eye had bled pretty bad. I looked like an Indian all painted up and ready to hit the warpath. I washed off the blood and stuck a piece of court plaster over the cut. My ribs felt like a couple of them were smashed, but there wasn't anything I could do about that.

I switched off the light over the mirror, went into the bedroom, pulled open the upper right-hand dresser drawer, took out my automatic and shoved it into my pocket. Then I went back out to the street and climbed into the car.

SULLIVAN'S place was still going full blast. As I walked through the gambling-room people stared at me like I was a somewhat bunged-up ghost. Ed wasn't in the big room so I went to the door of his office and tapped.

"Who's there?" his big voice boomed.

"Dan McCray—in person."

"C'mon in."

When his eyes hit my face his big jaw dropped. He stared at me a second, shaking his head.

"Did you get the license number, kid?" he said at last.

"No. That's what I'm after now."

"What you mean?"

"I'm here to ask you a question, Ed. You'll probably get sore but I can't help that. I'm pretty mad myself. The question is this: Is it your policy to hold up anybody who makes a killing here and take it away from them?"

His eyes turned hard. He pushed back his chair, got to his feet and came around the desk toward me.

"Look here, McCray—" he growled.

I waved the automatic in front of him like a stop-sign.

"Go back and sit down," I snapped. "I thought you'd get sore. That's why I brought this. I don't want to have to use it. All I want is the truth."

He glared at me, then went back and sat down. "Suppose you tell me what this is all about. I can see you've been manhandled and you sound like you've been taken for that thirty grand. If I can do anything to help you I'll do it. But it won't pay you to get tough with me."

I held the gun on my knee and told him all about it. When I got through he

just rubbed his chin and stared at me.

"They really gave you the works, didn't they," he said finally. "Now, I want to tell you something, Dan. I've been running gambling-joints all over the world for thirty years. I've made a lot of dough and I've lost a lot. But I never ran a crooked game and I never let a crook work for me if I could help it. And I've never had to knock off any of my customers for their winnings. The percentage has always been good enough for me. Now put away that cannon and we'll see what we can do about this."

I stuck the gun in my pocket and he picked up a big cigar, bit off the end and lit up.

"Naturally you couldn't see those yeggs," he said through a cloud of blue smoke. "But did you hear anything—I mean anything that might be a tip?"

I shook my head. Then I remembered something.

"One of them had a voice like a foghorn. He seemed to be the head man. At least he did most of the talking and I think he did most of the damage to me. But one of them had a shrill voice and he spoke up just once. He yelled something that sounded like. 'Let me thock him, let me thock him.' The boss shut him up quick.

Sullivan's eyes brightened. "Oh," he murmured. "A lisper with a high voice. Let me see." He chewed on his cigar a few seconds. "That could be Sniffy Ginnis. In fact I'd bet my shirt on it. He's a mean little cuss, he's got a voice like a woman and he lisps. I think that's all we need to know. You just wait a minute."

IT WAS more like fifteen minutes before he came back. His Irish face was split by a big grin. He sat down at his desk and aimed his cigar at me.

"I think we're on the right track, son. Ginnis has been working recently with a fellow named Manuel Ramos, whose a combination confidence man, card sharp and all-around crook. Ramos is a husky devil and he's got a voice as deep as the bells of the sea. He's probably the head man—the one who mussed up your pretty face."

"Don't mention it."

"The only thing is," he went on, frowning, "I can't tie Ramos or Ginnis up with anyone here tonight. I mean anyone who would have tipped him off to the killing you made. Of course, it could have been anybody. I don't know anything about my customers except what they do here."

"How am I going to find Ramos and his boy friends?"

He shook his head. "That may be tough. I don't know where they might be hanging out now. I've heard talk of him promoting some big poker games, with the sky the limit. Some of the big shots in town have been playing with him and I'll bet he's taken them for plenty. But I don't know where he's operating. There's just one chance."

"Go right ahead."

"There must have been at least three that manhandled you tonight. And from what I can find out the third one is likely to be Clarence Brandt. Ever hear of him?"

I shook my head.

"You're lucky. He's another louse if there ever was one. One of my boys knows him—rather knows about him. He's one of these smooth crooks and he's a hound for the ladies. That's how I got this tip I'm coming to."

"Don't let me stop you."

"This boy of mine knows the baby Brandt is rushing just now. I had him call her apartment. She wasn't there but her girl friend says she thinks she's at the Ponce de Leon. Know where that is?"

"You mean the all-night drink-and-dance joint?"

"Yeah. Anyway, if this baby's there, that's where Brandt probably is. It isn't

much, but it's the only angle I can give you."

I got up. "Thanks, Ed. I'm on my way."

"You sure you don't want me and a couple of my boys to tag along?"

"No. I'll tell you how I feel. I've got a little score to settle with those rats and I'm going to do it myself."

"You're being foolish, kid. They're bad boys to monkey with when you're outnumbered."

"Maybe so, but I'm on my own from here on. You've been a big help to me and I appreciate it. I'll be seeing you."

IT WAS ordinarily a half-hour drive from Sullivan's to the Ponce de Leon and I made it in twenty minutes. The place must have been pretty well jammed, judging by the number of cars in the parking lot. A young fellow with a flashlight waved me to a vacant space. I called him over.

"Would you like to make five bucks, buddy?"

"You're talking to a guy that dreams about nothing but five bucks."

"Swell." I slipped it to him. "Just go inside, page a fellow named Clarence Brandt and tell him Ramos is waiting out here to see him. Tell him it's important."

"Clarence Brandt," he repeated. "Ramos wants to see him. O. K." He stuck the five in his pocket and headed for the entrance to the building.

In a few minutes he came out again. There was a man behind him who swayed when he walked. The boy with the flashlight came part way down the road with him, pointed to my car and turned away. The other fellow kept on coming, still walking on eggs. When he got close enough I jumped out and jammed the automatic in his ribs, hard.

"Come on, Clarence," I said, "you're going for a ride."

He stared at me. He'd had at least five too many. "What is this? What you mean, ride?"

"Anywhere. Get behind that wheel and drive slow. If you get funny this thing in my hand might explode."

He seemed to be sobering up fast. Without a word he crawled back of the wheel and I climbed in after him, keeping the gun ready. He swung the car out on the road and we started away. "Where we going?"

"Never mind. Just drive."

We'd gone about a mile when I told him to pull up. He did. Then I turned around in my seat facing him, with the automatic on my knee.

"You birds did a lot of messing around with me," I said. "I'm going to be different. I'm going to ask you to do something. If you say yes, you'll go on living even if you don't deserve to. If you say no, I'll kill you without any more argument and my conscience wont' hurt me a bit."

In the light from the dashboard his face was white and damp with sweat. "What do you want?" he gasped.

"I want you to drive me to where Ramos is. Make it snappy—yes or no." I lifted the gun from my knee.

He stared at the automatic and then at me. "O. K.," he gulped, "I'll take you there."

He drove now like he hadn't had a drink since last New Year's. We went along narrow, dirt roads and made a lot of turns. Finally I saw a light about a hundred yards ahead.

"That's the place," he said.

"Don't go too close."

He pulled the car off the road onto a lawn.

"Turn off the motor," I said.

As he reached forward I brought the butt of the gun down on his temple. It made an unpleasant, crunching sound. I laughed.

"I owe you more than that," I said. I

tore off his necktie and knotted it around his ankles. Then I took a handkerchief from his pocket and tied his hands behind his back. I climbed out and walked toward the light.

I WENT up the steps on my tip toes and moved cautiously to the side of the door. Through an oblong glass panel I peered into the room and saw no one. I turned the knob, pushed the door open slowly and stepped into the room. The automatic was in my hand.

After taking two steps I stopped, staring at a body sprawled on the floor. It was a short, slim body and the shoulders were narrow. I caught one quick glance of what was left of the face and tore my eyes away from it. There are some things that are too much for even a strong stomach.

In the bewilderment that came over me then, I suddenly realized that I had been hearing something that hadn't registered at once. It was the sound of a man breathing and it came in long-drawn, shuddering gasps.

There was a round table in the center of the room. A nearly empty bottle and two glasses stood on it in the middle of a scattered pile of playing-cards. I walked to the other side of the table and found where the sound of painful breathing came from.

A man lay on his back, partly under the table. He was much bigger than the other, with broad bulky shoulders. He had an oily, olive skin and black hair cut short. His eyes were closed and his barrel chest was heaving. The front of his shirt was a mess of blood. A cradle phone was on the floor near him.

I reached over, grabbed the whiskey bottle and dropped to my knees. I forced some of the liquor into his mouth. In a few seconds his eyes opened. They were black and seemed to be staring into space.

"Are you Ramos?" I said, with my lips close to his ear.

"Yes. Ramos, that's me."

"You remember me? McCray? The guy you took for thirty grand?"

Something like a smile came over his face. "Yes."

"Where's that thirty grand?"

He shook his head weakly. "Gone. He took it."

"Who? Brandt?"

"No. Robertson. Paul Robertson. He came here for his cut. Saw the money. Started shooting. That's all."

A billfold was lying near Ramos' hand. I poked it open with my automatic. It was empty.

"Why did Robertson have a cut coming?"

"He tipped us off. About you winning."

"Who is this Robertson? Where does he live? What does he do?"

He shook his head again. "Don't know. Played poker with him. Took him for plenty. He still owed me. That's why he gave me the tip about you. To square the debt. He was supposed to get ten grand besides. Give me another shot."

I held the bottle to his lips. He drank and sighed. A few drops ran down his chin. He seemed to feel better. He tried to prop himself on his elbows and then sank back. His left hand reached out and caught my wrist.

"Listen," he said, "get that guy. We treated you pretty rough, but—anyway, get him."

"Why did he come tonight for the payoff? Couldn't he wait?"

"He's leaving town. Taking a plane east. You might get him at—at the ariport. That's it—the airport. The—"

His voice trailed away in a whisper. His eyes closed, he seemed to be fighting for breath.

I grabbed his shoulder. "Listen. You've got to tell me what he looks like."

His eyes flicked open. He was looking through me into space. His body stiffened,

his hands beat against the floor, then lay quiet. His head rolled limply to one side. He wasn't breathing.

I reached for the telephone that lay on the floor and dialed a number with a pencil. "Municipal airport," a voice said.

"Have you a plane leaving for the east tonight, or rather this morning?"

"The New York plane leaves at three A.M. That's the only one."

"Thanks."

I hung up, took out my handkerchief and wiped off the receiver carefully. Then I picked the whiskey bottle off the floor, wiped it and set it back on the table. On the way out I polished both doorknobs.

Brandt was still slumped over the wheel, out cold. I must have smacked him harder than I thought.

AT THAT moment I spotted headlights coming down the road. I grabbed Brandt, pulled him out of the coupe and stretched him out on the grass. When I jumped into the car the headlights were almost on me. I started the motor and gave her the gun. A couple of loud voices burst out then but I couldn't make out what they were saying and didn't try. Something else followed the voices. It sounded like a giant firecracker. There were more explosions that sounded the same way. Something hit my right fender. I could see the little dent it made. I kept on going.

After a little while, I looked at my watch. One o'clock. Plenty of time to get to the airport. It wouldn't do to be too early. To get to the airport I had to go through town and Harbison's house wasn't more than a block or two out of my way. It would be as good a place to kill time as any. After all he was probably sleeping peacefully under the delusion that everything was fixed. Well, he was wrong about that and there wasn't any use in me doing all the worrying for the partnership.

It took about fifteen minutes to get to George's house. I leaned on the doorbell without getting an answer and then leaned on it some more. Finally a light flashed on and a minute later old George came hobbling down the steps. I could see him through the glass in the front door. He was all wrapped up in a faded blue bathrobe and his hair was a mess. He came to the door, peered through the glass and then opened up.

"Great heavens, man," he gasped, "what's happened to you?"

"A little bit of everything." I walked across the room and squatted in a big, overstuffed chair. "I've been a busy little beaver and the net result is nothing—or worse."

He was looking down at me with his right hand in the pocket of his bathrobe, the other rubbing his chin. He still looked like he hadn't slept for a week.

"What are you trying to tell me?" he asked.

I tried to laugh. "It's a long story and I don't feel like going into detail. I'll give you the high spots. First, just forget what I told you about taking Sullivan for thirty grand."

His eyebrows climbed. "You mean you were kidding?"

"No. I had it—now I haven't. Some playful boys pried it loose from me. I guess it's gone for good, unless—"

"Unless what?"

As I opened my mouth to answer, the doorbell rang. George went over, peeped through the glass, then pulled the door open.

Edna rushed into the room. She was a nifty trick if I do say so myself. Sort of on the small side, but her measurements were right. She had yellow hair and blue eyes and when it came to reading the riot act she had few equals and no superiors.

A big man barged in behind her. It was Sullivan. Edna ran over and threw her arms around me.

"I've been nearly crazy, worrying about you," she half sobbed.

"Did you do any good, Dan?" Sullivan broke in.

I shook my head, pulled Edna's arms away and led her to the davenport. "Sit there and be good. Have you been following me around?"

"I kept calling your apartment," she explained. "Then I called George and he told me you'd won an enormous amount from Mr. Sullivan. I kept on trying to get you at the apartment. Finally I called Mr. Sullivan. He told me something had happened to you but that you were all right. I—"

"You had me worried too, son," Sullivan interrupted. "So I told her if she wanted to look for you I'd pick her up and help. We drove to the Ponce De Leon. No trace of you there, so we started scouring the countryside. Then we went to your apartment and finally came here. Now tell us what you've been doing."

I let out a sigh. "O.K. I'll make it snappy."

I'D got to the point where I found Sniffy Ginnis dead and Ramos dying and the thirty grand gone, when the doorbell rang. "What is this, George," I asked. "You giving a party?"

He looked kind of puzzled, but went over and peeked through the glass. Then he turned around and looked at me.

"It looks like the police," he said. "What will I do?"

"Better let 'em in," Sullivan said.

Harbison hesitated and then opened up. Two heavy-set fellows in civilian clothes pushed past him. A uniformed policeman was in back of them. He stayed at the door.

The man in front flashed a badge. "I'm Detective-sergeant Connelly," he growled. "Who owns that coupe parked in front?"

I got up. "I do. Did I forget to leave my lights burning."

"Something like that," he said with a mean looking grin. "Are you Dan McCray?"

"Yes."

He turned and spoke to the uniformed cop. "Bring him in."

A minute later the cop came back with his right hand attached to Clarence Brandt's elbow.

"That's him," Brandt yelled, pointing at me.

"O.K.," said Connelly, walking over to me. "You better come with us, buddy."

"Now wait a minute," I said. "How about telling me what this is all about?"

"That's right, officer," said Sullivan. "What have you got against McCray?"

Connelly looked at him. "Did somebody deal you in, Sullivan?"

The old gambler grinned. "You've got something there."

"Well, I'll tell you," the detective went on. "We haven't much on McCray—just one kidnaping and two murders!"

Edna gave out a little shriek and jumped to her feet. "You must be crazy!" she cried.

He handed her a look that would have mowed down anyone but Edna.

"The best thing for you to do, sister," he snapped, "is keep your face buttoned up." He turned back to me. "Weren't you driving that coupe when we shot at it back at the cottage about an hour ago?"

I shrugged. "Sure. What of it?"

"Did you know there were two dead men in that cottage?"

"Yes, but—"

"Look here, Dan," Harbison broke in, "you'd better not talk any more till you get a lawyer."

"Nuts. I don't need a lawyer."

Connelly shook his head sadly. "You need three or four lawyers, son, if you ask me."

"I didn't."

"O.K. I'm telling you anyway. Ramos must have managed to call for help just

after the shooting. We got out there in time to take a few pot shots at your buggy and get your license number. That's how we traced you here. We sent in a call to have your car followed if it was spotted."

"Go ahead. How do you tie me in with the murders?"

"I'll go back to that. We find Brandt all trussed up and unconscious from a crack on the conk. He tells us you pulled a rod on him, forced him to drive to the cottage and then slugged him. That's all he knows except that Ramos and Ginnis are lying on the floor in the cottage and they're pretty dead. It looks like that's enough to burn you."

Edna hid her face against Sullivan's big arm and started to cry. Nobody paid any attention.

"Did Brandt tell you how he and Ramos and Ginnis rolled me for thirty thousand dollars?" I asked.

Connelly looked at Brandt and shook his head. "Maybe he hadn't got around to that yet. How about it?"

Brandt shrugged. "I'm not talking about that."

"I can verify part of what McCray says," Sullivan broke in. "I know he left my place with three ten-thousand-dollar bills. I know he came back without them. We were able to figure that Ramos was back of it."

Connelly sneered. "Maybe you know who bumped off those two birds?"

Sullivan shook his head.

"I do," I said.

Connelly stared at me. "I'm listening."

"It was a man named Paul Robertson. Ramos told me a minute before he died."

"Paul Robertson? Never heard of him. Where does he tend bar?"

"I don't know. But Ramos said he was the guy who tipped him off about me winning the dough. And when he came to collect his share of the loot he just turned his cannon loose on them, took the thirty grand and skipped."

CONNELLY rubbed his nose and stared at me. "You'll have a sweet time proving that," he grumbled, "if you can't produce Mr. Robertson." He turned to Brandt. "Did you ever hear of this Paul Robertson?"

Brandt nodded sullenly. "Never met him, but I'd heard Ramos talk about him. Seems he was a sucker in a poker game. And that's right about Robertson giving the tip and being promised a cut. And—I've talked too much already, maybe."

"You'll talk more than that, chum," Connelly growled. He looked at me. "You say you don't know how to find Robertson?"

I glanced at my wrist watch. It was two-thirty. "There's only one clue," I began.

The doorbell sounded.

"What's this?" said Sullivan. "The army and navy?"

Connelly went over to the door, opened it and stuck his head out. In a minute he came back looking mad.

"What were you going to pull off, McCray?" he snapped. "Trying to take a run-out powder?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"There's a taxi-driver outside. He says he got an order to come to this address and take a passenger to the airport. Did you call for a cab before I got here?"

I shook my head. My heart was pounding away at a clip that wasn't healthy and I felt dizzy.

"He must have got the wrong address," Harbison said. He was sitting on the davenport, leaning back easily with his right hand in the pocket of his robe. I seemed to remember him keeping his hand there when I first came in.

"Baloney," said Connelly. "I've quit believing fairy tales. Come on, McCray. You're going down to headquarters. Maybe a little going-over will bring the truth out of you."

I let out a sick laugh. "I've been gone over pretty thoroughly already tonight," I said. "Guess a little more won't hurt me. Let me say good-bye to my friends."

"Don't try anything fancy."

I shook hands with Sullivan. The big man gave me a funny look but his handshake was hearty. Then I kissed Edna. Her face was all smeary from the tears she'd been putting out but she gave me a smile. A pretty game kid.

"Don't worry," I said. "Everything's going to be hotsy-totsy."

I turned away from her and faced Harbison. He was standing now and his right hand was still in his pocket. I went for his right wrist, gave it a savage twist and jerked the hand out.

"Hey!" yelled Connelly.

A gun clattered to the floor. It was a snub-nosed revolver, so little you could almost hide it in your fist, but it had a fat barrel. Harbison dived for it and I caught him under the chin with a right uppercut that I raised from the floor. It was a sweet punch and I've always been a little proud of it. Anyway, Harbison almost did a backwards somersault and landed on his neck.

Connelly grabbed for me, but I shook him off. "Use your brain, flatfoot," I yelled. "Pick up that gun. It's going to be evidence."

The detective picked it up. I was kneeling on Harbison's chest. There wasn't anything else in the right-hand pocket of his robe but there was a little silver cigarette case and a clip of matches in the other. I snapped the case open. One side was solid with cigarettes, the other had three. I shook out the cigarettes and there it was—my long lost thirty grand! The three crisp ten-thousand-dollar bills that I'd done everything but die for.

I handed them to Connelly. "More evidence," I said. "When George comes to I think you'll find he sometimes goes by the name of Paul Robertson and that that cute little gun is what he used to murder Ramos and Ginnis."

CONNELLY knelt down and slapped Harbison's face a couple times with the flat of his hand. Finally Harbison opened his eyes and sat up. Connelly and the other detective grabbed him and sat him down in an easy chair.

"We've got enough on you to put you in the hot seat," Connelly told him, "so you don't have to talk if you don't want to."

"You haven't anything on me," Harbison snarled.

"No? These three ten-thousand-dollar bills are enough. But the ballistics tests will prove your gun killed two men tonight. We don't need anything more."

Maybe the realization of what had happened just hit him then. Maybe he'd been putting his nerve to more of a test than it could stand. Anyway, Harbison dropped his head in his hands and cried like a baby.

I looked at his heaving shoulders and couldn't even feel sorry. "You're a fine partner," I said. "Telling me you mortgaged the plat to pay stock-market losses. When what you'd been doing was losing your shirt to Ramos playing poker. And then turning him loose on me. Why—"

He raised his head. "Don't, Dan," he begged.

"What do you mean, 'don't'?" I said. "If you knew the beating I took from those thugs. And I thought they were pretty low. But they were fine upstanding gentlemen of the old school compared to a filthy skunk like you."

He shut his eyes and a long shudder went through him. "I guess you're right," he said, more quietly. "I must have been crazy these last few months. It was a woman, Dan. I shouldn't blame her, but —anyway, if I'd never met her I wouldn't be in this mess. She's out at the airport

now, waiting for me, I guess. She—she did something to me. Made me lose my reason. I couldn't think of anything but getting away with her and starting life over. And I wanted money to do that. I couldn't raise it just by selling out my share in the business. I didn't want my wife to know. I wanted to fade out—just disappear. And I was going to do that tonight. Well, I played a dangerous game and I lost. Whatever happens to me now—well, I deserve it."

He dropped his head back in his hands.

I put my arm around Edna. "You better marry me quick, kid," I said. "Keep me out of mischief. And don't ever let me gamble, no matter how Ed Sullivan begs me."

Sullivan roared. "He's right about that, girl. You take good care of him. God knows, somebody should. Right now we better take him home and put him to bed."

"That sounds like heaven," I said. "I'm not going to wake up until one hour before the wedding. I've been kind of overexerting myself."

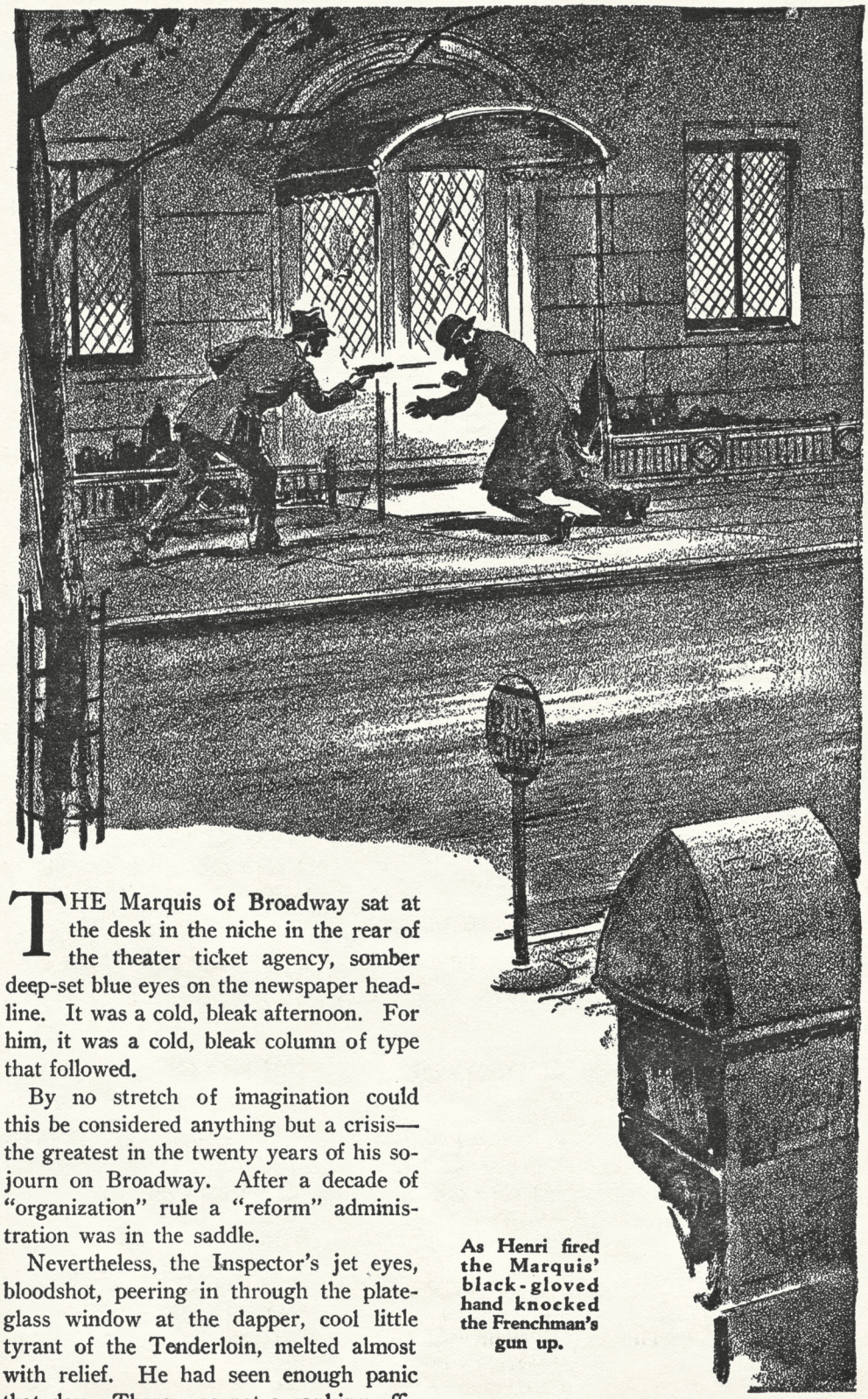
"And how!" said Sullivan.

I held out my hand to Connelly.

"How about slipping me that thirty grand. It's mine, you know. I worked like a dog for it. And I've got to meet a note with it tomorrow if I want to stay in the real-estate business."

Conelly shook his head. "Sorry. I've got to keep it for a while. It's pretty important evidence. But you can meet the note all right. You can use it for collateral."

I let out a long sigh. "So I still don't get it. O. K., then. Maybe it's a good idea for you to keep it for me. I don't seem to be able to hang on to it!"



As Henri fired the Marquis' black-gloved hand knocked the Frenchman's gun up.

THE Marquis of Broadway sat at the desk in the niche in the rear of the theater ticket agency, somber deep-set blue eyes on the newspaper headline. It was a cold, bleak afternoon. For him, it was a cold, bleak column of type that followed.

By no stretch of imagination could this be considered anything but a crisis—the greatest in the twenty years of his sojourn on Broadway. After a decade of "organization" rule a "reform" administration was in the saddle.

Nevertheless, the Inspector's jet eyes, bloodshot, peering in through the plate-glass window at the dapper, cool little tyrant of the Tenderloin, melted almost with relief. He had seen enough panic that day. There was not a ranking offi-

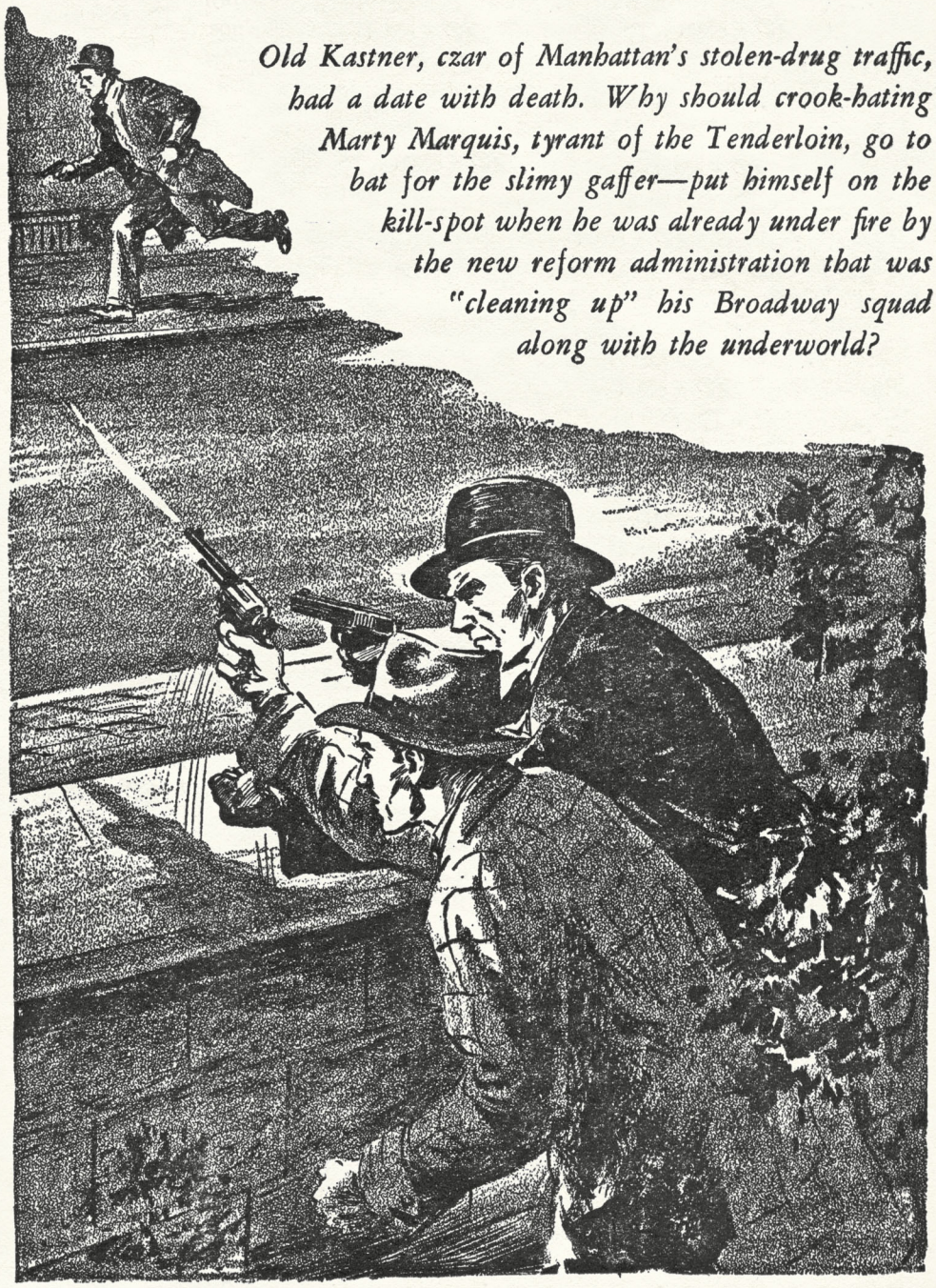
BOOMERANG BLASTOUT

A Marquis of Broadway Story

by John Lawrence

Author of "Natural Killer," etc.

Old Kastner, czar of Manhattan's stolen-drug traffic, had a date with death. Why should crook-hating Marty Marquis, tyrant of the Tenderloin, go to bat for the slimy gaffer—put himself on the kill-spot when he was already under fire by the new reform administration that was "cleaning up" his Broadway squad along with the underworld?



cer in his command who was not in trouble—or would be, if their affairs were suddenly spotlighted.

It was a cold certainty that this brilliant, super-honest new prosecutor would strike—and strike hard—at the police. Whether he would realize and consider the pressure under which honest officers had labored during the past twenty years—organization pressure which forced "angles"—remained to be seen. Where the lightning would strike first—which sections would be impaled at once—which precincts could find time to clean house, no one knew. The whole town was a griddle on which every brass hat in the department was cooking, even while they tried hastily to mop up.

THE Marquis couldn't even mop up. No situation exists anywhere such as that on Manhattan's Main Stem. In twenty years, the Marquis—with twenty-two irregulars—had built up an unorthodox routine of policing it that would bring shudders to any law-and-order league. He'd had to. Ten thousand greedy eyes—those of the cream of the world's thieves — were constantly beating down on the greatest easy-money mine in the world. A million fools a year came to Broadway to make asses of themselves. It was a question of supply and demand. The laws of the commonwealth meant nothing to either. Courts and processes were ignored; the iron hand of the Marquis was not. He dictated to exactly what extent the laws could be broken. He dictated who could and who could not operate in the White Light District. He, and he alone, decided how much lawlessness had to be permitted. He laid down rules to cover the situation as he saw it, and his edicts were backed with instant, ruthless, personal enforcement. He had long since given up worrying that they were mostly illegal.

He had a code of conduct that no one but himself could possibly understand. Certain lawbreakers can be more easily ruled by power of dollars. The Marquis could not have read a psychological paper to prove it—or anything else, for that matter—for back of his painfully-acquired, dapper, dark polish, there was a childhood in the tenements of Avenue A. But he knew to his own satisfaction, that it was so, and he did not disdain the method. He was not a dishonest officer. Nothing was of the slightest consequence to him beside his rigorous job. He ran it as twenty years had taught him to run it, and he knew in his heart that it could be run no other way.

Yet in court, today, he could be damned, ruined, dismissed, if the new regime wanted to play it that way. And there was nothing he could do about it. His system was solidified, established. He was as rigidly bound by it now as the thousands of vultures whom it held in check. He had to proceed as he always had. The storm-cloud that had rolled up would not, for him, be dissipated by time. He was—and would be for months—at the mercy of the personal understanding of the new prosecutor.

Still he sat cool, blue eyes somber, round, pink-cheeked, weathered face vaguely eager, vaguely cheerful under his imported hard hat. He was as immaculate, unperturbed, as though posed for a picture—tight black silk scarf, expensively tailored black Chesterfield, black gloves, knife-edged dark trousers carefully crossed, gleaming black shoes.

The Inspector went in. It was the first stop on his rounds where he had not met a scared man. "What? No wail?"

"What? No wail?"

"Would that help?"

"How are you set?"

"You know how I'm set.

"I guess I do," the Inspector said wearily, then, more quickly, "You've put the lid on the district? It's your only

hope, you know. They're looking for bear now. The newspapers never liked you much. Give them half a chance—some sensational unsolved mystery—and it'll be the blow-off."

"I thought of that."

The Inspector got up. "Marty—keep the spot quiet. If you can only sing small, keep from attracting attention, this D.A. may get educated before he gets to you."

WITHIN six hours the Inspector himself had run into the business of the girl—and the weird picture. Bud Leland's gambling-joint was on his regular rounds. He made it about ten o'clock. The dark, low-ceilinged room was noisy, droning. Milling crowds surrounded all the six dice tables that ribboned down its narrow black length. Each table was a bright-green island in a sea of smoke haze.

The dimness all but swallowed the girl's tiny figure. She wore a tailored black suit, black tricorne hat and black gloves. Her wistful, appealing little face and blond hair, plus a white stock and white at her wrists, seemed to be standing disembodied by the second table when the Inspector caught sight of her. Her long-lashed, deep-blue eyes searched the ring of absorbed faces around the table.

She stood there for maybe three minutes, then suddenly floated away to slowly materialize again in the fog around the next table. No one paid her the slightest attention—except the Inspector. His hickory-lean figure was against the wall, completely invisible, and his jet eyes need make no pretense of concealing their curiosity.

His attention was taken, not because she was the only woman in the place. No woman had to be afraid of being seen in Leland's places. But her winsome beauty did not conceal her smartness and big-town daintiness. She was definitely not the type of Bud Leland's regular hard-bitten, horsy clientele. He operated only a few weeks out of the year in each city, almost entirely for the benefit of the nomadic company who troop around the country with the race-meets. Vaguely, the girl was out of place. It took her ten minutes to reach the fourth table in line. This placed her not more than thirty feet from the Inspector and made her every move quite visible.

She found the face she was seeking. Her little body stiffened almost unnoticeably, and she retreated quickly backwards a step into the gloom.

Presently, she eased quietly around the table behind the ring of backs, stood motionless. At least, it seemed so, till a white square blossomed in her hand and the Inspector realized she had taken it from her black handbag.

She waited another second. The Inspector strove to identify the player in whom she was interested, but he could not pick him out until a thin-backed man in a long, dark-greenish overcoat suddenly reached far down the table, to place a bet. One of the slash side-pockets of his coat turned into view as he stretched. The girl's black-gloved fingers moved nimbly—surprisingly so.

When the thinnish man straightened again, the white envelope had slipped easily into his pocket and the girl was backing silently, unhurriedly away. Presently the shadows swallowed her completely. The Inspector's vaguely puzzled eyes focused on the face of the man whose coat had been invaded—a white-haired, stringy old man, fairly well-dressed, with lines of discouragement in his thin seamed face and dull disinterest in grape-like blue eyes. He had few counters before him.

After a while these few were gone, and the old man turned dully away from the table. Standing a foot or two behind the instantly closed-in ring of backs, he watched one or two throws before he slid his hands absently into his coat pockets and discovered his acquisition.

It was not the envelope, nor the writing on it that hit the old man. It was when he ripped the envelope open and took out the stiff, square enclosure—white from the Inspector's side — that he went to pieces.

In an instant, his eyes went suddenly terrified, shrunken. One skinny hand crawled up to his throat. He went stiff in a glaze of fear. For three heart-beats, his white-ringed eyes clung to the thing in his hand. Then he suddenly came to himself, high color rushing in to his temples as he flung wild eyes around to see if he were watched. At the same instant he crumpled envelope and contents savagely in one fist, whipped his arm down, flinging them blindly away behind him. For a minute, he looked around him, then fairly bolted — white-ringed eyes still probing—for the exit.

The Inspector half started after him, then reconsidered. His black eyes drifted down to the floor, to the crumpled envelope and what had been in it. He stooped slowly over and retrieved them.

IN THE vastness of an empty Broadway theater, two hours later, he stood anxious-faced beside the Marquis, his jet eyes and the Marquis' somber blue ones staring at the picture.

A Latin-looking girl was strapped to a bed. She had vague traces of beauty, but something had happened. Her lips, her ears were swollen, thick, gigantic. Her eyes had the frantic, burning light of madness. Her hands and feet were hideously enlarged, ghastly. She was a sickening monstrosity.

Across the picture, scrawled in red ink, was the assurance— *For this you shall pay with your heart's blood. Pray that the Saints shall show you mercy, for you shall taste deeply of hell before you die. As you made it to her, death shall be a welcome relief to you.*

"If there's anything at all to it," the Inspector said, "it could raise hell."

The Marquis nodded.

"It's in your district."

The Marquis reached a small, black-gloved hand for the crumpled envelope, also red-scrawled.

Silas Kastner, c/o Golding & Co., West Fifty-seventh St., N. Y. City, was what he read.

THE stringy old man stood on the hearth. The Marquis' small sitting-room was conservative in old oak and leather. One green-shaded table-lamp and the flickering grate fire supplied all the illumination. The frightened old man twisted his hat between stiff fingers.

From the gloom the Marquis said: "I'm not fooling. Come clean."

"I—I—Marty—I'm not asking for anything. Just let me go. I can—can take care of myself."

"Can you?"

"Well, what if I can't?" the other blurted shrilly. "What's it to you?"

"Nothing, personally," the Marquis assured him. "But for certain reasons, I want my district quiet. There's enough hubble-gubble in this, to attract the newshawks. If you're going to die—I want a killed quick. Who was the girl?"

"I don't know."

"What's this all about? Who sent the girl—and the picture?"

"Marty—I swear—"

"I swear, too. I swear I'll have it beaten out of you, if you stall for one minute longer."

The other's eyes were desperate. He set his teeth.

"Don't get heroic," the Marquis warned him, "if it's a matter of your nephew."

"Of—of—" the other stammered.

"Of your nephew. Of the type of business you do. Of worrying that talking will affect his fortunes."

"You—you—"

"We know all about you, yeah," the Marquis said. "Henri!"

The door of the bedroom swung open, to reveal two armchairs almost in the lighted entrance. Big Johnny Berthold, the blond giant and the dapper little dancing-eyed, black-moustached Henri sprawled in the chairs. The little Frenchman read from a long paper.

"Golding & Company: One of the oldest and most reliable names in the wholesale drug field. Founded in seventy-seven by Grandpa, passed to Papa in nineteen hundred and to son in twenty-four. This little pig went to market—the stock market—and was stripped in twenty-nine. Dutched it. The family had trouble getting anything for the firm. Bought by Silas Kastner, for two thousand dollars. He's a queer duck, who ought to know the answers. Born in Michigan, worked in lumber camps, sold balloons in a circus—short-change stuff—bellhop in a Detroit hotel, ran errands for Doc Brady the gambler, sold mining-stock, worked for an outlaw race-track in Des Moines, labor-trouble spy. Maybe other things, but never, apparently, got into law trouble.

"At time of purchase, Kastner, and one Buell, had a retail drug store in Dayton, opened just one month. They closed it and came immediately to New York. Buell, an expert pharmacist, handles the drugs. Kastner handles all contacts, buying and selling.

"For six years, Kastner has traveled all over the country, contacting the best fences in each city and offering a market for stolen drugs—as far as I know, the first well-organized market for hot stuff of this sort in the country.

"Hospitals, on the strength of the old name, buy freely and the prestige allows these babies to undersell competition with no questions asked.

"They handle only the very finest drugs—absolutely first-grade. No narcotics or poisons. Legal advice the very best and accounting set-up probably a honey.

"My opinion that it would take two years to build up a case against them, considering their legal and accounting set-ups and the patience with which they have gone to town. I don't believe they have made expenses in five years—they seem to realize they have a good racket and are willing to treat it carefully, nurse it along. Some day they sure as hell will have something and they are careful to keep their noses scrupulously clean.

"As far as the Squad is concerned, I don't see it's any of our business. There never seems to be any kickback on any of the deals the boys have made and in view of the fact that they keep their hands off the hop and so forth, I think you could give them a break. After all, if there's any beef to be made, it would probably be interstate and hence Federal, so why should we worry?

"Incidentally, one Albert Kastner, who seems to be nephew of Silas, helps in store. Partnership insurance names Albert as beneficiary, if anything happens to Silas. (Signed) Zeke Immerman."

THE Marquis explained. "Immerman was one of the members of my squad until recently. Are you clamming because you're afraid the business-insurance underwriters will balk if they find the joint is crooked—won't pay off on you?" The old man looked dazed.

"It's nothing to us," the Marquis said. "If you're as clean as this report indicates, we won't pass on what we know—if you talk now."

The old man croaked: "How—how long have you known this?"

"Three years anyway. After all, friend, Broadway is my district. Now—who is sending you threats and pictures?"

The old man licked his lips, gulped. "I—I think—two men named Enz. They—said that was their name."

"What have they against you?"

"I—I made a mistake in—in prescribing for their sister."

"That's the girl strapped to the bed? How—what mistake?"

The old man suddenly put his skinny hands over his face, groaned. "We were in Dayton," he blurted hoarsely. "I was alone in the store. These two crazy-looking Italians—I think they were Italians—came rushing in.

"I could hardly understand what they were saying. They could scarcely speak a word of English. They roared and shouted at me, showed me a large bottle. I realized they thought they were in the same store where they had gotten the bottle in the first place. There were a few grains of light brownish stuff in it. They wanted more of the same. Their sister, as far as I could gather, was in pain, and this stuff gave her relief.

"I tried to make them wait until Buell came back—tried to tell them they were in the wrong store. One of them whipped a knife from his clothes and almost ran it through my throat. They couldn't understand me—they thought I was refusing to sell them what they wanted.

"They were out of their heads—frantic. I thought they were excited enough to actually kill me. I tried to find what doctor had prescribed the dose. That sent them off again when I mentioned 'doctor.' They had gone to no doctor—were afraid of doctors. Some druggist had compounded the stuff. There was nothing for me to do but try and find the same stuff on our shelves.

"I know nothing about pharmacy. All I can say is—I found a bottle on the shelf with what I would swear was the identical stuff. I filled their bottle with it and they paid me and ran out. When my—when Buell came back, he saw the cover ajar on that bottle. He cursed and told me it was a dangerous drug—pituitrin. I didn't dare tell him I'd sold some. I found out in a roundabout way that it looked exactly like a compound of licorice—a simple physic. And I found out—from a book—the danger of the other stuff.

"They'd mentioned their names in their wild talk. I remembered it—Enz. I started out to find them—and couldn't. I spent two weeks looking for them. I—well, I could hardly go to the police. I found out—half by guess and half by things I ran across—that they were criminals—illiterate criminals new in the country. I guess that was why I couldn't find them—they kept themselves hidden. I reached the point of desperation. I knew if the girl was taking that stuff regularly — or even semi-regularly — something was going to happen to her. And if they were as distrustful of doctors as they claimed, they would not call one when it *did* happen—and it would go on, getting worse."

"They never came back?"

"No. The—the effects of the drug might not have shown up for weeks."

"What are the effects?"

The old man's eyes crawled to the crumpled photograph.

"I see," the Marquis said. "Your partner never knew any of this?"

"No."

"Was it after you couldn't find these Enzes that you came to New York? When time went on and you figured it was too late to repair the error—that they might come after you?"

"Not—not exactly. I was dickering for Golding and Co., even before that. It—well, maybe it hastened my decision."

"And this picture is the first kickback you've had?"

The old man nodded.

"You don't recognize the description of the blond girl who slipped this to you?"

The old man hesitated, his eyes feverish. "N-no, I guess I don't. There—

well, it might fit almost any blond girl, Marty. For a minute, I had a crazy idea that it sounded like a little tramp that Buell has been running with—Corinne Lane. She lives at the Drummond, but—oh, hell, it couldn't be."

"We'll see," the Marquis said. "Johnny, call the Drummond and see if you can get hold of her. If you can, get the Inspector."

After a minute, Johnny Berthold hung up the phone receiver and said: "She checked out at noon today."

For a second, the old man's eyes went wide with surprise, then he said: "Oh! Oh—that's right. She may have gone to Atlantic City with Buell. He left at noon for a little trip."

"Did he now?" the Marquis said. He hesitated a moment, in thin-eyed thought, then turned toward the bedroom. "Excuse us a minute," he said to Kastner.

Inside the closed bedroom, he told big Johnny Berthold: "Go catch me that partner—the one for Atlantic City."

The blond giant blinked. "Hey—you—But hey, these Enz boys!"

"How do they suddenly crop up on Kastner's trail? If this partner wanted to wash the old man out, tipping them off would be a nice clean method."

"What would he win? The business—which isn't worth ten thousand bucks all told?"

"I don't say he did. But I'd like to hear him say he didn't."

"You ever see the guy? A big, easy-going, good-natured fat guy. Outside his own stuff, I don't think he knows the time of day."

"Maybe he learned. Phone Dayton, Henri."

TEN minutes later they had sketchy descriptions of the two Enz brothers—illiterates, dangerous hold-up artists and positive killers, according to the Dayton police, but cunning enough to keep loose. Actually, they had never been arrested. Dayton headquarters knew what little they did know only through tips of stool-pigeons that never wound up anywhere. The Enzes were Latins, small-time outlaws, vicious as snakes, and it was the opinion of the officer to whom the Marquis talked that it was not improbable that they would kill for pleasure as well as profit—go completely mad-dog in a matter of revenge.

When they walked out into the sitting-room, the Marquis told the glazed old man: "Detective Henri, here, will take you home. Where do you live?"

Kastner croaked an address in the West Fifties.

"I know the drum," the little Frenchman said. "It's easy to cover."

"Don't be frightened," the Marquis told Kastner. "We'll get these gents."

The telephone rang. The Marquis nodded at Johnny and the big man hung over the phone on the library table, answered. His startled words stopped the Marquis and the others on their way to the door: "Huh?" he said. "Who? Kastner? . . . Yeah, wait a minute."

"The Marquis asked swiftly, as the old man blinked: "Who knew you were here?"

"N-nobody," the other gulped. "Good God—who—"

"Answer it," the Marquis said, and took five swift steps into the bedroom.

He got the extension phone by his bedside to his ear just about the time Kastner's frightened voice blurted, "Hello," into the other instrument.

There was no sound on the wire. Then suddenly, came a series of quick frantic hammerings followed by a fear-crazed woman's muffled scream—repeated again and again. By the time the second one split his eardrums, the Marquis had shouted, "Henri—trace it!" and the little Frenchman was streaking for the hall door of the apartment.

CORINNE LANE had been puzzled and frightened all evening. The black-looking neighborhood in which they stopped did nothing to make her less so. She looked in quick anxiety at the round-faced, cheerful plump man at her side, then at the almost deserted, dark pavements stretching up and down, along the very edge of Harlem.

"Now what?" she demanded.

"Just a phone call—in the drug store there, honey. Gosh sakes, don't be so hard to get along with. Once I get this out of the way, we're off for the seashore."

"I don't get it," she complained. "You make me check out of the hotel at noon, then we spend the afternoon at the movies instead of starting on the trip. We fool away the whole evening. You send me into a floating crap joint to stick an envelope in your partner's pocket for some stupid joke. And now at two in the morning, you have to get the brainwave to stop on the toughest street in town to make a phone call."

"Well, it's business, honey."

"Well, if you think I'm going to sit out here alone, you're crazy. I'll go in and hang around inside. There's too many funny-looking people in these doorways."

The dingy, open-all-night drug store was utterly silent. The counters were cluttered, the floor dirty and the mirrors behind the soda-fountain were fly-specked. It had a greasy smell of candy. Two telephone booths were in the rear corner of the store and to reach them, plump Tommy Buell had to force his bulk between and around two sets of counters.

The girl trailed worriedly at his heels.

She was standing with her back to the opening in the piled-high counters through which they had reached the phone-booth-niche, and he was inside the booth, dialing a number, when the gun-muzzle pressed against her side.

A husky, tense voice whispered in her ear: "Don't mek' no sound. Justa walk in udder boot', sist'. No get hurt. Iss stick-up."

If he had not added the last sentence, she would have screamed a warning. But she was momentarily fooled. The gun prodded her and she stumbled into the booth. The door was slid shut so quickly that she had not time to turn around and see the man behind her. But she did see, from the corner of her eye, in the instant that she stumbled in, a swarthy, rock-faced man slip from concealment beyond the far end of the booths.

And in the instant that she whirled round, to see the broad back and soft gray hat of her captor, holding the door of her booth closed, the rock-faced man crashed open the door of the cubicle which held Tommy Buell and she knew her supreme error. Tommy's voice abruptly ceased with a sharp yell of surprise. There was flailing motion—and then the phone suddenly made a thumping, vague, ringing sound. Tommy Buell cried out wildly—and the cry was cut off instantly—cut off by the sound of a split-second choked gurgle.

The girl's heart turned to ice. She screamed, flung herself against the door of the booth, screamed again and again—beating with her fists as desperation sent her brain flaming.

The door before her suddenly whipped open. She saw a plump, swarthy-pink face with long sideburns, a fury-twisted mouth that gibbered sounds at her. Then something hit her and she collapsed.

WHEN she came to, it was to find the Marquis' sympathetic blue eyes on her face, his dapper small figure in a chair beside her hospital bed. Big Johnny Berthold loomed behind him.

Her voice was husky, controlled, but so low as to be almost inaudible. "Is he dead, Marty?"

The Marquis nodded slowly. "They

strangled him with the telephone cord, kid. I don't see any use in kidding you."

She said nothing, but turned her cheek to the pillow and closed her eyes. Two tears glistened on her long lashes.

When they had received what information she could give and were in the hospital corridor, big Johnny gulped and said: "This makes me mad, this does. It doesn't make sense. Your hunch on the partner looked like the goods—only, damn it, he's the *corpse!*"

"We still want those Enzes. That's the main chore."

In a waiting-room downstairs the haggard Kastner sat staring at the floor, as though dazed.

The Marquis nodded at the jet-eyed, dapper little Henri. "Stay with him."

The stringy old man's voice was dry, toneless. "A bodyguard won't help me! They've made their intentions plain now. They're out to kill! They didn't give Tommy a chance! They'll kill a dozen bodyguards to—to get me! Get them for God's sake, Marty — find them — throw them in a cell before they find me."

The Marquis was stiff-jawed as he left the hospital, rode a cab to Broadway. For an hour, he filtered swiftly through his district, letting it be known in certain places that he wanted the Enzes.

He wound up at Dave's Restaurant.

There was a report there for him from Henri that Kastner was home safe in bed.

IT was light by the time the Marquis found the dapper little Frenchman, staked out in an areaway across from Kastner's apartment house.

"He's safe enough in there," Henri assured him. He looked up at the modestly exclusive graystone apartment house—one of the dozen that lined the block. "There's no back entrance except the fire exit and it's a solid sheet of steel that can't be opened from outside. That's the delivery entrance there—beside the building. Nobody's gone in either there or through the front door since I've been here and nobody will—without seeing me first."

"Where's Kastner's apartment?"

The Frenchman pointed to the fifth floor, the east side of the building's front. "I don't think he slept much. The light was on all night."

When they went up the old man didn't look as though he had. He was haggard, stringier than ever, his eyes bloodshot and feverish. He winced, dropped down on a rust-colored chesterfield and buried his face in his hands when he saw the Marquis.

His voice had a kind of glazed desperation. "Have you got any line on—"

"We have and we haven't," the Marquis evaded. "Have you any explanation as to why your partner sent his girl to plant that picture on you."

The other groaned. "No—no!"

"It looks like he put the Enzes on your trail—even helped them throw a scare into you."

"Oh my God—*why?* He didn't even know about the Enzes! And he'd nothing to gain by it. Our business is worth very little. And why would they kill him if he did?"

"It's a puzzle, all right. Well—don't you take any chances. Don't put your nose outside."

"I shouldn't go to business?"

"No. I'll drop by your plant and tell them to phone if they want anything."

THE store was on Fifty-seventh, with a narrow show-window containing, against dark walnut, little piles of obscure chemicals without labels.

The interior of the store was old-fashioned, dignified and very small. Through an archway at the rear, bumping sounds came and men's muffled voices. Presently a studious-looking man of thirty appeared, his thick brown eyes anxious be-

hind shell-rimmed spectacles. He had a smudge on one sallow cheek.

The Marquis showed his badge—a rare necessity—and said: "If you're Albert, I'd like to ask you a question or two."

The other's face became more pinched and anxious. "I—I'd prefer to wait, if you don't mind, till Mr. Kastner arrives."

"He isn't going to arrive. If you want to ask him anything, you'll have to phone him."

"Well, I—you see, we're just receiving shipments and are—putting the day's deliveries on the truck and—"

"I needn't interrupt it. I'll come back with you."

The faint hope aroused by the clerk's attitude did not materialize to anything. They went back to the storeroom at the back of the store.

A man in truck-driver's uniform was complaining fretfully: "What damned fool marked this. Hell, it weighs two hundred pounds." He pointed to an express-tagged box with black crayon markings—*Ephedrine sulphate.*

The harassed clerk directed that the packing-box in question be stored in the vault till Mr. Kastner arrived. The truck-driver and his assistant, plus a weedy-looking junior clerk, were moving boxes to the loading-platform at the rear of the store and the jumpy be-spectacled Albert at the Marquis' side called out shrill orders, most of which seemed to be ignored.

Between times, he managed to impart irritably the scant information that when Mr. Buell had left for lunch on the day before, he, Albert Kastner, had heard him say that he would be back in an hour, that Mr. Buell was apparently in excellent spirits—as he always was—and that he was an expert pharmacist of years standing. He could make no explanation of the ghastly thing that had happened. He acted as though he didn't care greatly.

It was while the Marquis was still in the store-room, trying to think of more questions, that the phone call came.

When the weedy-looking junior clerk finally got it through his head that the call was for the Marquis and called him to the phone, a booming, excited voice said quickly: "It's Patrolman Haines, Lieutenant. I've got one of them Entz fellows you sent out the broadcast on. He's shot in the head and he's dying. I thought I'd call you first before reportin' to the prec—"

"You'll be glad you did," the Marquis cut in. "Where are you? Did you shoot him?"

"Huh? No, no. I heard a shot while I was patrollin' me beat and I went in to investigate and here he is, dyin'—"

"Where?"

The patrolman gave an address on Columbus Avenue and the Marquis clipped: "I'll be there in five minutes. Don't report yet—I'll cover you. Does anybody know the man's been shot?"

"Apparently not. Or else these folks mind their own business. I just come up the stairs and there was the door standin' open. There's a phone in the room, but there ain't nobody around even yet."

"Well, *I* shot him," the Marquis said. "Have you got that? If anybody reaches you before I get there—*I shot him* and took after the other one."

"Huh? Hey—is that ri—"

"It's right enough for you to tell anybody that gets there before I do."

THE building was a block of stores on a corner, evidently being prepared for wrecking. All the stores stood empty. The lodgings on the floor above were, however, still in use. A doored stairway connected them to the street and when the Marquis ran up, the sweating patrolman was standing in the dingy hall outside a closed door—alone.

"All right," the Marquis flung at him. "Go ahead and report. You heard a shot.

You ran up here. I was here, with a gun in my hand and I told you the guy resisted arrest."

The patrolman gulped. "O. K., Lieutenant, if you say so, but—but the guy was in bed."

"You can resist arrest in bed."

There were two beds in the room. One was smooth, unrumpled. The other contained a man that the Marquis recognized instantly, from the girl's description, as the rock-faced killer who had strangled Tommy Buell. His pillow was stained, but not soaked, in fresh red blood, and blood matted his black hair. He was breathing quickly through his mouth, though gently, as if afraid to overdo it. His eyes were closed and he was unconscious. There was no gun near him.

As the patrolman whipped up the phone, the Marquis snapped: "Call the ambulance first."

A chair with the man's clothes was at the foot of the bed and the Marquis jumped for it, sent fingers flying through the pockets. A heaviness in the side-coat pocket proved to be a .38 automatic pistol.

The Marquis swung the chair quickly up to be beside the dying man.

"He reached for a gun in here," the Marquis explained when the patrolman had finished phoning and had joined him at the bedside. When the uniformed man's eyes showed unease, the Marquis added: "There's a grand that says so."

"All right, Lieutenant. *I* say so. Only the holes are in the back of his head."

The ambulance had sirened to a stop by the time the Marquis had assured himself that the dead criminal's pockets contained nothing of value, except, oddly, a photograph that could be nobody else but the other murderer—the one who had imprisoned and slugged the girl while his partner killed Buell. He pocketed this as the stretcher crew came in.

The interne took one look at the unconscious man's head and said wearily: "Why didn't you wait a while and we could of taken him direct to the morgue."

"He's done for?"

"Yep."

"Any chance of his regaining consciousness?"

The interne looked squarely into the Marquis' eyes. "You shot him. The hole's in the back of his head. And now you're worried about whether he's going to come to. Well, well, Marty, I'm surprised."

"Never mind being surprised. Answer my question."

"He could come to, but I don't think he'd be rational."

"Get him to your factory and see."

Sitting in the swaying, racing ambulance, the Marquis was utterly silent, his small, gloved hands flat in his Chesterfield pockets. He was aware of the straight stare of the brown-eyed young interne beside the stretcher, but he was not worried about the thoughts the other was thinking. He kept his eyes on the unconscious man's face, all through the screaming ride, the rush into the emergency room, the hastily called consultation.

To the hospital's head physician, he said: "If he's done for, hopelessly, can't you try and revive him—even if for a few minutes?"

The other's eyes had the same look as the interne's. He gave orders to rush the patient upstairs.

The patient died on the way up.

The Marquis came down again—to face a platoon of reporters. He stood on the top step of the exit stairs and told them: "I had a tip that he was holed up there and went after him. When I came in, he reached for a gun, so I gave it to him."

They asked him about the hole in the back of the head. The Marquis shrugged and said nastily, "I told you what happened," turned and stalked back into the building to escape further questions, went

downstairs, intending to pass out the door used for the emergency-room entrance.

The ambulance interne was smoking a cigarette in the hall.

"Why couldn't a person have two hundred pounds of ephedrine?" the Marquis asked him.

"Because it comes from China," the other said after a minute, "and the supply has quit on account of the war. Why?"

"I was just wondering," the Marquis said, and passed on.

FOR the rest of the day, he was on Broadway. After the afternoon papers appeared, he was a marked man. every newshawk had belabored the circumstances of the shooting of the heister, had made much of the fact that the holes were in the back of the man's head. It took no great intellect to read in their stories the belief that the Marquis had shot a defenseless man in cold blood, from behind.

When, at dusk, he went to Kastner's apartment, even the stringy old man was white-faced and involuntarily shrank a little from the Marquis' neat figure.

The Marquis saw the spread-open papers on the table and his lip lifted in a ghost of a smile. "There's only one to worry about now."

The old man's throat worked, and he blurted: "Did you—is it true you—shot him while he was asleep?"

The Marquis looked at him quizzically, shrugged. "Don't put too much faith in newspapers. They don't always get things straight. For instance: They say this Sebastian—that was his name, Sebastian Enz—died without talking. That isn't entirely true."

The old man's eyes were luminous.

"He didn't become rational," the Marquis explained, "but he jabbered. I may be wrong, but I'm almost certain that the other one is coming for you tonight."

"Tonight!" the old man gasped.

"You won't be here," the Marquis assured him. "I'll take your place."

"But—but my God—where'll I go? They'll see me—"

"No they won't—because we're going to exchange identities right here. Up till now, you've been safe inside here. But things have started to happen. Willie—yeah, that's the other brother's name—either has to quit or do his trick fast—even if it means taking wild chances. One of my men is coming up soon with a suitcase full of stuff. Fortunately, you're about my height and we can pad you up here and there so you could pass for me in the dark, going out of here."

It was specious enough, but the dazed old man seemed beyond objecting.

Johnny Berthold arrived with a suitcase. There were no arrangements for food in the old man's apartment, so they went out to a nearby restaurant for food. After that, it took nearly two hours to prepare the old man for the masquerade. They made a creditable effort. In darkness—or semi-darkness—Kastner could pass for the Marquis if unseen eyes were watching *for* the Marquis. Certainly, no one could identify him as Kastner.

It was nine o'clock, then ten. They sat around, talking about anything but the climax immediately ahead. At ten-thirty, the Marquis—he had not done anything about fixing himself up, up to that point—said: "Now you two listen carefully. I don't want any slip-ups. You're to take a taxi from here over to Ninth Avenue and walk down Ninth. You've got to be seen somewhere in the district and Ninth is dark enough so that, if you keep that hat down over your eyes, you can be mistaken for me. I don't imagine many people will speak to you—I'm kind of unpopular just at the moment. Fool around, being seen, yet not being seen, if you follow me, till twelve o'clock.

"At twelve o'clock, Johnny, take him over to Central Park West and walk

down. Start a few blocks above my apartment house. If anyone is watching—me, as they think—I want any possible doubts laid that I am not safely at home. When you get to the corner above my place, you, Johnny, stop and say good-night, then cut back up. I guess you can walk twenty yards alone without being nervous, Mr. Kastner. That's all you'll have to do alone. Eh?"

"I—yes, yes."

"Fine. Here's the key to my apartment. The doorman goes off duty at midnight, so there'll be nobody inside the building to see you in the light, except the elevator boy. You can hang around outside till he's making a trip or something, then walk up. One of my men will be in my apartment to take charge of you. By the way, have you got a gun?"

"Eh? No. Or—yes, I think I have."

"You don't need it, but you might tote it, if it will make you feel better."

The old man's fright had returned as he looked sick-eyed from one of them to the other. He croaked: "All—all right. I think it's in my trunk. I'll get it."

His courage almost failed when it was time to open the door and step into the hall. He hung back, blurted desperately: "Lieutenant — Marty — why couldn't I stay here, too. I—I don't want to go out on the street."

"Don't be silly," the Marquis told him. "If killers are going to get in here, we want you to be far away. You do as you're told."

THE Marquis made no attempt to don the white wig or any of the clothes laid out for him. He sat stolidly, watching the clock, looked at a couple of drug catalogues.

At eleven-thirty, there was a series of soft taps on the door. The Marquis took his service gun from his hip and opened up. The dapper little Frenchman, Henri,

came in, his eyes questioning the Marquis. "All set?"

The Marquis nodded and without closing the door, followed Henri into the hall. Then he closed it.

They made their way down the back stairs—the fire-stairs—and into an alley behind the building, where the little Frenchman's coupe purred. They drove slowly over to Central Park West, down it, parked the car a block and a quarter above the Marquis' apartment.

They had to keep walking down Central Park West, till three or four pedestrians had passed from sight, leaving the wide stretch of dimly lit street deserted. Then, with one accord, they swung over the low stone wall and were in the bushes lining the park's edge.

Presently, they were sitting on the cold ground, behind the low stone wall, directly opposite the Marquis' apartment house.

The entrance to the building was on the side street, not on the park proper. They had fifteen minutes to wait.

Once, the Frenchman whispered plaintively: "I suppose it wouldn't fit in with your plans to tell me what the hell goes on here?"

"No," the Marquis said, "but you might carry your gun in your lap. We may need some of your fancy sharpshoot—"

He went abruptly silent, as, two blocks down, two figures suddenly rounded the corner. There was no mistaking the big, lumbering figure of Johnny Berthold, with his too-small hat perched atop his shaggy blond head. And the man beside him was giving a moderately good imitation of the Marquis.

They came on. They came down one block, then another. Then they were at the corner, not forty yards from where the Marquis and the Frenchman knelt. There big Johnny tentatively put out a paw and shook hands vigorously with the

pseudo Marquis. "Well, good-night, Marty," he said loudly.

The other nodded jerkily. The big man turned and went back up Central Park. Kastner stood only a second on the sidewalk, then almost trotted across toward the dimly lit apartment-house entrance.

Beside the Marquis, the Frenchman gasped, whispered swiftly: "Look—in the door right across the street from yours." His gun whipped up above the wall.

In the same split second, the Marquis had seen the crouched figure leap from concealment, had seen the flash of the metal in his hand. The suddenly revealed skulker roared hoarsely: "Hey, you!"

Henri fired — but as he did so, the Marquis' black-gloved hand slashed the Frenchman's gun-muzzle suddenly skyward.

Henri cried, "Hey what the—"

"Wait!" the Marquis snapped.

The figure of Kastner had suddenly whirled. The stringy old man uttered a strangled cry, flung himself wildly onward for the apartment house.

The thick, crouched figure opposite squealed: "Taka thees, you . . . !" and fire and flame spat from his hand. The first shot sent the flying Kastner stumbling, wrenched a scream from him. The second knocked him sideways, his legs crossing, and he dived headfirst into the gutter. The third and fourth flamed as he lay there, kicking.

Not till then did the killer swing toward the two behind the stone wall of the park—and the Marquis' gun and the Frenchman's blazed together, riddled him. Johnny Berthold burst out of the entranceway of the apartment house in which the killer had lurked—too late.

As they raced toward the two fallen men, Henri gasped in wild unbelief: "I could have saved Kastner, Marty. I could have got the killer before he fired!"

"What for?" the Marquis wanted to

know. "This Kastner killed his partner—or hired it done. Then he back-doored you and tried to mop up his hirees—getting a bad break because only one of them was at home. But it would be a hell of a job to prove. Now we don't have to prove anything."

"But—but—" stammered the Frenchman. "Why? Why did he—"

"Because, you chump, he wanted the business for himself. He had picked up a big consignment of stolen ephedrine. Apparently he didn't tell his partner about it. It was worth two dollars and something an ounce up until recently. He probably paid less than that. This war in China has cut off the supply. It's suddenly skyrocketed—ten, twenty times that—it's now worth a fortune. He had to own the whole business in order to sell it—without splitting."

THE scene was swarming with police, ambulances, white-coated internes, and the Marquis and his men were riding up in the elevator toward his apartment, before Henri got untangled enough to blurt: "But—but I don't get it. These Enzes—their sister—the drug—"

"All phony. A wild dream. The Enzes were simply hired killers. Kastner put on a big act—merely to divert suspicion and get himself an alibi with us. Buell was a sap—did what Kastner told him—knocked off at noon today without telling anybody, hung around and made his girl go to Leland's to slip that envelope in Kastner's pocket. Kastner knew the Inspector would be there at that time and he took good care to be right under his eyes when the trick was pulled, then dropped the picture where the Inspector would see it.

"He knew that would pull me in and he guessed exactly what we would do—get him on the carpet. He had Buell instructed to go to that drug store and phone him at my place. He had his hired killers

planted there to wipe out Buell. If he'd managed to drop both the Enz brothers when he went to their hideout this morning, he would have been almost clear."

"But—but if you knew he was it, why didn't you jug—"

"Jug him hell. Proving it would be too tough—we'd be in the papers for weeks, attracting attention. This way—what have we got? One day's story. We'll tell it without all the trimmings—a simple hired killing with a double-cross—and me in the role of crafty hero. A one-day sensation that makes us look good."

Henri was still dubious. "I still don't see why all the masquerade stuff. Why you had Kastner impersonate—"

"Your head's a little thick. Kastner would be alive now, spouting fairy tales that might get us all a flock of publicity, if it weren't for that."

"But how d'you know the gunman would be waiting—"

"I didn't, sap. But the Enzes were strangers in town. They knew nobody—except Kastner. When Sebastian was killed, it was a safe bet that either his brother killed him or Kastner did.

"If Willie did it—then my taking the blame on my shoulders—pretending I'd butchered him in cold blood — would puzzle him but it wouldn't send him out fretting for my hide. By the same token, if Willie did it, Kastner didn't do it.

"But if Willie *didn't,* and thought *I* had, he'd go crazy to get me. Similarly, if Willie hadn't, then Kastner had.

"I couldn't be sure. I didn't have to be sure. I simply set Kastner up, in my clothes, where he'd get the dose if he were guilty and get nothing if he were innocent. So what happened? The case closes itself.

"The meanest paper in town won't find enough now to have a field day at my expense. Just a nice neat little package—all folded up and put away. What can they make of that?"

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.

HERE'S a racket—interestingly presented—which flourished in the West for a time until its perpetrator cashed in to the utmost before seeking new pastures to pollute—Watch out for it!

Sheridan, Wyoming.

Dear Sir:

A lucrative—and disastrous—racket was worked in Sheridan and vicinity last summer (1936).

It was based on a battery compound with which a rather convincing demonstration could be made, priced to sell at $1.50 retail and $ .50 wholesale. Mr. Wise guy, however, did not concern himself with the chicken feed to be had by actual sale of the compound to consumers.

Instead he "sold states"; i.e. the right to peddle his compound within a given state bringing him from $250 to $2,000, according to population and sales possibilities.

Contracts were signed, giving the buyer sole rights to purvey the product within "his" state, for so-much-down plus a stated royalty to be paid each month. The idea was that the state "owners" should in turn sell "rights" to the various counties therein.

The proposition looked attractive on the surface; its perpetrator exuded prosperity at every pore, and sums less than $10,000 were never mentioned by him nor in his presence. Victims were led to believe that what he was doing nationally could easily be duplicated on a smaller scale in each state, and few considered the fate of those expected to "buy counties" who'd be forced into actual contact with the ultimate consumer.

The contracts stated that failure to pay the monthly royalty on a given date each month invalidated the contract and gave Mr. Wise Guy the right to sell it (the "state") over again. By New Year's Sheridan was full of disillusioned victims. Since the contracts bound Mr. Wise Guy to nothing except to receive his monthly royalty payments, if and when they arrived, the law seems unable to touch this man.

One thing about this man's method was noticeable; all his business was conducted in person. He would not send any propoganda thru the mail; would not enter into correspondence about his contracts nor mail one.

Yours truly, L. M. Lish.

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