

ALL STORIES
COMPLETE



APRIL

10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

T.T. FLYNN —
A MR. MADDOX STORY
D.L. CHAMPION —
AN INSPECTOR ALLHOFF STORY
PETER PAIGE —
A CASH WALE STORY
JAN DANA —
AN ACME INDEMNITY OP STORY



FALSE TEETH

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BEFORE

AFTER



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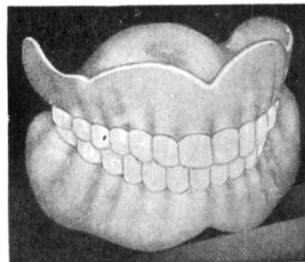


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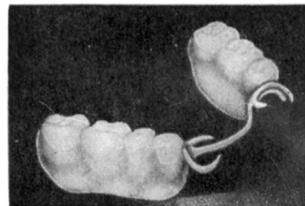
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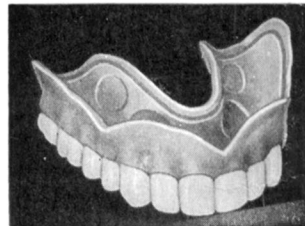
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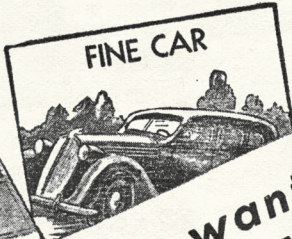
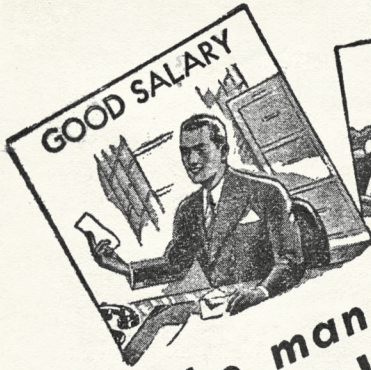
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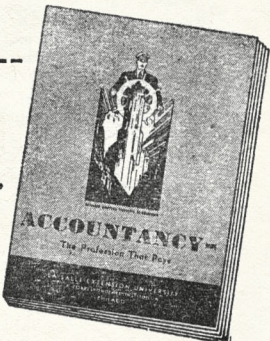
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10¢ DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE



EVERY STORY COMPLETE

EVERY STORY NEW—NO REPRINTS

Vol. 36

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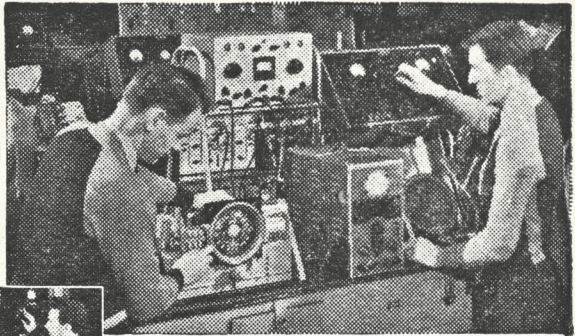
Black-and-White illustrations by John Fleming Gould

Watch for the May Issue

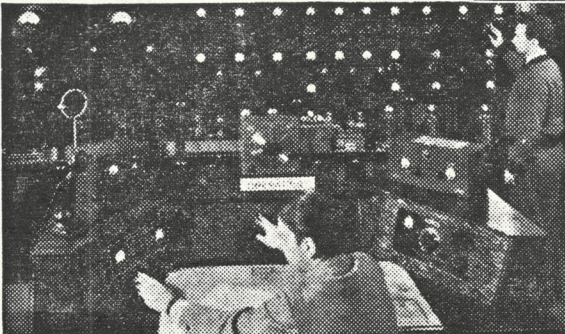
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The May Thrill Docket

REMEMBER Please Pass the *Poison* back in the February issue, which introduced Bill Brent, that misanthropic misfit on the staff of the *Recorder*, masquerading as Lorna Lorne, last court of appeal for the lovesick and ludicrous? Well, he's back again to *Let the Skeletons Rattle* in another fabulous bout with murder that had its germ in the Dix-Fairfax-Lorney files over which he presides. Claudia Dockery, the lady in the case this time, gets herself boggled up with a killer who bakes cookies in his spare time and gives FREDERICK C. DAVIS, the author of the novelette, a chance to score another thrill-beat with the strangest assortment of kill-minded wacks that ever arranged a murder program.

SAM MERWIN, JR. spreads a liberal portion of *Caviar for the Killer* around Manhattan and brings back Sergeant Lanning, who cracked the case of the toy soldiers a few months ago, to ravel the riddle Martin van Beuren Brogard, scion of the Four Hundred's first family, propounded, when murder invaded the sacred precincts of the *Social Register* and spilled blue blood along with ordinary crimson, in a *haut monde* massacre that filled the society pages with crime news and made the police docket read like a page out of Cholly Knickerbocker.

And CORNELL WOOLRICH plunges you into the maelstrom generated by the fumbling handiwork of a maladroit manicurist who was so bedeviled by her male clients that the file and orange stick she wielded became more doomful weapons than a gungel's gat or a mad surgeon's scalpel.

Plus shorts by D. L. CHAMPION, O. B. MYERS and others.

This great MAY issue will be on sale APRIL 4th.

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.

WE'VE heard of a hundred ways in which fake employers chisel from "prospective" employees—cash bonds, travel expenses, investigation fees, deposits of one sort or another—but here's a new one on the old "buy your own uniform" gag. Watch out for such ad's.

Denver, Colo.

"Resort Help all departments. Men and women. Above average salary. Beautiful Mountain resort. Long season. Bell captain and bell boys. Door man (Tall) waiters, chef, fry cook, yard men, grooms, caddies. All contact Mr. Martin. Room 200 Blank Hotel. 10 to 4." The calls were numerous.

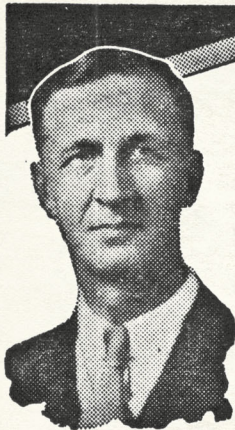
All were granted an interview. Mr. Martin gave them a general talk, named the salary offered for each department, weeded out those clearly unfit for hotel work.

"Now," said Mr. Martin, "of you fifty who, I feel, can fill the bill, we must ask this. You are required to furnish your uniforms which will cost you from ten to twenty dollars. But don't give me the money. I've arranged with Blank and Co. (largest store in town) to take your measurements and arrange your outfits. Now those who can afford to buy these outfits, sign your blanks. I'll give you a card to the store."

Mr. Martin landed 50 signers. Each was told when to go for the measurements. In the meantime Mr. Martin called at the store, stated his business, heckled over prices and beat the store down to the lowest possible price. He put up a \$50.00 bill as deposit, stated he wanted no credit, but did want the store to have a man ready to get the outfits together as fast as he sent applicants over with his signed order. Then when he had them all he would call, pay the total bill and pick up all the outfits at once.

In three days all was ready. He called all his new hired help to be at the hotel the following morning at 10 sharp. He loaded them in a bus, told the driver to drive to Blanks store. He followed in his own car.

The bus stopped as near the store front as possible. Mr. Martin then stepped up to the bus and said: "All right boys and girls, let's have your uniform money." They shelled out. He told the bus to get started for the hotel (120 miles up in the hills) then left in his own car for parts unknown.



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Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

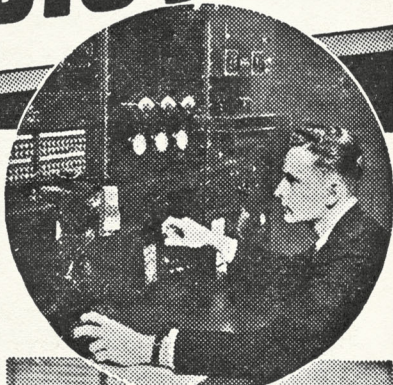
Radio Broadcasting stations employ operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good pay jobs. Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loud-speaker systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

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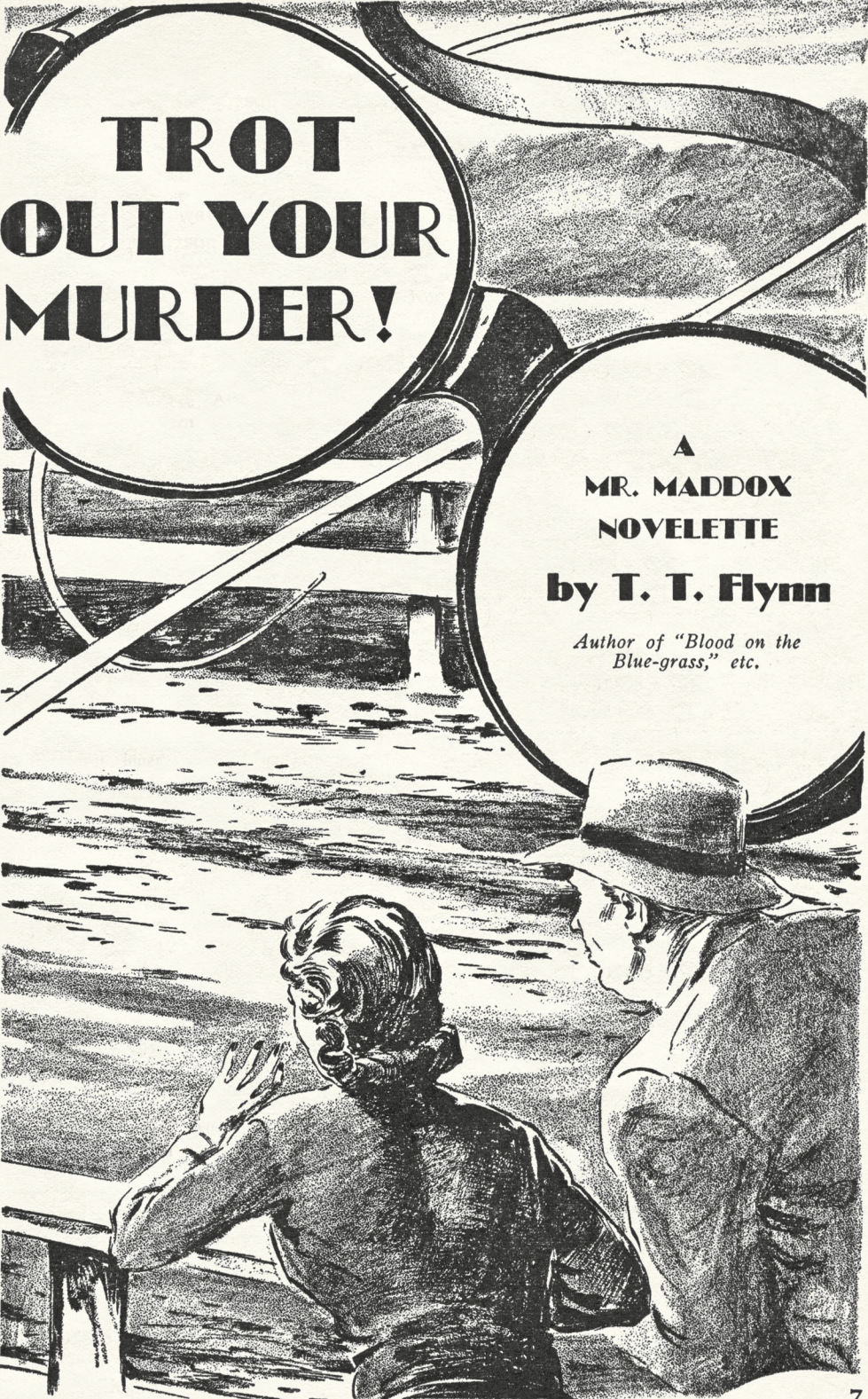
Tim's body rocketed off the sulky in a helpless plunge that carried him hard against the inside fence.

CHAPTER ONE

A Horse Meets Society

THIS week-day, about noon, Mr. Maddox drove swiftly up the Hudson River Parkway in speeding triple lines of traffic. To the right, Riverside Drive reared fabulous man-made cliffs to face the high stone cliffs across the great smooth river. And to the rear, the mid-Manhattan skyline formed dizzy peaks above the maelstroms at their feet.

And it was easy to believe that few other places on the wide earth could spawn so exotic a product as the girl who lounged beside Mr. Maddox in bored indifference.



TROT OUT YOUR MURDER!

A
MR. MADDOX
NOVELETTE

by T. T. Flynn

*Author of "Blood on the
Blue-grass," etc.*

Broadway, Fifth Avenue, Park Avenue and the night-club belt had spawned her. The Waldorf and the Ritz had given her background. An exclusive coiffeur had worked perfection with the tawny sheen of gold that was her hair. World-famous fashion experts had designed her hat and dress. And her smooth, oval, lovely face, her deep, brooding, long-lashed eyes could make even a hardened old bookie like Joe Maddox catch his breath every time he looked at her.

She was the ultimate in all that a great city could do for a woman—and she sat in smoldering, bored indifference as the big car carried her out of the city.

"The river's mighty pretty today," Mr. Maddox commented genially. "Look at those white yachts and gray battleships anchored out there. Like a painting, aren't they?"

She glanced indifferently at the wide sweep of river. Her yawn was a masterpiece of delicacy.

"Yachts," she declared, "bore me dreadfully."

Mr. Maddox loomed big and solid and richly impressive behind the gray plastic steering wheel. His chuckle was one of those vast deep spreading waves of humor that welled up into smiling crinkles on his broad bland face.

"Yachts bore you, do they?" Mr. Maddox said. "Mmmmm—think of that."

The girl did not look as if she were thinking. With all her exotic loveliness, her face was a bored blank as the big sedan rolled swiftly across the George Washington Bridge.

Highway 2 was a broad white concrete slab that carried them northward through the green Jersey countryside. When they crossed over into New York State again at Suffern the traffic was still heavy and the hand of the city was still hard upon them.

But the country grew more open, and in a little while—not much over an hour from the bridge—there was a broad flat field over to the right, below the level of the highway.

Tall trees were graceful and green at the far edge of the field, and a town was beyond. Under the first trees were long low green-painted horse barns and a small grandstand. And the white boundary

fences of the racetrack formed a graceful oval under the early afternoon sunlight.

"There we are," Mr. Maddox said. "If we're lucky, Tim Lonergan's somewhere about the barns."

"Does it make any difference?" the girl said indifferently. "I came to get the horse—not this Lonergan person."

Mr. Maddox chuckled again.

"Tim Lonergan makes a lot of difference, anywhere. And Tim's not going to like this. Take it from Joe Maddox, Tim's not going to like this."

She shrugged, and few women could have so dismissed, obliterated, wiped out an unseen man with a mere shrug.

When you turned right off the highway at the filling station, you were driving into Goshen, New York—and the hard hand of the city had suddenly lost its grip upon you, if you were one of the elect, partial to harness racing.

As he straightened the blue sedan into the shaded roadway leading into Goshen, Mr. Maddox took his foot off the gas, his big hands off the wheel, and exhaled pleasurably as he reached for a cigarette.

"It's going to be a great Hambletonian this year. Nothing like the Hambletonian. I haven't missed one for over twenty years."

The girl yawned and opened a hand-chased platinum vanity case and inspected her flawless features. A crimson fingernail that was a work of art in itself made little delicate touches at eyebrows and eyelashes.

Mr. Maddox smiled ruefully. "You just don't like horses, eh?"

"I suppose they're all right," she said absently. "Heaven knows they must be all right, by the way the photographers and columnists flock to Belmont."

"Mmmmm—horses have gone social in the last few years all right," Mr. Maddox agreed.

THEY were in the little tree-shaded town of Goshen now. Automobiles were behind them and ahead of them as Mr. Maddox turned right into an old narrow street and followed other cars toward the small racetrack.

And it was a small track, neat and old and rather shabby when you were used to the great multi-million-dollar flat-racing tracks near the metropolitan centers.

To all outward appearances the city had come here to the little Goshen track in surprising numbers. Rows of sleek cars were already parked on the green grass behind the small grandstand.

Well-dressed men and women were thronging about the grandstand, strolling around the barns and standing at the low track fence to watch the piston-drive of trotters and pacers between the shafts of dainty, bright-colored sulkies.

But there was a difference if you knew horse racing and horse tracks. It was in the air and all about. Not even Saratoga,

was no woman so gorgeous, so exotic and breathlessly lovely as the girl who walked rather distastefully to the horse barns beside Mr. Maddox.

Many eyes turned to follow them. And Joe Maddox, for all his shrewd wisdom and experience, might have lost some of his friendly smile if he could have dissected the thoughts behind two pairs of those eyes, or could have heard the monosyllabic remarks passed between two men.

But Tim Lonergan was on Mr. Maddox' mind—and Tim Lonergan they found in the third barn back from the track. Or

When that bland Buddha of the bangtail circuit undertook to turn a spoiled darling of café society into a female Jorrocks he never dreamed blackmail and murder would rear their ugly heads to put him behind the 8-ball. But murder can go at a trot as well as a gallop—and you're just as dead when it catches up with you between the shafts of a Satan-driven sulky or mounted on a postage-stamp saddle—as Maddox soon learned the race-day he drove Goshen ga-ga to keep the Hambletonian clean.

home and heart of the thoroughbred world, had this friendly, leisurely, country-fair atmosphere.

At Hialeah and Santa Anita, at Washington Park and Bowie and Churchill Downs, the horse barns were away from the crowd, unnoticed, unthought of for the most part. Sleek, dainty thoroughbreds appeared in the saddling sheds of those tracks. Diminutive jockeys in gay racing silks were hoisted on the postage-stamp saddles, paraded before the grandstands, raced briefly, and vanished from the sight and interest of the crowd.

But here at Goshen the stables were close beside the grandstand. Horses, drivers, stable help and spectators were one friendly unit drawn together by the common bond of harness racing.

And in all the gathering crowd this afternoon there was no man more distinguished than the big, well-fleshed figure of Joe Maddox. No face more friendly and beaming than that broad bland face known from coast to coast among the racing fans and betting fraternity.

And in all the crowd this afternoon there

rather they found Tim Lonergan's loud emphatic voice issuing from a horse stall.

"Toe weights hell! I know what weights she needs! Put those two-ounce ones back on her and she'll step like a lady!"

The smell of straw and manure, of leather and liniment and horses was sweetly rank before the serried stalls as Mr. Maddox called through the doorway.

"Here's a lady, Tim, who don't need toe weights. Brush off your talk and put on your manners. It's a day for the house of Lonergan—and your worries are over."

The loud voice came back disgustedly past the horse blocking the doorway.

"My worries'll never be over while I have to fight with a stubborn, bull-headed banshee's son who stopped thinking when he was hock-high!"

Tim Lonergan came up out of the straw, ducking under the horse's sleek neck. All six feet of Tim Lonergan, in shirt sleeves and soiled khaki trousers, black hair rumpled and bits of straw clinging to the knees where Tom had been kneeling.

"Any lady needs toe weights to keep her pretty feet—"

Tim Lonergan stopped in the doorway in midstride and midspeech. His eyes fixed in startled fascination on Mr. Maddox' companion. A flush struck Tim Lonergan's hard, tanned face. His mouth opened soundlessly—and after a moment his greeting was weak.

"Hello, Maddox. I didn't know it was you."

"Miss Allison—Tim Lonergan," Mr. Maddox said blandly.

Tim Lonergan ducked his head. The flush was still on his face. The slightly dazed look was still in his eyes.

"Miss Allison?" Tim mumbled. "Er—it's Miss Anne Allison, isn't it? Uh—how do you do?"

"How do you do?" she said coolly.

AND yet somehow in the space of a disapproving moment something had happened to her. She was not so bored now. Tim Lonergan had struck sparks against her indifference.

Her long-lashed eyes looked Tim over from soiled trousers to rumpled hair. Her nostrils quivered at the stable reek. And it was plain to see that she resented Tim Lonergan's handsome bulk along with horses and stables and all this business with which she had become involved.

And Tim Lonergan saw it and was puzzled.

Mr. Maddox broke the awkward moment with a chuckle.

"Tim, I see you keep up with the newspapers even if you aren't in New York much. Since you know who Miss Allison is, we can get to the point. Miss Allison wants a horse. And you've got horses to sell, eh? I know you had the other day, anyway."

Tim Lonergan nodded. His dazed look gave way to a friendly grin.

"That's right, Joe. I've still got 'em." And Tim drew a deep breath of satisfaction and spoke eagerly.

"Miss Allison, I didn't suspect you liked horses. And especially harness horses. Say, this is great. I—do you own any already?"

"All I want," said Anne Allison coldly, "is a horse that will win the Hambletonian this year."

Mr. Maddox could appreciate Tim's wondering look.

"That's some order," Tim said with dawning amusement. "A lot of us spend a lifetime looking for a horse that will win the Hambletonian." And Tim grinned indulgently. "You see, Miss Allison, when you have to enter a horse before he's born in a race that's run at three years old, you've got a long gamble that you'll ever get anything that's worth while."

Her shrug dismissed all that.

"I've decided to win the Hambletonian this year. Those in a position to know tell me you have a horse that probably will win this year. I don't remember his name."

"Larkspur," Tim said and his smile was still indulgent. "He's good. But we have our fingers crossed."

"Is he better than Blanche Carter's horse?"

"Well, we think so," Tim said cautiously. "That Peter Kline is some horse. Miss Carter was lucky to get him from Colonel Goodspeed last year. And Lon Wescott is a good trainer. He's brought Peter Kline along mighty well. The public seems to think well of him."

"Too well," Anne Allison said coldly. "You'd think no other horse ever existed and no other woman was ever so clever as this Carter girl in owning that horse. The publicity she's been getting has turned her head. I'm satisfied with the chances your horse has of beating her horse. I'll take him—and show her a thing or two."

"Just a minute," Tim said, and he had stopped smiling. "You want a race horse that will beat Peter Kline, just because the Carter girl is getting a run of publicity?" Tim's voice gathered volume. "You want to buy Larkspur and win the Hambletonian so you can cut in on her publicity? All the Hambletonian means to you is a chance to get your name and your pictures in the papers more than you appear already as one of the leaders of cafe society?"

"Don't shout at me," Anne Allison said coldly. "It really isn't any of your affair why I want the horse. I said I'd take him. And I'm willing to pay you liberally to finish training him for the race. I'll even give you part of the purse if you win."

Tim Lonergan's flush returned in a beet-red flood that went clear up into his black hair.

"Larkspur," Tim said in a stifled voice, "is not for sale! And even if he were,"

—Tim's voice was rising again— "even if I were down to my last dime and my feed bill cut off and begging for a buyer to take him off my hands, he wouldn't be sold for that purpose, Miss Allison! Why—why—" Tim choked on the surging violence of his feeling.

"Cafe society!" Tim exploded. "Girls like you, Miss Allison, with a fortune on your backs, and faces to stop the heart of any poor fool of a man! And only envy and froth in your empty heads! Deciding to buy my Larkspur like he was a—a blasted new hat, so you can win the Hambletonian and get your picture in the papers! I'm not pleased to have met you, Miss Allison, and a good day to you, ma'am! The lady in the stall here is more to my liking!"

Tim ducked his head furiously in the trace of a bow and was swearing under his breath as he swung around to enter the stall.

And Mr. Maddox stood there mute, flabbergasted, helpless for once in his life. Even knowing Tim Lonergan, he had not expected this outraged explosion at such an early point.

And the worst, Mr. Maddox thought with an inward groan, was yet to come, if he knew Anne Allison and Tim Lonergan. And by now he felt that he did.

CHAPTER TWO

Spoils to the Spoiled

IT WAS doubtful if any man had ever talked so to Anne Allison in all her pampered life. And yet, knowing her father, Mr. Maddox was not greatly surprised to see a furious and suddenly human girl whose fists clenched and who looked as if she would be pleased to claw Tim Lonergan into helpless confusion.

And it was at that precise moment that Mr. Maddox became aware of two men who had strolled around the end of the barn and had been idly looking at horses in nearby stalls.

They were near enough to have heard everything that the raised voices had said. Nevertheless, they were apparently absorbed in their scrutiny of the horse in that particular stall. And the slender elegant build and pale close-shaven profile of

one of them was enough to make Mr. Maddox wince under his breath.

"Hold it, Miss Allison! You're saying too much out loud!"

She heard him—his voice, at any rate—for her blazing look went to him for an instant. Only an instant. Then she followed Tim Lonergan to the stall doorway and her voice was sharp and cutting and triumphant.

"I hope, Mr. Lonergan, that horse whose company you prefer to mine is not Larkspur! For if it is, you're not going to have the pleasure very long!"

"Go away!" Tim Lonergan shouted from inside the stall. "Take her away, Maddox! You've got a nerve bringing her here!"

Still the two strangers were not looking. Still they seemed to be absorbed only in the horse that occupied that second stall. And Mr. Maddox swore savagely under his breath.

When a big Broadway gambler and ex-racketeer like Roscoe Knerr stalled with an act like this, something was in the wind. And it would be crooked! For Roscoe Knerr was crooked. And it would not be nice because the word had never been applied to Roscoe Knerr.

Even Knerr's first name was not nice if you knew about it. The underworld had tagged him "Roscoe" because too often gunplay had been connected with his crooked business.

"Miss Allison!" Mr. Maddox begged.

But he was wasting breath. Anne Allison spoke bitingly through the stall doorway.

"You may be interested to know I'm going to take your Larkspur horse!"

"Will you go away?" Tim Lonergan shouted again. "Your old man may own a steamship line and be crawling with millions—but you haven't got enough money to buy a headstall out of my tack! Now go away!"

"I had enough money," Anne Allison said furiously, "to buy up the notes you gave Cary Willard! They're demand notes and my lawyers tell me they're collectible at any time. I suppose this afternoon you have forty-five thousand dollars and accumulated interest! If you have, I'll take it while I'm here!"

That brought even Roscoe Knerr's pal-

lid face around. And by now Mr. Maddox didn't care much. For he knew he was listening to a lovely and furious girl smashing the heart and the hopes of a fine young man.

The silence that fell inside the stall was more eloquent than words. Then Tim Lonergan appeared in the doorway. Tim seemed to have gone pale and haggard all in a moment. He was quiet now, as if all the fire had been quenched.

Tim looked over Anne Allison's head.

"Is that right, Maddox?"

"I guess it is, Tim," Mr. Maddox said uncomfortably.

"You knew it when you brought her here?"

"Yes, Tim," Mr. Maddox said. "I guess I thought something could be worked out. Anyway, it was none of my doing. I've covered money for Miss Allison's father for years, and some for Miss Allison—and the least I could do was to drive Miss Allison out here and hope that something could be worked out."

Tim rubbed his forehead like there was a hurt inside.

"Cary Willard said he needed the money—but I didn't think he'd do anything like this. I told him I'd try to raise the money."

"He had to have cash," Mr. Maddox said. "Miss Allison gave him cash. Cary didn't know what would follow."

"Larkspur is worth more than forty-five thousand," Tim said with an effort.

"Oh, I'm prepared to give you the difference," Anne Allison said coldly. "All I want is the horse. You won't lose anything in spite of this scene you're making. Are you going to be reasonable about it?"

Tim Lonergan looked at her. His eyes were burning. "You win," Tim said in a calm and rather terrible voice.

Tim lifted his strong hands that could hold the reins on the wildest horse and master dangerous melees of racing sulkies on tight turns.

"If you were a man," Tim added thickly, "I'd break your neck! As it is, I'll give you publicity—and not the kind you want. The newspapers will get this story and get it straight! And when I'm through, you'll be a laugh in the headlines! Get out those notes of mine you bought! I'll turn Larkspur over now—and I hope

this is the last I'm forced to see of you!"

Item: WALLY WINZER'S PEEP-HOLE

What's this about glamour-lovely Anne Allison overboard from family steamships and the Nities for harness racing at Goshen this month, with good chance of winning the famous Hambletonian?

Item: BARNEY CALLIGAN'S SPORT-TALK

Some buzzing and gab along the main stem and up at Goshen about the sensational transfer of Tim Lonergan's Larkspur to Anne Allison, the Park Avenue Orchid and heiress of the Allison Steamship dough.

Tim Lonergan broadcasts his horse was snatched from him on a slick squeeze and says he's laughing about having his real Hambletonian winner in the other hip pocket. Candy Kid will pull the Lonergan sulky in the Hambletonian. The wise birds are scratching and wondering.

Item: MANHATTANITES, by Cecelia Havermeier.

Delightfully daring is Anne Allison's assault on harness racing at Goshen this month. Gasps of unbelief greeted photographs of lovely Anne in personal charge of her new racing stable. And *entre nous*, how eyebrows have lifted over whispers of a regrettable feud developing between two of society's now enthusiastic horsewomen. We didn't catch the names—but guesses are in order.

Item: WALLY WINZER'S PEEP-HOLE

It's a toss-up between Blanche Carter and Anne Allison at Goshen. Fast work, say the know-it-alls, for Anne to take that suite at a Goshen hotel and go all-out in her spectacular attempt to win the Hambletonian. Buzz McAllister, whose "rubber" checks never bounce, reported cheering on both the gals.

Item: SHOOTING IT STRAIGHT, by Hank Ristine

The dope's all scrambled on the leather carrying gee-gees coming up for the Hambletonian. What with the Allison heiress shoveling wads of dough to offset her inexperience and get the breaks for her Larkspur. Anyway, there's interest aplenty at Goshen this month and the city slickers are going in a big way for the country-fair type of racing.

We're watching the Lonergan entry. Tim Lonergan has learned many a trick in his wide experience on the "punkin" tracks. When they go under the barrier in the Hambletonian, the Irish Apollo will be driving his horse. A million bucks can't pull a fancy rein in a tight spot.

Item: CLOCKER SCOTT'S SLANT

Get aboard the Lonergan entry in the Hambletonian. There's something going on

there. The boxcar dough on Larkspur is owner-dough and the flash workout figures and the odds don't mean anything. Nuf sed.

It was Monday evening and Joe Maddox was riding up in the elevator to his suite at the Vardon Hotel, just off Times Square, when he read that last item of many that had appeared during the past several days. Mr. Maddox folded the paper and swore under his breath.

Pinky, the elevator boy, grinned wisely. "They hit you today, Mr. Maddox?"

"If that was all I had to worry about," Mr. Maddox growled, "I wouldn't be getting indigestion!"

The growl was still in Mr. Maddox' voice and a scowl was on his broad face as he shouldered into the suite, found Oscar in the bathroom shaving, and demanded: "Get any more of that dough on Peter Kline this afternoon?"

Oscar, wizened and sardonic, was the one who answered the telephones, put down the bets, and did most of the paper work for Joe Maddox' book.

And now Oscar turned from the mirror and spoke through a mask of lather.

"Another grand came in. What's the dope on that race, Joe? Are we taking sucker money on that Peter Kline horse—or are we getting the hook?"

"If I knew, I wouldn't be driving up to Goshen and back every day like a damned commuter!" Mr. Maddox snapped. "I hear one thing and I hear another. I read

one thing and I read something else. The clockers are flipping nickels to decide what to say. Tim Lonergan is sore at me and won't talk. And the Hambletonian is day after tomorrow."

Oscar tilted his head, went to work with the safety razor and spoke cynically from a mouth screwed out of shape.

"A horse is a horse. Ain't you seen enough of them to dope this Peter Kline out yourself?"

"That's why I'm jumpy. That's why I don't know whether I'm a sucker or a wise guy!" Mr. Maddox snapped. "Larkspur is a better horse than Peter Kline. They're training Peter Kline too fine, from all I can gather. That Carter girl is getting jumpy, I hear, and bearing down on her trainer. She and Anne Allison have got Goshen ga-ga with their feud. The dough they and their friends are putting up don't leave any sense in the odds."

Oscar cut himself, said, "Damn!" and muttered: "Somebody will clean up."

"My private opinion," Mr. Maddox said sourly in the doorway, "is that Tim Lonergan could take a plow-horse and a hay wagon and run circles around these society entries."

"But the smart money," Oscar reminded, "keeps showing up on Blanche Carter's Peter Kline. That grand this afternoon was from Louie Menzie, who runs the Swiss Tavern. He brought it up himself and said maybe he'd have some more. He's no dope."

Mr. R--- makes a Confession



3 Feel like a million this morning. Ex-Lax worked fine. Didn't upset me or keep me awake last night... Boy, watch me tear into my work today!



1 Almost got fired today. Boss caught me napping at my desk. The trouble is I need a laxative. But I hate to take the awful stuff.



2 Tom told me to try Ex-Lax and I bought a box on my way home. Took some before turning in for the night. A cinch to take—it tastes just like chocolate!

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



Mr. Maddox probed for a moment in an uncanny memory, and spoke ominously.

"Menzie's brother-in-law used to be pay-off man for Roscoe Knerr. I remember when he was shot. Don't tell me Knerr hasn't got a crooked finger in this somewhere. I smelled it coming that day Anne Allison took Tim Lonergan's horse away."

"I'm not telling you anything," Oscar mumbled as he scraped under his chin. "I'm asking you, Joe. What are you gonna do about it?"

"If I knew," Mr. Maddox growled, "I wouldn't want a drink so bad before I eat. Where's that Scotch?"

But Mr. Maddox never got to the bottle of Scotch. One of the two telephones rang. And the voice, when Mr. Maddox answered, was low, furtive, hurried.

"Maddox back yet?"

"Who is it?"

"That you, Maddox? It sounds like you."

"This is Joe Maddox."

"I been after you all afternoon. Look, Joe, this is Dandy Hoke. You remember me—Dandy Hoke?"

Mr. Maddox had to think a moment before he placed the name—and then his reply had no warmth.

"I remember you—and none of it's much good. What do you want? I'm too busy to be wasting time with chiselers."

Dandy Hoke took no offense. His furtive voice pitched a shade higher, toward a placating whine.

"O.K., Joe—I know you got no time to waste. Would I be buzzing you like this for nothing? I got a deal for you. It's worth fifty on the line tonight, Joe. Bring half a C over an' talk to me, Joe. I'm in the Carlew. Room 306."

"Listen you!" Mr. Maddox said with cold emphasis. "If it was cigar bands, and you were outside my window, I wouldn't lean out and listen. The nerve of you asking me to bring over half a C. And don't come up here or I'll have you tossed out on your ear."

"Look, Joe—don't take it that way! I'd come over there if I could. So help me."

"Hang up and don't bother me!"

Mr. Maddox was putting the telephone down when he caught Dandy Hoke's feverish words tumbling out of the receiver.

"It's about Goshen—"

MR. MADDOX snatched the handset back. His broad bland face was suddenly hard with attention.

"What was that you said, Hoke?"

"Goshen, Joe."

"What about Goshen?"

"Slip fifty in your pocket an' come over here," Dandy Hoke begged. "It's worth more, Joe. You'll say so—an' make it right with me. But I gotta have fifty tonight, Joe. You won't be sorry."

"I'd better not be."

"Knock four times on 306, Joe. One heavy an' three light. I'm not using my right name here."

"That," said Mr. Maddox, "wouldn't be anything new. I'll stop by if I get the time."

That was an understatement. Mr. Maddox hung up and was reaching for his hat as he called to Oscar.

"Anybody by the name of Dandy Hoke been trying to get me this afternoon?"

"Nobody gave that name," Oscar said, looking out of the bathroom. "But I forgot, Joe. Some lug telephoned two or three times, asking for you. He wouldn't give no name."

"How do you know it was a lug?"

"I've heard enough lugs over enough telephones since I been taking horse bets," Oscar answered cynically. "This guy was a lug and he had something on his mind."

"I'll meet you at Jimmy's place," Mr. Maddox said as he started for the door.

"Where you going?"

"To see what's in that lug's mind," Mr. Maddox said, and was gone.

The Hotel Carlew was on the other side of Times Square, toward Eighth Avenue. When new the Carlew had not been so very respectable. Now it was not new and glad to welcome most of the dredgings off the shady fringes of Broadway.

A tourist might not have suspected, but a man like Joe Maddox could sort and classify the lobby crowd with a glance or two. And tonight Mr. Maddox was barely inside the door before he made a nimble turn toward an empty lobby chair which held a discarded newspaper.

In another moment he was at ease in the chair, eyeing the desk past the edge of the open paper. That stocky grizzled man talking to the desk clerk was Cassidy, of the Masterton Agency, which guarded

horse tracks from coast to coast. Cassidy, who had for years been trying to catch Joe Maddox, the bookie, in some matter outside the law.

Now Cassidy nodded to the clerk and headed for the elevators. Mr. Maddox thoughtfully muttered, "Damn!" and watched Cassidy enter an elevator and start up.

It was a good bet that Cassidy had been questioning the desk clerk about Dandy Hoke. Now with Cassidy in the elevator, Mr. Maddox glumly resigned himself to Cassidy's seeing Hoke first. Cassidy was that kind of a detective.

No other passengers went up. Mr. Maddox watched for the floor indicator to stop at the third floor. But the hand went on around as the elevator continued upward. And Dandy Hoke didn't belong up there on the eighth floor where the elevator finally stopped.

There was a chance that Cassidy didn't even know that Dandy Hoke was in the hotel. Mr. Maddox smiled grimly as he crossed the lobby and his big bulk took the stairs with surprising nimbleness. There was at least a chance now to see what Hoke had on his mind. And the stairs held no sharp-eyed elevator operators to remember who had gone up to the third floor.

Room 306 was to the right of the elevators, around a turn in the corridor. Mr. Maddox heard the elevator that Cassidy had taken come back down without stopping. And he made the turn in the corridor just as a girl emerged from 306 and closed the door. . . .

She turned, saw the bulk of him coming toward her. She did not gasp—but she looked as if inwardly she were gasping. And as if she were gripped by the cold hand of horrified helplessness. She seemed to be trying to decide what to do and was not thinking fast enough in a sudden emergency.

Mr. Maddox helped her. The bland good humor of his broad face showed only cursory interest as he walked leisurely past the girl and the room from which she had just emerged. But keen eyes that could note a split-hair change in the odds, the suspicious flicker of a jockey's eye, the shade of staleness in a favorite going to the post, missed nothing about the girl.

She was vastly relieved at being ignored. And behind all that was a dazed, white-faced emotion she was fighting to suppress.

They passed. The girl hurried to the turn of the corridor and was gone. And Mr. Maddox thought hard about her as he walked to the window at the end of the corridor and turned back.

A girl coming out of Dandy Hoke's room would be nothing unusual. Even a girl like this, who was far from the Broadway type. Hoke and his kind chiseled among her kind. They hunted where the bankrolls were fattest.

Hoke would be at his smooth ease with that athletic-looking girl with the wide mouth and high cheekbones. She had the air, the look of money and background. And all unconsciously so, as girls did who had always taken such things for granted.

Oh, yes—the Dandy would be at his ease with her. But he wouldn't be meeting her in one of the shadiest hotels around Times Square. You simply didn't find girls like her slipping in and out of hotels like this.

Mr. Maddox knocked on 306. And knocked again. And for a moment wondered if he had the right room.

The Carlew was an old hotel, without spring locks on the doors. Mr. Maddox tried the knob. The door swung in on a darkened room. Which might have meant anything.

Mr. Maddox stepped in and fumbled for the light switch to see what it did mean. He blinked as the light went on. And then for a long moment stood staring at the disordered room—and finally reached for the doorknob and closed the door and moved into the room, staring about with narrowed, hardening eyes.

CHAPTER THREE

Homicide of a Heel

THE room had been ransacked. Thoroughly. Dresser drawers were pulled out. A coat and trousers lay in the clothes closet doorway. They had been pulled off the hangers, searched and dropped. On the bed was a man's Panama hat. The contents of a tan traveling bag had been lifted out and tossed on the floor.

And Mr. Maddox was in the center of the room, taking in everything, when his

breath sucked harshly and his eyes riveted through the open doorway of the bathroom.

A man was in there. Mr. Maddox had no slightest doubt that the foot and the leg hanging over the edge of the bathtub belonged to Dandy Hoke.

This was the horror that had been behind the girl's pale fright when she slipped out of the room. No wonder she had gasped inwardly, had stood in frozen indecision when she unexpectedly faced a stranger as she left.

Wire-tight nerves warned Mr. Maddox to follow her fast. Get out of the room, out of the hotel quickly and inconspicuously. This was no place for Joe Maddox. No place for a nationally known bookie whose normal business forced more contacts with the underworld than he relished.

But instead Mr. Maddox stepped into the bathroom and switched the pitiless glare of overhead light on white tile and porcelain.

Dandy Hoke was in the bathtub and the Dandy would never bathe again. He had not been bathing this time. He was fully dressed in a light tan worsted summer suit, pale tan silk shirt and expensive white-and-tan summer shoes. Carefully, tastefully dressed, as Dandy Hoke and his kind were usually certain to be. And Hoke looked as if he had fallen back into the tub hard, clumsily, helplessly, before he died.

The white-tiled floor showed no blood. But there was blood on Dandy Hoke's coat front and silk shirt. And powder marks on the coat and a small round hole over the heart.

Mr. Maddox swore softly.

The Dandy had moved about in the tub before he died. Blood was crimson on his right hand where it had fumbled at the death wound. Finger smears were gruesomely vivid on the back side of the tub, where the Dandy's fingers had aimlessly pressed before he died.

Mr. Maddox' foot was touching a damp bath towel, scorched and stained in spots. He picked up the towel and held it full length.

The stains were powder stains around small holes down the center of the towel. Bullet holes, of course, scorched at the edges by the fiery muzzle blast of a gun.

The powder smell still hung in the air. The wet towel spoke for itself. Mr. Maddox muttered aloud for the comfort of the sound in that bright-tiled little room of death.

"Wadded a towel around the gun to stop some of the noise—and maybe keep Hoke from seeing what was coming! The cloth started to smolder and was dunked under a faucet! And while Hoke was dying here in the tub, his room was frisked!"

A purse had been tucked under the girl's arm as she went out. With the first surprise over, Mr. Maddox could think with grim detachment. He had called the Dandy a chiseler. He could have called him worse.

More than one woman—and man too—probably had reason to wish Dandy Hoke dead. Blackmail was not the least source of Dandy Hoke's shady livelihood. There could be plenty of reason for the girl coming here to see Hoke and killing him and frantically searching the room for evidence which had given Hoke a hold on her.

Mr. Maddox bent over the tub and felt the dead man's wrist. The flesh was still warm. Blood had barely started to congeal. The Dandy had been dead only a little while.

And then, still leaning over the tub, Mr. Maddox uttered a startled grunt and twisted the better to see something he had not noticed before.

Hoke's bloody right hand had made crimson marks on the front side of the tub. But not aimless marks. Mr. Maddox was looking down at crude, wavering letters which the Dandy had traced while he died. Letters placed so that one had to be leaning over the tub before they were clearly visible.

Ann Alisen

THE last *n* was crude and wavering off into illegibility as if the Dandy's life and strength were going fast. But there it was, smeared vividly against the white porcelain.

Anne Allison—accused by the last move of a dying man. Anne Allison—who was in all the headlines for her latest publicity stunt at Goshen. And Dandy Hoke had telephoned Joe Maddox in high agitation about some business that concerned Goshen. . . .

Mr. Maddox straightened, reached for his handkerchief and mopped his broad face. He felt as if perspiration were breaking out.

It was not hard to believe that the Dandy had been afraid this might happen. He had been hiding here in the Carlew under another name, without money. Oh, it was easy to believe this black-haired, narrow-shouldered young crook had been hiding.

But not easy to believe he had been hiding from Anne Allison. Anne was not the girl who had hurriedly left the room. Anne was staying at Goshen these days. Anne Allison couldn't possibly have done this!

Mr. Maddox bent again to study the damning blood letters. . . .

There they were. There the Homicide men would find them. There police cameras and newspaper cameras would record them for evidence and the headlines. There in crimson blood on porcelain and steel was the final payoff of publicity that would engulf and destroy lovely Anne Allison.

Mr. Maddox cursed. He didn't want to believe it—and there it was. There crumpled in the bathtub was Dandy Hoke and the blood-stained finger that had damned Anne Allison.

Up there in Goshen was Anne Allison and her petty feud with the Carter woman over gossipy publicity. And over on Park Avenue, in a costly apartment, was old Buck Allison, bulwarked behind his ships and his millions.

Money and success had not changed Buck Allison a great deal from the broad-shouldered, heavy-fisted young fellow who had started out with a couple of old lumber schooners on the Pacific Coast.

Buck Allison had never been a good picker of horses. But he had laughed when he lost and laughed when he won. And the girl who had not been born those long years ago on the Coast would bring no laughter to Buck Allison if this hit the headlines.

It would probably be a waste of time to search Hoke's room again. And each minute Joe Maddox wasted here made his own risk more acute. But Mr. Maddox had never been more grimly, deliberately calm as he took a hand towel off the rack,

wet it, rubbed on soap, and bent over the tub.

When he was through the towel was stained and Anne Allison's name had been wiped out of the headlines. For a short time at least:

With the same towel Mr. Maddox rubbed the light switch he had touched and put out the bathroom light. He wiped the light switch in the bedroom and the inside doorknob.

He listened for sound outside in the hall, heard nothing, and used the towel to open the door. He rubbed the outer knob hard, tossed the towel back in the room, and with his handkerchief closed the door as he went out.

He descended the stairs without encountering anyone.

The girl was not in the lobby. Mr. Maddox had not expected her to be. Cassidy was not in sight either. There could be nothing suspicious about the big bland man who came unnoticed off the stairs and strolled leisurely to the street.

Only when he reached the sidewalk and turned toward Times Square did Mr. Maddox draw a slow breath of relief. And then he almost swore aloud as Cassidy's familiar, stocky figure came up from behind and fell into step.

Cassidy was smiling—and the thin smile might have meant anything.

"I didn't know you were staying at that dump, Joe," Cassidy said.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cassidy Asks the Time

MR. MADDUX smiled too, and it was an effort. "Who said I was staying there? Where did you drop from?"

Cassidy's smile continued.

"I was just passing. You're not staying at the Carlew?"

"Stop stalling," Mr. Maddox said. "You know I stay at the Vardon. Why so much interest?"

"Habit, I guess. Who do you know in the Carlew, Joe?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"That's right."

"Just wandered in there, I suppose?"

"Something like that," Mr. Maddox

nodded. "I wanted the time. Any more questions?"

"Well, who's going to win the Hambletonian day after tomorrow?"

Mr. Maddox chuckled with some sincerity. "If I could answer that, I'd make some money, Cassidy. What's your sudden interest in the Carlew?"

"I was looking for a fellow."

"I don't know him."

"I'll bet not," Cassidy nodded. "Seeing much of the racing at Goshen, Joe?"

"Some."

"How is the money being bet on the Hambletonian?"

"How should I know?" Mr. Maddox replied from force of habit. For years—too many years—Cassidy's sharp wits had been trying to catch Joe Maddox taking illegal bets around the big horse tracks. And now Cassidy was plainly driving at something.

"If you don't know, nobody knows," Cassidy said idly. "I hear you drove that Allison girl to Goshen the day she took Larkspur away from Tim Lonergan."

"Did you?" Mr. Maddox said noncommittally.

"That's a funny situation," Cassidy mused.

"Is it?"

"Tim Lonergan swears she can throw money ankle deep around the track and still won't win the Hambletonian with his Larkspur. Lonergan's got a fine hate on her. And *vice versa*."

"Interesting," Mr. Maddox said blandly. "You're keeping up with things, aren't you, Cassidy?"

"I hear things," Cassidy shrugged. "That Miss Carter's Peter Kline has got a lot on the ball. It ought to be a race, Joe."

"It usually is."

"Three big owners. Three good horses. Big money being bet. Plenty of room for crooked work, Joe."

"Show me a horse race and I'll show you room for crooked work," Mr. Maddox murmured—and inwardly he was thinking of the body in that third-floor bathtub.

Already a maid might have entered the room. Already the police might be coming, to search, probe, ask pointed questions. If not now, then any minute, any

hour. And Cassidy's oblique, carelessly misleading questions were driving at some point that was hot and hard in Cassidy's mind.

"You know how the Masterton Agency feels about horse races and crooked work, Joe."

"You've caused me enough trouble in the past with your hunches and ideas," Mr. Maddox said bluntly.

"I just thought I'd mention it," Cassidy said amiably.

They had reached the bright lights, the crowded streets and walks of Times Square. Cassidy stopped. "What time have you got, Joe?"

Mr. Maddox glanced instinctively at his wrist watch. "Eight twenty-five."

"Thanks," Cassidy nodded, and his smile was thin, his voice gentle. "Did you say you went into the Carlew to get the time, Joe?"

That was Cassidy, casual—and deadly. You never quite realized when the big Masterton detective was at his deadliest. And yet Mr. Maddox had never looked more like a bland and smiling Buddha as he parried the thrust.

"Did I say that? I went in to set my watch. It had stopped."

"I see," Cassidy nodded, still smiling. "Well, so long, Joe. I'll be seeing you."

"I don't doubt it," Mr. Maddox agreed.

HE WAS smiling as he left Cassidy. The smile lasted until he was out of sight. Then Mr. Maddox wiped his face. He felt as if he might be close to a chill.

But when Mr. Maddox walked into Jimmy's place, farther up Broadway, he was smiling again.

Jimmy's place was not Broadway, unless you knew Broadway. Nothing gaudy and garish appealed to the passing public. And inside there was no entertainment. Only paneled walls, comfortable tables, booths, and good food.

But at any hour of the day or night in Jimmy's place you could find the sporting world, theatrical world, newspaper world—and often the underworld.

Nothing exciting about them, nothing to interest strangers. They would merely be eating, talking, trading gossip, information. Strangers would never guess that headlines were often planned inside the

smoothly paneled walls of Jimmy's place.

Mr. Maddox was big, broadly smiling and hearty as he greeted acquaintances on his way back to a booth where Oscar was already eating.

Oscar looked up from a forkful of steak.

"Find the lug?" Oscar asked without much interest.

"Yes," Mr. Maddox said, and when a deft waiter appeared, Mr. Maddox remained standing and gave his order briefly. "Double Scotch."

Oscar's eyes widened. When the waiter was gone, Oscar asked uneasily: "Trouble, Joe?"

"Lugs," Mr. Maddox said, "are always trouble. I've got to make a telephone call."

Jimmy's telephone booths, in a back corner, were for a clientele that did much secretive telephoning. There were two booths, roomy, comfortable, absolutely soundproof. Padded stools let one sit at ease during long conversations.

Mr. Maddox telephoned the Park Avenue apartment of J. P. Allison. A maid answered, said that Miss Allison was not at home, and to another question readily

said that Miss Allison was at Goshen, New York.

Mr. Maddox hung up with relief. He had been afraid Anne Allison was in town for the evening. Goshen would be an alibi that would go far toward shielding her from hasty accusation.

Not that any alibi would have countered that grisly accusation of a dying man. All Buck Allison's money could not have prevented the police taking Anne into quick custody, could not have stopped screaming headlines.

But now, for better or worse, there was time to dig into the grim mystery.

The double Scotch was waiting when Mr. Maddox joined Oscar again. And Oscar was alert now.

"What's the trouble, Joe?"

"Plenty," Mr. Maddox said as he slid into the booth. "He was dead."

Oscar gulped on his steak. "Holy cow! Sudden, wasn't it?"

"Evidently," Mr. Maddox said. "He was murdered."

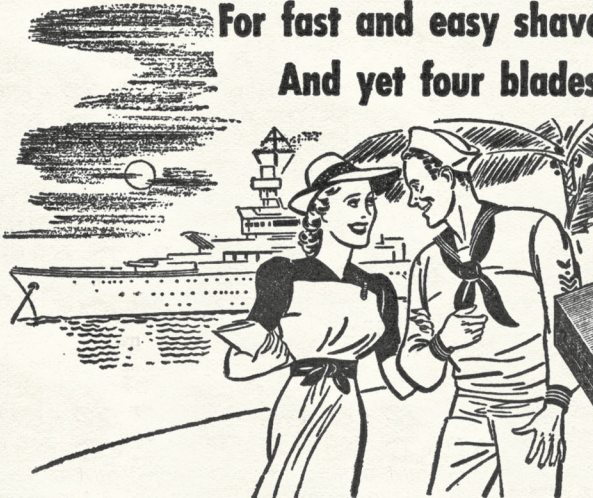
Oscar choked, grabbed for the water glass and cleared his throat. "Were the

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cops there yet? Did anybody guess you came to see him?"

"I walked into the room and found him." Mr. Maddox eyed the big glinting diamond on his finger. "Cassidy saw me leaving the hotel."

Oscar groaned. "I had a feeling that lug meant trouble when he kept telephoning for you. Tell me—what's the payoff, Joe?"

"I don't know," Mr. Maddox confessed. He swallowed the double Scotch and let the smoky bite stay in his throat. "He had some dope about Goshen. And before he could talk, he was murdered. It must be about the Hambletonian. I'm driving back to Goshen tonight."

Oscar protested instantly. "Don't be a sap! If one guy gets himself killed, two can get killed!"

"Easily," Mr. Maddox admitted.

"You're getting set to be the next one!" Oscar warned, and leaned forward. "Joe, get some sense for once in your life! If that guy got knocked off in his hotel room, think what may happen if you stick your neck out asking for the same!"

"That," Mr. Maddox said lightly, "is what interests me. If I don't stick my neck out, maybe I'll never know."

"You're crazy, Joe!"

"Probably," Mr. Maddox agreed. "And I'm in a hurry."

Oscar looked regretfully at his steak and put his napkin on the table. "O.K., Joe. Let's go."

"You," said Mr. Maddox, "are staying here with the book. And you don't know where I am. You don't know anything about me. You don't know what I was doing this evening. Especially if Cassidy comes around asking you a lot of questions."

"Will he be around?" Oscar asked uneasily. "That big mug always means trouble."

"No telling what Cassidy will do after that body is found," Mr. Maddox said. "I want you to watch the money that shows up on the Hambletonian. And pick up any dope you can get on Roscoe Knerr."

"Joe, do you think Knerr—"

"I've stopped thinking," Mr. Maddox said. "If I'm not back tomorrow, I'll telephone you."

CHAPTER FIVE

Maddox Makes a Bow

GOSHEN, NEW YORK, by night, was a far cry from Broadway and Times Square. Only a few dim lights were visible at the racetrack. Most of the town was asleep. But bright lights still burned in the Old State Tavern, not far from the railroad tracks.

The Tavern was a small, old-fashioned hotel and coffee shop where Anne Allison had taken rooms. For years the Tavern had been where the harness racing fraternity congregated of evenings.

Now, a little before midnight, a phonograph was playing loudly in the coffee shop when Mr. Maddox entered. The babble of voices was noisy through drifting tobacco smoke. The unaccustomed odors of expensive powder and perfume clashed with the good honest smell of straw, liniment and horse stables usually noticeable when the harness world converged on Goshen each year.

Mr. Maddox smiled faintly as he looked about the room. The Tavern, tonight, was probably the only spot in America where cafe society could be found rubbing elbows with horse stable regulars.

Anne Allison, at a table in the back, was the reason. Friends of Anne had stayed over from the afternoon's racing or driven up from New York for the evening. Everyone else in the long, low-ceilinged room seemed to have been included in the party. And a party it was.

Tables and chairs had been pushed back to make a tiny dance floor. Talk was loud. Laughter was louder.

Some of the faces Mr. Maddox knew. An ironical smile touched his mouth as he noted the familiar grizzled mustache of Uncle Steve Bendor at the small bar with a girl who probably was no stranger to the rotogravure and gossip columns.

The girl laughed, patted Uncle Steve's arm and moved away. Uncle Steve buried his mustache in a stein of beer and was staring owlshly after her when Mr. Maddox chuckled at his shoulder.

"It's all a dream, old-timer. You'll wake up and be sleeping in the straw again."

"Huh?" Uncle Steve swiped at the

foam on his mustache, and then looked foolish as he saw who had spoken. "Howdy, Maddox. Where'd you turn up from?"

"I floated in on a cloud," Mr. Maddox said gravely. "A pink and rosy cloud following a snowstorm of hundred-dollar bills, with pretty girls patting my arm and telling me what a kick they were getting out of harness racing."

"Eavesdropping ain't fair," Uncle Steve complained sheepishly. "If they want to make a circus, I ain't the one to hang back. Look at 'em, Maddox. The boys out at the county fairs wouldn't believe it. Money don't mean nothin' to them. Last night that tall blond young feller back there give Eddy ten bucks for mixin' him a drink he liked. Ten bucks!"

"That young man," said Mr. Maddox, "is Buzz McAllister, whose father controls a large piece of the rubber tire industry. Is he one of your pals now, you old stable goat?"

"Ain't no call to rub it in," Uncle Steve complained. "I'm workin' for Jonas Clearwater. And Jonas is training that horse for Miss Allison. When I'm told to hang around here nights an' answer questions, there ain't anything else to do."

"A night club entertainer, eh? I never would have thought it."

"Neither would I," Uncle Steve admitted. "But it beats washin' a horse. I never seen such goin's on or so much money spent so fast, Maddox. Big cars a-comin' and a-goin' and cameramen takin' pictures of Miss Allison an' her horse and Jonas Clearwater. And a press agent named Crown underfoot with ideas to get printed in the papers. Swells from New York comin' up to look around an' strangers everywhere askin' questions. Jonas Clearwater's got a fire in his britches. He's left the other horses on his training list to the stable help while he fusses around with that Larkspur."

Uncle Steve drained his stein and shook his head.

"You wouldn't believe it, Maddox. No siree—you wouldn't believe it!"

"A press agent and everything," Mr. Maddox murmured. "How about Tim Lonergan? Is Tim around here tonight?"

"Lonergan stays close to the barns." Uncle Steve leaned closer. "He sure don't like Miss Allison. Nor her him.

It sticks out all over them when they pass at the track."

"You can't blame Tim," Mr. Maddox said absently. He was looking back at Anne Allison and thinking again how breathlessly lovely she was.

Tonight Anne wore a white linen suit. Just plain white, with the styled simplicity of genius. Every woman in the room must have envied the picture Anne made.

Her table was the center of a small group, some standing. All were hilarious. Most of them had drinks. Anne too. Half the length of the room, Mr. Maddox could see the sparkle and gaiety that made her different from the bored, beautiful girl who had come for Tim Lonergan's horse the other day. This was Anne Allison, the darling of cafe society.

IT SEEMED fantastic now to believe that Anne could be accused of anything by the dying Dandy Hoke.

But she had. And it was murder, calculated, deliberate. The bath towel through which the shot had been fired was proof.

Anne was looking toward them. She beckoned.

"She's a-wavin' at me," Uncle Steve said complacently. "More fool questions outa them friends of hers, I reckon. See you later."

But Uncle Steve had barely reached the table when a pink-faced, briskly smiling young man reached Mr. Maddox' side.

"Miss Allison tried to catch your eye, Mr. Maddox. She'd like you to meet her friends. I'm Terry Crown."

"The press agent," Mr. Maddox smiled as they started back.

Terry Crown laughed.

"We don't admit it. Press agents are supposed to be read—not thought of."

Anne was gay with her greeting, her introductions to the others around the table. A Miss Kane, a Mrs. Blythe, Loretta Rolande, who was a Broadway star and a good one.

Buzz McAllister, Mr. Maddox knew. Blythe and a Tom Fortune were strangers. Hilliard Stone, tall, dark and lean, he had heard of. Polo and yachting kept Stone in the headlines. The Stone banking interests were internationally known. And there was Eddy Hickman, thin, alert,

with a slightly sardonic, chestnut-tanned face. Eddy Hickman's by-lines were beginning to be noticed in the sport pages of the *Globe*.

"You'll all have to bet with Mr. Maddox," Anne told them gaily. "He's almost a family institution. He used to be Dad's bookmaker in California before I was born."

"Friend of Lonergan's too, aren't you, Maddox?" Eddy Hickman asked slyly.

"I'm everyone's friend," Mr. Maddox told him blandly.

"How do you dope the Hambletonian?"

"There's always a chance for the best horse to win."

They thought that was funny. The Kane girl's laughter was shrill and too loud. She'd been drinking too much. Her eyes were getting glassy. But Eddy Hickman was sober. A faint smile stayed on his dark face.

"Only a chance?" Hickman asked.

"Anne has the winner," Terry Crown put in briskly. "It'll be a walk-away. The trainer's certain. How about it, Maddox?"

"I'm not Jonas Clearwater," Mr. Maddox evaded genially. "If I can believe all I read, Larkspur will win in straight heats on publicity alone."

They also thought that was witty. The Kane girl screamed with laughter.

"Anne, darling, he's precious! He's got to be my bookmaker, too! Joe, what odds will you give on Anne and Blanche Carter?"

"And this Lonergan person and the squirrely-looking horse he's going to race?" Buzz McAllister called across the table.

"Tim Lonergan's a fine driver," Mr. Maddox told them. "You never can tell what Tim will do."

Anne had lost her smile. And abruptly she pushed back her chair and stood up. "Night, everybody. I'm going to bed."

The Kane girl cried protest.

"It's early, Anne! We drove clear up here to see you and waited—and you come in for one drink and run off again. It's hardly twelve. You haven't been to bed this early since you left Miss Cattlett's school!"

"Pour them in their cars, Terry," Anne said, and waved at them, including Mr.

Maddox, and ignored the further protests as she left.

"Anne was up at five this morning to see about her horse," Terry Crown explained cheerfully.

"To see about her publicity, you mean," the Kane girl corrected loudly. "This is the last time I'll drive up to see her! Come on, Tom, let's start back."

Mr. Maddox rubbed his chin and spoke to Terry Crown. "I thought Miss Allison had been here all evening."

The brisk young press agent gave him a quick look. "Anne had an errand to do and a flat tire delayed her." Terry Crown moved on around the table to speak with Eddy Hickman. He might almost have been dodging further questions.

Mr. Maddox was impassive as he walked away and entered the Tavern lobby. Anne had gone upstairs. The sad-eyed desk clerk said that Miss Allison had the three front rooms on the second floor. Her sitting-room was the middle door.

A maid opened the door when Mr. Maddox knocked. She was middle-aged, capable and brief. "Miss Allison is retiring and will see no one."

"Tell her it's Mr. Maddox and it's important."

She closed the door again. Anne herself opened it a few moments later. She had started to take her hair down and had caught it up again hastily. The flush had left her cheeks. The gaiety was gone.

"Is it so very important?" Anne asked. "I'm awfully tired."

"I hear you got up at five this morning," Mr. Maddox sympathized.

"Funny, isn't it?" Anne said. "I've often gone to bed at daybreak. Getting up so early seems strange."

"You won't find many cameramen or reporters around so early," Mr. Maddox chuckled.

Anne shrugged. She was not even trying to smile. But she was not bored now. She had changed in the last few days.

"I went to the barn," she said. "It's all strange to me—but I want to be there while Larkspur is being trained. He's so beautiful when he runs."

"That," said Mr. Maddox, "sounds serious."

Anne flushed. Her eyes hardened—if deep long-lashed eyes like hers could be said to harden.

"I said I would win. Usually I do what I promise."

"Mmmn," Mr. Maddox said thoughtfully. "Tim Lonergan was the one you promised, wasn't he?"

Anne's flush deepened. "I'll spend any amount of money to win after the way he talked to me and to the newspapermen! He's going to feel awfully foolish after the Hambletonian!"

"Money," Mr. Maddox suggested, "can't do everything."

"Money can do anything," Anne said with a finality that left no room for argument. Her hand went to the doorknob in a gesture of dismissal. "Was there anything more? I'm really very tired and I'm to be called at five again."

Mr. Maddox looked at her keenly and dropped his voice for her ears alone.

"I wonder if you're too tired to talk about Dandy Hoke?"

CHAPTER SIX

A Strange Bedfellow

ANNE closed her eyes. Her hand was hard upon the doorknob, as if she needed the support. A tiny pulse in her white throat began to throb madly. And the color drained out of her cheeks as she opened the door in silent permission for him to enter.

But only the faintest tremor was in her voice as she called out to her maid in the next room.

"Mary, will you go downstairs for a little? I'll telephone down when I want you."

"Yes, miss."

They heard the door of the adjoining room open and close as the maid went out.

"Won't you sit down?" Anne asked.

She had taken a cigarette from a package on the old writing table against the wall. Her hand was steady. But she was rigidly, almost fiercely on guard, and doing so well at it that Mr. Maddox wondered if he had ever really known her.

He shook his head and remained standing.

"So you do know Dandy Hoke?" he said thoughtfully.

"I didn't say I did," Anne denied. "Who is the man? Why do you ask me about him?"

"You were in New York tonight."

"Was I?" Anne said. "And what business is it of yours?"

Mr. Maddox sighed. She was so young and lovely. Spoiled and pampered undoubtedly. But admirable too in this moment. Buck Allison himself couldn't have controlled his emotions better.

"Look, young lady," Mr. Maddox said bluntly, "I've known your father a long time. I'm not one of these scatter-brained bar-flies you run around with. This man Hoke is dead. He was shot. Murdered. And he used his finger and some of his own blood to write your name on the side of the bathtub in which he died. It's murder, do you understand? Murder! And he accused you. Now let's hear what it's all about!"

He thought then she was going to faint. No girl could have that ghastly drawn look of frozen horror and stay normal. Her whisper came forced and husky.

"My name was put where the police will accuse me of m-murder?"

"Yes," said Mr. Maddox grimly.

"And—and the police are looking for me now?"

"Sit down, kid. Take it easy," Mr. Maddox relented. "I don't think they are. I walked in and found the body and saw your name and washed it off before I left. You're in the clear for the time being."

It was like pouring life back into her. And Mr. Maddox could understand. Hardened old bookie that he was, he had been shaken into a cold sweat at the thought of being tied in with murder. How much worse it must be for this girl.

And then Mr. Maddox could have kicked himself for taking away the full bludgeon of fear that he needed to make her talk freely. For Anne's breasts rose with the shaky breath she caught deeply—and once more she was on guard.

"I haven't killed anyone," she denied huskily. "You can't believe I did!"

"No," Mr. Maddox admitted. "I don't think you killed him. But why did he leave your name?"

"I don't know," Anne said.

"You must know."

"But I don't!"

"You knew him, didn't you?"

Anne went to the table and pressed the cigarette out in an ash tray. She still looked ghastly, but she was calm enough when she turned back.

"I haven't admitted that I knew this man. I won't admit that I even know what you're talking about. But—but I'll tell you about a girl who has been paying blackmail over the usual indiscreet letters."

Anne swallowed and shook her head.

"They were letters to a married man. They should never have been written. I don't think they meant exactly what they seem to say. But a good lawyer could twist them into court evidence. The man's wife would see that they were used. He and his children would be dragged into an unsavory mess. He shouldn't have kept them, but he did, and they were stolen from him."

"This girl paid blackmail to help him?" Mr. Maddox asked curiously. "And he let her?"

"He had no money to pay," Anne said steadily. "It—it seemed better to do the paying and—keep everything quiet."

Mr. Maddox shrugged. "That still doesn't say why Hoke was killed."

"I can't tell you why," Anne said again. She clenched her hands. "This man Hoke telephoned and said he had to have money quickly. He promised to give up the letters this time. He said he didn't want them any more. But he had to have five thousand dollars within an hour or so. The girl couldn't get the money that quickly. She—she telephoned her best girl friend to get it and go in her place. And the friend went to his hotel room and found him dead and had presence of mind to walk out again and—and say nothing."

"I saw her come out of Hoke's room," Mr. Maddox muttered. "So that checks. And Hoke left your name there before he died. His room was ransacked. He must have believed that you—well, the girl, if you want it that way—had him killed on account of the letters."

"But how could he?" Anne asked in dry tight despair.

"Rats like Hoke can believe anything because they'd do anything," Mr. Maddox

said. "Anyway, Hoke believed it. And if those letters were in his room, they're gone now. The room was frisked by an expert."

"Do you think someone else has the letters?" Anne asked tautly.

"Evidently." Mr. Maddox scowled thoughtfully—and spoke his mind bluntly. "This girl had better tell her father. He's needed now. Murder is too serious for any girl to be up against alone."

"He mustn't hear about it!"

"If I know this girl's father, he's all right," Mr. Maddox urged. "He'll understand and help."

"No!" Anne insisted. She was twisting her hands nervously together. Tears were very close to her eyes. "He—he mustn't ever know!"

"Kid," said Mr. Maddox kindly, "I'm old enough to know what's right and what's best in a matter like this. Let me talk to him. I can make him understand."

"You'll go to him! I'll have to tell you now to stop you!" Anne gulped. "You don't understand. This—this girl has the same name as her mother. Most people would think the girl wrote those letters. Her—her mother is dead. And her mother wrote them in the year before she died. She didn't mean all she said. But it's there in black and white!"

Anne's chin was trembling as she let all pretense go.

"Father mustn't wake up some morning and find *her* name in the papers, in—in a cheap divorce court. Can't you see I'm trying to keep his memories as they are? To keep something for him that's terribly precious and dear since she died? They think I wrote the letters. But he'd know. I'll pay—I'll do anything to keep him from knowing about them!"

MR. MADDUX stood there with his throat tight also. He swore helplessly to himself. Joe Maddox had never been up against anything like this before.

You could figure out crooks. You could match move with move. You could take a chance on violence and publicity. You could always fall back on money and lawyers. But what could you do about a girl who was protecting the mistakes of her mother and the memories of a father whose grief must have been great?

Once this hit the headlines there was no hope. Anne couldn't do anything. Buck Allison would have his bitter disillusionment.

"I don't know what to do!" Anne wailed.

And now she wasn't Anne Allison, lovely sophisticate of cafe society. Anne Allison, beautiful, bored and petty about the little spites that ruffled her money-smoothed days and nights.

She was just big Buck Allison's kid, stunningly pretty. But young, very young, under her veneer of sophistication. Young, frightened, helpless in this morass of blackmail and crime that had engulfed her. And yet fiercely protecting Buck Allison and her mother.

"Who else knows about this?" Mr. Maddox asked gently. "Your girl friend, of course. Who is she?"

"Betty Garfield."

"How much does she know?"

"I told her he had letters. Betty believes I wrote them."

"Will she talk now?"

"I—I don't think so. When Betty found him dead in that room, she didn't say anything. She's level-headed. Betty met me in the Pierre lobby, where I was to go as soon as I could drive in from here. She told me what she had found. She was awfully upset. But she agreed it would be best not to say anything. I'm sure she won't, for my sake."

"I hope you know her," Mr. Maddox said under his breath. "Anyone else know?"

"My press agent, Terry Crown, knows a little. He has to know quite a lot about me anyway, to do his work right. He's very clever. I told him I was being black-

mailed. He agreed it was better to pay than have bad publicity."

"Does he know Dandy Hoke was doing the blackmailing?"

"Oh, no. But I wanted Terry to understand in case anything did happen."

"Like him that much, do you?"

"Terry's job is to get me the best publicity possible. I thought he should know. And—and I wanted some advice. I had to talk to someone. Terry seemed the most logical person. My interests are his interests."

ANNE wiped her eyes and twisted the handkerchief between her hands. "What shall I do?" she asked hopelessly. "The police may have found something that will make them think I killed him. The letters might be there in the room after all. Or—or if someone else has them, what will they do?"

She was thinking clearly enough. She was right, and it made her helpless fear greater.

Mr. Maddox sighed inwardly. This was bad. Worse probably than Anne thought. But none of that showed on his face.

Mr. Maddox took her hand and patted it with a kindly gallantry that would have astonished many people who thought they knew Joe Maddox, the hard-boiled bookie.

"Kid," said Mr. Maddox, "right now you go to bed and sleep. I'll be here tonight. It probably isn't as bad as you think."

Mr. Maddox tipped her chin up. His broad face was smiling. He had never looked so big, so vastly confident, so humorous and reassuring.

"Smile," Mr. Maddox ordered. "To-



morrow it won't seem nearly so bad. I've got a hunch everything will be all right. Now let me do the worrying and go to bed."

Anne's smile was wan and pathetic—but it was a smile. Gratitude was a bright glow under her long lashes.

"It helps just to hear that and to know you'll be near," Anne confessed. "I'll go to sleep and I'll keep smiling and—and thank you, Joe Maddox."

She still had that wan smile as she closed the door.

And the sad-eyed clerk downstairs was not smiling as he shook his head.

"We haven't any rooms. Won't have until after the Hambletonian."

"Not even a bed anywhere?" Mr. Maddox questioned. "I want to stay here for several days."

"Nope," the clerk said positively. "There's even an extra bed been put in my room and rented to a newspaperman."

"Mmmm—got a room have you?" Mr. Maddox mused. "What are your rates?"

"Four dollars a day, single, until after the Hambletonian. But there won't be anything, mister. I'm sorry."

"So am I," Mr. Maddox said with genial regret. "I'd be willing to pay a fifty dollar bill for a bed for the next three or four days."

The clerk gave him a startled look, and then dipped a steel pen in ink and handed it across the counter.

"I can sleep out in the woodshed for that, mister. But you'll have to be in with that newspaperman."

"Who is he—Eddy Hickman?"

"Grasner's his name. He won't bother you. Got a bag?"

"Out in the car. I'll get it."

The little, low-ceilinged room was in the third floor attic, under the slope of the roof. A light was on inside. A man was bending from the edge of a narrow bed, taking off his shoes, when the clerk led the way in.

"This gentleman'll use my bed for a few days."

"Yeah? Packing them in, aren't—"

The man broke off, staring from heavy-lidded eyes as Mr. Maddox walked in. "Make yourself at home," he said, and pulled off the shoe and dropped it on the floor.

The clerk departed. Mr. Maddox tossed his hat on the bed and took off his coat. He had never been more bland and genial.

"Maddox is the name. The clerk tells me you're a newspaperman. What paper?"

"Chicago paper," Grasner grunted. He sat there on the edge of the bed, pudgy, middle-aged, with lax, rounded shoulders. And yet somehow the man gave the impression that he had suddenly gone tense, watchful, wary.

Mr. Maddox was not surprised. Grasner and Roscoe Knerr had been well enough aware of Joe Maddox the other afternoon when they stood within earshot of Anne Allison and Tim Lonergan.

And now Grasner looked as if he thought Joe Maddox had taken the other bed in this attic room for some ulterior purpose.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Trickery at the Track

MR. MADDUX beamed in friendly cheerfulness. "I've got friends on the Chicago papers. Which one are you with?"

"Star," Grasner said. He removed the other shoe. His manner was more cordial when he straightened. "I hear you're a bookie. Taking any money on these Goshen races?"

"On the Hambletonian."

"Any limit?"

"I lay off what I can't handle."

"What horse do you like?"

"Larkspur is getting a big play," Mr. Maddox said cheerfully as he busied himself getting ready for bed. "I wouldn't be surprised if he doesn't go to the barrier the favorite."

"I don't like favorites," Grasner said. "They cost me money."

The man seemed to be making an effort to be pleasant. Mr. Maddox met it with a greater pleasantness, bland and smiling. Cordiality was thick in the little attic room until the light was out.

Mr. Maddox lay staring up into the darkness, turning Grasner over in his mind. Roscoe Knerr had a wide acquaintance. Grasner might be a newspaperman from Chicago. And the Hambletonian, as

the premier harness race of the year, drew interest from coast to coast.

But Mr. Maddox doubted Grasner as much as the man had apparently doubted him at first sight. He smiled grimly in the darkness at the thought that Grasner was probably lying awake wondering about him.

But there were many other things to think about. Many twisted, threatening threads that made a pattern of trouble and grief. Mr. Maddox fell asleep grappling with them.

The room clerk pounded on the door not long after dawn. Mr. Maddox swung out of bed with the feeling that he had been sleeping at the edge of disaster. And as he drove to the track through the golden wash of sunlight the feeling persisted.

Already dainty rubber-tired sulkies and the slightly heavier training carts were on the track. The fast drum-slap of trotters and the softer rhythm of leather-hobbled pacers came out of the soft gray dust in heart-warming cadence.

Fine horses. Gentlemen drivers. Crookedness had seldom touched this grandest of equine sports. All the long summer around the county fairs and the state fairs of the Grand Circuit the trotting races had thrilled thousands who seldom saw any other kind of horse race.

Here at Goshen tomorrow the season would come to a climax in the Hambletonian, for three-year trotters, with its estimated purse of forty thousand dollars. And another great name would join past immortals of trotting history like Dan Patch, Goldsmith Maid, Directum I, Uhlan and others.

Mr. Maddox stood near the grandstand and watched a drum-rush come down the stretch. The horse was brown and small, with legs that seemed too short and back that seemed too long. He seemed to run off-balance, bobbing his head awkwardly. Yet mane and tail whipped back with the speed of his running and the piston-like drive of his legs was a straight, true blur that seemed satisfactory to Tim Lonergan, sitting easily on the sulky seat.

Unlike the dainty thoroughbreds, these trotters took a lot of running to warm up, to train right. Tim made two more circuits of the track with his Candy Kid before he pulled off the track.

Tim had taken off his white dust coat, silk cap and goggles and was watching Candy Kid being taken out of sulky and harness when Mr. Maddox came up and stopped before him.

"He's good, Tim," Mr. Maddox said.

"Is he?" Tim said coolly.

Mr. Maddox sighed.

"Look, Tim, I didn't take your Larkspur. I didn't have anything to do with it. Come down off your high-horse. With a trotter like that, you've still got a chance to win your Hambletonian."

TIM'S frostiness thawed a little. He watched Candy Kid being led away. His slow smile was contented.

"The ugly little runt," Tim said. "I think he knows what it's all about. He's trotting like a champion since I lost Larkspur."

"That's all you need. That and the breaks, Tim."

"Did you see Jonas Clearwater and the Allison girl at the rail with stop watches?" Tim asked. "Jonas is running a three-ringed circus, with more money than he ever thought existed. Larkspur is a better horse than Jonas ever had in training. And Candy Kid has him worried to death." Tim's smile hardened. "Tomorrow we'll see whether she's as clever as she thought she was."

"Anne's not as bad as you think she is," Mr. Maddox said abruptly.

Tim spat. His tanned young face was expressive.

"She couldn't be," Tim said. "When I walked out of the stall the other day and saw her, I thought nobody like her could help being an angel. I could have stood losing Larkspur, for I owed the money. But the cheap publicity circus she's put on around here finished me. Look at her, coming around early now, as if she's really interested in her horse and the race. There's no place in trotting for phonies like her!"

Mr. Maddox shook his head. "She's not a phoney, Tim. She's young. She's never understood all this. She went into it like she would a social campaign. But she's not a phoney."

"Are you trying to sell her to me, Maddox?"

"What would you do with her?" Mr.

Maddox chuckled. "You've got your horses and racing. You couldn't use a girl like Anne, even if she was the angel you thought she was."

"A girl like that, who understood horses—" Tim broke off, frowning, as if what he was about to say didn't belong in his mind. "Look, Maddox, since you think so well of her, tell her to keep that damn press agent of hers away. He hangs around trying to make himself agreeable. He said something about having my picture taken with her, and I almost threw him out. Tell her we're running a training stable, not a headline mill."

"I'll tell her, Tim," Mr. Maddox said. "And I wanted to ask you if you'd noticed anything suspicious around your stalls."

"No. Why?" Tim asked; staring.

"No reason," Mr. Maddox shrugged. "But there's a lot of money coming out on this Hambletonian. You can't be too careful."

Tim's smile was indulgent.

"You've been around flat racing too much, Maddox. We don't have that sort of thing in trotting." And Tim turned away to watch his horse being washed off and rubbed down before being taken out on the track again.

Mr. Maddox thought of Tim's last remark not more than an hour later when Tim brought Candy Kid down the stretch once more and into the first turn in another drumming rush.

Anne was standing there, too, in jodhpurs and dainty leather boots, the golden sun on the tawny gold of her hair and faint shadows of strain and sleeplessness under her eyes.

The New York papers had arrived without mention of a dead body. Anne had said with white-lipped strain: "They must know something. They must be doing something."

"No news is good news," Mr. Maddox had reminded.

And then Candy Kid streaked toward them and Anne forgot her troubles.

"Doesn't it make a picture?" she asked.

"That's Tim Lonergan," Mr. Maddox reminded slyly.

Anne's quick cry of horror was the only reply she had a chance to make—

A wheel of Tim Lonergan's dainty red-and-blue sulky had come off in the turn.

The axle dropped down and ploughed a geyser of dirt. Candy Kid broke out of the trot and swerved fast and hard to the jerk of the reins as Tim's body rocketed off the sulky in a helpless plunge that carried him hard against the inside fence.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Out of the Running

IT WAS all over while Anne's cry was still on her lips. Candy Kid swerved across the track kicking at the wrecked sulky. And as Mr. Maddox went over the low fence with a smothered oath, the dust drifted away from Tim Lonergan's limp body.

Other sulkies were pulling up on the track. Men beyond the fence and at the barns were shouting, running. But Mr. Maddox, moving fast despite his bulk, reached Tim first. Anne was only a step behind.

Tim's scalp was laid open in a long gash. Mr. Maddox' keen eyes noted Tim's right leg twisted at a queer angle below the knee. A hand on the leg was enough.

"Is he dead?" Anne asked tightly.

"I doubt it," Mr. Maddox said, and he called to the first men who came running up. "His leg's broken! Better get a stretcher."

Anne had dropped to her knees and was using her handkerchief on Tim's bloody, dirty face. There was enough help present and more coming. Mr. Maddox headed at a jog trot around the turn where a driver had cut over, jumped from his sulky and stopped Candy Kid.

Men from the stables reached the wrecked sulky and trembling horse before Mr. Maddox. The gray-haired, tight-lipped driver called: "Is Lonergan hurt much?"

"Broken leg and a head cut," Mr. Maddox panted. "I think he'll be all right. How's the horse?"

Before anyone could answer an astonishingly ugly, bow-legged little man came up at a plunging run and alternately cursed to himself and crooned soothingly as he hurriedly examined Candy Kid.

This was Monk Magee, Tim's stable boss, with arms too long, shoulders too

broad, bowed legs too short for the thick, powerful torso. There was something incongruous in the crooning sounds coming from that beetle-browed, flat-nosed simian face, in the almost feminine, gentle touch of great strong hands on Candy Kid's legs.

Monk cursed when the left hind leg flinched under his touch.

"Bruised himself!" Monk said, and swung around with a plunging motion that brought him to the dirt-crusted wheel spindle of the sulky that Mr. Maddox was silently examining.

Monk jerked up the side of the sulky as if it were no weight at all. His other big hand wiped dirt and grease off the spindle with one hard rotary motion of a calloused palm.

For a moment Monk stared down at the threads on the end of the spindle. Scowling blackly he looked at Mr. Maddox and started to say something. Then he thought better of it and swung back to the horse, rumbling: "Let's get him outa the shafts!"

Mr. Maddox bit off the end of a big black cigar, lighted it and turned thoughtfully away. Monk's look was enough. That lost wheel was something more than an accident.

Tim Lonergan hadn't been killed. Candy Kid hadn't been crippled. But either or both might have happened. And as it was Candy Kid's bruised leg might turn bad. And worse—Tim Lonergan would be laid up with a broken leg tomorrow when the Hambletonian field scored down for the first heat.

Alone there on the track in the bright sunlight, Mr. Maddox swore as blackly as Monk Magee.

"Tim's out of the race, damn them! Damn every crook who ever put a dirty hand on horse racing!"

The next hour was a busy one. Tim Lonergan, still unconscious, had been put into Anne Allison's big automobile and rushed to the hospital at Middleton. Mr. Maddox got the private word he wanted with Monk Magee.

"Funny that wheel didn't come off when Tim went around the track first this morning," Mr. Maddox said.

Monk's big fists clenched. His eyes were red, sultry, dangerous.

"Tim used a cart the first time. He didn't take that little fire wagon until the

second breeze. I went over it myself yesterday afternoon. Everything was tight. It'll be a black day if I find who did it." Monk spat. "See about him, will ya? Tell him Candy Kid'll be all right an' I'm waitin' for orders."

Middleton was not many miles down the highway. Anne had already left the hospital. A nurse at the reception desk said that Lonergan was conscious and the doctors were setting his leg. His skull had not been fractured. He would do fine resting in bed while the leg knit.

And Tim would be in a black bitter mood at being crippled out of the race tomorrow. Mr. Maddox left a note to be delivered as soon as Tim could receive it and started back to Goshen. And the day clerk at the Tavern had news that somehow was not surprising. Grasner had checked out.

THERE was one narrow telephone booth at the back of the lobby. Mr. Maddox edged his bulk in, closed the door, and put a call through to the *Chicago Star*. He was not greatly surprised either to hear that Grasner was not known at the *Star*.

It all seemed to be part of a pattern that was shaping up fast now. Mr. Maddox chewed the end of an unlighted cigar as he called the Vardon, in New York, and asked for his suite.

Oscar answered and blurted: "Are you all right, Joe? Have they pinched you yet?"

Mr. Maddox snatched the cigar from his mouth. "What do you mean? What's happened?"

Oscar was anguished.

"Detectives were here about half an hour ago, Joe. They wanted you."

"Did they have a warrant?"

"I don't know. They didn't tell me, Joe. But they asked plenty questions! They wanted to know about phone calls we got from the Carlew Hotel yesterday. The guy who made them has been murdered. They wanted to know what business we had with him!"

Mr. Maddox swore at his stupidity. He had forgotten that the Carlew must have kept a record of Hoke's telephone calls. "What did you tell them?"

"What could I tell 'em, Joe? Calls

come in all day long. He must have been asking for horse odds or something, wasn't he? They say he was registered under the name of Murray, but his right name was Hoke. I don't remember those names—and I guess you don't either, eh, Joe?"

Oscar's anguished voice was trying to say that detectives might be listening to their conversation. Mr. Maddox picked it up calmly.

"If his name was Hoke, I talked to him. He was interested in the big race tomorrow. If the detectives come back, tell 'em I'll be glad to answer any questions. Which horse in the Hambletonian has been getting the most play?"

"Peter Kline."

"I'll be seeing you," Mr. Maddox said. "Tell Shorty I'll see him soon as I get in town."

"Uh—oh, Shorty! Sure, I'll tell him, Joe."

Mr. Maddox stepped out of the cramped hot booth and reached for a handkerchief to wipe his broad, perspiring face. And he stopped at sight of Cassidy's grizzled figure standing close to the booth.

Cassidy's Panama hat was pulled low in front. A half-smoked cigarette was in his fingers. And Cassidy stood staring for electric seconds of pregnant silence.

Mr. Maddox was jumpy. It took an effort to smile.

"Surprise, eh, Cassidy? I should have left the door open so you could hear easier."

Cassidy drew on the cigarette. His eyes were cold, thoughtful. "Who were you calling, Joe?"

"Oscar," Mr. Maddox said. "Anything else on your mind?"

"I hear Lonergan's out of the race tomorrow."

Mr. Maddox nodded and stopped smiling.

"Tough on the boy. The race meant a lot to him. Already he'd had his share of bad luck in losing Larkspur."

"I hear you were watching when he was hurt," Cassidy said bleakly.

"That's right."

"Spent last night here in Goshen for the first time this season, didn't you, Joe?"

"That's right again," Mr. Maddox said. And now his broad face began to harden.

"So what, Cassidy? What's that to you?"

"Where's your partner, Grasner?"

"My what?"

"Your buddy. Your roommate. The clerk tells me you and Grasner bunked together last night."

Cassidy stiffened as Mr. Maddox stepped close and jabbed a big finger at his chest.

"Don't blow off your mouth!" Mr. Maddox warned coldly. "The guy's not my partner. I took the only bed they had here. I didn't know that mug was around until I walked into the room."

In long years of knowing the big Masterton detective, Mr. Maddox had never seen Cassidy's mouth such a steel-trap line.

"Don't hand me guff, Joe," Cassidy said coldly. "This last business about Tim Lonergan is too raw! I figured you were up to something when I caught you coming out of the Carlew, where Grasner had a room. But when I hear what happened to Lonergan and find you and Grasner holed up together last night, I know you've turned dirty crook, too."

Nothing as yet about Dandy Hoke. Mr. Maddox lighted the cigar.

"Be yourself, Cassidy," he said quietly. "I don't know Grasner—but I saw him with Roscoe Knerr last week. Last night Grasner told me he worked on the *Chicago Star*. I just put a call through to the *Star*. They didn't know anything about him. Ask the clerk. He'll have a record of the call. Why should I be checking on Grasner if I was thick with him?"

CASSIDY walked over to the desk and talked with the clerk. His face was a study when he came back.

"You made the call all right," Cassidy admitted.

"Who is Grasner? What's the idea of tailing him?"

"You wouldn't hand me a gag, Joe?"

"Tim Lonergan's my friend. Or would that mean anything to you?" Mr. Maddox said brusquely.

"If it's a gag, I'll nail you, so help me," Cassidy promised evenly. "Grasner's from Chicago. He works for that Loop bookie mob that took it on the chin when their wire services were cut off. They're making a dollar any way they can now."

Mr. Maddox nodded understandingly. "Scratching around for dough on the trotting circuit, are they?"

"Our Chicago office heard rumors about the Hambletonian," Cassidy said. "Larkspur was being talked up. Confidential stuff for the suckers who like an inside tip. I was told to look Goshen over for any of the Chicago mob. And Grasner was here giving everything the business like he was a Grand Circuit regular. If he ever bothered with a harness race before, I'll pay off in boxcars."

"You're safe," Mr. Maddox guessed.

"I saw him with Knerr," Cassidy said. "That made it a stinkaroo for sure. We've had Knerr down on the book ever since we were damn sure but couldn't prove that he planned that switch at Saratoga four years ago, when Ojibway ran as Claremont and paid off at \$38.40."

Mr. Maddox scowled at the memory.

"So Knerr did that? I kissed better than eleven grand good-bye on that swindle before they found that the horse was Ojibway. Solly Baines, the trainer, committed suicide before they could put him on the carpet."

"Baines died in his automobile with a bullet in his head and the gun in his hand," Cassidy corrected. "It looked like suicide and they wrapped it up that way. Nobody ever had any different evidence. But last year Baines' girl friend told me that Baines had been drunk and sore that night and said he wouldn't be a fall guy for anyone else. He drove away and was found dead. She kept quiet while the heat was on."

"Knerr used his Roscoe again, eh?"

"Nobody's ever proved it. But when I

see Grasner here at Goshen with Knerr, it's enough."

"Tim Lonergan's out of the race."

"And what good does that do?" Cassidy countered impatiently. "The layers in Chicago are being tipped on Larkspur. Which means the mob don't think this Allison girl's horse will win. If Lonergan still owned Larkspur, I'd see some sense to what happened this morning."

"Cassidy," said Mr. Maddox, "sometimes you're dumb. Smart money in New York is coming out on Peter Kline."

"Larkspur's a better horse," Cassidy snapped. "I don't have to be clubbed to figure the racket. Larkspur gets it next—and Peter Kline has the race all his own way. The Chicago bunch keeps all the Larkspur money—and the wise guys collect on the dough they've laid on Peter Kline." Cassidy's jaw shoved out. "I'll put a guard on Larkspur until the race starts! And God help those crooks if they try anything!"

"Fast thinking," Mr. Maddox said. "Didn't I hear you say Grasner had a room at the Carlew?"

"You did." And some of Cassidy's suspicion returned. "It's mighty queer you showed up there too, Joe."

"Why should I lie about it? I hadn't the slightest idea Grasner had a room there. What was he doing?"

"You're too damned innocent," Cassidy muttered. "But I don't know where the catch is about you, Joe. And I don't know why Grasner was staying at that dump. He checked in there that morning, and he'd just gone out that evening. So I went up and frisked his room. I couldn't find a thing. But he wasn't there for his

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health. He still had a room at the Mator." "

"That," said Mr. Maddox, "is funny. But you're keeping up with him, Cassidy." Mr. Maddox glanced at his wrist watch. "Going over to the track?"

"I've some telephone calls to make. And Joe—I just hope you're on the level with me."

Mr. Maddox chuckled. "We're practically pals. You can count on me for anything. I'll see you later."

Mr. Maddox was smiling when he walked out to the car. The smile faded, his face was bleak, grim as he drove fast to the track.

Cassidy evidently hadn't heard about Dandy Hoke's death in the Carlew. When he did hear, when he learned that Joe Maddox had been in touch with Dandy Hoke about the Hambletonian shortly before Hoke's murder, Cassidy would go into action. His testimony alone could put Joe Maddox under a murder charge.

Anne Allison and Terry Crown were talking outside Jonas Clearwater's barn when Mr. Maddox stopped.

"You drove up fast enough for something to be wrong," Terry Crown called genially as they came to the car.

"I'm in a hurry to get back to Tim Lonergan," Mr. Maddox said briefly. "I've a private message for Miss Allison, if you don't mind."

"Not at all—sorry." Crown walked back and left them alone.

Mr. Maddox spoke swiftly. "The police are tracing the telephone calls that Hoke made yesterday. Was he in his hotel room when he called you?"

CHAPTER NINE

Blind Man's Buff

ANNE caught her breath. "Why—why, I never thought. They'll know he called me!"

"They will if he used his room telephone."

"Wait—I remember hearing the operator ask for more money. I heard him put it in."

Mr. Maddox exhaled a breath of relief.

"Luck," he said. "Hoke was too

smooth to leave a trace of that call. You're in the clear for a little. Don't do any talking at all."

"Won't the police be looking for you?"

"They are," said Mr. Maddox. "I'll do the best I can. Cassidy, of the Master-ton Detective Agency, will put a guard on your horse until the race starts. He's right. Thank him for it. Don't let Cassidy pump you. He'll try. If anything serious comes up, go to Middleton or some place where you can talk privately, call this number and ask for Shorty. He'll get word to me if it's possible."

Mr. Maddox scrawled a Manhattan telephone number on a notebook and tore it out.

"Can't I do *anything*?" Anne begged.

"Keep your head up and your mouth closed, kid," Mr. Maddox said kindly. "I'll do the best I can."

There was no sign of Cassidy as Mr. Maddox drove left out of Goshen. But he did not relax until he crossed the New York highway and kept straight ahead toward Warwick, and Hamburg over in New Jersey.

This longer, roundabout way to New York was safer for Joe Maddox this morning. Through Newark, Jersey City and the Holland Tunnel, Mr. Maddox reached lower Manhattan. Near the Pennsylvania Station he put the car in a side street garage. At the corner he bought a paper and found Hoke's murder on the front page.

A maid had found the body. The police stated it was murder. Hoke had been registered as a Donald Murray. His real name had quickly been traced by laundry marks.

That was all that seemed to be known when the paper went to press. But by now the police might know much more. Cassidy, from Goshen, might have contributed his evidence over long-distance. A general pick-up might be out for Joe Maddox.

Circumstantial evidence was damning. In the long run a murder charge might not stick. But they could hold him for questioning. They could smear Joe Maddox in the headlines.

In a Pennsylvania Station telephone booth Mr. Maddox dialed the number of Shorty's place. Oscar should be there

now unless the police had stopped him.

Shorty's place was called Chez Yvonne, after Shorty's plump French wife. Years back Shorty had been Wally Cartier, a coming jockey on the Big Apple tracks. A tangle of falling horses at Havre de Grace had left Wally crippled, broke, with no chance of marrying Yvonne. Mr. Maddox had loaned money to open Chez Yvonne. Now in all the country Joe Maddox had no more steadfast friends than Shorty and Yvonne.

Oscar was there. His voice was almost a groan of relief.

"I didn't know whether they'd get you or not, Joe! Have you seen the papers?"

"I have," said Mr. Maddox. "Did you get there without being spotted?"

"I made a Seventh Avenue subway just as the doors closed, Joe. No one else got on after me. I unloaded at the next stop and got across town fast." Oscar was jumpy, apprehensive. "Joe, the cops have got you fingered. An' it's murder!"

"It's worse than murder," said Mr. Maddox. "It's a squeeze on the Hambletonian. Has Louie Menzie laid any more dough on Peter Kline?"

"Not with us. Last night I heard of two grand more he's laid with other books."

"How about Knerr?"

"I couldn't hear anything about him."

"When that rat's quietest, he's working hardest. Is Larkspur getting a play?"

"Plenty," Oscar said. "The boys over in Jersey say it's coming in heavy from everywhere. The Allison girl's publicity is bringing out the small money. And her friends are putting up plenty."

"Lay off all the Larkspur money," Mr. Maddox directed. "Take every dollar you can get on Peter Kline. Telephone around town and over in Jersey and shake some of that Peter Kline money into our book."

"That Peter Kline money's hot!" Oscar warned. "It's wise money, Joe. Roscoe Knerr and his pals must be behind a lot of it. They seem sure Peter Kline will win tomorrow. It'll put you behind the eight-ball, Joe! If Peter Kline wins, you'll be cleaned."

"I'll take a chance," Mr. Maddox said. "I'm going to try a big bluff. If it works, we'll be sitting pretty. If it doesn't, I won't need the bankroll anyway. Now listen closely."

"Joe, don't do anything foolish! You—"

"Shut up and listen!"

Oscar listened—and at the end he was almost apoplectic.

"You can't do this, Joe! It's murder sure as anything! You won't get away with it!"

"I'll try," Mr. Maddox said calmly.

"Joe, just once listen! I know what I'm talking—"

Mr. Maddox hung up. He was sober, thinking hard as he walked through the station to the taxi ramp.

LOUIE MENZIE'S Swiss Tavern was in that boiling, busy block of Seventh Avenue just above Times Square. Two white-clad sandwich chefs were busy in the neon-ringed window. A heavy luncheon crowd was noisy inside when Mr. Maddox entered. Not a seat was available. Mr. Maddox was blandly unconcerned as he walked back and found Menzie standing at the end of the bar.

Menzie took an ivory cigarette holder from his mouth. "Hello, Maddox. How's tricks?"

Menzie had been a hooper when the Palace was in its prime. He still had the narrow-shouldered, wasp-waisted build of a hooper. A black, hairline mustache gave a young-old look to his narrow, cynical face. Now Menzie was suddenly watchful, as if certain this meeting was something more than chance.

"Betting pretty heavy on the Hambletonian tomorrow, aren't you?" Mr. Maddox said genially.

"One bet," Menzie replied. "And I should get better odds. They tell me I'm giving you my money on Peter Kline."

"He's trained too fine," Mr. Maddox said. "Why not switch to Larkspur? It's O.K. by me."

"I never had any luck switching bets," Menzie declined.

"I'm looking for Grasner."

"He's not—I mean I don't know the guy."

"Too bad," Mr. Maddox said regretfully. "He's being fingered and don't know it. Roscoe Knerr wouldn't be around here either, would he?"

"I ain't seen him for weeks."

"Well, I'll be seeing you."

Mr. Maddox had taken the first departing step when Louie Menzie's hand caught his arm. "Wait a minute. I just happened to think of a guy named Grasner."

"From Chicago?"

Louie Menzie blinked with growing uneasiness.

"I don't know much about him. Maybe I can find him for you. What's his trouble?"

"It probably isn't the same man," said Mr. Maddox. "I had a room with him at Goshen last night. He's kind of meaty. Looks like a slob. Never mind. It's his worry, not ours."

"Wait!" Menzie said again. He moistened his lips. "Look, I ain't the one to pass up a guy who's in a jam. I'll make a call or two. Maybe I can find this fellow."

"Got a heart as big as a boiler, haven't you, Louie?" Mr. Maddox chuckled. "Tell him I'm on my way in about three minutes—and I hope he's still not staying at the Matador."

Menzie was suddenly jumpy. "It'll only take a minute, Maddox. Wait here for me."

Menzie hurried off so quickly he bumped a waitress and made her spill soup. And he was gone not much more than three minutes. In that short time his dapper assurance had vanished. He was perspiring when he returned.

"I found him. He remembers you. Look, he's sending a hack. He wants to talk to you. Will that be all right?"

"Why not?" Mr. Maddox asked cheerfully, and walked out front and placidly smoked a cigar as he waited for the taxicab Grasner was sending. Fifty cabs passed that he could have taken to any address—and if it bothered Mr. Maddox, his broad cheerful face gave no sign.

When a taxi finally stopped in front of the Swiss Tavern and sounded the horn, Mr. Maddox entered it. The driver held the door open a moment longer. Another passenger jumped inside.

"This cab's taken," Mr. Maddox protested as the taxi rolled on.

"I'm riding with you, Maddox," the wiry young stranger stated as he sat back hard and watchfully in the corner of the seat.

His smile had a cold edge. He looked

out the back window as the taxi whipped past two slower cars and wheeled off Seventh Avenue at the next corner. His glance slid to Mr. Maddox' impassive face and out the back window again. "Just to make sure you ain't followed," he commented.

"Grasner thinks of everything," Mr. Maddox said mildly and relaxed while the taxi shuttled fast through the midtown streets, rolled up Fifth Avenue and turned into Central Park.

The driver called back: "How does it look?"

"I don't see anything behind. Let's deliver him." The young man tossed a pair of sun goggles on the seat. "Put 'em on."

"Son," said Mr. Maddox, "my eyes are all right."

"Who'n hell said they weren't? Put 'em on. Do I have to get tough about it?"

CHAPTER TEN

Masks Off

MR. MADDOX shrugged and put on the glasses. The side pieces closed snugly against his face. The lenses were black and opaque. A blindfold would not have cut off sight any better. And yet the glasses undoubtedly looked innocent.

Now and then the taxi was in heavy traffic. Sometimes not. After the first few turns it was impossible to tell which way they were going. Mr. Maddox had no idea where they were when the taxi rolled over a sidewalk ramp and entered a closed space. Someone closed doors behind the taxi. Mr. Maddox was taken out, guided through a doorway, up a short flight of steps, through a hall, into a room smelling of fresh cigarette smoke, and pushed into an overstuffed chair.

Mr. Maddox took off the glasses. A faint smile came on his face as he made out Grasner's pudgy figure several steps away. "This," Mr. Maddox said, looking around, "doesn't seem to be the Matador."

Grasner was scowling. The young man who had guided Mr. Maddox into the room stood watchfully near the doorway. A jerk of Grasner's head sent him out

silently, closing the door behind him.

Window shades, curtains were drawn. By the furniture this was the living-room of a house. The bright afternoon sun against the lower windows placed it as facing west.

Grasner's demand was blunt. "How'd you know I was staying at the Mator?"

"How do I know a lot of things?" Mr. Maddox said. "What'll you take for those letters that Dandy Hoke had?"

Grasner's jaw sagged. Then his face began to get red. "What letters, damn you?"

Scalp nerves prickled under Mr. Maddox' hat. Planning a thing like this was easy. But when you blasted the truth into an ugly fear-mask on your man's face, the danger was suddenly coldly threatening.

"They won't get you anything now," Mr. Maddox stated coolly. "Hoke can't use them. Maybe I can. I'll take a chance. What are they worth?"

"Damn you!" Grasner said again. His voice was thicker. "What d'you know about this guy Hoke? And letters—"

"There's that business with Tim Lonergan this morning," Mr. Maddox mused. "And that eighth floor room you had at the Carlew. . . ."

Grasner had a soft flabby look. Now back of that look he was ugly, dangerous. But before he could speak an answer came from the other side of the room.

"Letters ain't what you'll get!"

Roscoe Knerr had his gun out as he came into the room. He had the same elegant, pallid look. The soft grate of his voice was barely threatening.

Mr. Maddox sat straighter. "Better not, Roscoe. I'm not Solly Baines."

"Why you—" Knerr stopped as a man might who suddenly found himself on treacherous ground.

Grasner moistened his lips. "Who's Solly Baines?"

"He was a trainer at Saratoga," Mr. Maddox said. "Solly could have told things if he hadn't been found dead in his car. It won't work so well with me."

Knerr's gun was a thirty-two automatic, compact, lethal. The muzzle moved slightly as Knerr stood staring. Strained indecision showed around his mouth. The

soft grate of his voice spoke to no one in particular.

"I should have fixed this guy before he ever came here. But if he gets out now with his squawk, it won't be any worse than if he's knocked off now. I might as well give it to him and take a chance."

GRASNER'S flabby face was moist. "I don't like it! He went to Menzie's place and started all this. He knows too much! He asked for trouble as soon as he got here. It ain't right."

Knerr looked at the Chicago man. "You sure he wasn't followed here?"

"The boys said not."

"Then what gives? Who knows if he's knocked off?"

"How do I know?" Grasner said. "Put up that damned gun until we're sure of it."

"Look—don't tell me what to do."

All of a sudden Grasner didn't seem so pudgy and flabby. "They wouldn't like it back home if you made trouble, Knerr. The boys don't like trouble."

Knerr thought that over and sulkily slipped the gun inside his coat. "All right. What about this guy?"

"Maybe he'll talk."

"Don't make me laugh. He didn't come here to talk. Ask along Broadway how much Joe Maddox talks."

"I've made dummies talk," Grasner said.

"Listen, you Halstead Street slob," Mr. Maddox said calmly, "talk about the letters. That's why I'm here."

"Look at him," Grasner said. "Giving orders. Don't tell me he ain't rigged something. O.K., Maddox—how's about five grand for those letters?"

"Maybe. Let's see them."

"Tomorrow."

"Today. And I want to see what I'm buying."

"You ain't buying anything yet."

"I'll give you time," Mr. Maddox said. "Three hours. And I want an answer in half an hour or I won't be responsible. Hoke was murdered. They burn guys up the river for murder."

Grasner swung quickly to Roscoe Knerr. "Hear him? See if that *was* followed. If you've put a monkey wrench in this business—"

"Cut it," Knerr warned. "He's got ears. Put him upstairs while we talk about this."

"Half an hour," Mr. Maddox warned.

Joe, the young gunman, took him upstairs to a bedroom. At least there was a small single bed against one wall, a table, water bucket, tin basin and towels against the other wall. The air was close and stale when Joe closed the door. And almost instantly Mr. Maddox saw that the room had no windows and only the one door.

Mr. Maddox sat on the bed and eyed an ashtray heaped with old cigarette butts on the corner of the table. One overhead light was bright. The door was heavy. The room was a nice cell that had been used before.

Mr. Maddox whistled softly. He was close to the letters. Roscoe Knerr had tacitly admitted killing Hoke. So far they were bluffed, worried, uncertain. But now what?

Oscar should have been within sight of Louie Menzie's place. Oscar should have tailed the taxi or gotten the license number. When ninety minutes passed without Mr. Maddox telephoning Shorty, at the Chez Yvonne, Oscar was to know there was trouble.

The half hour had passed. Mr. Maddox knocked on the door—and kept knocking until a voice answered.

"Open up. I've waited long enough," Mr. Maddox called.

"Take it easy. You've got a lot of waiting to do in there."

"What is this, a snatch?"

"You guess. An' don't waste time making a racket on the door."

Mr. Maddox lighted a cigar and stretched thoughtfully on the bed. He'd had to risk this. And now, locked up, held prisoner, he could bring charges against Grasner and Knerr. He had something to use against them.

The cigar left such rank smoke in the windowless room that Mr. Maddox did not light another. When the second half hour passed he hammered on the door again. And this time he was completely ignored.

They didn't know the police should now be looking for Joe Maddox. They didn't know Cassidy had been watching

the Carlew. But they did know Joe Maddox had facts unhealthy for them. They should be smart enough to make a deal. Once the letters were in Anne Allison's hands, the matter of Dandy Hoke's murder and the running of the Hambletonian tomorrow could be taken up.

Time dragged. Mr. Maddox paced the room, now and then tried knocking on the door. But it was almost six P.M. when Grasner finally came in with the young gunman named Joe and a second man, narrow-faced, watchful.

"I warned you! Do you want trouble?" Mr. Maddox snapped.

"Shut up!" Grasner retorted. He took a gun from his coat pocket, closed the door and said: "You've had your three hours and more. And what happens?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Mr. Maddox Takes It

MR. MADDOX said nothing. Grasner sneered at him.

"The cops have been to the hack garage asking questions. They went away sure that they'd been kidded. You're on your own now, Maddox. Do you know where that leaves you?"

"You tell me," Mr. Maddox said slowly.

Grasner thumbed the safety off the gun. "Behind the eight-ball, Maddox. Now we'll see how you come around here blatting your mouth so much. What was on that paper you gave the Allison girl when you chased her press agent away from your car this morning?"

Mr. Maddox sat on the bed edge and bit off the end of his last cigar.

"So that guy talked to you crooks," Mr. Maddox said thoughtfully. "Miss Allison will be interested."

"Not her," Grasner sneered. "She's got other things on her mind. Her horse ain't winning the race tomorrow. She's through with Goshen and the headlines, sucker."

Mr. Maddox' big hand broke the unlighted cigar and let the pieces fall slowly through his fingers. He was stunned and looked stunned. He hadn't expected this. And yet looking back it had come like the pieces of a puzzle falling into

place. It was all very neat and logical.

"You blackmailed her with those letters," Mr. Maddox guessed. "That's why you took 'em from Hoke. You must have known that Hoke was blackmailing her."

Grasner's smile was unpleasant. He looked well pleased with himself.

"How did you know about Hoke?" Mr. Maddox said and he was talking half to himself. "Crow! That's it! Her press agent! He knew Anne was paying blackmail. But he didn't know who the man was. Anne didn't tell him. So Crow and Hoke must have had contact. And then you crooks cut in to get the letters. But this Terry Crown wasn't worried at any time. So he was playing ball with you."

"Pretty smooth, if I do say so," Grasner admitted readily. "I like set-ups like that. There's no trouble. Loneran's out of the race. The Allison horse won't win. Peter Kline will get it."

"And in Chicago they're betting heavily on Larkspur," said Mr. Maddox. "Your mob keeps that money. And here in New York you and Knerr are laying

out big dough on Peter Kline—and those bets will win."

"You're smart too late," Grasner said. "We've bet ten grand more with your book. And it'll be paid—because we'll have you to order it paid."

That meant Joe Maddox wouldn't be knocked off tonight. And it meant too that Oscar was still on the job, taking Peter Kline money as ordered. And Peter Kline was framed to win. Here went Joe Maddox' bankroll and reputation. There wouldn't be enough money to pay off.

"You lousy rats!" Mr. Maddox said quietly. "This'll backfire on you some way. You can't monkey with a good horse like Larkspur. Goshen's not a flat-race track. Those trotting men will know if Miss Allison orders her horse pulled."

"That," said Grasner, "is up to her. If there's a slug afterwards she can explain it away—or else. Now where'd you get your dope about us? Who else knows it? And tell it straight if you want to stay healthy."

"Who said I wanted to stay healthy?"



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Mr. Maddox growled at the Chicago man. "Clip him, Joe," Grasner said.

Joe had been standing close with drawn gun. Mr. Maddox saw the blow start. He parried with an arm as he ducked forward. Arm met arm. The blow deflected. Mr. Maddox' big hand gripped Joe's arm and twisted as he lunged up.

Both his hands were on the gun arm an instant later. His right hand clamped down over the gun. He swung Joe around—and never finished the move....

A GUN fired close behind him. Strength went out of his left arm. Numbness struck up into the shoulder. And an instant later he was slugged with a gun barrel. Joe wrenched away. All three men jumped Mr. Maddox. He was groggy as they threw him back on the bed.

Grasner was swearing.

"Take a look at his arm! We may need him tomorrow!" Grasner panted. "I thought he had Joe's gun!"

They got the coat off, the sleeve up. Dully Mr. Maddox saw the bullet-hole, the red blood. His head felt balloon-size, whirling.

Joe hurried out and returned with a small first-aid kit. Iodine bit and burned in the wound. Layers of bandage stained red before the bleeding seemed to slacken. Then Grasner said: "All right, Maddox—start talking!"

"Go to hell!" Mr. Maddox said thickly.

Grasner hit him in the face. Curly and Joe held him.

"How'd you know I was staying at the Matador?" Grasner asked.

"Give a guess, you cheap crook!"

Grasner hit him again. It was brutal. There seemed to be no end to it. Mr. Maddox' face was cut. He stayed groggy. Matches burned him, fingers were twisted to the point of breaking. Finally Grasner gave it up in a flurry of oaths.

"He's a damn clam like Knerr said! Leave him here! I want him alive tomorrow!"

Mr. Maddox lay motionless until they were gone. His body was one great ache and pain. And under that, anger was like nothing he had ever known.

They had forgotten the small first-aid kit. Mr. Maddox carried it to the wash table and grimaced painfully at his reflection in the mirror. A wet towel cleaned his face. Adhesive closed the cuts. He decided to let the arm alone. By ignoring the pain he could use it.

Back on the bed again he relaxed and tried to think. Joe Maddox' number was up. He knew too much. He didn't have a chance. Anne Allison had yielded to blackmail. The Hambletonian was going to be run crooked for the first time. Everybody would lose.

Hundreds, thousands of small horse players in Chicago, Tim Lonergan, Anne Allison, Joe Maddox, all would lose. And Joe Maddox would lose most of all because they would kill Joe Maddox after the book paid off.

No one returned to the room. Only by his watch could Mr. Maddox tell that it was night. Hours later he slept fitfully in his clothes.

He awoke, stiff, sore, feverish, head aching badly from lack of air. Out at Goshen it was Hambletonian day. The sun was bright on banners and flags. Trotters and pacers would be out on the track. Already the first trickle of the great afternoon crowd would be on hand, little thinking that mid-western crooks had already decided the result of the Hambletonian.

In the mirror Mr. Maddox looked at a broad haggard face patched grotesquely with white adhesive. His suit was baggy and wrinkled. He looked as bad as he felt. Washing did not help.

Mr. Maddox kicked the door. No one came. He was growling with impotent rage as he rolled the bedcovers into a bundle and tossed them beside the door. He placed the one chair in the room next to the bundle and sat down.

It was nineteen minutes to eight. Thereafter the long minutes stretched into hours. Mr. Maddox sat quietly with a vast, expressionless patience few men could have achieved. It was late noon when a key grated in the lock.

Mr. Maddox had the bundle of bedclothes in his arms and was waiting silently when the door opened. Joe's voice said: "Are you still around—"

Joe was in the doorway when the

bundled sheets, bedspread and pillow struck his face and chest. He yelled an oath. The gun he carried crashed loudly.

But the bedclothes were coming down over the gun and Joe hadn't yet seen his target. He was just clawing his face free when a big infuriated bear of a man was on him silently.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Mr. Maddox Dishes It Out

JOE yelled again when he saw the patched gargoyle of a face. His gun jumped two futile shots into the mass of bedclothes dragging his hand down. Mr. Maddox never knew where the bullets went. He slugged a big fist into Joe's contorted face with all the fury built up through the night and morning.

Joe reeled back. Maddox grabbed the gun arm once more. This time they were alone. Joe yelled with pain as Mr. Maddox gave the arm a mighty wrench. The gun dropped.

Mr. Maddox threw him against the wall, hit him again as he reeled away. This time Joe went down and stayed.

A man was running upstairs. His yell of warning preceded him. "*Don't kill him, Joe!*"

He burst into the upper hall an instant after Joe fell. It was Curly, gun in hand and ludicrous surprise showing at sight of Mr. Maddox snatching Joe's automatic off the floor.

Curly fired one shot as Mr. Maddox got the gun. Then bolted back down the stairs. Mr. Maddox lunged after him. In the hallway downstairs Curly fired a shot back.

The bullet chipped plaster down on Mr. Maddox' face. But his plunging rush down the stairs did not stop. Curly bolted into the adjoining room. But he lost time.

It was the living-room. Curly's foot slipped on the rug. He caromed off a chair and tried to turn. And the flying bulk of Mr. Maddox drove into him. The automatic Mr. Maddox carried buried half its length in Curly's side.

"Drop it!" Mr. Maddox rasped.

Curly dropped his gun as he brought up hard against the wall. "Don't do it!

For God's sake, Maddox! Don't shoot!"

"Who else is in the house?" Mr. Maddox demanded.

"No one!"

The feverish, swollen left arm hurt badly as Mr. Maddox manhandled the young gunman away from the wall. He paused long enough to get the second automatic off the floor. Then, gun in Curly's back, Mr. Maddox grated: "Where's Grasner?"

"I don't know!"

"Don't lie to me!"

"Him and Roscoe Knerr's been gone all night! I don't know where they are! This is just a place Knerr comes now and then! My wife and I live here!"

"Where is this house?"

They were in New Rochelle. The thin-faced threat had gone out of Curly. He was shaking, looked like he was telling the truth.

"What about those letters?" Mr. Maddox demanded.

Curly shook his head. "I never seen them."

"Get upstairs."

Joe was stirring weakly on the floor. "Drag him in the room," Mr. Maddox ordered.

Curly obeyed, grunting with the effort. Mr. Maddox locked the door, went downstairs and telephoned the Vardon Hotel, without much hope of finding Oscar. But Oscar was there.

"Joe! I thought you were a goner! Where are you? What happened?"

"No thanks to you!" Mr. Maddox said scathingly. "Did you think I was out picking violets?"

"Joe, I saw you get in that taxi. I got the license number. The cops checked on it when I called them. The taxi with that license number had been in the shop two days for repairs. The tags were on it. They hadn't been out of the garage. Somebody had duplicate tags. The cops thought I was pulling a phoney. They almost pinched me."

"Maybe they should have," Mr. Maddox said sourly. "What about Hoke's murder?"

"Nothing new about it by today's paper."

"How much money have you taken on Peter Kline?"

"A hundred and twenty-three grand. I got all I could like you told me, Joe. I figured you knew something."

MR. MADDUX snapped: "I still know something. Peter Kline's due to win. We're sunk. Don't take any more money. Close the book."

Oscar's stricken silence spoke for itself.

"If you get track of Roscoe Knerr call the cops," Mr. Maddox said. "They'll want him. I'll see you later."

"What are you going to do, Joe? Miss Allison telephoned half of last night."

"What do you think? Stop that crooked race!" Mr. Maddox snapped, and hung up and then called Anne Allison, at Goshen. The Tavern clerk reported Miss Allison out. Swearing, Mr. Maddox looked at his watch. Time was short. He called the New York City Police, asked to be connected with Homicide, and spoke to a Lieutenant Jefferson.

Mr. Maddox spoke distinctly, calmly. "Take this address please . . . This is Joseph Maddox. I'm staying at the Vardon Hotel. I've been locked up here all night by men responsible for killing Dandy Hoke at the Carlew Hotel. I've locked two of them in an upstairs room. They're taking orders from Roscoe Knerr and a man named Grasner, from Chicago. The Masterton Detective Agency will tell you about them."

"Anything more?"

"The guns these two men had will be under the telephone stand here. The key to the room they're in is under the telephone. I'm stepping out where I'll be safer, Lieutenant."

Mr. Maddox guessed he had several minutes start. He was lucky. Two blocks away he met an empty taxi and stopped it.

"Goshen," Mr. Maddox told the driver.

"Where?"

"The racetrack at Goshen. Go over the Bear Mountain Bridge. And I'm in the devil of a hurry."

It was a wild ride with Mr. Maddox urging the driver faster and faster, while the watch hands seemed to race. And Mr. Maddox was sweating with anxiety when the track flags and banners came into sight to the right of the highway.

"Hurry up!" Mr. Maddox said hoarsely.

Late as it was, automobiles were still arriving. Parking space was far from the grandstand. Mr. Maddox overpaid the driver ten dollars and left the taxi with an eighth of a mile to cover on foot.

He was sweating when he burst into the grounds. And he had not taken a dozen steps when a heavy hand fell on his arm and he was jerked around.

"I wondered if you'd have nerve enough to try a sneak in here this afternoon," Cassidy said with sarcastic satisfaction. "You're pinched and don't give me any guff about it!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Race to the Swift

"I would have to run into you!" Mr. Maddox snarled. "Listen, you dumb flatfoot—this is serious! I'm in a hurry! Make your pinch later!"

Cassidy's jaw pushed out stubbornly. "Don't waste your breath! What a sucker you made of me yesterday! I hope they throw the book at you!"

"Are they running the Hambletonian?"

"First heat coming up."

"I've got to see about it!"

"Don't make me laugh, Joe. I didn't turn you in to New York Homicide because I wanted to grab you myself. Here—ain't this blood on your sleeve?"

"I've got a bullet hole there that hurts like hell when you paw it! But I've got no time to talk about it now! I've got to see Miss Allison before the race starts!"

Cassidy's angular face was a study—and then Cassidy shrugged and growled: "Come along. She's got a box. But no tricks, Joe!"

The murmuring excitement of the crowd was like surf on a long beach. The mounting suspension could be felt like an electric charge in the air as they pushed to the front of the grandstand.

"Here we are," Cassidy said. "Make it snappy."

The Allison party filled the box in front of the grandstand. Buzz McAllister was there, and Crown, the pink-faced young press agent, and Loretta Rolande,

the Broadway actress, and several older people Mr. Maddox did not know.

And Buck Allison was there and saw Mr. Maddox first. "Hello, Maddox. Sorry there's not a seat for you."

Anne heard, looked quickly and got up and came out of the box. The field was turning at the upper end of the track. The long breathless count of fourteen would be starting as the horses came back to meet the barrier.

"I tried and tried to get you," Anne said. "What happened?"

"You can't do it, kid," Mr. Maddox said under his breath. "You've got to win this race if you can."

"Oh! You know about it?"

"I know who's got the letters—but I couldn't get them in time. Your horse has got to win if he can—those letters will have to hit the headlines if it breaks that way," Mr. Maddox said grimly.

Anne's queer crooked little smile might have meant anything.

The eight horses in the race were almost to the barrier. The judges were tensely watching the count . . . twelve, thirteen, fourteen—the barrier shot up.

Larkspur was fourth from the rail, a bit slow on the start, half a head behind the leaders. But Larkspur's driver looked cool, unexcited as he gripped the reins and hunched almost lazily on the sulky.

Mr. Maddox turned speechlessly to watch the sulkies skimming through the dust haze into the turn.

"That looks like Tim Lonergan behind Larkspur!"

"Oh, watch him! Watch him come up!" Anne gasped. "Look at Tim drive! I knew he could do it!"

"Tim's got a broken leg!"

"It's in a cast," Anne said. "Tim insisted."

"Insisted?" said Mr. Maddox dazedly. "Tim Lonergan insisted on driving your Larkspur while his leg was broken?"

Along the backstretch and into the far turn those magnificent trotters flew. The crowd was coming to its feet. All eyes were on the horses and sulkies when Mr. Maddox jumped to the box entrance and grabbed Terry Crown, the press agent, who was unobtrusively leaving.

"Stick around, son!"

Terry Crown twisted violently, would have run had Mr. Maddox not yanked him stumbling back to Cassidy, who had forgotten everything but the race.

Cassidy looked around angrily at the rude interruption.

"Pinch him, Cassidy!" Mr. Maddox said. "He's working with Grasner and Roscoe Knerr. And here's where I win a hundred and twenty three grand!"

Mr. Maddox said it before he looked. And he just had time to look past Terry Crown and see Tim Lonergan driving Larkspur to the finish, half a length ahead of Peter Kline.

And Tim, up out of a hospital bed, with his broken leg stiff and straight in front of him, would take the second heat too, with that great horse Tim had raised from a colt. Sometimes you knew such things before they happened.

Mr. Maddox turned to Anne, who had tears in her eyes as she laughed up at him. "How did it happen?" he asked.

Anne's smile faded at the memory.

"A telephone call told me what I had to do. I said I would do it—and I couldn't. I couldn't do it to Larkspur. He had a right to win if he could. I went to the hospital and tried to give him back to Tim. He wouldn't take Larkspur back. So I told Tim what I'd promised to do and said I'd win anyway with Larkspur if I could, and it didn't matter who got hurt. I telephoned father right there and told him all the truth. And he said I was right."

"And what did Tim say?"

"Tim asked me to marry him," Anne said.

Cassidy's hand fell on Mr. Maddox's shoulder.

"Joe! This guy is talking already! Maybe I was a little hasty! Maybe your trouble can be smoothed out."

"Trouble?" Mr. Maddox said. "Who's got trouble after all the money I'm making today?"

Friends had surrounded Anne and were congratulating her. Mr. Maddox had to shout over their heads.

"Miss Allison—*what did you tell Tim?*"

"I told him I would!" Anne called. "What else could I tell that big noisy darling? He wouldn't have listened."

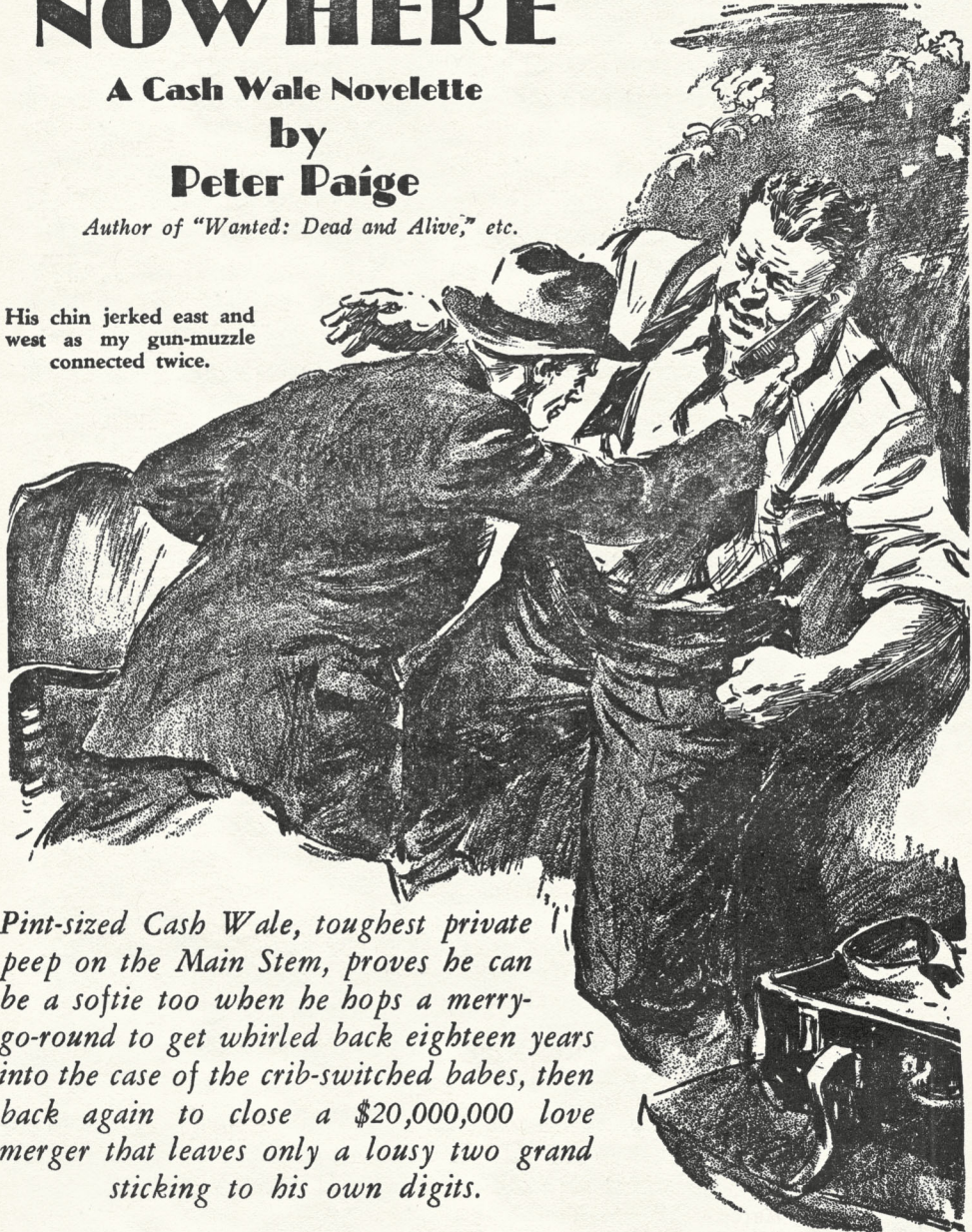
THE BULLET FROM NOWHERE

A Cash Wale Novelette

by
Peter Paige

Author of "Wanted: Dead and Alive," etc.

His chin jerked east and west as my gun-muzzle connected twice.



Pint-sized Cash Wale, toughest private peep on the Main Stem, proves he can be a softie too when he hops a merry-go-round to get whirled back eighteen years into the case of the crib-switched babes, then back again to close a \$20,000,000 love merger that leaves only a lousy two grand sticking to his own digits.

CHAPTER ONE

Murder in the Mirror

PHILLIP, singing waiter of Dor-gan's Dump, was serving drinks off his tray to the Murray party at ringside. His little finger held a folded

note to the bottom of the cocktail glass he set before Ruth St. John. But her attention was away, her ivory-doll face turned expectantly toward the entrance, and she lifted her drink without seeing the note.

Phillip served Gilbert T. Murray, the tall, tanned blond whose legal designs on

the girl were blue book chatter. But Murray was gazing with an expression of disgust at nothing and also missed seeing the note.

Phillip set the third and last drink before Egbert St. John, pimply-panned young cousin to Ruth. A character around the Stem, Egbert, with constant hunger for a loose buck or broad, and a pair of long, tapering hands.

One of these slid over the note.

I watched this tableau through the mirror slanted over Dorgan's bar. In fact, I watched the Murray party in the line of business. Their table was at ringside, jammed amid other tables packed with blue-bleeders, and visible through a sort of murky haze due to indistinct lighting—but the action had been clear.

In the mirror, I watched Phillip make his way back, pass behind me on his way to the kitchen which was to my left—but my eyes stopped at Vivian Day before he got there. I had not noticed her climb the stool at my elbow. Our eyes met in the mirror.

"That's none of yours," throbbed her voice in that husky manner that packed Dorgan's Dump nightly.

"Yours?" I said.

"I didn't say that," she said.

"Which makes it old home week," I said.

She kicked my shin.

"That Murray crowd's nice people, Cash Wale, and you're a heel. Don't mix with our customers."

I stared without expression at Harry Dorgan across the bar until his eyes dropped.

"Don't let it throw you," I told Vivian.

THROUGH the mirror I watched her nose wrinkle in distaste. The rest of her helped that deep-river voice keep Dorgan's at capacity. It was not a matter of bumps. She had them, and in formation. It was her face that registered.

It wore clean brown eyes flecked with gold. The same brown and gold swam through her hair. Her complexion made society dolls bite their lips and streak for the lounge to manufacture competition. This, despite her close-to-forty age and a clip-house pedigree from when. But now her expression was taut from worry.

She said: "You couldn't throw me, heel. You couldn't play any tune that hasn't already worn a groove in my piano. So that makes two of us—"

Harry Dorgan leaned over and touched the stem of her glass which showed evidence of use. "*Vivian*—" he said. She clung to the glass.

"I know what I'm doing, Harry. Cash and I speak the same slum, is all. I'm doing fine, Harry—"

Dorgan shrugged and dropped his eyes from mine again. Most citizens around the shady fringe of Broadway dropped their eyes from mine. The bulge under the left side of my jacket did that—and its history.

A beefy, darkish, always scowling character, this Harry Dorgan. The Dump was his without strings, but he chose to work the bar and leave ceremony to the hirelings.

Dorgan moved down the bar as the mirror showed me Phillip emerge from the kitchen with a tray of free lunch and bring it between Vivian and me with a wise grin.

"It's for free, sports!"

"I hear someone polished your corners, Phillip," I said, without turning.

His face couldn't turn paler than normal. It was a long, rubbery face with a coal-black mop topping it off, and wide blue eyes that gave him a baby's expression, and a loose mouth which earned him side jobs at mimicry and off-shade crooning. The twitch of his lip corners betrayed him now.

"Those things happen, sport," he said.

"I'd like to know," I said. "Maybe I'll even buy to know."

Phillip shook his black mop and moved off. That was something, I thought. He generally broke his arm reaching for odd change. He was, aside from waiting and entertaining, a one-man supply depot for cops, columnists and anyone who wanted to know enough to pay.

I watched him leave through the mirror until Vivian pushed her empty glass at Dorgan and said: "You only see things in reverse through the glass, heel. A corner table has the same view, and it's a straight one."

"Easier to move from a stool than a table," I said.

"They'll get you anyhow," said Vivian.

I said: "That's right. What do you want, Vivian?"

Vivian frowned at Dorgan who was clearing his throat to butt in.

"I said we talked the same slum," she told him. "Cash knows I'm angling."

"Walk down the bar, Dorgan," I said. And, to Vivian: "I'm listening—"

She turned from Dorgan's retreating back to scowl at me. Something afire between those two from way back, but that was none of mine. Vivian opened her mouth to speak, then closed it as her eyes widened at the mirror.

It was Barney Kane. A fleshy character in tails with a chin dimpled in half and the idea that dolls were manufactured for Barney Kane—which generally was the case. He stood before the check-room, surveying the Dump like some conquering hero.

The man with him surveyed the floor. This character wore an oversized red schnozz in the middle of his face. Dirty red stubble covered the rest of it. His pants bagged, his jacket was three sizes too large and patched. He surveyed the floor because his face was halfway to it. Kane supported him by one arm, holding him like a rag doll.

"He's doing it again!" whispered Vivian Day.

"Sure," I said. "Like that guy O. Henry wrote about, Kane brings in a bum off the street every night. Its a build-up for chatter columns."

Vivian's eyes crinkled when Barney Kane waved and she turned to wave back.

"You in his parade?" I asked.

"Barney's all right," murmured Vivian without conviction. "But why—"

"I told you. He's hipped on O. Henry."

"Not about this mooch, heel. It's the third night in a row for this tramp. *Why?*"

I DIDN'T reply because Kane and his derelict were passing the Murray table and a second tableau showed in reverse through the mirror. Ruth St. John's small, exact, ivory face had been on Barney Kane from the moment he appeared. Before that, it had been on the entrance.

And two deuces still made four in my book.

Now, as he supported the tramp past

her table with his right hand, he leaned over, whispered in Ruth St. John's ear and patted her bare shoulder with his pudgy left.

Vivian at my side gasped, "*Oh!*"

Gilbert T. Murray whipped half out of his seat—dropped back at a gestured command from his white-faced fiancée. I caught the expression on Egbert St. John, an unholy satisfaction that showed in every line of his pimpled face—and I thought of the note.

Then Barney Kane was being bowed by Phillip into a seat at a corner table. His derelict slumped into another and conversation, which had died at Kane's appearance, picked up to normal again.

Vivian was struggling to compose her face in the mirror.

"Green-eyed?" I grinned at her.

"She's engaged to Murray!" snapped Vivian.

"I'm not referring to Kane," I said. "Murray used to play in your garden—"

Her shoe nicked my shin again.

"Lay off, heel. This is business."

"What's business?"

"Working for me."

"I'm expensive, kid—"

Vivian fingered my arm. There was pain added to the worry in her expression.

"This is serious, heel. I'm willing to pay you one hundred dollars to investigate something for me. That's not high, as your rates go, but it's not peanuts—and it's for me, heel."

"I'm listening," I said.

Vivian's bosom was rising and falling rapidly. Dorgan was close again, glaring down at the peel he was draping around a Horse's Neck.

"I want you to find out why Barney Kane brought that mooch here for the third time," said Vivian breathlessly. "I want you to find out what hold Barney has on Ruth St. John—and why her wedding to Murray has been delayed. And for learning these, heel, I will give you one hundred—"

"No," I said.

Vivian's face was suddenly all lines and anguish.

"But why, heel? *Why?*"

"I'm on a case now."

"I'm not asking you to drop that. Just to learn these—"

"One case is enough," I said. Vivian Day's teeth bared at me. "I've heard of you handling two—"

"Two cases? Yes," I said. "But not opposite sides of the same case."

The Horse's Neck dropped from Harry Dorgan's fingers and smashed on the floor. Vivian Day's eyes were luminous on mine.

"I'll—kill—you—heel!" she breathed.

"It's been tried," I said. "That's why I'm sitting at the bar in front of a mirror instead of at a table. It's been tried and I'm still pitching shout-outs. You skip all this. It's over your head anyhow."

"And stop following Ruth St. John around the streets. She didn't know who you were and it made her jittery as hell. Good-bye for now, Vivian Day," I said and slid off the stool, leaving her to stare at Harry Dorgan who stared back at her in a manner that made me dwell on the bulge under my jacket.

THE hat-check girl, a pert little blonde in a red turtle-neck sweater—"atmosphere" in the Dump—pushed the front

of her sweater expectantly my way as I came up. But I passed her, looked in the first of three phone booths that lined the wall alongside the check-room, read the number and entered the third booth.

I dialed the number of the first. Phillip, passing with his tray, answered it.

"Gilbert Murray there?" I asked through my handkerchief. "Tell him it's Frank."

"O.K., sport!" came through the receiver. I watched Phillip zig-zag to the Murray table and lean over. There was some talk, then Murray rose and came my way. It had taken a dozen generations of moneyed swank to produce him, and every line of Murray's clothes, easy bearing and face showed it. His face, in particular—tanned, lean-jawed, wide gray eyes and a blond wave that had dented many a chorus line until the St. John doll got under his skin and he returned to his ship-building family fold.

He didn't look into my booth, but went into the first.

"Wale," I said, without benefit of handkerchief.

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"Did you learn why she is following Ruth?" came his cultured tones.

"It's got to do with Barney Kane and that stiff Barney dragged in tonight."

Murray uttered a word they'd have booted him out of the social register for. Then: "Listen, Wale, is that all you have learned?"

"It's a start—"

"That will hardly do, Wale. I employed you to discover why Ruth changed her mind about marrying me. But remember, according to our little agreement, you either produce results before tomorrow morning—before Ruth announces our broken engagement to the press—or you will not be—"

"The payoff is my headache," I said.

"Listen, Wale. I know Kane has something to do with it. She doesn't love that tinhorn—she loves me. She told me that, when our engagement was broken. It smacked of muck, which was why I hired you. You have the reputation of—"

"You hired me. That's enough!" I clipped.

"Wale, if you are attempting one of your reputed deals—if you are in league with the person influencing Ruth—or if you are holding out for more money—I will—"

"I'm one-priced. Don't threaten me, and hang up."

There was a pause during which I saw Egbert bow away from Ruth St. John and head for the lounge. Then: "Hold on a minute, Wale, I forgot to tell you something. Ruth's cousin, Egbert, has been acting very—"

"I know that," I said. "Good-bye for now." I broke the connection and watched Gilbert T. Murray stalk past my booth without a glance. His ancestors and my rep saw to that.

Blue-bleeding citizens hesitated about knowing me in public because recent history—pre-repeal history—had me peddling my gun to a parade of mobsters who are now mainly dead or in Alcatraz.

Now I was legitimate, I was the Cash Wale Investigation Service—in demand when impolite shenanigans were in order. Which meant my gun was still for hire. Also my savvy of the ins and outs of this and that. But all in a nice legal, cash-on-the-line way.

Gilbert T. Murray depended on me to smear any scandal keeping him from his intended. He'd reached me via another blue-bleeder who had sampled my service and found it good. Murray's price was good, but he would rather have lost his right hand than been seen with it in mine.

Which was his loss, I figured.

PHILLIP was carrying by a new trayful of free lunch as I emerged from the booth. I stopped him.

"You passed a note to the St. John doll before. From who and what?"

Phillip held the tray as if offering me a sandwich.

"Two," he said.

"One," I said.

He nodded and I passed a dollar bill under the napkin which draped over his tray. That was Phillip's bank. His rubbery face leaned close.

"Barney Kane gave it, sport. At the door, outside. I didn't look. O.K.?" he said quietly.

"You slipped her the note before Kane arrived."

"He was outside waitin' to pick up the stiff. O.K.?"

"How about that stiff?" I said. "You ever feed him in back?"

Phillip nodded.

"I never turn no one away, sport. This one was out back about three days ago. O.K.?"

"O.K.," I said, letting Phillip move on with my dollar. I walked through the kitchen into the alley that ran alongside Dorgan's Dump. A crap game was going on in the light from the open doorway. High blank walls and an iron grille-work fence out of sight around a bend in the alley hemmed it in.

It was one of those early spring nights with balmy currents thawing out the air.

Sailor Duffy held the dice. His battered naked head glistened with moisture. Before him lay five dimes which the others covered without comment. Although, among themselves, they bet a ten buck minimum. Some of them spotted me, nodded.

Sailor crapped out with a grunt from his heart. He saw me, pleaded: "Lemme have a tenner, Cash. Hagh?"

"You broke?"

"I on'y got a buck, sixty-five. Cash. How'm I gonna roll a streak wit' a buck, sixty-five, hagh?"

"You figure that out," I said and started back inside.

Someone snickered and someone else shushed him with a whispered: "*That's Wale, you dope!*"

I liked it—sure, I liked it! That was the lifeblood of my grift. That guy's whisper floated on my reputation—which was nine-tenths hot air. But the other tenth kept it alive and I knew that whisper in a high-flying bone game was better than a full page ad in the *Times*.

Sailor Duffy was the muscle in my grift. They let him play dimes alongside of their real stakes on my rep. Not that Sailor couldn't have as much dough as they flashed—and more—if he needed it. We shared even. Only Sailor had "spells." He listened to noises that weren't there.

It had been like that since he dropped a fifteen round slug-fest to the heavyweight champ of the world. When I picked him up, it was on a Hoover breadline and since then it had been the two of us, up or down—and don't crack!

Back in the Dump, I made my way to Barney Kane's table. The stiff was half on and half off the table. Barney Kane's usual grin became cautious.

"H'lo, Wale. Drink rye?"

There was a chair and a fifth of Seagram's with glasses but I ignored both.

"Want you to do something for me, Kane," I said.

His caution gave way to a cold mask that froze the meat on his face white. He carried a bulge under his arm also, Barney Kane.

"That's out, Wale," he said.

"I haven't told it yet," I said. "I want you to lay off Ruth St. John. No notes, phone calls, or words—in public or private."

BARNEY KANE'S breath sucked in as he scrambled to his feet. The table wobbled, making the red-stubbled tramp sit up and glare at me from swollen eyes. Conversation around us stopped in mid-air.

Barney Kane's chubby fingers fluttered between suicide and wisdom—

Then Harry Dorgan pushed his scowling hulk between us—I still can't figure how he made it from the bar that fast. He was facing Kane. He said: "Telephone for you, Barney. Important—"

Barney Kane's breath wheezed again and he blinked rapidly, backing off. "I'm gonna call you on that, Wale!" he shouted.

"The booth nearest the check-room," said Harry Dorgan. He pushed Barney Kane away with one hand, gripped my arm with the other. I shrugged it off. "You'll take a drink now, Wale," Dorgan mumbled. His eyes were unfriendly.

I led the way back to the bar between rows of silent, upturned faces. Ruth St. John's expression as I passed marked me three times lower than bottom. Gilbert T. Murray avoided my eyes and cousin Egbert leered. Kane was entering the booth as I occupied the stool next to Vivian Day. She kicked me, began to speak, but Dorgan whispered to her: "Start Phillip's act."

"He's busy now, Harry."

"Then go on yourself."

She called me the same thing Murray had mentioned on the phone and made for the platform.

I watched her through the mirror until her song was launched in that low, throbbing voice—a song about what bedsheets could tell. But somehow it left her clean. I looked around.

They were arguing at the Murray table in whispers. Kane's tramp was gulping rye out of the bottle. Phillip moved smoothly around with his tray. Kane, in the booth, was motionless, not talking. Suddenly he flung open the door, yelled over Vivian's song: "Hey, Dorgan, this lines dead!"

"Long-distance," replied Dorgan in a hoarse whisper. Kane slammed the door and shook a chubby finger at me through the glass.

Dorgan scowled at his hands and said: "Why don't you get out of here now, Wale?"

I said: "Ask Kane. I fight for what I get. He's a tout, and a pimp. Ask him, Dorgan, and don't ever crack like that to me again!"

"Whenever you show, it's a headache," muttered Dorgan, edging down the bar.

Through the mirror, I watched Ruth St. John shake her head angrily at Gilbert T. Murray, then rise and make for the entrance. She passed the check-room and stopped, facing Kane in his booth. He didn't see her. His attention was on the phone. I could see he was listening, not talking.

Ruth St. John stamped a foot impatiently, turned to look at her table where cousin Egbert was having words with Murray. She turned back and rapped on the door of Barney Kane's booth.

Then she screamed!

Vivian's song faltered on a high note, leaving dead silence. I streaked to the booth, Harry Dorgan at my heels—he'd vaulted the bar. Ruth St. John lay crumpled on the floor. The hat-check girl was stooping over her.

I didn't open the booth. I didn't have to. Dorgan tried, and I knocked his hand away.

"Get the law," I said. "Block the exits and get the law."

"You outa your head?" he growled. "A dame faints an—" He reached for the booth's door again, but stopped as the muzzle of my automatic sank deep into his chest.

Vivian Day, just coming up, yelped.

"*Get the law!*" I rapped at Dorgan. "Someone shot Kane's Adam's apple away! The guy's dead! It's murder—"

Vivian Day joined Ruth St. John on the floor.

CHAPTER TWO

The Quick Killer

IT TOOK half an hour for me to get out of there. Inspector Jack Quinn, of Homicide, saw to that. It was one of those anybody-could-have-done-it and it-ain't-possible kills. Quinn took it out on me. That was one of his favorite pastimes. The other two consisted of wagging his shaggy eyebrows and growing livid as a red-hot coal. All three were in operation as his stoogies—print men, photogs, questioning dicks and the like—built up a picture of the case.

And now Quinn's finger jabbed my chest as if the secret somehow lay buried there.

"You was lookin' in the mirror and you saw Kane shut the door," Quinn said, jabbing. "He waved at you *after* closing the door and you saw nobody around his booth from then until the frill screamed."

"That's right."

Quinn's eyes became flinty.

"Kane's got a thirty-two slug in his neck which he didn't put there himself because his own rod's unfired—" Quinn jabbed.

"You asking or telling?" I said.

Quinn ignored that, continued: "There's no bullet hole in the booth and no gimmick in the phone or anything like that. Nobody heard a shot. Although he was in view of forty, fifty people, nobody was near him at the time. He couldn't have walked in there shot because that slug killed him immediate—" Quinn jabbed.

"So what does that make me?" I said.

"Nobody called him long-distance," Quinn continued, "but there was a call. It came from the next booth. The killer put through the call from one booth to the next. Dorgan heard a woman's voice and clicks like it was long-distance—" Quinn jabbed.

"That makes me what?" I repeated.

"A damn liar!" snarled Quinn, jabbing. "Someone opened that door, shot Kane with a silenced automatic and walked on. Maybe that goon stooge of yours, Duffy, maybe a hired punk, maybe someone not connected with you. But, whichever it was, you had strong words with Kane just before he went to the booth. You've been chiselin' in each other's grifts from way back. And, whichever it was, you saw the killer in that mirror!"

"I wasn't watching Kane all the time," I said quietly. "Sailor was out back and you know I don't hire gunsels. Furthermore," I said, "touch me again and, so help me, I'll clip you!"

He didn't and I didn't.

There was a moment in which Quinn's eyebrows debated about me—he topped me by six inches and maybe fifty pounds—but then he turned away without another word and started on the hat-check girl, the blond dish in the turtle-neck sweater whose name, it developed, was Sadie.

This was in one of the Dump's upstairs

rooms. Dorgan, the Murray party, Kane's tramp and a few others were assembled.

The room dated from the time Dorgan's Dump was strictly clip, before Vivian's smile and songs attracted customers who could afford to be robbed honest. It was a "creep" room—that is, a room with a hidden closet from which a dip could emerge at the right moment and empty the wallet from trousers belonging to a gent otherwise occupied.

I went downstairs without interference. Kane's body had long since been removed. Drinks were on the house to hold the crowd—most of which "held"—listening to Phillip's impersonation of Laughton impersonating Mickey Rooney. The crowd ate it up.

Vivian stared moodily at me from the mirror as I entered the kitchen and found Sailor Duffy watching a pearl diver set cans of garbage into the alley.

"What happened to the game?" I asked.

Sailor shrugged. "I'm down to fifty cents, Cash. That ain't right, Cash. Suppose I wanna drink an' play also, hagh?"

I gave him a five dollar bill.

"Drink cokes," I said. "Stick around. I'll be back later."

He brightened at the bill, frowned at my words.

"Cokes, Cash?"

"Anything else and I'll slug you!"

"O.K., Cash, O. K.! I just asked—"

The pearl diver, a little Filipino, grinned. Sailor packed two hundred odd pounds in six feet three. I managed a hundred and forty in five feet two. People generally laughed when I ordered the big palooka around. Sailor wiped the grin off the Filipino's face with a backhand slap.

The check-room was deserted. I crawled the counter for my fedora and top-coat. Phillip's tray of free lunch, minus the overhanging napkin, was on the counter. I helped myself to a tuna, left two quarters—one on the tray, the other on the counter—and went out.

Vivian's voice followed me—something about what happened when papa turned off the light. It still left her clean.

THE Dump was off Eighth Avenue in the Fifties. From outside, it resembled a huge tilted garbage pail through

which citizens entered. The doorman, Andy, was rigged in patches and beard.

"H'lo, Cash," he mumbled. "Hot stuff inside, huh?"

I looked at the prowl buggies angled to the curb and nodded. "You here when Kane walked in, Andy?"

"Sure. Wasn't he with me ten minutes waitin' for that stiff to show?"

"It was a date?"

"Looked like."

"They say inside he gave you a note to deliver."

Andy bristled.

"Not me, Cash. I ain't seen no note. Mebbe Phillip, that guy. He talked with Phillip. Right there—" Andy pointed.

"Then I heard it wrong," I said indifferently.

We both turned as the Murray party emerged. Ruth St. John's ivory face was nose-deep in the ermine collar of her evening jacket. Murray's gray eyes passed over me without a flicker. Egbert eyed me, frankly curious.

Andy whistled through two fingers and a chauffeured Packard drew up outside the prowl buggies. Egbert St. John patted Murray's back as the latter helped Ruth inside.

"See you tomorrow, Gil?" spoke Egbert.

Murray nodded, entered, and the limousine purred into the night. Egbert hesitated a few moments, then began walking toward Ninth Avenue.

"Be seeing you, Andy," I told the doorman, and moved off on Egbert's tail. I wanted a look at that note. Quinn's interrogation had failed to arouse mention of it. It was just among Vivian, Egbert and myself—only Egbert thought it was exclusive.

He threw a few nervous glances over his shoulder, but I was across the street by then. Anyhow, it was black as pitch—one of those moonless, motionless nights.

We turned a block north on Ninth, then went left and continued toward Tenth, an even darker block of warehouses, closed machine shops and no traffic.

Egbert stepped into a parked cab.

It was so unexpected, I had gone on. But, when he didn't emerge past the cab, I withdrew into a shadow. The cab stood

without lights. I could make out the driver's bulk in front. He sat motionless, made no effort to get the cab going.

About a minute passed like that, then I loosened my automatic in its holster and walked deliberately across the street toward the cab, my feet echoing hollowly on the pavement.

I came up from behind and peered inside—at Egbert's pimply face. The driver still didn't move. I opened the rear door, stared at Egbert a moment, then at the other rear door which hung open.

My automatic was out when I stepped through that door to the sidewalk. As far as I could see there was no activity, just night-blackened houses and silence.

Before me yawned the black maw of a yard. I found the wall, guided myself with my fingers edging into the blackness. The wall led me to a five-foot wooden fence which blocked the yard. Peering over it, I made out a flurry of motion as a shadow sped from the yard beyond the fence and swerved into the next street.

When I reached this street, more silence confronted me, more blackened house fronts and fathomless shadows. It would have taken a squad of men half an hour to probe them all. And I had no squad.

I returned to the parked cab.

The driver's hands were on the wheel although both legs were on the right side of the steering shaft. Someone had propped him up like that. Blackish lines ran down his cheek from under the cap. He was very still. Egbert must have entered the cab without noticing the driver's condition.

Egbert should have run like hell.

It was under Egbert's jaw—like the quick killer's signature—a small, blackish hole. Thirty-two, possibly. Egbert's head lay back, his eyes open, mouth wide. He was still warm, but dead. Egbert would never be deader.

My foot struck something as I moved about. I found it—a hollowed metal cylinder. I wrapped a handkerchief around it. It was also warm. I knew about that, also.

The cab's interior smelled from gas fumes—the smell was strongest inside the cylinder.

It was a silencer.

The killer had fired once, then removed it. He had to remove it. A silencer jams

the mechanism of an automatic and you have to remove it, let the gases escape before screwing it back on for a second shot.

The killer must have been doing this when I crossed the street. In his haste, he dropped it. In his fear of facing a pitched gun fight, he left it.

I wondered about the quick killer as I emptied Egbert St. John's pockets into mine. Quinn said a woman lured Kane to the phone and the shadowy figure I saw could have been a woman. But no woman had stopped before Kane's booth while I watched in the mirror. Unless—it just struck me—unless it happened while Dorgan held my attention.

Before leaving, I felt the driver's pulse. There was no pulse, just a tire iron on the floorboard. I began to dislike the quick killer. He could have just sapped the driver—all he wanted was the cab. He didn't have to kill the driver.

I CARRIED a mug of beer to a small booth in a bar off Columbus Circle and went through what came from Egbert's pockets. The wallet held exactly one dollar bill aside from cards to a few swank clubs. There was an address book which would have done the Vice Squad proud. A pair of gray suede gloves, a handkerchief, two key rings, a pocket knife, pen, two cigars and the folded note comprised the remainder of the haul.

I read the note carefully, then took everything to the men's room and flushed all but the dollar, cigars and metal objects down the bowl. The cigars landed in my pocket, the dollar paid for the beer, the metal objects were slated for the first sewer and the words of the note remained in my head.

When you leave here, walk from Ninth Avenue to Tenth Avenue along the south side of Fifty—— Street and step into the first parked taxicab you see for the payoff.

It was unsigned and printed in pencil.

Riding the subway downtown, I wondered if Egbert caught the "payoff" intended for Ruth St. John—or whether it was she who was to pay off and Egbert's recognition of the cab's occupant earned him a slug in the throat

In either case, Egbert asked for what he got.

And, in either case, Barney Kane had pushed one of his fat fingers into the pie. And one of Vivian Day's slender digits was angled at the same pastry, Harry Dorgan's not far behind. And another pie-involved finger belonged to the red-headed stiff Kane had carried into Dorgan's Dump. And, plumb in the center of this pie, sat the quick killer—minus his silencer now.

But most of all, I wanted to learn about Barney Kane. The subway carried me to Fourth Street where I got off and walked to his Village hide-away.

KANE lived in a three-story brownstone, on the second floor. The vestibule door was open. Kane's door was locked. A trapdoor in the roof and the rear fire-escape led me to a bedroom window which happened to be open. The balmy air currents had seen to that.

Closing Venetian blinds all around, I switched on a reading lamp in the library-office from which Kane had bossed his grifts. The place was neat and modern—no bulges in the furniture, everything streamlined into everything else—all in a sort of gray shade.

I spent ten minutes opening and closing drawers, riffling the pages of books, searching under the gray broadloom rug, inside chairs, behind vases—and found not one solitary word of writing, not a single letter, not even a rent receipt.

It was a three-room apartment and ten minutes were enough. No wall safe or anything like that—it pointed to a safe deposit box. And that would be Quinn's

department. He'd been very careful, Barney Kane—except in the pinch.

I switched off the light, started for the door, stopped as a fist rapped on the panel.

"Someone's in there, Flannagan—I saw a light!" came a low voice that was vaguely like Quinn's. The knocking was repeated. Then a hand touched the door-knob—

I was on the fire-escape when the door swung open, and in the yard below by the time a light appeared in the windows of Kane's apartment. The back door of the building was open. I entered a dimly lighted hall, walked to the vestibule and peered into the street—

Dark and empty. That was wrong—Quinn never walked. Manhattan's Homicide Squad was strictly motorized. But the street was empty.

I was leaning against the vestibule wall, peering out to make sure of this, when my shoulder dislodged something and I caught it halfway to the floor—a black letter box that had been on a nail. I caught the box, but two letters spilled to the floor and the name, *Barney Kane*, stared up at me from both of them!

Scrawled in pencil over one was: *Mr. Shane thout these was for him. He didnt open them. Mrs. Downes.*

I dropped both letters in my pocket.

I remounted the stairs slowly, and loudly, with my automatic drawn.

Barney Kane's door stood open. The lights were on inside. The library was empty, but a picture of confusion. Someone had duplicated my search without putting things back in place. I followed the lights to the bedroom where the window I had closed stood wide open. I



Quinn in cuffs, his mouth lost in Sailor's ham-like left hand, his arms pinioned by Sailor's telephone-pole right arm.

He wore puffed, blue circles under both shaggy brows.

I scowled. "What's that for, Sailor? I didn't tell you to slug him!"

"Aw, Cash," pleaded Sailor from behind Quinn. "I asked him an' he tol' me. He tol' me what is a goon."

I said: "Inspector, before I remove the bracelets and return your rod and tell Sailor to ungag you, let's get this straight. You heard what went on.

"For the rest, unless you want to be laughed to your grave for being held in a creep closet while your prize suspect solved a batch of kills for you, my advice is to forget Sailor's and my part in it and take credit for that—"

I nodded at the remains of Phillip, then told Sailor: "Let him go."

Quinn, when he calmed down to yelling, yelled: "You didn't have to kill him, Wale, not how you can shoot, you didn't!"

"Self-defense, Inspector," I said. "I was in a hurry—"

"Not how those shots were spaced, you weren't!"

"They came one on top of the other," I said. "I've got witnesses. We mustn't forget the witnesses, Inspector."

Quinn glared around at Harry Dorgan who stood motionless with an arm around Vivian, then at Sailor—who nodded: "Me, I'm a witness!"

Quinn looked at Phillip on the table, then at the floor beyond where I'd been sitting. "If he stood where he fell and he missed you, why don't the slug show in the floor there—" He pointed. One hand followed the other with a metallic clank. "Get these off!" he yelled.

As Sailor went to work on the cuffs, I said: "I never look to make sure if a slug comes with the shot before shooting back—"

"How about that maid's kid who's inherited a fortune illegal?"

I pulled the silencer out of my pocket, still in my handkerchief, gave it to him.

"Be satisfied with that," I said. "Maybe it's got Phillip's prints on it. I found it in the cab where Egbert and the hackie were bumped. As for what you mentioned, I don't know what you're batting

about. My advice is to leave blackmail to professional blackmailers and stick to homicide."

Quinn's face was hot enough to fry eggs on. "Get out of here, Wale," he choked. "Get out!"

SO IT was Vivian, Dorgan and myself on the stairs again, with Sailor behind us and the Filipino still dreaming over his mop below. I gave Dorgan his baby cannon and told Vivian: "What you wanted to hire me for is cleared, babe. The doll will hook the mint, thinking both Delaneys are dead. But it would have been a lot easier all around if you had told me that you're Violet Delaney—"

Vivian shrank into Dorgan's arms and he turned a white face to me.

"Let it hang there, Wale," he pleaded. "She's suffered eighteen years for one mistake. I tried patching things by marrying her in Delaney's name but the kids had been switched around then. And now, after all these years, Delaney had to show three nights running with Kane. And Kane had public words with Mary—Ruth—and it's been hell for Vivian, Wale."

"The kid has Vivian's eyes," I said.

"So you—we had you all wrong in this, Wale," pleaded Dorgan.

"At least the kid gets a break," I said.

Vivian suddenly broke from Dorgan's arms and faced me. "You're still a heel, Wale! I know what you want—"

"I want to get out of here now," I said, thickly.

"You're such a wise-angled, dough-angled little heel," she giggled, "and all this night you've been working for me for free! *For nothing*, Cash Wale—" her words drowned in a sob and then she was back in Dorgan's arms, letting it all out against his shoulder.

Dorgan's face framed a wide-eyed plea:

"Not any more, Wale—"

But Sailor bristled: "Whaddya mean Cash comes outa this night for free? Cash an' me shares alike an' I come outa the bone game a winner by two bucks an' eighty-five cents! Howya like them apples?"

I patted the two grand in my vest pocket and, forcing a grin in the face of Vivian in Dorgan's arms, whispered: "Yeah! Howya like them apples?"

in reflected gossip-column glory. And the tale of the bullet from nowhere, that had done for Barney Kane, was on every lip.

A druggist had made me presentable with some tape, where Dorgan's knee split my lip. I drew a few nods and no comment, approaching Vivian Day at the bar. She was on straight Scotch now. Her only greeting was a grimace of dislike.

"Harry around?" I asked, meeting her brooding glance in the mirror.

"Nobody's around," she murmured in that husky throb. "Coppers put Sadie through hoops—but she don't know from me and I'm blank. Phillip takes two hours' relief and Dorgan's mutterin' threats." Vivian's expression brightened as she turned from the mirror to me. "He's going to kill you, heel, Dorgan is—you know that?" She noticed the tape on my lip and said, "Well!"

I said: "You want to tell me why you followed Ruth St. John around?"

Vivian said: "Why don't you—" It did not sound pleasant, coming from her. Particularly, since she meant every curse of it.

"It's coming dawn," I murmured, and retreated to the kitchen. The Filipino pearl diver nodded at the alley and I walked out to find the bone game resumed. Sailor once again held the dice. This time, with nickels before him.

I stood in a shadow, half watching and marshaling some facts together when a draft of second-hand alcohol washed over me and someone mumbled: "Two cribs—two, see?"

He leaned on me and I didn't shove him off. It was Kane's tramp, complete to the beet-like nose amid red stubble. Under that, he looked fortyish and a long time kicked. I stood there and took the fumes and said: "Yeah. "It's funny about cribs—"

The tramp swung around to peer down at me, his eyes swollen out of focus.

"Funny! Shorty, if you knowed th' half of it!"

"You tell me half of it," I said, "and let me guess the rest."

A wise grin spread through his red stubble.

"Nah, nah," he mumbled thickly.

"Evr'body paysh an' paysh t'hear good ol' Charley Delaney tell about th' cribs. Evr'body—paysh an' paysh an' paysh an' paysh an'—"

HE LEANED heavily on my arm, began sagging. I jerked him against the wall. We were a few yards from the crapshooters and they were occupied.

"Delaney?" I prompted. "You ever hear of Mary and Violet Delaney—from Buffalo?"

"M'own flesh 'n blood—" he mumbled. "Paysh an' paysh—" He sagged from my grip to the concrete and began snoring.

Sailor loomed over me. "He botherin' ya, Cash?"

"How'd you make out?" I said.

"Me? I'm rollin' good for once, Cash—"

"Then why play for jits?"

"Aw, Cash!" Sailor explained earnestly, "that way I hold on to the winnin's longer—" Sailor winced from my expression, changed the subject. "The lush botherin' ya, Cash?"

"You're taking him home," I told him. "You'll let him sleep a couple of hours in your bed." My watch showed it was two-thirty. "You'll let him sleep until five, then put him through hot and cold showers. Give him hot black coffee and bromo. I want him sober by five thirty."

"Aw, Cash!" protested Sailor, his lumpy features aghast. "In my bed, Cash? Mebbe he's got bugs an' I'll catch 'em!"

"It won't be the first time," I said.

"Aw, Cash!"

"Take him in a cab," I said.

I followed as Sailor reluctantly carried Charles Delaney to the grille fence at the end of the alley. None of the players glanced up.

Phillip was in the kitchen filling a tray with more free lunch. He grinned at me. "That was you took the tuna?"

"Me," I said.

Phillip's grin broadened.

"You have a Scotch rep, sport—but not by me. Damn few chisellers around here'd leave a tip on a loose tray."

"Maybe you'll give me Dorgan's address," I said.

Phillip assumed his business look and extended the tray. A dollar passed from my hand under the napkin draping it.

"Right across the street," grinned Phillip. "Apartment 3B. Thanks, sport—"

I watched until the swinging doors closed behind his black mop. The Filipino was out of sight. The row of garbage pails alongside the door caught my attention. The lid of one was slightly to one side and, beneath, I could make out something white. Absently, I kicked the lid more to the side. I stood looking down into the pail all of five seconds.

Then I stooped and lifted the automatic from inside. It was folded inside a powder-stained napkin. Under the napkin, the muzzle wore shiny nicks. The silencer from my pocket fitted snugly—it belonged.

The gun was a Colt, thirty-two caliber, with a dull, blue-steel finish and a powder-darkened bore. I worked the slide and a bullet hopped out. Rapidly, I dug the lead from the pellet with a fork, then returned the empty cartridge-case to the top of the magazine clip and closed the slide.

Pocketing the silencer, I re-wrapped the gun in the napkin, set it back in the garbage can with the lid askew as I had found it.

Vivian was singing about bedrooms when I left. Somehow, the Scotch seemed to have made her more intimate with the song than I liked.

THE doorman, Andy, was leaning against the wall, cupping a lighted cigarette inside his palm. Smoke dribbled from his nostrils when he saw who I was.

"Everybody's hoppin' in and out to-night," he said.

"Who?"

"You, for one—"

"Who else?"

Andy squinted thoughtfully.

"Well, there's that Murray guy—he's been around twice since you left, lookin' for somebody. I don't know who. Then Vivian's been comin' in and out. And the boss—"

"Where's Dorgan now?"

The doorman angled a stubbled chin across the street at a renovated tenement house that loomed darkly in the night.

"He lives there."

"O.K., Andy," I said. "Who else has been around?"

"That chippy St. John doll. She come in a taxi, stayed in it for about ten min-

utes, then rode away again. I saw her face lookin' out the cab's winder, like she expected to see somethin'. Everybody's lookin' for somethin'. You, Mr. Wale?"

"Dorgan," I said.

"Like I told you, he's across the street. Apartment 3B."

"Suppose he's needed here?"

Andy stared at me uncertainly, then shifted his attention to his feet.

"You mean how do I call him?"

"That's it, Andy."

"I knock on his door three times," said the doorman, not meeting my eyes. "Then I get back here and he always comes. Even if he's grabbin' a nod, he gets outa bed and comes—"

I felt Andy's eyes on my back as I crossed the dark street. 3B was in back, at the end of a long gloomy corridor flanked by peeling green wallpaper—it was that kind of house. I had no trouble. My three knocks drew footsteps from inside. The door swung open and I said: "Surprise, surprise—"

Harry Dorgan said nothing. He was in shirtsleeves and suspenders, a black tie hanging loosely over his shoulders. He didn't look surprised, just white. His scowl was so white it was almost blue.

He backed inside. With the muzzle of my automatic boring into his chest, he *had* to back inside. I kicked shut the door in passing and we came to a stop against the far wall of his living-room.

"Going some place, Harry?" I said.

This because a suitcase lay open on the cheap studio couch with shirts, underwear, and such piled around.

Dorgan's eyes, now that I saw them close, were yellowish and foggy. They were motionless on me. The rest of him was also motionless—except his nostrils. They quivered in spasms the way I had once seen a cornered rat's belly quiver in spasms.

I said: "What brought you to Kane's, Harry?"

He spat down into my face.

Then his chin jerked east and west as my automatic's muzzle connected twice and Dorgan crumpled to his imitation oriental rug. I wiped the saliva from my face with a sleeve and checked through the suitcase.

Snapshots and studio portraits filled

a good quarter of it. I riffled through them and got the idea. They were all of Vivian Day. Vivian smiling, gazing soulfully down—up—right—left, before a mike, in cheesecake—a fine collection if you liked Vivian. I sometimes mistook pillows for Vivian nights—

Under everything else in the suitcase lay a Buffalo marriage certificate made out to Charles Delaney and Violet Conroy. It was dated June, 1923.

I muddled over this a few seconds, then put it out of my mind. Charles Delaney, in person, would talk when he sobered. He would tell me, among other items, why the certificate was in possession of Harry Dorgan and Delaney would also tell me why it was dated in 1923 when his daughter Mary's birth certificate was dated in 1922.

I RETURNED to Harry Dorgan who was crawling slowly to his knees. I put my heel on his left shoulder and propped him back against the wall. He reached for my ankle, then snapped his hands away with a grunt—but not fast enough. A red welt ran along the back of one hand, continued along the back of the other.

An automatic cuts everybody down to one size—used right.

I said: "What brought you to Kane's, Harry?"

He didn't spit this time—he'd caught the idea. But he didn't talk, either. He lay against the wall and wished I was dead with every part of his face.

A peculiar egg all around. Harry Dorgan—what with bartending in the joint he owned, carrying the torch for a streamlined smoothie like Vivian Day and living in this dive notwithstanding a five-figure income.

I said: "Harry, suppose I go to the cops and tell them Barney Kane was bumped because of a payoff involving Ruth St. John and a tramp named Charles Delaney, and a couple of females named Violet and Mary respectively, and a matter of two cribs about which various citizens have paid and paid—"

I got no farther. The hate washed out of Dorgan's face, leaving it haggard and old.

"No!" he whispered hoarsely.

I said: "Harry, what brought you to Kane's?"

"To cover for someone," he whispered.

"Ruth St. John," I said.

He stared dumbly at me.

"O.K., you went to cover for Ruth St. John," I said. "Why?"

Dorgan's eyes dropped to the welts on the backs of his palms. He muttered: "You were at Kane's, Wale—"

"To cover for Ruth St. John," I said. "Only me, I get paid for it."

His eyes shot up to my face again, as if to force the truth from me by the intensity of his stare.

"That a fact?" he whispered.

I said: "You've got it all wrong, Harry. I'm asking you—"

He said: "I was the St. John's chauffeur around eighteen years ago. Up near Buffalo, that was."

I waxed sarcastic. "That's a real good reason for racing the cops to Barney Kane's—and chesting me. You know what it means, using hands on me. You've been around long enough to know what happens. You know my grift floats on reputation and I'm not going to let a pair of loose fists spoil it. You know it so well it's probably why you're fixing to lam. So now tell me why you covered for Ruth St. John."

"I told you, Wale."

"Then tell me about Violet Conroy who married Charles Delaney," I said.

Harry Dorgan was sweating now. There was business with his tongue and Adam's apple getting mixed before his next words came.

"Lay off her, Wale. I don't care how fast you can shoot, Wale. If you mess into this and smash a lot of people's lives, I'll smash you, Wale. I'll say this much. Violet Conroy was the maid with the St. Johns. Delaney was the gardener—"

"And you were the chauffeur," I said, ignoring the threat. "And baby Mary Delaney happened in, a year before she was legal. I got that much, Harry. Also, about that time, Ruth St. John likewise hatched, her mother dying in the process. Who nursed and took care of Ruth?"

A rivulet of sweat ran down Harry Dorgan's cheek.

"Violet," he said.

"And she took care of her own kid at

the same time?" I kept hammering at him.

Dorgan nodded imperceptibly.

"That would make two cribs," I said. Then, as hate began to inflame Dorgan's yellow eyes, I asked: "And what became of Delaney?"

"He drifted."

"And Violet?"

"She drifted."

"With Mary Delaney?"

"Mary Delaney fell accidentally from her crib and died when she was three weeks old," said Dorgan.

"That left one crib," I said.

Dorgan's scowl could have been engraved in ivory—wet, streaming ivory.

"So that's it," I said, taking my heel from his shoulder. "Unpack that grip, Harry," I added. "You're not going anyplace. Not unless you want Ruth St. John in the gutter, you're not going anyplace. Just across the street, Harry. I want you there with Vivian Day in about an hour."

At the door, I said: "Good-bye for now, Harry Dorgan—"

CHAPTER FOUR

Two Cribs and Two Grand

SOME chill air left over from winter sifted through the night as I once more stood before Dorgan's Dump. Andy, the doorman, was not in sight. I hesitated about entering, then thought about the gun in the garbage pail and walked to the grille-work fencing the alley.

The gate was unlatched—beyond it, heavy shadows—beyond them, around the bend in the wall, a hazy shaft of light from the kitchen window. I was almost to the bend when the rod jammed painfully into my spine. A hand snaked under my arm, withdrew my heater from its holster. Then warm breath lingered on my neck and Inspector Jack Quinn's growl mocked: "I figured you'd show sooner or later, and waited in the yard to catch you in the club—and you walk right into my arms!"

He stood alone, must have been deep in the shadows when I peered in the gate. He stood with his positive covering my middle as I turned to face him. He was between me and the street.

"Very funny," I said.

I couldn't see his eyebrows. I could have imagined them writhing from sheer joy. The joy was in his voice: "Funny, shrimp? It goes like this: you're under arrest, Wale, and I'm warning you that anything you say may be used against—"

"The charge," I cut in. "Give with the makings for a nice legal suit."

Quinn chuckled. "Just a technicality, shrimp. I'm charging you with homicide!"

"Kane?"

"No, shrimp, not Kane. We'll maybe ring that one in on you later. For the time being, there's Egbert St. John, found shot and another guy found sapped two blocks from here—with your prints all over the coupe—"

I was supposed to blurt: "You mean the cab!" I didn't. I said: "You arresting me for the murder of Egbert St. John?"

"No," drawled Inspector Quinn, "not for that either. Although I think you'll do fine when ballistics is through. No, shrimp, you're under arrest for murdering a tramp named Charles Delaney!"

"I found his remains in your flat when I went there to ask more questions about you and Kane. I have witnesses who will avoid a gambling rap by testifying they saw your goon, Duffy, carrying Delaney out of here. Other witnesses to show Delaney was the only person in hearing distance when you scrapped with Kane—a possible motive.

"Delaney may have listened to something that would have connected you up to the neck with the murder of Kane and you rubbed him. Or had that goon, Duffy—"

Inspector Jack Quinn stopped talking then. He stopped talking because an arm the size of a log had wound under his chin from behind. Another arm of the same dimensions was generating pressure on Quinn's diaphragm—

Quinn may have had ideas of shooting. Not that he saw me or where his rod pointed—his eyes were swollen white in their sockets and pointing up. His tongue bulged out.

Lifting the rod from his fist was like lifting it from a cushion for all the resistance he offered. As I found my own automatic in his coat pocket, his breath whooshed out and Sailor Duffy's mis-

shapen face peered over Quinn's shoulder.

"What's a goon, Cash?" growled Duffy. "That's what I wanna know—what's a goon, *hagh?*"

"Leggo his throat before he croaks!" I snapped. Sailor's arms loosened their hold and Inspector Quinn sagged a foot, his breath coming in jerks. I told Sailor: "Hold him against the wall until I get back."

"Aw, Cash, suppose he comes outa—"

"Keep holding him!" I flung over my shoulder.

THE Filipino was not in the kitchen. The automatic still was, still wrapped in its napkin. I worked the slide twice and caught my hand-made blank as it hopped out. I pondered over it awhile, then pressed it back into the magazine and closed the slide.

That this was the quick killer's rod, I was certain. That it wasn't used to bump Delaney was equally certain. I was faced with two answers. Either a second killer was on the prowl, or the original quick killer had used another weapon on Delaney which could frame me. Both questions led to others which I didn't have time to brood over.

The automatic was back in the napkin and in the pail again when I returned to where Sailor held Quinn's limp form in the shadows. "I can't do this all night, Cash," pleaded Sailor.

"You couldn't stay with that tramp either," I said softly. "*Or did you?*"

"Me, Cash? *Nagh!* I figgered I'd get back to the bone game an' win us a little stake, Cash. Alla time it's you bringin' home the berries. Me, I—"

I stopped him impatiently.

"How about the lush?"

"He was in dreamland, Cash. He snored to beat sixty an' I kept turnin' him over but he'd turn back an' then I got sick o' listenin' so I come over for another chanct at the bones, on'y they ain't no game. On'y this flatty with a heater on you. So I—"

"Shut up," I said. "Let me think. I wish I knew how Delaney was rubbed—"

Sailor brightened.

"Ask *him*, Cash!" He shook Quinn like a rag doll.

"Can't wait, Sailor." I regarded my

slap-nutty partner thoughtfully, then said: "Look, if he was handcuffed, think you could hold him quiet but conscious for about half an hour?"

"Aw, Cash—"

"It would mean getting him upstairs without being seen," I said.

"I could fix that," said Sailor, without enthusiasm. "There's a winder in the kitchen goes to the back yard an' back stairs. But let him wake up an' keep him quiet alla that time, Cash?"

"If it doesn't work, you'll only get around ten years," I said.

"Aw, Cash—"

It took five minutes to maneuver Quinn through the kitchen and out the window, Sailor after him. Neither the Filipino nor anyone else interfered. The kitchen was deserted because it was after three and what customers remained had no interest in grub.

Through the swinging doors, I saw the Filipino mopping a distant corner of the floor. A sprinkling of customers were occupied with drinks and confidential talk. Harry Dorgan stood behind the bar in his overcoat and Vivian Day spoke to him from a bar stool—their heads were close, their expressions drawn.

Back at the window, I saw Inspector Quinn's number twelves sail by. They swung around to be replaced by Sailor's assortment of facial bumps.

"Cash—" he hissed.

"What?"

"I wanna know, Cash. What's a goon, *hagh?*"

I closed the window.

GILBERT T. MURRAY'S voice was nervous on the phone: "Listen, *Wale*, I didn't expect you to go that far—"

"How far?"

"Well—Kane." Murray's voice grew angry. "It will only serve to embarrass Ruth. She was seen talking with that son of a —"

"You're speaking of the dead, pal," I said. "And pull in your horns about Kane. I don't work like that—not for this kind of dough. And that brings me to the point. Have that dough on ice, as agreed."

Murray forgot his ancestors to gush familiarly: "*Cash! Do you mean you—*"

"I mean I don't take checks," I said. And hung up.

I walked three blocks to another drug store and phoned Ruth St. John. It took her seconds to answer. Nobody was sleeping this night.

"This is the man you didn't meet at the Dump tonight," I said through my handkerchief. "How about that payoff?"

For a moment I thought I was talking into blank space. Then, tense words filled the blank: "You have found them?"

"I told you about that."

"May I see them?"

"Uh-uh. Not till my palm is crossed with shekels, babe—"

Again the line seemed to go dead. Then: "You sound—uh—different."

I growled: "You wanna play, or do I peddle 'em elsewhere?"

"Now?"

"Maybe."

"Oh, I have the money! I had it all night as I promised but never received a sign as you promised. I even drove back to the club later. Won't you *please* let me see them?"

"I'm coming up to your place, babe. Tell the doorman to admit Mr. Frank."

"Why, last time you were Mr. Jones—"

"I'm ambidextrous," I said, breaking the connection.

IT WAS one of those super-de luxe apartment palaces with twin towers overlooking Central Park from the west. In spite of the hour, the name of Frank whisked me through a plush and palm lobby, up a cage of streamlined gilt to a narrow foyer with one door. A penthouse, this.

Ruth St. John answered my ring herself. Recognition stamped her eyes, as if they were saying, *You!* but her lips didn't move.

She was a trim slip of a doll in a light blue robe that flared to the rug.

She backed a little as I entered. She spoke when I closed the door behind me.

"Where are they?"

"We alone?"

"Where are they?"

"That was a device to crash in, Miss St. John," I said, gently. "Me, I'm playing on your side—"

For a moment she stood poised, taut—

like a bird about to take wing. Then every trim line of her face wrinkled and a sob broke past her lips. The back of her wrist flew to her mouth. She spun through eggshell drapes which blocked the foyer.

I followed into half a million dollars worth of living-room—all done up in low, smooth curves and eggshell colors.

She had flung herself on a curved lounge, face down. Her shoulders heaved—but it was soundless.

I felt like a fish out of water and kept my eyes on a painting that looked like scrambled eggs gone wrong.

After awhile she sat up and found my eyes on her.

"Why don't you go away?" she pleaded.

"Because I want to tell you it's no use looking for your parents," I said.

Her eyes went to a pair of oil paintings which hung over the fireplace, a young couple with chins out of the blue book—the late Mr. and Mrs. St. John.

"Not them," I cut in as she was about to speak. "I mean your *real* parents, Mary Delaney—"

She began to say, "You don't understand—" then my words clicked. "*You know?*" she whispered.

"But you didn't?" I said.

"No," she whispered, "not until that man phoned. He said it could be proven from my footprints—"

"And he wanted dough to stay clammed," I said. "He threatened to expose you. It would mean losing the St. John inheritance because the will gives the estate to cousin Egbert if Ruth St. John died before she was twenty-one, and the *real* Ruth St. John had died at the age of three weeks—as Mary Delaney."

The girl's chin went up.

"Believe me, it was not the money—it was my own father and mother, do you understand what that means? My own parents! I wanted to—"

"I know," I said. "And, learning this, you broke with Murray because it might cramp his position, maybe even douse the torch he carried for you. How about Barney Kane? He was once overboard for you, probably still was, from habit. You get him into it—to check for you?"

"Oh, he *did!*" cried the girl, flushing. "Tonight Barney said he had learned the

identity of the man who phoned me. He told me he had thrashed that man and that I would not be bothered any longer."

"And when Kane was plugged, you knew you would," I concluded. "That's why you let me in. But I'm here with Barney's tune—you're not going to be bothered again—and I don't plug easy."

She went to the window as mixed feelings began chasing across her ivory face.

"Don't worry about the man who called you," I said quietly. "And forget about the woman who's been following you around lately. As for Charles and Violet Delaney—believe me, babe, they're past your help. Or anyone's help—"

The girl whirled.

"They are—"

"Yes," I lied solemnly. "These many years, babe. It's tough on you. It makes you a two-time orphan."

"You know," she whispered, "you know, I *thought* it would be like that—"

"Answer it," I said, as the door chimes sounded.

GILBERT T. MURRAY'S agitated voice sounded from the foyer: "Ruth, dear, please steady yourself for a shock. It is about Egbert. I've just learned that he was—*Ruth, you're crying!*"

I couldn't make out what she said, but Murray burst through the eggshell drapes, the tan on his face turned ashen, and his fists knotted. "What have you been saying to her?" he demanded hoarsely. "Who gave you a right to come here in the first place? Get out, *Wale!*"

"You ready to pay off?" I said.

The girl appeared behind Murray, her eyes swimming. "Pay off—for *what?*"

"Everybody's asking questions," I said. "The boy-friend hired me to learn why you were freezing him out—that's why I told you I was on your side. I learned why you turned him down and now I intend to collect, as agreed."

Murray's strained face turned to the girl, her wet face turned to him, and everything became so quiet that I was able to hear late traffic moving in the street twenty floors down.

Then Murray turned back to me with an expression that feared what he had seen.

"That's off, *Wale,*" he barely managed.

"I'll pay you—but no more snooping."

"The investigation came through," I told him.

"Damn you; I don't want to hear it!"

"You want to marry the girl?"

Both of them stared at me now. Both wore the same frightened expression.

"Miss St. John was being blackmailed," I said, emphasizing the *Miss St. John* with a sidelong glance at her. The back of her wrist was to her mouth and her eyes stared.

"Don't say it, *Wale,*" Murray pleaded.

"O.K., I won't," I said. "The blackmail was a phoney anyhow, one of those things. But Miss St. John, figuring the kind of snobs you both hatched from, knew what damage even a faked scandal could do to your marriage. So—"

The girl's ivory cheeks grew spots of red as Murray swept her into his arms.

"Sweet," he whispered, "I don't care anything about your past, true or false. I don't even want to know about it. All I want is for you to—"

I tapped his shoulder.

"That stuff bores me even in the movies where it's done with practice," I said. "You ready to pay off?"

He let her go long enough to pass me an envelope with four bills, each worth five centuries.

"That closes the deal," I said. "Tonight wipes out every trace of the blackmail—but complete. And you'll never find out, pal."

"That's how I want it," whispered Gilbert T. Murray happily.

Passing through the eggshell drapes, I looked back, said: "Well, good-bye for now—" But they were in a strangle hold.

The doll was gushing: "Oh, yes, darling, *yes!*"

I slammed out the door feeling like a piker. There I was, wanted by the cops for four unsolved kills. I was due to be wanted for attacking and snatching a cop inspector. I had been slugged, chased, pushed around and marked lousy by Vivian Day, one of the few Manhattan she-jobs who affected my pulse—and all for a lousy two grand.

While, due to my work, that crib-hopping babe inside was able to gush, "Yes!"—and close a twenty million dollar merger!

CHAPTER FIVE

The Bullet to Nowhere

VIVIAN DAY questioned me in that husky throb: "You want to see me upstairs, heel?"

"Harry also," I said. "This will be a lecture on a bullet from nowhere and two cribs. Interested?"

They stared helplessly at me, Vivian from my side of the bar, Harry Dorgan from behind the bar—still in his black overcoat.

The swinging kitchen doors were propped open now. I called through them to Phillip who sat hunched over a cup of coffee and a tabloid: "Bring two quarts of Haig and Haig in pinch-bottles to that creep room at the end of the corridor upstairs. I don't mean refills, guy. O.K.?"

"O.K., sport!" grinned Phillip. The only other sign of life in Dorgan's Dump was the Filipino. He'd piled the tables in a remote corner. Now, with the enthusiasm of a robot, he plied a mop.

"We'll go upstairs and listen, Wale," said Harry Dorgan.

"Fine," I said.

Vivian shrugged bare shoulders and eased off her stool with great deliberation. Even the slight waver as she crossed the room took nothing from her. Harry Dorgan came around the bar and helped her with an arm to the stairs.

Halfway up, all three of us froze as my hand emerged from Dorgan's coat pocket with a revolver that thought it was a cannon. Aside from size, the bore was rusted and the hammer wagged.

"You'll spend years combing this out of your face if you ever try firing it, Harry," I said, wedging the long barrel under my belt.

Dorgan's yellow-fog eyes turned helplessly to Vivian, then he urged her upstairs. I followed after a backward glance. Phillip was behind the bar, assembling bottles and glasses on a tray.

THE creep room at the end of the corridor was done up in red leather, red upholstery, red carpet, red-shaded lamp and pictures that would have reddened any high school girl's cheeks. Vivian and Dorgan sat side by side on the couch while

I seated myself facing them. I pointed to the paneled wall at the foot of the couch.

"Ought to seal that creep door before some wise cop spots it."

"Get to the point, Wale," muttered Dorgan.

"That's right, heel," echoed Vivian. "The quicker I don't have to see your ratty little face, the quicker my digestion will return to normal."

Phillip entered with his napkin-draped tray supporting two bottles and three brandy glasses. He set the tray on the table and began tearing the seal off one of the bottles.

"The point," I said, facing Dorgan, "is that somebody got next to that tramp, Delaney's, yarn about two cribs. A rich little doll occupied one and the kid hatched by the housemaid occupied the other. The maid's doll was a little accident due to the gardener who also happened to be the tramp, Delaney—"

Dorgan's scowl was blue again. His fingers made convulsive stabs at his coat pocket, then he remembered I carried the baby cannon.

I continued: "It seems there was a switch in the cribs. I think it came about when the rich little doll fell out of hers and landed dead. That was at the age of three weeks. Most kids look alike at that age, except to their mamas—and the rich kid's mama was dead.

"That left the maid. Maybe it was the idea of giving her own girl a break in life. Maybe this maid wanted to feel her oats—she was young, healthy, and ambitious. Maybe it was both—giving the kid and herself a break.

"So the record has it that the maid's kid died—that was the switch. The maid ran both cribs. It was a simple matter to change clothes from the rich little corpse to her own daughter. And now she was, as they say, a bereaved mother—"

"Wale, do you *have* to go on?" whispered Dorgan hoarsely.

"If I want to avoid a bum rap, I have to go on, Harry," I said. "To cut it short, the maid's kid has now grown up—an heiress. Not only has she a mint, but she is engaged to wed another mint. When the guy who heard the tramp, Delaney, get this far, he angled for a slice of the girl's

mint. In short, he blackmailed the girl—and that brings me to Barney Kane—”

“Barney?” choked Vivian Day.

“Did the one clean thing in his life,” I said. “Or maybe he was angling for the squeeze himself. He got next to Delaney—probably by accident, through his habit of feeding tramps off the street here—and Delaney talked. Delaney also mentioned talking to others and, in that manner, Kane learned about the blackmailer.

“Kane beat the blackmailer with his fists and warned the guy to muscle out as of then. What happened, you know. The blackmailer muscled Kane out instead—”

“How?” whispered Dorgan. “Do you know that, Wale? You watched Kane in the mirror—I watched him across the bar. Vivian’s act held the customers at their tables. We would have seen anybody at Kane’s booth—”

“We could have seen and not realized.”

“What do you mean?”

“How about a waiter passing by?” I asked, turning in my seat to watch Phillip who stood across the table from me, the tray in his hands.

“A waiter could have done it with both of us watching him,” I said. “Using a silenced rod hidden by the napkin under his tray. He could have motioned Kane to open the booth’s door, then plugged Kane in the throat, kicked the door shut and moved off. This could have taken maybe five seconds.”

I saw Phillip’s tray was in his left hand now. His right was somewhere under it, hidden from view by the overhanging napkin.

“You’re framing me, sport,” he whispered carefully.

“Phillip’s been with me three years,” spoke Dorgan from the couch.

“And always hungry for a buck.”

“You sure of this, heel?” asked Vivian unsteadily from the couch.

“Phillip was dusted about the time Kane used fists on the blackmailer,” I said. “Phillip admitted to me he fed Delaney in back, and Delaney must have talked from gratitude. Phillip was on a two-hour relief when somebody bumped young Egbert and when someone bulled me out of Kane’s apartment by imitating Inspector Quinn’s voice—and Phillip’s a mimic. Which could also account for the

female voice that lured Kane to the phone.

“Also, right after the Kane bump, I found Phillip’s tray in the check-room minus its napkin—powder stains, probably. And finally, to make the case legal, ballistics will show Kane and young Egbert were done in with slugs from Phillip’s rod—”

“What rod?” came from Dorgan.

“The one he’s holding under that napkin now,” I said.

TEARS were forming in Phillip’s eyes now from the intensity of his stare, but his thick lips pursed speculatively. There was no movement in the room. There was a pause that built up tension until Phillip said: “How you set this up, you’re pretty much of a dope, Wale.”

“Am I right about your heater under the napkin?” I said.

“Now it’s got to be three more,” he said, flicking his eyes to the others.

“That’s what killing does,” I said. “It becomes an epidemic, once the fever gets in you.”

“I always figured you for a smoothie,” Phillip said.

“I’m a smoothie,” I said. “Inspector Quinn’s in that creep door behind you.”

“The hell he is,” Phillip said. “Quinn hasn’t been around for hours. Anyhow, he wouldn’t work with you, not after wanting you for strangling Delaney—”

“So you know Delaney was strangled,” I said. “You were in the kitchen when I told Sailor to carry Delaney home. Probably took another relief—”

“He took a second relief!” spat Vivian hoarsely.

Phillip said: “That’s enough for stalling. I’ll get a medal for this—”

The napkin around his tray suddenly flamed to a crackling explosion. I watched his eyes blink out the tears that had formed. He flung off the tray, revealing the smoking blue-steel muzzle of his automatic. He turned it on Dorgan, who was lunging from the couch—then his face snapped back, grew an expression of astonishment that I wasn’t dead—

I winked at him and shot him through the neck.

I said: “Bring him out, Sailor.”

The creep door at the foot of the couch swung open, revealing Inspector Jack

Quinn in cuffs, his mouth lost in Sailor's ham-like left hand, his arms pinioned by Sailor's telephone-pole right arm.

He wore puffed, blue circles under both shaggy brows.

I scowled. "What's that for, Sailor? I didn't tell you to slug him!"

"Aw, Cash," pleaded Sailor from behind Quinn. "I asked him an' he tol' me. He tol' me what is a goon."

I said: "Inspector, before I remove the bracelets and return your rod and tell Sailor to ungag you, let's get this straight. You heard what went on.

"For the rest, unless you want to be laughed to your grave for being held in a creep closet while your prize suspect solved a batch of kills for you, my advice is to forget Sailor's and my part in it and take credit for that—"

I nodded at the remains of Phillip, then told Sailor: "Let him go."

Quinn, when he calmed down to yelling, yelled: "You didn't have to kill him, Wale, not how you can shoot, you didn't!"

"Self-defense, Inspector," I said. "I was in a hurry—"

"Not how those shots were spaced, you weren't!"

"They came one on top of the other," I said. "I've got witnesses. We mustn't forget the witnesses, Inspector."

Quinn glared around at Harry Dorgan who stood motionless with an arm around Vivian, then at Sailor—who nodded: "Me, I'm a witness!"

Quinn looked at Phillip on the table, then at the floor beyond where I'd been sitting. "If he stood where he fell and he missed you, why don't the slug show in the floor there—" He pointed. One hand followed the other with a metallic clank. "Get these off!" he yelled.

As Sailor went to work on the cuffs, I said: "I never look to make sure if a slug comes with the shot before shooting back—"

"How about that maid's kid who's inherited a fortune illegal?"

I pulled the silencer out of my pocket, still in my handkerchief, gave it to him.

"Be satisfied with that," I said. "Maybe it's got Phillip's prints on it. I found it in the cab where Egbert and the hackie were bumped. As for what you mentioned, I don't know what you're batting

about. My advice is to leave blackmail to professional blackmailers and stick to homicide."

Quinn's face was hot enough to fry eggs on. "Get out of here, Wale," he choked. "Get out!"

SO IT was Vivian, Dorgan and myself on the stairs again, with Sailor behind us and the Filipino still dreaming over his mop below. I gave Dorgan his baby cannon and told Vivian: "What you wanted to hire me for is cleared, babe. The doll will hook the mint, thinking both Delaneys are dead. But it would have been a lot easier all around if you had told me that you're Violet Delaney—"

Vivian shrank into Dorgan's arms and he turned a white face to me.

"Let it hang there, Wale," he pleaded. "She's suffered eighteen years for one mistake. I tried patching things by marrying her in Delaney's name but the kids had been switched around then. And now, after all these years, Delaney had to show three nights running with Kane. And Kane had public words with Mary—Ruth—and it's been hell for Vivian, Wale."

"The kid has Vivian's eyes," I said.

"So you—we had you all wrong in this, Wale," pleaded Dorgan.

"At least the kid gets a break," I said.

Vivian suddenly broke from Dorgan's arms and faced me. "You're still a heel, Wale! I know what you want—"

"I want to get out of here now," I said, thickly.

"You're such a wise-angled, dough-angled little heel," she giggled, "and all this night you've been working for me for free! *For nothing*, Cash Wale—" her words drowned in a sob and then she was back in Dorgan's arms, letting it all out against his shoulder.

Dorgan's face framed a wide-eyed plea:

"Not any more, Wale—"

But Sailor bristled: "Whaddya mean Cash comes outa this night for free? Cash an' me shares alike an' I come outa the bone game a winner by two bucks an' eighty-five cents! Howya like them apples?"

I patted the two grand in my vest pocket and, forcing a grin in the face of Vivian in Dorgan's arms, whispered: "Yeah! Howya like them apples?"

CHEESE IT— THE CORPSE!

An Acme Indemnity Op Story
by Jan Dana



"The disturbance is over," barked the gray-faced man, striding past Witherspoon.

With 75 grand insurance involved, Acme's sleuth wanted to know why the eccentric Sir Charles' precious son, whom the baronet had beaten up with touching paternal affection, was mysteriously dying. And he was groping in the dark—till the whole picture flashed upon him, in the dazzling glare of a photo-bulb.

THE bull-chested, gray-faced man strode in to the Park South Hotel's glittering lobby at twenty minutes before eleven. He managed to

draw a dozen eyes—including the hotel dick's—before he ever reached the registry-desk. For all his intense, driving walk, he was silent on his feet and he

managed to plow across the huge lobby and belly up to the marble counter without attracting the eye of the morning-coated room clerk. The clerk had his back turned, was hunched over, furtively repairing a broken fingernail. The big man stood there a second, flexing his gray-gloved hands. Then he glanced down at a scrap of paper between thumb and forefinger, scowled, swayed, then turned suddenly and walked grimly over to the elevators.

This aroused the curiosity of the house dick enough to send him casually after, but he got to the elevator containing the gray-faced man just a moment too late.

Inasmuch as the Park South boasts thirty-four floors and a bank of twelve cars, it was some minutes before the elevator again returned to the ground floor. And then the operator proved to be a thick-headed nitwit (according to the house dick's lights) incapable of seeing to the end of his pointed nose.

"That big guy—with the Chesterfield coat, black bound-brim hat and gray gloves you just took up," he said as he boarded the car. "What floor'd he want?"

"Huh? Well, hell, I didn't notice. I had a car full. You mean the bald-headed—"

"No, you lame-brain, I mean the gray-haired guy—he may have been bald under his hat, but—the guy with gray eyes—looked like he was breathin' fire and—"

"Oh—him! Yeah, sure. He got off at twenty-nine. Or was it twenty-one: No, twenty-four."

It was twenty-six, and it took the not-overly-perturbed house dick a good fifteen minutes to ascertain the fact.

He finally got off the elevator at twenty-six—and almost collided with a slender, peach-skinned blond girl with fright-darkened luminous blue eyes and a starch-white face. She looked about eighteen, dainty and exquisite. Hatless, she was hastily buttoning a pony coat, and she was into the elevator behind him, the door closed, before he got more than a glimpse.

THE silver-haired floor clerk was not at her desk and she came around the corner from the corridor, wringing her hands as the frowning house detective

swung back. She blurted: "Oh, Mr. Witherspoon—twenty-six-oh-seven—there's crashing around and shouting in there—Mr. and Mrs. Carter—Mrs. Carter just ran out. Some big man—"

Witherspoon justified, said, "Ha!" and strode authoritatively down to the door. There were no more crashing sounds, but a man's deep, furious voice was stringing tight-bitten words together in a steady stream. And even as Witherspoon raised his hand to knock, the door was wrenched open and the big man plowed out.

He stopped with the knob in his hand. His big, mobile, gray face was flushed, his gray eyes pinpoints of fire. "Well?"

Witherspoon cleared his throat importantly. "This disturbance—can't have that sort of thing."

"The disturbance is over," the big man said, tight-lipped. "Mr. Carter is checking out." He slammed the door behind him, strode hard-heeled down the hall to the elevator.

In the instant's glimpse of the room's interior that Witherspoon got, he saw: pale-faced, thin youth with near-black eyes struggling to get up off the floor. The youth was in shirt-sleeves and his face was twisted in pain. A little red line ran down his chin from his mouth, and he seemed to be flopping a little as though one side hurt him.

While Witherspoon hesitated in ear-scratching indecision, he heard the elevator door open, close, down the corridor.

Ten minutes later, the boy called for a bellboy to carry down his bags—one pig-skin suitcase and a tiny overnight case—and emerged in a long, shapeless black topcoat with the collar loosely turned up, gray soft hat and gray gloves, holding a handkerchief to his mouth with one hand, the other hand buried in a deep pocket.

When he had gone down, Witherspoon wandered down to his vacated room and went in. The room was not made up. Obviously a pair of humans had passed the night there. The double bed was open. There was one tiny spot of blood on the edge of the trailing sheet, bright-red and fresh.

There was another bright-red and fresh spot on a shiny blue-tinted, printed card lying under the bed. Typewritten on the

card, in the space for name and address, was: *Sir Charles Mallet, Rosedale, Toronto 4, Ontario*. But that address had been lined through with ink, and, also in ink, was written in: *Alcyone Lodge, Mariposa, N. Y.*

In large printed letters at the bottom of the card was of course: *In Case of Accident, Please Notify Nearest Office of Acme Indemnity Company*, and a four-bank, fine-print list of our widespread branches and agencies.

Witherspoon somehow achieved the conclusion that he had stumbled on something that would be worth money to us.

BUT queerly enough, it was—in a way. Preeker, my bony-nosed, fretful, four-eyed little boss talked to me about it in his office downtown: “Go up and see that maniac! Twenty-five dollars he wants—and I wouldn’t pay a dime a thousand for it! If he hadn’t once tipped us to that jewel heist—hell and brimstone, give him five!”

I couldn’t even see that much. And rarely does Preeker unbelt without anaesthetic. He enlightened me fretfully. “I know, I know—but the loan department and the mailing department have been looking for him for eighteen months and knowing the ——’s address is worth something.”

“Looking for who? The hotel snoop?”

“For this Sir Charles Mallet, stupid! The fools lost track of him after his building-loan association blew up in Toronto. Him with a fifty-thousand dollar policy, borrowed to the hilt and a twenty-fiver on his son—and they calmly lost track of him. It’s worth five to me not to have that whining airedale McGargan up here every couple of weeks wanting to know if we’ve found him. And listen—that Mariposa is only a little out of your way when you go upstate next week. You can drop over and give him back that card and tell him his policies will be canceled if he don’t keep in touch with us.”

I ran into McGargan, head of the loan department, on my way out and he told me about Mallet.

“A real wild-eyed plunger,” he described him. “He’s Canadian. Got one of the last titles handed out before the Canucks decided they didn’t want any more.

He used to be one of the directors of Acme Canadian. He’s been up and down faster than a freight elevator and, in the past thirty years, nearly as often. A promoter, sort of, although he’s been in the investment banking business, and wheat-speculating, not to mention the stock market. Once he even tried to manufacture aeroplanes. But whatever he’s in, he’s either worth millions—or not a red cent. He’s supposed to have broken a bank in Canada twenty years ago, at the time he had one of the biggest racing stables on the continent and the biggest castle in Canada. Oh, he’s a lalaloosa.”

“He’s broke now?”

“I guess so if he’s in ‘retirement.’ But he’ll pop up with something. Look—explain to him that he sends the whole damned organization into the jitters when he lays low like that.”

“I can see a guy like that listening to an insurance dick.”

“Well, try.”

THIS was on a Friday night. I was supposed to leave Monday to drive upstate to Keeling, to see what gave at the office of our local agent there, and expected to get up near Mariposa by Wednesday. I didn’t, because it developed that our Keeling agent had fallen into the habit of insuring horses against losing races and had cleaned out the till. That took a couple of days to wind up and I drove into Pattenville—the nearest town on my map to Mariposa that had a road running into it—just at dark the following Friday evening.

Two local yokels gave me absolutely opposite directions as to how to reach Mariposa and I finally resorted to the telephone.

“It’s a very small place,” the operator told me conversationally. “In fact, for all I know, it wouldn’t be more than that one big estate—that Alcyone Lodge estate. They don’t even have an exchange of their own.”

“Suppose you buzz them for me, dear. They’ve got a phone, no?”

Indignation—or something—held her speechless, but she nearly rattled the ear off me as she played with her plugs.

After a lot of ringing, a girl’s hesitant voice answered “Hello.”

"This is Acme Indemnity," I told her. "Sir Charles dropped his identification card in the Park South Hotel the other night. I'd like to drop over and return it and speak to him a minute."

I heard her breath catch. Then she said: "Who? Who did you say it was?"

"Acme—A-C-M-E—Indemnity," I told her patiently. "The insurance company."

"What—what kind of insurance? I mean—"

"Life, dear," I told her. "Life insurance. We carry a life policy on Sir Charles and his son. We also write fire, theft, collision, credit, bonding, liability and automobile. But not on Sir Charles. Hello."

She was silent so long that I would have thought that she'd gone, except that I could hear her quick breathing.

"Who—who are you? I mean, are you an agent?"

"I'm a company detective who was given this card to deliver. Suppose you let me speak—"

"No, no. I—could I see you before you—when are you coming?"

"As soon as somebody will tell me how to get there."

"I—I'm Miss Burroughs—Milton Mallet's nurse—will you see me a few minutes—ask someone where the Swamp road is, go to the end of that, then turn right. The beginning of the estate is about two miles along that way. You can tell where it begins by the corner of the white fence. Will—will you meet me there before you see Sir Charles?"

"What? Well, sure, I guess so. What's the idea?"

"It—it's thick woods inside the fence but I'll be watching for you. You—you'll be alone?"

"Yeah. Say, what—"

"I'll be there in an hour," she said breathlessly and hung up.

I SAT in the booth, scowling at the instrument, scratching my head. Certainly if this Milton Mallet was old enough to go hoteling with blondes, he was past the nursemaid stage. The girl I had spoken to must be a medical nurse—and that should mean he was pretty ill. Mind, I do not go into the writhing

frenzy that Preeker does at the least threat to Acme's treasury, but—well, I could worry a *little* about a twenty-five-grand policy-holder:

I found the Swamp road easily enough—a narrow, rutted dirt lane that raised hell with what few springs there still were in the old convertible—and drove nearly four miles along it, turned onto the one she had described. It was as dark by then as the inside of a derby hat.

I drove through alternate patches of thick, matted forest and abandoned strips of farmland. There were no houses. The dampness of the swamp, wherever it was, still clung to the air and I presumed that that explained the abandonment of the farming efforts.

My wheels suddenly rattled in fresh gravel and, a minute later, the nose of the car turned upwards as I faced a long hill, and when I had come to the top of the hill, the white bar of an old-fashioned rail fence, whitewashed, sprang out at the left of the road. I had run past the lower corner of it before I stopped.

I sat there. The whole project suddenly seemed a little cockeyed, but finally I got out, dimmed the car's lights and crunched my way over to the corner of the fence. The night was absolutely still, smothering black. My headlights were barely a distant glow.

After a second, I got out my flashlight and played it along over the fence. The lush growth that was characteristic of the section had crowded right up to the fence line. Evergreens of some sort were crowded together, choked together, and there was underbrush so thick that my light might have come up against a green wall.

I switched off the light, scratched my head again.

A breathless, half-whispering girl's voice blurted frightenedly: "Are—are you the insurance detective?"

"Yeah."

"Wait—wait just a minute."

She must have been standing inside the curtain of brush for minutes—making sure it was me, I guess. I heard the brush crackle as she took a step—and then the situation suddenly took fire.

Flame and roar hammered out at me.

The first banging shot was so muffled

by the grotto of greenery that I actually didn't realize what it was. How it missed me was a total mystery. But the second and third vicious reports sent lead singing about my head like bees.

I gasped, tried to duck. My foot treadmilled in the loose shale and I went down to one knee. The gun behind the greenery banged again—and again. I was caught absolutely flatfooted, my own gun safely tucked away back in the glove compartment of the car. Stone kicked in my face as I floundered. I sweated ice, flung myself, rolling wildly, for the ditch at the side of the road, caught the brow of the hill and almost got tilted all the way to the bottom. Only by clawing wildly at the shale did I angle myself over—and down into six inches of soft ooze with a slop!

I scrounged around hastily, crouched on my hunkers, peering, astounded and shaken, across at the angle of the whitewashed fence.

No more shots came. Faintly, I heard footsteps running away through the woods.

I WAS thunderstruck. I crawled, red-faced, out of the ditch, went back to my car and got a couple of rags, scoured slabs of ooze from my knees and elbows. I got the gun from the glove compartment, hefted it and momentarily debated trying to breast the jungle opposite—but only momentarily. My little well-wisher was long gone by now—probably back inside the house.

I slid grimly into the car and sent it on its way between solid walls of green now on both sides of the road.

Five minutes later, the whitewashed fence turned into a low stone wall and then abruptly rose to a stone pillar. Wide spiked-iron gates filled the roadway between that pillar and its twin and through the gate I could see a comfortable, rather old-fashioned white frame Colonial house, with a wide circular driveway that led right up to the front steps, and back again. Most of the windows were lighted.

A Buick coupe stood in the driveway, directly in front of the steps.

I turned in—and the gates, evidently electric-eye-operated, swung silently inward.

I had tooled round the graveled driveway and stopped behind the other car, climbed out, before I noticed that its license plates began with M. D.—New York State's designation for a doctor's car.

That got my thoughts away from myself sharply, back to the apparently seriously sick man inside the house.

Only a screen door was closed on the front entrance of the house and as I went up, I heard a sharp, irritated man's voice in the hall inside say: "Where is everybody? What's going on here, Emma?"

"Ain't none of my affair, doctah," a dinge's voice replied wearily. "I was down in de kitchen and didn't hear none of 'em go out. They all here a hour ago."

"Where the devil's my nurse, Miss Burroughs?"

"Dunno, sir. She here las' time I look."

"By God, she won't be *next* time you look. This is outrageous."

I tapped on the door and he whirled round to face me—a blue-eyed little pink-faced gnome with stiff gray hair *en brosse* and flickering little plump pink hands. A frown clouded his round, pink forehead. "Yes? And what may you want?"

"I want Sir Charles Mallet—or his nurse," I said. "But apparently I'm not going to get them." Since nobody made any effort to let me in, I opened the door myself and stepped inside. "Acme insurance," I told him and tendered him a card.

He scowled over it. "Well?"

"Your patient, Mr. Milton Mallet, is a policy-holder of ours," I said. "Naturally, we're interested to know how seriously ill he is."

"Oh, are you? Well, he's damned seriously ill and what do you think of that?"

"How is he ill? What's the matter?"

"Septicemia. He had a—er—accident and broke a rib. The fracture compounded before they called a doctor and septicemia set in. He's a very, very sick young man."

"You don't mean he's going to die?"

"No, I don't. But that doesn't say he mightn't. You want to take a look at him? Come on."

I followed him upstairs and to a bedroom at the front of the house with my head in a whirl. Mentally I definitely

canceled all engagements north. Certainly, if ever a situation called for the earnest efforts of an Acme sleuth, here it was.

I was not let in much farther than the door. The boy lay unconscious in a large four-poster bed. He was emaciated to skin and bone, his face a bile-yellow color, except where it held high fever spots.

THE doctor swore in a long, muttering stream under his breath as he swiftly took the boy's pulse and temperature. "That damned nurse! I'll have her thrown out of the profession—leaving him like this!" he raged. "Can you imagine—"

I stood silent, while he worked swiftly. He stripped down the bedclothes and I saw the dressing on the boy's yellow, skeleton-like side. It was breath-taking—how he must have been eaten down, in the past week. The doctor, still swearing, snapped open his bag, took green soap to a washbasin in the corner, washed up, returned and stripped away the dressing. I could see the ugly, suppurating wound in the unconscious youth's side.

"Don't take offense, Doc," I finally said as he rebandaged him, "but kicking around in the insurance business for twelve years, you naturally pick up a lot of medical ideas. I thought this new sulfanilamide was supposed to take care of this sort of thing."

"Exactly—except that it just happens that this youngster has an allergy to it. Naturally, I tried it, first thing—and he nearly died in a convulsion. I only wish to hell it was as simple as that. But he's the one in ten thousand that can't take it." He finished the re-dressing, stepped back, then forward again and felt inside the bed, cursed once more. "He's had another sweat. These damn sheets have to be changed. That nurse—listen—do something for me. Go down to the phone in the hall and ask the operator to get you Miss Daniels, the nurse at Cedar Falls. Then tell Miss Daniels to get over here as quickly as she can. I'll boil that Burroughs in oil."

I went down and hunted around till I found the phone under the stairs in the front hall, cranked it vigorously, until I got my old friend, the Pattenville operator.

"How are you, dear?" I asked. "Will you get me this Miss Daniels in a hurry—like a good girl?"

"You again! What's the matter? Is Miss Burroughs leaving?"

"Now, now, I'll give you a full report later. Just get me that nurse now. It's urgent."

Damned if she didn't take me seriously—on the seeing later proposition. Apparently gossip-hunger possessed her, for she broke in as she was making the connection to say eagerly: "I'll be off at ten o'clock. If—if you happened to be by the exchange building— Hello—here's your party."

The doctor came to the head of the stairs above as I hung up. "Is she coming? Good." His driving, electric blue eyes looked down at me.

"Yeah." I attempted one more suggestion. "You don't think the kid should be at the hospital, Doc?"

"The nearest hospital is twenty miles—at Arlington. Ten of that is over roads that—well, you've been over them. That broken rib would be in his heart before we got there—or his lungs. Furthermore, I won't send a patient to that Arlington slaughter-house. It's just a plain death trap—I use the one at Keeling when I have to hospitalize a patient."

AN AUTOMOBILE'S motor sounded coming close to the gates outside, then headlights blazed in my face as I looked out the screen door. A three-year-old Chrysler coupe rolled around to stop behind mine. People got out of both doors, but not till they were coming up the steps were they in the shaft of light so that I could recognize the dynamic, mobile-featured gray-eyed man as the big man of the Park South Hotel disturbance. He came up and in, ripping off chamois gloves and scowling. "Well? Who are you?"

"He's from Acme Insurance, Sir Charles. He heard Milton was sick and came to investigate," the doctor told him, coming downstairs. "And where the hell is my nurse?"

"Nurse?" the gray-eyed man said automatically, but his lambent gray eyes had jumped to me in quick intensity. "I don't know. How did you find—how did

you hear my son was sick?" he shot at me.

"We keep in touch with our policy-holders' troubles," I evaded him. I was trying to be offhand, trying to pretend I was not mentally struck breathless by the green-eyed, redheaded girl who had come in behind him, also stripping off gloves and now shaking out her long, flaming bob as she took off a tiny green Robin-hood hat. She had skin like cream and a curved, high-breasted, luscious figure that even the plain little wood's-green suit she wore could not conceal.

"How is Milton, Doctor?" her quick soft voice asked. "Any improvement?"

"About the same. Listen—where is Miss Burroughs?"

They both looked up, finally absorbing the question. "She isn't here?" Sir Charles flung his black hat aside absently, revealing himself as frontally bald, followed it with his loose camel's-hair coat. "What do you mean, where is she? She was here when we went out an hour ago."

"Well, she's vanished. That shine you have in the kitchen sees nothing, hears nothing, and does nothing. But Burroughs has walked out and vanished, by all appearances. It's the damndest thing I ever heard of. I'm going to get another nurse."

They blinked at one another. "But where—where could she have gone?" the girl's soft voice asked. Her long-lashed, searching green eyes came up and raked mine as though she knew damned well I knew the answer.

It took me only a split-second to decide to hold my tongue—temporarily. At least till I divined what lay here.

The phone suddenly jangled down the hall. Mallet, who had had his mouth open to speak to me closed it abruptly and then said: "Get it, Nadine."

The redheaded girl nodded, walked with exquisite, quick grace to the niche under the stairs and said: "Sir Charles Mallet's residence—this is Miss Fay, his secretary, speaking . . . Who is calling? . . . Oh. Just a moment." She stepped into sight, holding a hand back to cover the mouthpiece. Her eyes were concerned. "It's Stevenson—of Casmir Brothers, calling from New York."

He flexed his hands quickly, went swiftly and took the receiver from her. "Yes—yes, this is Sir Charles. What . . . Now wait a min. . . . No. Look here. . . . Yes, yes, I know, but. . . . No, it simply can't be postponed. The others are all satisfied and . . . No, no, absolutely not. Now just a minute, I'm not exactly a fool, you know. I've spent two years getting this in shape and I'm. . . . No, I've waited as long as I possibly can. You've agreed before . . . damn it, no—" His voice was anxious almost to the point of fretfulness. "No, I tell you—wait a minute. Look—I'll have to call you back."

He slammed down the receiver, came back out, his hot gray eyes boring into mine. He was galvanized by some inner fire—presumably by the conversation he had just had. He asked me point-blank: "Well, Mr.—" he had to look at my crumpled card to get my name, "is there anything more we can do for you?"

I hesitated, but the evening was still early and I had an excuse to get back if I decided. . . .

"I guess not," I said. "Though I'm still curious to know what happened to that nurse."

"So am I," the doctor said grimly, coming the rest of the way downstairs. "I propose—"

The gray-eyed financier made a quick, jittery hand-gesture. "Please—you—you do what you like about her, Vaughan—have to excuse me—extremely urgent business. Nadine—please come in the study. Good-night, sir."

I bowed out.

I DROVE a piece slowly, back to the turn-off onto the Swamp road, pulled up at the side and tried to smoke an idea out of my hot brain.

What in the world had I stumbled into? Obviously, the gray-eyed Sir Charles was up to his ears in some important business deal—to judge from the nervousness he had just displayed. I half-wondered, half-assumed that the Casmir Brothers from whom the call had come were the Wall Street banking firm—a very fine house.

I dug up every item I could think of concerning him. The incident of the Park South Hotel—and the blonde. The desperately sick youth. The mysterious and

breath-taking matter of the nurse's heading me off from the house and attempting to put me on the spot. Was there some connection there? And the boy's unexpectedly severe illness?

My conscience reminded me that I had more than one responsibility to consider. One as a sleuth—to find out what went on. The second—and it suddenly loomed more overpowering by far than the first—to try and do what I could toward the health of our policy-holder, Milton Mallet.

For a moment, I nearly turned round and went back, to lay before the doctor exactly what *had* happened to his missing nurse. For all I knew she might have been—well, maybe doing something to harm the patient. Something the doctor should undo.

I couldn't get faith in that. I got my green book out of the dash compartment—the list of doctors in New York State who are accredited by Acme. I found that a Dr. Wilson, in Pattenville, was on the list and I drove quickly on. Not that I doubted the diagnosis or the sincerity of the medico in charge of the case, understand, but because this was almost obligatory routine—to consult our own man when we have trouble in the neighborhood.

A curb lounge directed me readily to Wilson's house on Main Street, and he turned out to be a young blond with intelligent gray eyes and a Greek profile. He had just finished a late dinner when I came in.

"We have a policy-holder over at Mariposa—a Milton Mallet," I said. "He's very sick and a little pink-faced guy with bright blue eyes is looking after him."

"Doctor Vaughan," he supplied.

"Well, what sort of doctor is he?"

"Very capable, as far as I know."

"If you didn't think so, you'd still say the same, wouldn't you?"

He laughed. "I suppose I would."

"Well, the boy's got septicemia, so Vaughan says, and can't take sulfanilamide—has an allergy to it."

"That's right."

"I was wondering what about a consul—how do you mean that's right?"

"I've already *been* called into consultation. When Vaughan found the boy couldn't abide the drug he asked me to

check up. I was there when he tried the second time—with a very small amount. It was instantly obvious that Mallet couldn't stand it."

I mused on that. "How come *you* weren't called originally? I thought you were top doctor around here."

"I wouldn't say that. The best-known perhaps. Which is probably why I *wasn't* called. They're great ones for secrecy out there, so I'm told, and Mallet probably chose Vaughan because he hasn't been here long and isn't on close terms with most of the townspeople."

"Does that mean—"

"Now stop it. There's no way you can get me to cast aspersions on Vaughan's ability. He's been here just under a year and people are slow to accept him, that's all. He had a good practice in New York, I understand, and just wanted to move to the country. I've talked to him and he knows his medicine. Particularly, he knows the diagnosis in the present case and there's nothing I can say that will help your skeptical mind."

THAT seemed to cover that. "This nurse—Miss Burroughs. You know her?"

"Yes. She's worked for me."

"Is she all right? I mean—I don't know just what I mean."

"Neither do I. She's a competent, experienced nurse."

I had a sudden dopey idea. "Is she a pretty blonde? Young?"

"She is not. She's a little mouse-like person, dumpy, with glasses."

I couldn't think of any more, so I thanked him and got up. "Exactly what shape would you say Milton Mallet was in? What are his chances?"

He shook his head. "I don't know, frankly. You'll have to ask Vaughan."

I drove slowly back down the street. It occurred to me that I should call Preeker and I went into the drug store from which I had phoned before.

"Well, you do get around," the pert little phone girl said, when I asked her to call New York. "You're a detective, aren't you?"

I mentally damned small-town listening-in proclivities and decided to censor my calls henceforth.

Preeker received my bare news with all the calm of a hooked salmon. "Stay there," he screeched. "Get more doctors—get him to the hospital! Do something!"

I said, "Sure," and hung up. I said nothing of the attempt to murder me and the disappearing nurse.

While I sat a moment after hanging up, the girl gave the phone a little nudging tinkle and when I picked it up, giggled in my ear: "You weren't really in earnest about meeting me after—were you?"

"Well, sure. Why not?"

"You know where the telephone building is?"

"I'll find it. Listen—that Miss Burroughs—the nurse that used to be out at the Mallets—do you know where she lives?"

"Uh-huh."

She told me—a little wooden house at the west end of town, where the girl lived alone. I drove out there. Apart from wasting an hour and a half hanging around waiting for some of the darkened windows to light up, I achieved absolutely nothing.

I found another phone halfway back to the drug store and had my soul-mate ring the Mallets out at Mariposa.

"So sorry to trouble you," I said when I heard the cool tones of the beautiful redhead on the other end of the wire. "But I didn't, by any chance, drop my wallet out there, did I?"

"Wallet? We haven't seen it. Whereabouts did you drop it?"

"I was only upstairs in the sick-room and downstairs in the hall. If it isn't in either place—"

"Just a moment. I'll ask the doctor."

I couldn't catch her before she left the phone so I had to wait till she came back and reported that there was no trace of it.

"It'll probably turn up somewhere. By the way, did Doctor Vaughan actually fire that Miss Burroughs when she got back?"

"She hasn't gotten back yet. But I'm sure he intends to. You see he has another nurse already here."

"Oh," I said. "It's kind of queer, isn't it? I suppose she just drove off in her car—maybe had an accident somewhere."

"Car? She has no car that I know of."

"No? Well, thank you," I said quickly and hung up—and again I got the little nudging ring from my girl friend.

"I'm off in ten minutes now," she said coyly. "Where will you meet me? In front of the steps?"

"Uh—yeah," I said, with every intention in the world of being miles from the spot.

IT WAS not till I was back in the old bus that I realized how short I was on ideas. I had exactly one and one only left. I could try tracking down the apparently murderous nurse—go back out to Mallet's estate and try my hand at searching through the hundred-odd acre of choked woods, in the dark, with my flashlight—utterly futile—or else go back and open the whole thing up to the dynamic Sir Charles and his breath-taking secretary—Or I could search out the local law and confess myself out of my depth.

Then I suddenly thought again of the blonde—the blonde who had been playing house in New York with the now dangerously sick Milton. I suddenly decided that she *must* be a piece of this tantalizing little maze—even if not the key piece. Finding her became important.

And where better to inquire than the flirtatious little telephone girl? It was a natural, if ever there was one. I even had a sudden fatuous wonder, as I drove quickly down the main street, if *she* could be the blonde.

She wasn't, of course. But she was much more of a dish than was to be expected—basing expectations on her easy availability. She was trim-figured, with black hair, Dutch-bobbed, with bangs on her forehead. Her face was a little too short, a little too flat-chinned, but she had an accommodating pair of ripe lips and her lacquer-black, long-lashed eyes were shining and electric. She had pretty legs, and she tripped down the steps, climbed in and plumped herself beside me with an engaging little smile.

"My name's Doris," she said. "What's yours?"

I told her, and gave her a flash of the old personality. "Say," I said. "There

was something I wanted to ask you before we start out. Did you ever know about a blonde that Milton Mallet was playing around with?"

And that touched off the whole smoky little situation, sent it firecracking to its startling climax so fast that I couldn't get my breath.

"That trollop at the Skytop? Madge something? I certainly do. He just called her up before I came out."

"Skytop? What's the Skytop?" I asked, before the full force of what she said sank in. "Hey! Wait a minute! What did you say?"

"I said Milton Mallet just called her at the roadhouse and made a date to meet her out behind the arbor."

"Tonight? Arbor? Where? When? Where's this arbor?"

"At the Skytop, silly. It's out behind the roadhouse. See? They have this little hill with a flat top and the Skytop is up there and they have a garage and then this evergreen arbor. She's going to slip out and meet him behind there right after her glamor-girl number at eleven o'clock. Just for a minute, he said."

My eye leaped to my dashboard clock. It was just after ten thirty. I took a long breath. "Baby," I said, "how about *us* going to this Skytop?"

WE GOT a table in a corner in the thronged supper-room. The walls were rustic, the floor was smoothly waxed hardwood, the dinge band excellent and the floor show strictly Broadway talent. Doris pouted because she couldn't sit nearer ringside and show off the fact that she was being bought champagne, but I shushed her. We had arrived just in time to hear the final encore of the blonde's blues number and I got a good look at her.

She was a luscious thing—glowing with youth, peach-bloom skin, lovely corn-colored page-boy bob and deep, deep blue eyes. Her figure was the kind that made you set your teeth and hold your breath. But—even though her voice was true and deep and throbbing in a blues number—there was a vague dumbness about her. She wasn't nearly as wise as she looked at first glance. It was in her eyes, if you searched for it, in her carefully rehearsed

pose and in her not-quite-convincing gestures. But she had more than enough to get across and no doubt about that.

"Hey," Doris wanted to know, "are you with me or mooning at that one, too?"

"Just business, sugar," I murmured. "Make it up to you, presently. Where is this arbor? No—I don't want you to come out—just tell me where it is."

"It's back behind there—almost at the edge of the hill," she said petulantly. "Is this what you brought me out for?"

"No, *sir!* Just sit here, say nothing, be a good girl and gives all the champagne you want," I said. "Plus me."

I walked out to the front door, muttered something to the doorman about my car and went down into the graveled drive.

Nobody seemed to have any interest in my strolling around to the back of the place.

The spot wasn't badly named—Skytop. It perched on a plateau on the crown of a hill high enough to have the road corkscrew all the way around it. The highway below was far down in front of the front door. The plateau itself wasn't more than a couple of hundred feet in diameter, almost circular. There were only a few trees dotted around and the arbor of evergreens out to the left of, and slightly behind, the main building. I strolled across turf, praying that there were no spooners inside—and there weren't. It was neatly planned inside, under the drawn-together tops of the trees. Rustic benches were dotted down its forty or fifty foot length, but arranged so that each was secluded by greenery from the others.

I wondered where "behind" the arbor was, but that worry evaporated upon examination. The arbor was on the periphery of the little plateau and one end backed right to the edge of the hill. No one could stand and talk there. The only possible place was at the side, where a little crescent of ground was completely shielded from all light and, curiously enough, from all sound from the roadhouse.

I risked a quick dart of my flashlight beam down the slanting edge of the hill. It was roughly barbered, a steep slope of grass down to the winding road below.

Excitement began to rise in me. I think I was beginning to get vague

glimpses of the truth, but there were still utterly obscure spots.

MAYBE I was hyper-anxious and shadow-boxing, but I suddenly was keyed up, absorbed in the possibilities of this momentary meeting. It *had* to be revealing. Whoever was coming here, it was *not* the emaciated, comatose, desperately sick Milton Mallet whom I had seen back in Alcylene Lodge. If I could catch a scrap of real evidence against somebody—or even if I could make somebody *think* I had it—it might blast out the key-log in what up till now, seemed an immovable jam.

I hurried back to my car, keyed open the rumble seat and fished inside. Then, with my hand on what I was seeking, I hesitated. The luminous dial on my watch said quarter to eleven. I could not take a chance on going back inside now. Whoever the second party to this meeting might be, he—or she—would be slipping out to the arbor any minute. I had to be in position first, or—

I got out my notebook and a pencil and, after a minute's quick thought, scribbled a note to my Doris that would keep her from prowling out here to find out what was keeping me. I called the carriage starter down from the veranda, gave him the note and a dollar.

"The girl I came in with—little girl with straight black hair—you know her?"

"Doris? Sure. Everybody knows Doris."

"What do you mean, everybody knows her?"

"Her uncle is the sheriff"—he chuckled—"and he thinks every boy who even passes the time of day with her is trifling with her affections. The guys in town are all scared stiff to come near her."

"Her uncle's the sheriff?" That gave me sudden new thought. "Wait a minute." I took back the note.

Even as I hesitated, with my pencil poised, I heard the long roll of drums inside, and then silence. Then the jovial voice of the m. c. "Ladies and gentlemen: Miss Madge Lajeune in her famous 'Glamour Girl' number—"

Hastily, I dashed off a few lines, folded the note, handed it to him and said: "Get that to her in a hurry, will you?"

"O. K."

I beat it around the corner again—my car was there so I guess he thought I was taking a powder on the girl, but I was past worrying about that now. I got to my rumble, lifted out the little box camera, fumbled out a flash bulb and a film-pack and scurried across the lawn as fast as I knew how. I got around behind the arbor, got lying on my belly on the downward slope of the hill, my gun beside me, hastily slid the pack into the camera and plugged in the flash bulb—and flattened down, waiting.

Don't get me wrong. I didn't know whether I was going to get a picture of anything or not. If I did, fine. But mostly I wanted action—any action. I was outside this whole damned thing, it seemed—it was moving, but I was not aboard. This might reasonably be expected to direct their attention at me, at least. And—now that suspicions were dancing in my mind, I was on fire to have attention coming my way. For even if the evil thing that I was beginning to suspect were correct, I was miles from having any proof—and the only present way to get it, involved gambling with the life of a policy-holder. This way, I might dynamite—

I hastily settled the box camera so it was level on the ground, steadied it with my elbow, finger on trigger—and a foot scuffed, coming across the lawn.

That was all I heard. I swear it was. Despite straining my eyes and ears, I did not hear so much as a breath. Whoever came around—and I *felt* that someone *had* come around—was as silent as the air itself.

Minutes passed. I felt sweat run down my neck and my gun-butt was hot in my left hand.

Then I caught a glimpse of the singer, Madge, coming. I could see around the front end of the arbor, and I saw her slipping quickly across the lawn, looking behind her, as though afraid of being seen. She crossed through a bar of light and I saw that she had on a yellow, long-skirted dress and her fingers were twisted nervously in a rope of pearls at her throat.

Then she melted into the blackness in front of me and was instantly swallowed by the shadow. She came to a halt. I

could hear that. Then she whispered hesitantly, "Mil—Milton."

A voice whispered, "Yes—here."

There was just a split-second—and then a solid whack!

I caught my breath, strained to hear, momentarily forgetting all about the camera. I came to, instantly. Aiming was no good. I had to hope I was pointed right. With my right hand I thumbed the switch.

THE night bloomed—and I, fool that I was, saw practically nothing of what was before me. Gun in one hand, camera in the other, I had not adjusted the reflector and enough of the glare of light hit my eyes so that I was only aware of whirling figures—of something in red writhing, whirling—and then the tongue of vicious flame that cracked out at me, exploding my flashlight and reflector into a thousand pieces almost in my face—and by the madness of hell, deflecting to blast my gun spinning wildly out of my numbed hand!

There was a split-second when panic paralyzed me. Then fear lent me ten brains. There was a little warm trickle running down my forehead. My left hand and arm were numb to the elbow.

I grabbed at the camera with my right hand—even as I whirled myself over and over. I got thumb and forefinger on the film-pack, whipped it out, flipped the camera away from me. I felt blood run into my eye and heard gasping whispers above. I was neatly spitted, helpless. I jammed the film-pack inside my coat, flung out my arms, closed my eyes and lay face up, unbreathing.

The camera was pinging and bouncing noisily down the side of the hill.

A torch beam shot out above me, settled on my face. I heard a hoarse gasped whisper—almost a moan: "Oh, dear God—we're done for—ruined!"

The second whisper was like a whip-crack.

"No! No! Look—we've killed him! Even if he isn't dead, he couldn't have seen—look—the camera! Down the hill—we've got to get it and make sure it's broken. Quick—run—the car!"

The flashbeam went away. I was soaking in cold sweat. I had never faced death

so closely, so helplessly, before and it almost seemed a miracle that I had escaped. I struggled up, started to scramble up the bank—and swung back for a feverish moment to dig out my flashlight and swing it around in hopes my gun had come to rest without bouncing all the way down the hill.

I scrambled down for it, ten feet below the lip, scrambled up again and raced around the arbor, hefting it in one hand, nursing the plate under my coat with the other. My ears were strained, but the blaring orchestra, now that I was clear of the arbor, blotted out all sound. I ran around to the front of the roadhouse, straining to hear the getaway car. I heard nothing—and then I did.

Halfway down the hill, below the level of light, on the winding round, a car started into life, jumped away. I could not even be sure in what direction it was. I sprinted back to the edge of the hill by the arbor, tried to pierce the blackness downwards.

I heard the crackle of tires, saw headlights bloom up for just a second—then saw the car veer sharply—and pass squarely over my box camera in the middle of the road below, smashing it flat. Then the headlights blacked out, the car spurted, whined away.

Far down the road, the sudden wail of a siren rose on the night—the sheriff whom I had had my Doris phone for in a last burst of un-self-confidence. But he was too late to intercept the other car.

I ran out into the roadway. When he raced up the hill a minute later, I waved him down, told him who I was and snapped: "Who develops pictures in this town? If he's in bed, get there ahead of me and tell him I want a three-minute developing job. I'll meet you there—"

He was the biggest Law I ever saw—fully six feet six and broad in proportion. Heavy black eyebrows met above his nose and his face was a dark scowl. But he stammered: "Jones—Jones' Drug Store—still open—Main Street."

It was the store I had phoned from. I threw, "Meet me there," as I ran for my car.

We reached there in a whirl of dust almost together and ten minutes later I was staring at the picture, open-mouthed.

As though a funnel had been inserted in my brain and a cascade of light poured down through it, I sensed the whole damnable, stunning little drama in one long gasping sequence.

THE picture was of Sir Charles Mallet, of his redheaded secretary—and of the blond singer, Madge. The blonde lay on the ground, eyes closed. Sir Charles, his face turned half toward the camera, was in the very act of ripping the pearls from the girl's neck. Over and behind them, the redheaded Nadine was whirling—the blur in her hand, I knew only too pointedly, was a gun.

I snatched the print under cover as the giant sheriff crowded in behind me. I whirled him round and sped him outside.

"Get a couple of your deputies," I shot at him. "I'm dynamiting the foulest murder scheme you've ever gawked at. If you never hurried in your life, do it now. Do this—"

I rattled instructions at him as I ran him out with me to my car. "You got it?" I bawled as I flung myself in and drove down the starter.

"Ye-yeah. Good Lord, you mean—"

"For God's sake, get there in time," I flung as I fairly lifted the old convertible off the ground.

I raced it, thundered and boomed over the wretched roads—till I finally skidded it to a long stop, just beyond the gates of Sir Charles Mallet's hideout, twenty minutes later, piled out and ran back—and the blood pounded in my veins. Mallet's Chrysler stood in the driveway, behind the doctor's car—apparently *he* was still here, also.

I stood there, as long as I dared, keeping out of range of the electric eye. I don't know how many minutes I strained and sweated—fifteen, twenty, till I could wait no longer.

Then I stepped forward and waved my arms above my head, the gates swung open—and the whole little horror raced to its end.

I started round the circular driveway and the front door—the wooden door was closed now, as well as the screen—came open. The doctor, carrying his black bag, came out, hesitated, talking to an angular,

tall, harsh-faced spinster in nurse's uniform.

". . . Looks definitely better to me. Hope he will be out of the coma in the morning." Then he saw me coming up the steps and broke off frowning. "Who is—oh, hello."

"Don't go just yet, Doctor, will you? I may need a witness. Sir Charles and Miss Fay are inside?"

"Ye-yes. What? Witness? What do you—"

"I'll show you!"

He blinked, handed his bag to the nurse, searching my eyes curiously. "All right. Put that in my car, will you please, Miss Daniels."

"And you'd better stay out there," I shot at her, as I hurried the doctor inside.

I closed the door behind us—and turned to face the two I had seen less than an hour before, back at the Skytop.

They had come out of a room near the back of the hall. They stood rigid, staring at me. The girl's green eyes were ghastly, hollow, incredulous, her face starch save for her rouge. The financier's gray face was like lead, his gray eyes half-dazed.

"You remember me," I said. "The insurance sleuth—and portrait photographer."

Sir Charles tried to speak, but almost choked. "You—you—"

"Yeah, me," I said and leaned my back against the door. "Just to make sure nobody starts going places before I get my chance."

"Ch-chance—" the girl's green eyes were hollow fire.

"Yeah. Chance to turn up to the sheriff—he's on his way—this rotten, deadly racket."

The silence was like sulphur. I saw Sir Charles' throat bob as I folded my arms casually. He half put out one hand—still gloved. He tried four times before he finally blurted: "Look here—that necklace—my son gave it to her—had no right. We didn't steal it."

I nodded. "I gathered that. What was it? Your last cashable item? You were down to that—with everything staked on this business deal?"

"Ye-yes." He was beginning to fear me, wonder at me.

"The kid was running riot, giving away your last few assets, sticking his neck out for trouble, keeping you jittery on one side, while this deal you've gambled the works on had you on the griddle on the other? What was the deal? Don't try to hold back on me—I warn you."

He swallowed again. "A—a syndicate," he said huskily. "Buy up ships rotting in American harbors, transfer registry and run war goods—"

"And that young hotpants running wild? That's why you went and yanked him out of the Park South—and smacked him. Right? Did you know he'd given her the pearls then?"

"N-no. I—I just found that out day before yesterday. Someone saw—saw the little fool wearing them in the show and—and mentioned it. I went to the safe and found—"

"They were gone. And she wouldn't give them back? What are they worth?"

"At—at least seventy-five thousand dollars."

"Hmmm. Well, I think I see a fair deal shaping up here. You can have the picture I got of you—in trade for the pearls."

HE STARTED forward—and stopped. His eyes swelled in stunned incredulity—and then sank into his head. "But I—I—" he stammered desperately. Little nerves were beginning to jerk his face. "I—" he could not finish.

"You mean you can't give me them?" I asked brightly. "That was what I wanted to know—"

The sound of a racing motor down the road just barely got to my ears. I speeded up a little. "How is Milton, Doctor?" I asked. "Is he going to live?"

The doctor, bewilderment and consternation in his eyes, answered: "I think he is. He has taken a sudden turn for the better. It's most mysterious, but—what is all this?"

"Did it ever occur to you that your missing nurse might have been responsible for this dangerous condition?"

"What!"

"Remember when sulfanilamide first came out, and people died from it? Not from *it* rather, but from an impure compound. Just for the sake of argument,

say the nurse found out about this compound fracture of Milton's and deliberately infected it—gave him blood-poison. Then suppose she got at your supply of sulfanilamide and added a chemical that would produce convulsions—there's dozens of them—so that it appeared that the boy was allergic to the stuff. Is there anything there that couldn't have happened?"

"My God! Why, why no. You mean she—but why, in God's name would anyone—"

"Say she didn't want him to get better too quickly. Say she—well, say she was bleeding Sir Charles here—threatening him—to let his son die."

"Why, that's absurd. He would have come to me—or some other doctor."

"He did—and what did it get him? And chew on this—she wasn't only threatening him with letting the son die. She was also threatening him with conviction of murder in at least the second degree. For, don't forget that the boy's injury was caused originally by Sir Charles. If the boy died from it, Sir Charles was guilty of killing him. Right? Hell, of course it's right. It's a million-dollar racket—as long as she could keep the boy hovering between life and death. She could suck every last damned penny that Sir Charles could raise, out of him. It wasn't a racket that could go on forever, because there was always the chance that the boy would die—or get better—and end it. So it had to be driven through fast. Probably she was feeding him *some* sulfanilamide secretly, or something, to keep him from sinking—while she threw the hooks into Sir Charles here, eh?"

The doctor's mouth was open. "Why—why, it's incredible. She—but how—"

"But how could a nurse do it? I think you've got something there, Doc. I especially think you've got something"—I heard steps running up onto the veranda behind me—"when you consider that she got very excited when she intercepted my first phone call here and wanted to meet me out by the corner of the estate. And that, when I got there, all that came my way was a shower of lead."

"You—you mean she shot at you?" he gasped.

"No, sweetheart. I mean the rat that was *really* running the racket I've just de-

scribed must have overheard her making the date, must have gotten wise that *she* suspected him and must have hotfooted it after her. When he heard her meet me and mention that I was a detective, he saw his million-dollar racket slipping and had absolutely no choice but to cut loose with a gun. Some of the bullets sprayed me—there was a pounding at the door—“but some—”

THE doctor's gun appeared from under his coat like magic. His teeth were suddenly bared. “Damn you!” It was almost torn out of him in a great sob. “How, in God's name— You can't prove—”

“I can prove a hell of a lot if those pearls that Sir Charles just stole—all right, took back—are nestling in your medicine kit outside,” I snarled. “And you're not going near that boy again—so Sir Charles can breathe easy—and talk. You're through, blackmailer. You flopped at the racket the same as you flopped at your profession—first in New York, and then here. So give yourself—”

He suddenly started backing toward the stairs. “No! No!” He shouted hoarsely. “I won't! I—send the sheriff away!” He got one foot on the stairs behind him. “Send him away—I'll still—I can still kill—Sir Charles—it's up to you—make him let me get away or—ahhh!”

I shot him from under my arm. He screamed, raised up to his toes, clutching at the blood suddenly spurting from his throat. I started forward—and some reflex action suddenly tightened his grip on the automatic in his hand. Lead suddenly roared and hammered all over the room and we dived wildly for cover. I had to fire

desperately twice before I hit him in the hand, even as he was crashing down, knocked the racketing gun spinning out of his grip.

The door crashed open and the black-browed sheriff dived in, gun in hand.

“Take it easy,” I yelled at him. “Everything's over. Did you find her?”

“Yeah! Yeah! She had two bullets in the back of her head. Who—”

“Just relax—and get a real doctor here—Doctor Wilson. We need him even if he can't save that one for the chair.”

AN HOUR later, the sheriff accompanied me when I left his office and started out toward my car. “Listen,” he said. “I ain't saying you didn't do a hell of a smart piece of work. How did you start suspecting this croaker?”

“Any doctor that doesn't use the hospital nearest him—well, it's usually because he is barred from it. That—in spite of crazy medical ethics that won't let other doctors knock him—means he's not much good. From there—well, think it out for yourself.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he mused. “Then he suddenly straightened. “You going back to get Doris, eh? You like her, hey?”

I looked at his bulging muscles, his giant figure and swallowed. “Well, to tell the truth, I've got to get up to Albany in a hurry. There was nothing personal with Doris and me. I—uh—just offered her a business proposition—fifty bucks to guide me out there and—well, give me a front. Here's the fifty—” I hastily gave it to him. “She—she'll understand.”

I left him staring blackly at the bill, and drove quickly away from there.



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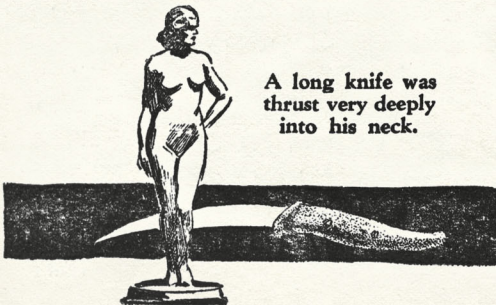
TRY THIS ON YOUR KNIFE

by John Earl Davis

If the cops had ever heard of a crime passionel that's what they'd have called this one. As it was they dubbed it "just another one of these here now 'fatal kiss' killings." And they weren't far off at that. Take a lady with a roving libido, a lad who lives for lechery alone and a husband with a collection of the sharpest knives in town and murder under any name smells just as foul.

AROUND headquarters they've always called it a routine, cut-and-dried case. A pushover, where the answers come one, two, three, and there's nothing more but formalities—and the pushing of a switch up in Ossining.

Maybe so. It's a cinch the answers came easily enough—all but one of them. Just one angle: it wouldn't have cut any ice in court, but it was at the bottom of everything that happened. It was wacky, but it made sense out of a crime that



A long knife was thrust very deeply into his neck.



otherwise would have been just one of those things.

And nobody knows that angle but me—and, of course, Swan himself. But Swan isn't likely to go around telling about it.

The first time I saw him was funny. It was my first night on that beat out in the sticks, and I was being very good—checking on everything, not letting anything get by me. You know the way a young cop is likely to be, just getting started.

All right. I had to keep busy, or just go to sleep out of being bored. It was that dull out there. Along about midnight I'd just about sold myself on the idea that nothing was stirring, not even a rat, when I stopped at this little shop to try the door the way I was supposed to do all along the line.

Well, there was a light in this place, way toward the back, and I stopped to look. The shop had a glass front, without any lettering on it, but it hadn't been washed in years, and I pressed my nose against it to see what gave. What I saw was plenty to start me moving.

A figure was crouching at the other end of the shop—a man. He was bent in front of a small safe, working on the dial. So, I thought, my first night out here . . . I felt excited. I gripped my nightstick tighter and moved to the door and put my hand on the knob.

That was just as he got the safe open. He must have heard the first little noise I made, for he shot one fast, scared glance over his shoulder and slammed the steel door fast, pushed the handle over and twirled the dial, almost in one motion. Then he got up and came directly toward the door, while I was still trying it and finding it locked.

He opened the door and stood there a second, looking at me squarely, without blinking. A big man, that: a little under six feet, maybe, but very broad and solid-looking. His head was square, almost like a building block, his mouth was wide, and his eyes were like quiet pools.

After that first second he smiled and said: "You're new, aren't you? I'm Swan—I belong here. Just checking up to see that everything's all right. Hate to be robbed, you know"

I must have hesitated for a moment, wondering whether he was telling the truth. There was something about this that didn't seem quite complete. I couldn't quite get the picture of a man opening his own safe at midnight just to see if he hadn't been robbed—then closing and locking it quick at the sight of a cop.

Maybe he guessed what I was thinking. Anyway, he said: "Won't you come in and see my shop? We might as well get acquainted. You'll always be welcome here."

So far I hadn't spoken a word. I nodded, and walked in, and he closed the door behind us. I noticed that he glanced quickly at the window and the door, and that there was a quick flicker over his face as if he had just come to a decision of some kind. A simple enough decision, as I learned later, but it meant plenty.

He waved to a counter that ran the length of the narrow store space. "My work," he said proudly. "People buy these things." His voice rose a little on that word "buy" as if he were pleased but a little surprised.

Well, those things were wooden miniatures: all birds and animals, and the slickest pieces of wood carving I've ever seen, before or since. They were scattered over the counter, and they filled two or three shelves behind the counter. There wasn't another thing in that shop for sale.

And the prices! He had tags on a lot of them: a little dachshund, sleek and very life-like, for ten dollars; a seal, with a ball on its nose—same price; a tiny penguin, less than an inch high, but perfect, for twenty-five dollars. Some things were higher, nothing less than five.

He saw the look on my face, and he smiled. "Yes, they pay those prices. And when they don't want to pay, I don't sell. After all, I have a little put away, I don't need to starve. Now maybe you would like to see—"

BUT HE didn't finish, and I wasn't listening anyway. A door had opened at the far end of the place, and a woman came out, blinking at us sleepily. She had on pajamas and a dressing gown, which were neat and pretty and modest—nothing special. I wouldn't have noticed them much in any case.

For the woman was beautiful, even without make-up, even with that sleepy frowziness that hangs over anybody who's just gotten out of bed. Which is saying something. She was small and young. Her face was a perfect—well, oval, I guess—the skin dark and smooth. And a mass of jet black hair fell down to her shoulders.

She said: "I heard you talking, Swan, and I wondered who was here. Is anything wrong?" She looked at me then, her eyes mildly inquiring.

Swan went and took her hand and kissed it lightly, smiling at her much as he had smiled at me. "Nothing is wrong, Bertha. Officer, this is Mrs. Swan. Bertha, Mr.—"

"Casey," I said. "I'm glad to meet you, Mrs. Swan." And I guess I meant it—at the time, anyway.

She looked back at me with a kind of sober politeness and murmured, "Thank you, Mr. Casey." Then she said, "Good night"—for both of us—and turned and went back, closing the door behind her.

There was just a moment of silence after that. I was thinking that this woman wasn't Swan's type at all—they didn't seem to belong together. Not that it was any of my business. Swan was smiling—pride again, I thought, and happiness—and now he cleared his throat politely.

"Maybe you'd like to see my work bench, Mr. Casey." He took me back by the safe, near the door Bertha had gone through. "We live back of the shop, you see. It is very convenient for me when I like to work at night. I had planned to do a little work tonight, but now I think I would rather talk."

His work table was piled high with different kinds of wood, varying in size but all very carefully arranged. There was a tray of knives with wooden handles, ranging from one long straight blade to small, strangely curved things such as I'd never seen before. All of them were very clean and very sharp, and, like the blocks of wood, they were arranged in perfect order.

"I designed some of the knives myself," he told me. "Each has its purpose, and may be used only for that." He touched some of them, running his fingers over them lightly.

I said something about his equipment and his work—how I admired them, and so on—and he beamed. "Shall we talk about it, Mr. Casey? Will you sit down? This stuff you have seen is of little importance, but—"

He checked himself, rather hastily, I thought, and pointed to the chair in front of his work bench. "If you'd like to sit down." There was a smock over the back of the chair, old and faded almost white, but clean and pressed and folded ever so neatly. He started to remove it. "I always put this on when I'm working. I'll get it out of your way—"

But I said: "No thanks, Mr. Swan. I've got a beat to cover, you know. Got to be going."

I turned to leave, and he turned with me—and then he stopped and went tense. A face had been pressed against the front window. It was gone now, but we had each seen a flash of it. A man's face, with a thin line of dark mustache.

What happened then was very strange. I mean Swan's reaction. He looked both frightened and angry, and he backed against the small safe, his hands gripping the top of it behind him. I remembered how quickly he had closed that safe at the first noise I had made on his door knob, how he had said: "I have a little put away. . . ."

I started for the door. "Probably just a curious floater," I muttered, "but I'll check on him anyway."

Swan had relaxed immediately, and was smiling again. "No, Officer, no need to bother. I can,"—his square face became very grim all of a sudden—"I can take care of it, if necessary." And looking at his big, capable hands, now knotting into fists, I didn't really doubt him.

But I went out of there just the same, and spent the rest of the night looking for that man with the dark pencil-thin mustache.

I didn't find him.

WELL, that was the first night. I saw everything, then, that was going to count in what happened later. Everything except what was in Swan's safe.

And I thought I had a pretty good idea about that. Picking up odds and ends of conversation in the bars and poolrooms

and beaneries along my beat, and putting it together with what I'd seen and heard there in the shop, I didn't have much doubt that the man had a lot of money stashed away in that safe.

And he didn't want to lose it, naturally. The way he watched his strongbox was a kind of standing joke among folks in the neighborhood. Nobody had ever seen what was inside of it, but they would all tell you it must be plenty.

So maybe I kept an extra careful watch on that shop. And when I walked by the next night I saw there'd been some changes made.

Shades had been installed. They covered the window and the door-glass, completely. I remembered the quick glance he had given the windows after letting me in, and at first I was a little sore. This guy didn't have to worry about *me* snooping.

But I cooled down right away. Maybe it was that face we'd seen at the window, just before I left. And after all, the man was entitled to privacy. He was probably working, for I could see a light through the shades.

So I gave the door knob a try, just for luck, and I was about to turn away and hit the pavements some more when I heard his step, coming rapidly toward the front. He unlocked the door and opened it just a little way, smiling and nodding. He seemed friendly enough, but distracted—and it was clear he wasn't going to ask me in.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Casey," he said. "I was working." He had on his faded-out smock, and a few wood shavings were clinging to it. A knife was in one hand. There wasn't room enough in the doorway to see what he was working on, and I didn't care.

"O.K.," I said. "Just checking. After this don't bother when I rattle the door knob at night. It's part of the job."

He thanked me and shut the door, and I went on my way, just a little sorry that he hadn't wanted me to stop and talk a while. Jeepers, that beat was dull!

Or so I thought.

But there were several things I couldn't get off my mind. One of them was that face we'd seen in the window. Another was the face of Bertha—Mrs. Swan. Not

that I had any special, personal feeling about it: I was married, and very much in love with my wife. But it was a face I wanted to see again, just the same. Almost any man would.

Not to make too much of that, I also thought I'd like to see more of Swan's little carvings. No, I don't know anything about art. But those were mighty fine pieces of work. And so I cut myself a little short on sleep and went around to the shop the next afternoon early, before time to report for duty.

They were both in, and both seemed glad to see me—he in his gentle, friendly way, she with sober, quiet courtesy. There weren't any customers just then—only the three of us. I started to look at the carvings, and Bertha came over and talked to me about them, and pretty soon Swan excused himself and went back to his bench. He had his smock on, and was carving out an eagle poised for flight. "A trinket," he said, grinning. "They're fun to do, but—" He shrugged, and went on with his work.

Bertha was holding up a little figure of a cat—so perfect and so smooth in every line I could almost hear it purr. She was saying: "This took a specially hard wood to do right. He worked on it for—"

AND then the man walked in the front door.

He was tall and smooth-looking. He wore his clothes like a model, and carried himself as if he had the world in his pocket and didn't particularly care. And he had a dark mustache, so thin and neat it could have been drawn there with a pencil.

Sure. There are plenty of mustaches like that, and this one didn't have to mean a thing. But it did—I knew it did. Seeing that face here now, I was sure it was the one that had been pressed against Swan's window, night before last.

But then what? It's no crime to look through a window. You can't pinch a man for that. I was startled, more than the incident seemed to be worth, and for a moment I just stood there looking at him.

And then I felt foolish. They knew the man. Bertha said, "Hello there,"

pretty offhandedly, and Swan got up from his bench and came along the counter to where we were. "Good afternoon, Mr. Pell," he said. "Mr. Pell, Mr. Casey." I couldn't tell from the way he spoke how he felt toward the guy.

Pell nodded and then paid no more attention to me. He reached for the cat Bertha was holding, took it and laughed a little. "Charming, beautiful, charming. Did he model it after you? You know it's much too lovely to have had any other model."

A flush swept over her face and she smiled—a little strained smile, as if she didn't know whether to be pleased or annoyed. Swan, watching them both closely, said nothing.

Pell tossed the cat in the air a little way and caught it, then looked at its tag. "Ten dollars? Cheap, very cheap. I'll take it." He put the cat in one pocket, fumbled in another, brought out a ten-dollar bill and threw it on the counter. Then he said: "We seal the bargain, beautiful?"

Without any more warning than that, he grabbed Bertha's arms, pulled her up tightly against him, and kissed her on the mouth. She resisted, pushing hard against his shoulders, and when he let her go—almost at once—she gasped and stepped back, moving her mouth but not getting any sounds out.

It all happened very quickly. I had grabbed the guy's arm when Swan came around the counter, shoving me aside, saying: "No, Casey, this is for me." Before I could do a thing he had Pell by the collar, tightly at arm's length, and was hitting his face, each side, back and forth, with return trips of the back and flat of his hand.

Smack! Smack! It was the only noise in the shop—and it was loud. Then Swan picked up Pell bodily and threw him out of the front door into the street. He came back and picked up the ten-dollar bill from the counter, balled it in his fist, and threw that after him.

"Next time," he said calmly—as Pell started to pick himself up from the pavement—"next time I will break your neck with my own hands." He said it so calmly that I was not in the least doubtful that he meant it.

AND me, a cop—I was standing there watching that. What else could I do? Swan was giving that guy exactly the treatment I would have handed out if it had been my wife, and he was doing all right without my help. Besides, I wasn't in uniform, and I couldn't see how it would do any good for me to mix in.

Bertha had started crying soundlessly, in spite of her obvious effort to control herself. She stood very straight, the tears rolling down her cheeks unchecked. Swan put his arm around her gently and said: "It is all right, my dear. It will not happen again."

Half turning to me, he said: "I am sorry that had to happen, Mr. Casey. Will you come back and have a cup of coffee with us? We will talk about other things, and forget this." And to Bertha: "Go and get coffee ready, my dear."

Bertha left obediently, and I said: "Thanks, I will." I've never turned down coffee yet. There was still plenty of time before I had to go on duty, and I wanted to know more about these people. Much more.

It seems funny, but it didn't surprise me at all when Swan glanced at his safe, folded his smock carefully across the back of his chair, then went forward and pulled the shades and locked the front door before leading me into his quarters at the back.

He said: "It is simple. . . ."

It was simple, but clean and cheerful. The door led directly into a home-like place that was kitchen and dining-room and living-room, all together. To one side—in the space behind an adjacent store—was a small bedroom, well enough furnished, with twin beds. He showed me that, and the three of us sat down to our coffee at the kitchen table.

"I like your place," I said, looking around. The back kitchen door, giving on a service alley, was hung with fresh white curtains—everything was as orderly as Swan's own work bench. I said as much, passing the compliment on to Bertha.

"Swan helps me," she said. "He is naturally neater than I." The tears were gone from her face now. She had freshened her make-up—lightly, inconspicuously—and she seemed more beautiful

than ever. I admit that for just a minute I had to think pretty hard about my own wife, to get myself straightened out.

Swan smiled indulgently and went to a shelf on the other side of the room, where a row of pipes was ranged in front of half a dozen large tobacco cans. "My only luxury outside of my work," he said. "My pipes, and my Thursday night at the movies."

He sat down again and got a pipe going. "This Pell," he said easily, "is not a very nice person. I do not know how he gets his money, but it is not good. He has come into the shop now and then to look at things, and I have always tolerated him. Why not? But now of course it is different—eh, Bertha?"

Bertha, looking into her coffee cup, nodded and said nothing. Swan laughed. "It is all right. We will forget about it and talk of other things."

We did. We talked until I had almost forgotten about the time, and had to hurry getting back to the station. It was a pleasant hour I'd spent in that kitchen: the first—and the last—before the show-down.

AFTER that I didn't get around there in the daytime for a while, but I got to seeing a good deal of Swan at night. Once in a while he would come to the door when I tried the knob. He had always been working, and he seemed driven on by an inner excitement that I couldn't explain—and he wouldn't.

Then came the night—a Wednesday night, I have good reason to remember—when he came to the door and said: "I would like to walk with you a while, Mr. Casey. I have been working hard. Excuse me—"

He closed the door in my face. Presently the light went out behind the blinds, and he was with me again, without his smock. He locked the door carefully, and we started to walk.

He didn't talk at first, but I could feel that he was keyed up, the way a man is when he's working like sixty on a job he wants to finish, and has just begun to see that it's going to come out right.

Just to break the silence, I said: "You work pretty hard, Mr. Swan. All day and most of the night too. I should think

you'd be pretty tuckered out sometimes."

He glanced at me queerly in the light of a street lamp we were passing. "It is different," he said.

I didn't have any idea what he meant by that, and at first I didn't ask. I felt that maybe he wanted me to, but I wasn't sure. So we walked along like that for a while, and pretty soon we were entering a little park they had in that neighborhood. There were a few dark corners in there, and I always thought it worth at least one quick look a night.

We went slowly down the tree-shadowed walk, apparently the only things stirring in the whole place. At last I said: "What is it you're working on, that it's so different from the other things?"

He drew a deep breath. We were approaching a little pavilion in the center of the park: a quiet place, surrounded by trees. He was ready to tell me something important to him. I knew it. And then, as we swung around a big elm, I stopped suddenly and put my hand on his arm. "Let's get out of here," I whispered.

But he had seen. There, in that little pavilion, were two figures standing close together. A tall man—a small woman. She was standing on tiptoe against him, her arms pressed over him, her hands clasped behind his neck. The lights of a passing car swept over them at that moment. There wasn't any doubting.

Bertha—and Pell.

I felt sick. They hadn't heard us, and I pulled Swan away from there in a hurry. Not that there was any trouble. He came willingly enough, and when we were out of the park he said: "It is all right, Casey. Don't worry about it. I'd like to go home now—alone."

I let him go. But I *was* worried. I thought about that day when he had thrown Pell out of the shop and said, oh, so calmly: "The next time I will break your neck with my own hands." Much as I liked Swan—and sympathized with him—I couldn't let things like that happen on my beat. Not if I ever expected a promotion.

So I made it a point to go back there, a little later. The light was on behind the blinds, and I decided it was all right. He was working again—poor guy, probably trying to get his mind off what he'd

seen there in the little park pavilion.

But as I tramped the streets for the rest of the night, I couldn't get my mind off any of it. Everything seemed to fall into place now: the way she'd blushed and half smiled, when Pell made that first verbal pass at her about the cat, the way she'd been stymied for something to say when he kissed her, the way she was silent when Swan had talked about Pell afterward.

A slut, I told myself, a slut and a snake. And that poor guy Swan, who never did a bit of harm to anybody. . . .

Just the same I was worried. When I went home in the morning I was still worried, and when I went on duty that night I was only a little relieved to know that nothing had happened so far.

Because something was going to happen. I felt sure of it. Every bone in my body felt it.

AT FIRST I thought maybe I'd been wrong. The beat was quiet, and when I tried Swan's door early in the evening it was O. K. There was no light behind those blinds, but that was all right—I remembered that this was Thursday, Swan's night at the movies. I wondered where Bertha would be, and the answer I gave myself made me swear under my breath. The slut!

But I couldn't shake off the feeling of uneasiness that came with the memory of Swan's big strong hands, the grim look on that square face of his when he caught Pell looking through the window.

So I was back there again about ten o'clock. If I'd only got there half an hour earlier—

But I didn't. . . . The lights were still out. It was a double feature movie and Swan wouldn't be back yet anyway. I tried the door—and then I began to give out sweat. *Cold* sweat!

The knob turned too easily in my hand. The door opened under my slight pressure. I knew that lock was busted.

I went in, and shut the door as tight as I could behind me. The shades kept it dark. I found my flashlight and turned it on, following it back to the light switch—and stopped, calling on saints I thought I'd forgotten. My beam of light focused on the safe—and what was slumped in front of it.

Pell, still dressed like a tailor's model—but no longer dapper. He was on his knees, his head resting against the safe door. His right hand was still on the combination dial. But it wasn't moving, because a long knife was thrust very deeply into his neck. And there was blood—a good deal of it.

I got the light on quick and knelt beside him. But there was nothing more to do for Pell this side of embalming. I looked at the knives on Swan's work bench and then back at the knife in Pell's neck. It was the big long-bladed one I had noticed among the others the first night there.

From there on, I probably didn't handle it quite according to regulations. I started out right. I got up and went toward the front door, intending to report to headquarters. I already knew that there wasn't a phone in Swan's place.

I had gotten just halfway to the front when the door opened, and Swan came in. He looked startled and puzzled and angry—all at once. He said: "I saw the light, Casey—what is this about?"

I pointed to the back of the shop, where the body was. I didn't say anything, just watched him. He looked at the body, then looked at me. He frowned, rubbed a big hand over his square chin, and said, "Oh!"

After that he walked past me to the safe, and the first thing he did was to see whether it was unlocked—which it wasn't. He stood up then and faced me, hardly wasting a look on Pell's body.

I said: "Where've you been, Swan?"

He shrugged. "Movies. Just got back. How did this happen?"

Look: I liked the guy, but this was too cool for me. I said: "Let's hear more of your side of the story. This man has tried to rob you. He has—uh—insulted your wife. He—"

"What?"

WE BOTH looked up. Bertha was standing in the doorway. She looked just as I had seen her that first night: pajamas and dressing gown, no make-up, black hair tousled from the pillow. She came ahead a couple of steps, looking at us inquiringly, until she saw what was there with us.

Then she opened her mouth to scream

—and got her hand there ahead of the noise. She put the other hand against the wall, to steady herself, and for a moment she stood there rigid, breathing deeply. Then she slowly began to slip.

I caught her, and before I could stop him Swan was gone through the rear door. But in a minute he was back, with cold water and a cloth. I mopped her head, and presently she opened her eyes.

"All right," she said. "I—it was a shock, that's all."

The slut. I suppose it was a shock for her.

I had a whistle. I dug it out and gave it to her. "Mrs. Swan, please go to the front door and blow that until somebody comes. Then bring it back to me." I made a mental note to wash that whistle good in boiling water before I ever used it again.

She nodded and followed my directions quickly, as if she was glad to get away from that sight in front of the safe. Pretty soon a guy came up to the door, wondering what it was all about, and I told him to phone headquarters. Then I had Bertha close the door, to keep out the curious mob that would gather.

I said: "Mrs. Swan, where was your husband tonight?"

Without hesitating she answered: "At the movies."

"What time did he leave?"

"He always leaves about eight o'clock, maybe a little before."

"Never mind always. What time did he leave tonight?"

She looked at me quietly a minute before answering. "About the same time, I guess."

"What do you mean, you guess?"

She ran her tongue between her lips, once. "Well, I went out about seven, myself, to visit a sister of mine. But Swan was going to the movies."

Swan nodded placidly. I turned back to Bertha.

"What time did you get home?"

"About nine."

"Was the lock broken on the front door when you came in?"

"I don't know. I came in the back door from the alley. I often use that door."

"And after that?"

"I went right to bed. I woke up when I heard your voices."

Maybe so, I thought. Maybe so. The sister would probably back her up when the time came. And for all I knew she was telling the truth. Still. . . .

I had an idea. I said: "Pell thought he was going to get into that safe. And he didn't have tools. Mrs. Swan—" I hesitated. This was a nasty thrust, but I felt nasty. "Mrs. Swan, do you know anybody interested enough in Pell to give him the combination?"

"I do not!" She fairly whipped the words at me. I felt as if I'd been slapped in the face by them.

Swan gave me his gentlest smile, though. He said: "That couldn't happen, Mr. Casey. Nobody knows the combination of that safe but me. I'm quite sure of that."

The way he said it made me sure of that too. Pretty sure. But still there was Pell's hand on that dial.

I was all ready to start on another track when more cops barged through the door, and after that I was second fiddle. I made my report, and the headquarters boys started in to ask questions. So I began to wander around.

I wasn't sure what I was looking for. I went back to the Swans' rear apartment, found everything in order in the kitchen. In the bedroom, it was the way you see it after a woman has turned in: hairpins on the dressing table, the top off a cold cream jar, a few strands of hair on the comb, and so on.

One of the beds certainly looked as if it had been slept in. The covers were thrown back, the sheets and pillow rumpled. Under the bed was a pair of shoes—Bertha's, without a doubt.

The other bed was still made up, but there was something a little wrong about it. I went over there and looked at it closer. It didn't have that fresh perfection of a bed that's been made and then let alone.

I HAD a hunch. I went after that bed: I pulled back the covers, and then pulled up the mattress. And I found something. It was that faded-out smock of Swan's, pushed into a ball and left there.

I looked it over carefully. There were splotches of blood.

Well, I surely hated to do it, but there

wasn't anything else to do. I took the smock out and gave it to the guy in charge. One look was about enough for him. "This yours?"—and so on. Swan still seemed to be calm, but I hated to think what was going on inside of him.

I didn't want to watch him any more. I wandered up front and looked at the door lock. Carelessly first, and then more closely. That was a funny thing—I couldn't believe it at first, but it was so. The marks told me. That lock had been busted from inside!

Well, I thought about that for a little while, and gradually the picture came clear. It had to, because I'd seen all the parts of it—or most of them, anyway. All they'd need in court. I went back to the head man, who was still going after Swan hot and heavy, and I said: "Pardon me, Lieutenant, but I've got a question I want to ask. I think it's important."

Probably he should have hung me by my eyebrows for that, but he just looked a little surprised and said: "All right, make it snappy."

Then I turned to Bertha and said: "Mrs. Swan, why did you kill him?"

Funny. Nobody said a word for a minute. The lieutenant just raised his eyebrows, and the rest of them stared at me.

So I talked fast then, trying to keep them with me. "Swan," I said, "would never have used his own wood-carving knife on Pell. He's too proud of those knives—he keeps them clean and in order. For Pell's neck his hands are enough."

"Psychology?" the lieutenant murmured, not without sarcasm.

"And here's more of the same," I said. "He is naturally neat and fussy. Mrs. Swan isn't. Which one of them would get that smock bloody, then ball it up and put it under a mattress? Not Swan—he couldn't. Not in a million years. If he hid it, he'd fold it first."

Swan didn't say a word. Bertha glared, and the lieutenant cleared his throat.

"If you look at that lock," I went on hastily, "you'll find it's busted from the inside. To make it easy for Pell to get in here. Why? I know enough about Swan to know that he isn't having his own safe robbed by anybody—least of all Pell. But I know enough of Mrs. Swan—"

"Stop!" she screamed. "Shut up,

you—" I won't go on with what she called me. It isn't fit to print, not even fit for a cop to repeat.

When she was through I said: "So you did give him the combination, or what he thought was the combination, and then fixed it so he could get in here—so you could kill him. *Why did you kill him?*"

She began to sob now. And after a little she began to laugh. It was pretty horrible, the way she laughed. And with the laughter came out gouts of words like these: "He *would* throw me down, the—" (I can't repeat it, but it was filthy.) "And he thought after that I'd give him the combination to that safe—"

I finally managed to shut her up for a minute. I said: "I was here that day Swan had to throw him out on your account. Remember? Had he ever acted like that in front of Swan before?"

"No!" She screamed it. "That was the brushoff, you fool. He was signing off on me, the son of a skunk, the—"

"All right," I said. "Then the other night in the park, after that. Maybe you don't know it, but Swan and I saw you then. You were arguing with him, weren't you—trying to get him back?"

"Yes." She uttered that so low I could hardly hear it. Her face went perfectly white, and her mouth was bitter. Then she raised her head, her eyes savagely defiant. "No! I wouldn't have taken him back. It was a trap—the safe—and the piddling, sneaking fool bit on it. And he's paid, and I'm glad, and you can all—"

WELL, they took her away pretty soon, and I stopped long enough to tell Swan how sorry I was. Curiously, he didn't seem much affected. He said: "It is too bad. I will help her all I can. But now I must work. Good-night."

And there was a gleam in his eye when he said: "Now I must work."

Well, he did help her. Paid for a high-priced lawyer all the way through the trial, but he never went to see her once. The day she was strapped in the chair I went back to see him. We went back in his kitchen and had a pipe together.

I said: "Swan, I'm awfully sorry."

"Yes." He nodded gravely, then brightened. "Ah, but she is finished!"

It sounded horribly callous to me. I

didn't know how to answer. But he didn't notice. He got up and started to the front, where the safe was. "I'll show you." There was a little silence, and then the click of the handle, the squeak of the door and he was with me again.

He was carrying something, tenderly, with loving care. "My sweet one," he said. "My only faithful. She is finished."

And then he showed me the thing he'd been working on, night after night, behind those drawn blinds in his shop. The richest, the sleekest, the finest of all his wood carvings. But not a bird or an animal. No. A woman—a radiant thing, if you can get radiance into wood. And he had.

She was nude: perfectly formed and beautiful. Delicately carved hair to her shoulders. Features of the utmost grace. At first I thought I saw a hint of Bertha in her, but then it was gone.

Perhaps he guessed my thought. "It started with her," he said, "when I loved her—when she was faithful. That was a long time ago. There were other men, you understand, before this one. . . ."

He was silent for a moment or two, shaking his head a little sadly—but not

bitterly. Then he shrugged and looked back up at me, with the trace of a smile.

"I didn't work on it for a while, after I first found out, but as time went on it didn't matter any more. When this other fellow came along, I didn't even notice. I threw him out, yes—because I could not have him insulting me and my wife, in my own shop. But it didn't matter.

"Because I had only to finish my lovely one, the work of my own hands. She was the only one that counted."

So that was the angle that never got into court. And that was the reason. . . .

I said: "This was why you were guarding your safe so carefully?"

He nodded.

"But your money—"

He smiled indulgently, got up and walked over to the shelf where he kept his pipes. "My friend," he said, "five of these tobacco cans are full of currency—except for a little stale tobacco on the top.

"But it doesn't matter, Casey. The other thing—my faithful one—that is what counts."

I didn't argue with him.

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COFFEE FOR A KILLER

An Inspector Allhoff Story

by

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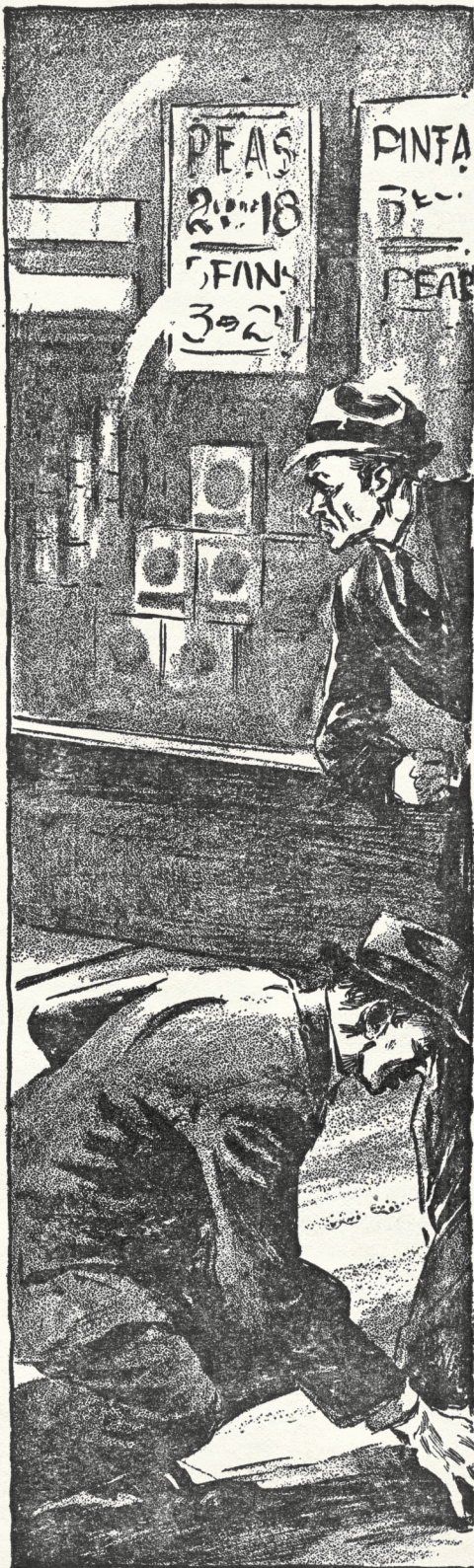
A killer with money to burn, sets a match to a murder flare-up that lays a smoke-screen before the whole police department—till Inspector Allhoff, coffee connoisseur, stirs up grounds for an indictment in a steaming cup of his favorite brew.

CHAPTER ONE

Brains vs. Stoolies

I SAT gloomily at my desk staring at the travel page of the evening paper, feeling very much like the German High Command standing at Calais gazing at the Dover cliffs across the channel. Pictorially, Miami Beach, palm lined and glistening in the sunlight was very, very attractive. The siren words strung together by the Chamber of Commerce press agent added fuel to the discontent in my breast. With a sigh I dragged my mind back from the waters of the Gulf and dumped it in the lap of reality.

I looked around the room in utter disgust. It was four o'clock of the afternoon and the lights were already lit. The chipped and soiled wood of the walls encircled the frenzied disorder of Allhoff's



They proceeded to beat the be-jeezes out of Battersly.



apartment. Dirty dishes floated in the sink like a fleet of dispirited garbage scows. Allhoff's soiled linen which had been worn at least once, lay scattered across the floor. Cigarette ash and paper which had missed the waste basket formed sporting hazards for the cockroaches in their march toward the garbage can. The general atmosphere was one of gloom, dirt, disorder and melancholy.

Directly in front of me, Battersly's blue-uniformed bent back arched over his desk as he applied every brain cell to following the adventures of his favorite comic strip detective. On my left sat Allhoff.

His swivel chair was pulled as far up to his desk as possible. His chest was pressed against its top. On his left the stained coffee pot gurgled on its electric base. Before him lay a sheet of yellow paper on which he made meaningless marks with a pencil as he stared broodingly off into space.

The feeling of depression that was upon me lifted somewhat as I watched him. After several years, I was quite fed up with Allhoff's being right, thoroughly tired of his instinctive diagnosis of whatever problem the commissioner laid in his lap. This time, however, he had established a record. For forty-eight hours he had been as completely baffled as the veriest rookie on the force. There was no sympathy in my heart.

"Perhaps," I said aloud, "you're slipping."

He made a sound like a misanthropic panther. He picked up the coffee pot and filled his cup. He ladled in sugar with a prodigal hand. He drained the cup before he answered.

"Am I a police inspector?" he demanded. "Or a yogi? Can I solve a murder that doesn't make any sense after they've burned up all the clues? The whole thing's ridiculous. I don't see any point in anyone's killing Murdock."

"He was a banker, wasn't he? From what I hear bankers have lots of enemies. Industrial and communistic."

"Enemy or not," snapped Allhoff, "why didn't the killer take the dough? Killing a banker at his home on a night when he happens to be carrying ten grand in cash is logical enough. But why scatter the

dough all over the floor and leave it there? It doesn't make any sense at all."

I lit my pipe and from sheer boredom pursued the conversation.

"Are you sure the butler was telling the truth about the money?"

"Of course. He found the body, stabbed. He saw the dough all over the floor. When he called Murdock's wife, she saw it, too. Then while they wait for the coppers to get there the mysterious fire breaks out. Burns all the dough, half the furniture, and has begun to cremate the body when the firemen arrive."

BATTERSLY turned his attention from Dick Tracy and offered a contribution.

"Do you think the fire had anything to do with the killing? Or was it just accidental?"

"How the devil do I know?" said Allhoff testily. "The fire inspectors say there was gasoline in the room. But I don't know. Damn it, I don't know anything. I wish to God I'd never heard of the case."

He refilled his cup with coffee the color of Pluto's blood, and glowered menacingly at the far wall. I puffed at my pipe and grinned at his back.

It was not, I knew, the abstruse angles of the case that had him sore. He was nursing a personal insult. His ego, his pride, had been wounded. Heretofore, whenever the commissioner had handed a case to Allhoff, it had been all Allhoff's. No one else got a tittle of credit nor an ounce of authority.

This time, however, recognizing that there was absolutely nothing to work on, the commissioner had assigned two men to the case. He was playing two angles. Allhoff had brains and was, without doubt, a reasoning creature. Gebhart had stool-pigeons. The commissioner had assigned them both to the Murdock killing with orders to work independently. If intelligence failed to bring up the solution, perhaps the stoolies would come through, and vice versa. The commissioner, quite sensibly, was playing the percentage. But to Allhoff it was a mortal blow.

There was no living person whom Allhoff liked. There were several whom he hated. There were at least two whom he

hated with every bit of the venom stored up in his twisted little soul. One of these was Gebhart. For twenty years, while both of them were rising to inspector's rank, they had fought. Allhoff detested Gebhart as a moron whose promotions depended solely on the fact of his obtaining a better class of stoolies. Gebhart hated Allhoff as a muscle man always fears the brains he cannot understand. They had double-crossed each other continually for two decades. On at least three occasions they had locked themselves in the detectives' room and proceeded to hammer each other into insensibility.

And now the commissioner had thrown a crowning insult at Allhoff by implying that Gebhart had as much chance of breaking the Murdock murder as himself. To add injury to that insult Allhoff, in some forty-eight hours, had accomplished precisely nothing. I knew he was eating his miserable heart out with worry that Gebhart would get something first.

About fifteen minutes before quitting time, I heard the footsteps on the stairs. Allhoff's nose was buried in his coffee cup as a sharp rap sounded on the panels of the door, and without waiting for an answer, Gebhart walked in.

With him was a girl—a brassy blonde of indeterminate age. She was pretty as polished rock is pretty. There was nothing soft about her face and she carried her shapely body like a flag. Allhoff took the cup away from his nose and set it down clatteringly in the saucer. He glared at Gebhart who grinned back mockingly at him.

"This, baby," he said to the girl, "this slum is where the brains of the police department hangs out. Sort of needs a feminine touch, don't you think?"

"Damn you," said Allhoff thickly. "What are you doing here?"

Despite the challenge in his tone, Gebhart maintained his bland amiability.

"This is Miss Whalen," he announced. "My girl friend. Had a date with her so I brought her along."

"Brought her along for what?" snarled Allhoff. "If this is official business, state it and get the hell out."

Gebhart kept his smile. He waved the girl to a chair and took one himself. He crossed his legs and lit a cigarette. All-

hoff still glared at him. I knew the depth of his emotion as I watched his hand tremble when he poured more coffee.

"Say," said Gebhart, as if he'd just thought of it, "ever hear of a guy called Murdock?"

Allhoff froze with the cup lifted halfway to his lips. His eyes narrowed and his voice was taut as a spring when he spoke.

"Stop clowning, damn you! What about Murdock?"

Gebhart looked up. "Why," he said with phoney innocence, "he's dead."

THE Whalen girl laughed uproariously and Gebhart joined in. Allhoff put down his cup and slopped coffee in the saucer.

"Very funny," he said with heavy sarcasm. "Very, very funny. And now that you've given us our laugh, will you kindly take your doxy and get out of here."

I wasn't quite sure what he meant by that last and Gebhart wasn't either. However since Allhoff was staring at the blonde we both gathered that it was an insult directed at Gebhart's lady friend. Gebhart stood up and now his mocking smile was gone.

"I'll get out," he said, "when I tell you what I came up here to tell you. I'm here to tell you about Murdock."

"You've told me he's dead," said Allhoff. "That I already know."

"That's all you *do* know. I know who killed him."

Allhoff's face became white. He said, "It's a lie," in the tone of a man who was very much afraid it wasn't.

Gebhart laughed. When he spoke his voice was high, excited and vicious.

"It's true," he said. "So true it's going to break your miserable little heart. For years you've been throwing your weight about this man's police department. For years you've been boasting that you're the only guy with an ounce of competence. Well, this time, I've licked you. You haven't even got a clue yet and I've broken the case. Maybe you'll shut up for a while now, Inspector."

"You will get out of here," said Allhoff speaking like a machine gun, "and with you, you will take your——"

This time there was no doubt he meant

the blonde and there was no need of etymological research to find the definition of his word. The Whalen girl flushed and took a step toward him. Gebhart put a hand on her arm, said, "I'll handle this, baby," and towered suddenly over Allhoff's desk.

"You lousy little bum," he roared. "For years the whole damned department has hated your guts. But I've hated 'em more than all the others put together. For years I've tried to put you in your place and now, by God, I've succeeded. I've broken the Murdock case and you haven't moved an inch on it. What about the great Allhoff brain now? Sometimes I think your legs are longer than your mind."

For a moment there was a silence in the room tense as a coiled spring, vibrant as the instant before an air raid alarm. Allhoff put a hand on his desk and slowly pushed his chair back. At the edge of his chair where his knees should have been, two leather pads abruptly terminated his thighs. Battersly made a strange hissing sound as he sucked in air and broke the silence. Allhoff's voice came deeply from his chest like that of an avenging angel.

"For that," he said, "you will apologize on your knees."

The blonde laughed off key. "Apologize? To a runt like you? He could lick you with one hand."

Allhoff's right arm moved rapidly. He opened a desk drawer and closed it again. His Police Special was in his hand and its muzzle drew an accurate bead on Gebhart's heart.

"Can he lick *this*?" said Allhoff.

Gebhart looked at the gun and his jaw was set firmly. The girl's eyes were wide and worried. Battersly stared at the tableau like a peasant at a skyscraper. I put down my pipe, stood up and said sharply, "Allhoff!"

"Keep out of this, Simmonds," he said, without taking his eyes from Gebhart. "You," he went on, "you and that trollop will apologize. On your knees!"

Gebhart stood uncertainly staring at the gun. The blonde put her hand on his arm.

"He wouldn't dare," she whispered. "Tell him to go to hell. He wouldn't dare."

But Gebhart knew Allhoff better than that. For that matter, so did I.

"Now listen, Inspector," said Gebhart placatingly, "maybe I said too much. Maybe I—"

"Your knees," said Allhoff. "You and your doll there."

GEBHART looked at the gun, raised his eyes and looked at Allhoff. There was maniacal purpose in Allhoff's face. His little eyes were hot and bitter. Gebhart swallowed something in his throat. He put his hand on the girl's arm, and as he sank to his knees he dragged her down with him. There was murder in his gaze as he said slowly: "I apologize, Inspector."

Allhoff nodded, transferred his glance to the Whalen girl. "And you?"

I saw Gebhart's fingers tighten on her arm. She nodded her head quickly. "Me, too," she said. "I'm sorry."

"All right," said Allhoff. "Get out!"

They rose slowly to their feet. Flushed humiliation was in Gebhart's cheeks. The girl was plainly angry but fear kept her silent. They walked slowly to the door. There, Gebhart turned around.

"I'm going to get you for this," he said in a low husky voice. "I'm going to get you if it takes the rest of my life."

"Get out!" Allhoff said again, and reached for the coffee pot.

I was prepared for his explosion as soon as they left the room. It was apparent that he was keeping a volcano clamped down inside him. He had been controlling himself, maintaining an icy calm before Gebhart and, knowing him as I did, I knew he couldn't keep it up much longer. He didn't.

The instant the footfalls died away on the stairs, Allhoff swung around in his swivel chair and faced Battersly. He pounded his fists on the arms of his chair and raised his voice in a surging roar.

"Curse you!" he shouted. "Because of you, because of your arrant cowardice, I'm put in a position where morons like Gebhart can insult me. I devote my brain and body to the police department and you take half the latter away from me. You—"

He pulled obscenity out of his vocabulary like a street cleaner pulling filth from

a clogged sewer. His face was red as bougainvillea, his fists flailed the chair arm, his leather stumps kicked convulsively in the air.

Battersly sat with averted face before his attacker. Like a disciple of Gandhi, he bent before the onslaught meekly, without retaliation. Then, when Allhoff's profanity beat against my ears until I could stand it no longer, I took a hand myself.

"Allhoff," I said, "for God's sake, lay off. You'll drive us all crazy including yourself."

He paused for a moment to take breath. Then he turned on me. I shrugged my shoulders and went back to my desk. At least I had diverted his thunderous sentences from Battersly to myself. I went back to the travel page of the evening paper. Some seven minutes later, Allhoff, out of breath and epithet, shut up. He sipped more coffee sullenly, sibilantly.

THIS, I reflected on the way home in the subway, had been going on for more years than I cared to remember. It had had its genesis half a decade ago, during a raid on an upper West End Avenue rooming-house. The stool-pigeon grapevine had reported that a trio of gangsters wanted in a dozen states were hiding out at a certain address in the nineties. Allhoff had been assigned to lead the raiding squad.

Battersly, a raw rookie in those days, had been ordered to effect a rear entrance, disable the operator of the Tommy gun which, we'd been informed, commanded the stairway facing the door. Battersly got in, all right. Then, at the zero hour he developed an understandable case of stage fright, with the net result that he fled up the stairway to the roof at the precise moment Allhoff came battering through the front door.

Allhoff charged into some twenty-odd lead slugs coming with high velocity from the barrel of the Tommy gun. Most of them lodged in his legs below the knee. A week later, gangrene set in and an hour after that came the amputation.

Of course, a legless police inspector violated every item in the civil service book. But the commissioner was of no mind to lose his best man on any technicality. He arranged that Allhoff should

live in this tenement slum because of its proximity to headquarters. He arranged further that the city, through devious bookkeeping devices paid Allhoff his old salary. And with perhaps too grim a sense of justice, he had granted Allhoff's demand that Battersly be assigned as an aide. I had been thrown in the deal to keep peace between them.

Mine was a futile task. When Allhoff's legs had gone, something of his mind had gone along with them. Not that he was stupid, but there were occasions when I considered him far closer to insanity than many inmates of public institutions. Hatred and bitterness rankled in his heart and almost all of it was directed at young Battersly. He never missed a chance to extract revenge.

Personally, I would rather have walked the beat on the farthest outpost of Staten Island than loaf at a desk here. But the commissioner insisted upon this assignment and I'd spent too many years building up my pension to throw it away now.

CHAPTER TWO

Money to Burn

I ARRIVED at the tenement the following morning as Allhoff emerged from his bedroom, unwashed and drowsy-eyed. He didn't speak. He never did until he'd absorbed at least a quart of the strong brackish brew he fondly believed was coffee. He dragged himself up into his chair, handed the coffee pot silently to me and opened the bottom desk drawer.

I filled the pot with water and returned it. Allhoff opened the can he had taken from the drawer and cursed loudly. At that moment, Battersly came in, shaved and primped, his brass buttons gleaming resplendently. He saluted and headed for his desk. Allhoff's thundering voice stopped him.

"I don't ask much of you," he roared. "I do the brain work here, Simmonds handles the papers and reports. All I require from you, when you've finished keeping up with the comic strips, is that coffee and sugar be kept in the joint. You can't even do that adequately."

He held out the empty coffee can accusingly as if it were a murder weapon.

Battersly bit his lip and frowned. "It was half full yesterday, sir. I swear it was. I looked. You *couldn't* have used it all. It—"

"It's empty now," snarled Allhoff. "Get me another can. And for God's sake, hurry."

He took a worn leather purse from his pocket and extracted a quarter. Battersly put the coin in his pocket and ran down the stairs. Allhoff stared gloomily at the wall and a series of low growls came out of his dry throat. A cocaineless hophead suffered less than Allhoff minus his quota of caffeine.

His fingers drummed angrily on the desk top as time went by and Battersly did not return. A good fifteen minutes elapsed and still Allhoff had no coffee. His fingers were beating a rapid tattoo now and he was muttering to himself. Silently, I cursed Battersly. He possessed a gift for getting Allhoff in black moods. I steeled myself for the explosion which would inevitably occur when Battersly returned.

A moment later the door opened. I heard Allhoff's intake of breath as he prepared to unload a verbal barrage on Battersly's tardy head. But as he looked up he held his wrath.

Battersly stood panting in the doorway. His cap was gone. As were two buttons from his uniform. His collar was ripped and his tie askew. One eye was developing slowly but with certainty into a shiner and blood dripped from his nose on to his chest. His hair was ruffled and there were a pair of nasty scratches on his cheek.

He took a brown paper parcel from under his arm and laid it on Allhoff's desk.

"The coffee, sir," he said.

"My God," said Allhoff, "and did you go through the German lines to get it?"

"I was ganged," said Battersly. "A mob of tough guys beat me up."

"Why?" I asked.

Battersly shrugged. "I don't know. I can't figure it. Just for the hell of it, I guess."

Allhoff was staring at the wrapped-up coffee can on his desk. There was a frown upon his brow. He looked up at Battersly and said: "Exactly what happened?"

Battersly dabbed at his red nose with a

handkerchief. "Well," he said, "this mob of guys—there was five of them—was hanging out a couple of doors away from the grocery store. They never paid me any attention when I passed them the first time. Then I came out of the grocer's after buying the coffee—and that's the funny part of it."

"Uproarious," said Allhoff sarcastically. "What's funny about it?"

"Well, they got me when I came *out* of the grocery store. See? They let me go when I passed right by them. Then they get me afterwards."

"What happened then?"

"They began to slug me. Two of them held my hands so I couldn't go for my gun. The others slugged me. They knocked off my cap, knocked the coffee from under my arm and proceeded to beat hell out of me. I was half out when they quit. They was a block away when I got up. One of them had my cap. I saw him wave it at me before they scrambled around the corner of Broome Street. *Souvenir*, I guess."

ALLHOFF grunted again. I was mildly surprised that he showed no elation. The idea of Battersly's getting smacked around certainly should have appealed to him. Battersly went into the bathroom to wash his face. Allhoff remained in his brown study until Battersly reappeared, then he suddenly banged his fist hard on the desk. He opened the drawer and put away the coffee. He looked around at me and said: "Simmonds, get me a glass of water."

I stared at him. "You mean you're not going to have coffee?"

"I haven't time. I'm working now."

I went to the sink and filled a glass. "Working on what?"

"These guys that beat up Battersly." He took the water, drank it and stared thoughtfully at the door.

I watched him and felt like a guy who has seen something drop *up*. Allhoff, foregoing his coffee, was a phenomenon happening not more than once in a lifetime.

"Battersly," said Allhoff. "Go across the street. Look through all the pictures in the gallery. Carefully."

"Yes, sir," said Battersly. "What am

I looking for, sir?" He waited, puzzled.

"The guys that beat you up, you idiot. Get over there, see if you can pick any of them out."

Battersly went out while I stared at Allhoff in amazement for the second time in five minutes.

"I'm rather surprised," I told him, "at your zeal in wanting to put Battersly's assailants behind the bars."

"Battersly," he said, and the contempt in his voice was eloquent. "I don't give a damn about Battersly's assailants. Why should I?"

"Then what are you worrying about it for? The whole thing's obvious enough."

He swung around in his swivel chair and glared at me. "Is it?" he snapped. "Then go ahead, explain it."

"There are plenty of hooligans in this town who think it's smart to beat up coppers. It happens once a week. You know that."

Allhoff sighed the sigh of a man whose patience is sorely strained. "So that's all you get out of it."

"What else?"

He vouchsafed no answer. He stared at the wall like a professor of mathematics who in a few moments will have figured out how to square a circle.

After two hours Battersly returned. He laid a small square photograph on Allhoff's desk.

"That was one of the guys, Inspector. It was the only one I could recognize."

Allhoff picked up the photograph and examined it. "Frankie Splayton," he said. "All-around punk. Picked up four times. Robbery, D. and D., narcotics. Convicted twice on the last charge. Simmonds, what've you got on him?"

I got up, went to the filing cabinet at the side of the room. After a moment's rummaging, I told him: "Not much beside what you already know. He's a satellite of Danny Raleigh's."

"Ah," said Allhoff. "Raleigh, eh?"

Battersly and I exchanged glances. I shrugged. What was going on in Allhoff's head was utterly beyond me. And this time, I suspected it was also beyond Allhoff.

Battersly and I went back to our desks, leaving Allhoff still staring blankly into space. The three of us remained that way

until my telephone rang. I picked it up and listened.

"Allhoff," I said when I had hung up, "I have some news you'll be delighted to hear."

He came out of his trance and cocked an inquiring eyebrow.

"It seems your pal, Gebhart, hasn't broken the Murdock case at all."

Allhoff uttered an oath which I decided was aimed at Gebhart rather than at me.

"That was a message from the commissioner. He wants you to bear down on the case. It seems Gebhart got some information from a stoolie which seemed to crack it open but it turned out to be phoney. Which news, I assume, fills your ears with honey."

Perhaps it did, but from his attitude it wasn't noticeable. His frown had grown more corrugated, and his register of profound thought more marked.

"Raleigh," he said suddenly. "Danny Raleigh. Counterfeiting was one of his prime activities, wasn't it?"

I nodded. "That and forgery. With perhaps a killing thrown in here and there. Why?"

"Good God, I'm beginning to see it."

"See what?"

THE telephone rang again before he could answer. I listened to the message and relayed it.

"Things are happening. There was another murder, precisely like Murdock's—except they've got the guy who did it."

"The hell they have," said Allhoff. "What's the details?"

"Guy by the name of Weldon. Stockbroker. Took some eighteen thousand dollars home with him. Shot in his study. His wife heard the shot. Rushed into the room. Saw her husband dead, dough scattered all over the floor. Went to call the coppers. While they were on the way, a fire broke out in the study. They rescued the corpse but half the house burned down before the firemen got it under control."

"Interesting," said Allhoff. "But what's this about them getting the guy who did it?"

"There was a guy who'd lost all his dough in the market. Rightly or wrongly he blamed Weldon for his losses. Swore

before witnesses, he'd kill him. Was picked up near the Weldon house right after the crime. They've got him over at headquarters now. Homicide says it's cold."

"That's indicative that it isn't," said Allhoff, who had his own opinion of Homicide. "Call 'em back. Tell 'em to send that guy over. I want to see him."

I transmitted the message. At least I'd sooner having him working on the Murdock case which made some sense, rather than on the weighty problem of who beat up Battersly, which didn't.

Fifteen minutes later a burly Irish cop dragged a pale, scared little man into the office. The copper saluted Allhoff and announced: "This is Smith, sir. The prisoner in the Weldon case."

Allhoff waved Smith to a chair. Smith sat down as if he expected to be electrocuted there and then. He was a thin little guy who looked undernourished. He had a pair of wild eyes and at the moment fear had been poured into them. His fingers moved nervously at his sides.

"I didn't do it," he said to Allhoff. "I don't care what they say, I didn't."

Allhoff regarded him appraisingly and nodded his head. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if you didn't. What's your version of it all?"

Smith shifted nervously in his chair and spoke in a high-pitched voice.

"Weldon robbed me. Sold me worthless stock in enterprises controlled by him. Sure, I said I'd kill him. He took every cent I had. But I didn't do it."

"What were you doing in the neighborhood of his house?" asked Allhoff.

"I went to ask him for money. I only

wanted a stake. Enough to get started again. After all he took from me, I figured maybe he had heart enough to give me that much. I was going to see him. I got in the lobby of the house and they pinched me."

"How much did Weldon leave you?"

"Three hundred bucks," said Smith bitterly. "Three hundred bucks in the bank and less than ten in my pocket. I got a wife and two kids, too. I got—"

Allhoff waved him to silence. "All right," he said to the copper, "take him away."

"Wait a minute," yelled Smith. "Aren't you going to help me? I tell you I didn't do it. I tell you—"

"Stop telling me," said Allhoff. "I know damned well you didn't do it."

"Then why—"

"You've got to go back to the can, anyway," said Allhoff. "I'm not quite ready to spring you yet."

The Irish copper dragged him away, while Smith audibly voiced his opinion of the police department.

Allhoff drank coffee morosely for the rest of the day. Basking in his silence, Battersly and I made no attempt to engage him in conversation.

THE following day was Thursday and the package came. It was an oblong parcel, perhaps five by eight inches. It was wrapped securely in brown wrapping paper and bore a vast number of colored stamps. And since Allhoff had never received any mail in all my memory, I accepted it with a surprised air, from the postman.

"Have you a birthday coming up?" I



Tim brought the bus to a skidding halt in the snow. Belle Tucker screamed. The sign said:

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**DETECTIVE
TALES**

said as I laid it on his desk. "Looks like a present from a wealthy pal judging by all the stamps he's plastered over it."

Allhoff looked up from his coffee. He picked up the package and turned it over slowly in his hands. He grunted, then said: "Your powers of observation are improving, Simmonds. There's a buck's worth of stamps on this. Two bits would have carried it."

He studied the exterior of the package like a philatelist, making no attempt to open it.

"Well," I said, curiosity gnawing at me, "aren't you going to see what it is? Or are you afraid it's a bomb?"

He looked at me sharply. "A bomb," he said with a sudden inhalation. "A bomb, eh?"

I was surprised at his sudden serious air.

"I have no relatives," he went on. "As you are well aware I have no friends. I can think of no one who might send me anything at all through the mails."

"So," I said, "why not dump it in a bucket of water and then open it?"

His swift glance at me held contempt.

"It's lucky you're not on the bomb squad. Water's no damned good half the time. Oil is what you use." He turned his head in Battersly's direction. "Battersly. Here, take this across the street to Sergeant Averill on the Bomb Squad. Tell him to douse it in a pail of oil, then open it. Wait there until you get his report."

I blinked at him. Allhoff was no one's sucker and he wasn't a guy with any trend toward panic. Yet here he was taking my kidding suggestion as grimly as a scary old maid. Battersly got up took the parcel, with an odd inquiring glance at me and left the room. Allhoff returned broodingly to his coffee. I shook my head and clucked at him.

"And do you look under the bed for burglars at night before retiring?" I asked solicitously.

"Idiot," he snarled. "If a man tries once to kill you and fails, it's logical he'll try again."

I opened my eyes wide at that. "Who tried to kill you? When? How?"

For reply he sucked down coffee noisily. Then after the cup had clattered back

into the saucer, he said slowly: "That Danny Raleigh. His last rap, as I remember it, was counterfeiting. But he beat it in a federal court. It was bad stuff he'd been passing. Easily spotted."

"Well," I said, "what about it? What's that got to do with some guy trying to kill you?"

But now he ignored me completely. He concentrated on his coffee and pretended I wasn't there. I sighed, after a while, and went back to my desk.

BATTERSLY returned, taking the outside stairs two at a time. He burst, flushed and breathless into the office.

"My God," he said, "what do you think, Inspector?"

Allhoff and I looked at him. I remarked that Allhoff seemed calm and in no wise curious about Battersly's excitement.

"It was a bomb," cried Battersly. "Set to go off when that package was opened. It really was, Inspector."

"Sure," said Allhoff with the air of a man who has just been told that two and two reach a total of four.

"Good Lord," I said, "who'd be sending you a bomb? We're not even working on a case, except that screwy Murdock thing and we certainly haven't made any progress there."

Allhoff yawned. "Listen," he said, "you think you can get me some heroin from Narcotics?"

"Some *what*?"

"Heroin. It's a mixture compounded of so many parts morphine, combined with—"

"I know what it is. I just wondered if I heard you properly. What do you want heroin for?"

"Just get me some and shut up," said Allhoff. "Five or six ounces should be plenty."

"Five or six ounces," I said as I moved toward the door. "My God, the whole damned town can get high on that."

As I crossed the street to headquarters I reflected upon a very peculiar circumstance. Allhoff had appeared vastly more interested in the fact of simple assault upon Battersly than he was in an attempt upon his own life. Pondering this I was one bewildered police sergeant when I brought him back his six ounces of heroin.

Casually he tossed the drug into a desk drawer. Then turning to Battersly and myself, he said: "Tomorrow morning I want a number of people here. I want them here early. Get 'em before they've had a chance to get their breakfast, if you can. Here's the list. First, Gebhart and that blonde of his, second, Gebhart's mother and a Mrs. Charles Latrobe of Neptune Avenue, Coney Island. That's Gebhart's married sister."

"My God," I said, "what *is* this? A communion breakfast for the Gebhart clan?"

"Third," he went on, ignoring me, "I want Frankie Splayton and Danny Raleigh. I don't care how you two guys split them up—you can get more coppers or a wagon if you want to—but Battersly'd better pick up Raleigh."

"Why?" I said.

"Because he's a tough guy, Sergeant," said Allhoff mocking. "And unless I'm very, very wrong, he's not going to want to come at all."

I scratched my head. "I don't see this," I told him. "What are you going to solve? The mystery of who beat up Battersly?"

He smiled without mirth. "Among other things. I shall also solve the mystery of who killed Murdock, who killed Weldon, who tried to kill me."

He reached for the coffee pot as Battersly and I stared at him in bewilderment.

"Is that all?" I asked with heavy irony.

"No," he said over the top of his cup. "Before you go home, roll a typewriter over here where I can get at it with a modicum of effort. Thank you."

I rolled the typewriter-stand across the room and my thoughts were no more lucid after his last order. Allhoff hadn't touched a typewriter for at least a year. On the way home in the subway I decided that he had either gone utterly mad or that he expected to pull some very odd rabbits from the hat on the morrow.

CHAPTER THREE

The Affable Allhoff

IT WAS a little after eight thirty in the morning when Battersly and I herded our motley collection into Allhoff's tene-

ment apartment. None of them, I think, had had their breakfast and indignation hovered over their heads like a cloud. Indeed, it had taken a telephone call to the commissioner himself before Gebhart had agreed to come along with me. Gebhart's mother, a plump blonde of indeterminate years, was annoyed and his sister was loudly proclaiming the fact that she, as a citizen, knew her rights under the Constitution.

Gebhart's blonde glared sullenly at Allhoff as she came in the room. It was apparent that she had neither forgiven nor forgotten the humiliation he had forced upon her during her last visit.

Battersly's customers, it seemed, were no more delighted to greet Inspector Allhoff at this hour in the morning than were mine. Splayton looked exactly what he was. A small-time punk dressed in a green suit of extreme cut. His face was pasty, his eyes shifty. He cringed as he came into the room, glanced about furtively, obviously terrified that he had been dragged here in order that Battersly could extract brutal revenge for the beating he had undergone the other day.

Danny Raleigh was a crook of vastly different caliber. His clothes were conservative and tailor made. His bearing was jaunty, though tempered with shrewd alertness. He eyed Allhoff appraisingly, then cast a swift, veiled glance at Gebhart. Battersly stood with his back to the door like a jailer as the group herded itself into the little room.

The thing that staggered me was the arrangements Allhoff had made for his involuntary guests. Chairs were grouped about his desk in a semi-circle. More amazing, they had been freshly dusted. Laid out on the desk blotter stood six coffee cups, shining and white. Obviously they had been recently washed and with soap. Obviously, too, since Battersly and I had just arrived, they had been washed by Allhoff—a fact which sent several precedents crashing into pieces upon the floor.

Six teaspoons, bright and polished, lay by the sides of the cups. Even the coffee pot, I noted, had been burnished to brightness for the first time in its venerable career. Dazed, I went over to my desk. Inspector Allhoff, apparently was entertaining at breakfast, which was rather

like a professional hermit suddenly becoming an Elk.

Allhoff had been reading a sheet of typewritten paper when we had come in. Now, he placed it face down on the desk and smiled with what I'm sure he thought was beneficence. Actually he looked like a panther in need of a dentist. When he spoke there was oil, honey and glycerine in his tone.

"I am very sorry," he said, "to disturb you all at this hour. However we all have certain duties as citizens—duties which, I'm sure, you'll be only too happy to discharge."

Mrs. Gebhart alone seemed slightly mollified by these words. Splayton, the punk, still looked as if an invisible rubber hose was suspended above his head. Danny Raleigh watched Allhoff through half closed lids as a zoo keeper might watch a dangerous animal.

Gebhart's sister and the Whalen girl retained their air of outraged dignity, while Gebhart, red-faced and angry said: "Save the editorial, Allhoff. There may be some departmental reason for you dragging me down here this morning. But, forcing my family to come also, is sheer malice. You did it to annoy me because you hate my guts."

I WAS watching Allhoff closely and when he didn't get angry, I came to the conclusion that he was playing a very deep game indeed.

"Now, Gebhart," he said mildly, "this is very important. It's a murder case. You as a policeman know that solving such cases is the most important thing there is to us. A little inconvenience doesn't matter. Now," he waved his hands toward the chairs, "will everyone sit down, please?"

Everyone sat down with an air of not committing themselves.

"Now," said Allhoff, "you'll remember, Gebhart, there was a case a few days ago which you announced you'd solved."

I remarked that Danny Raleigh's eyes had steel in them then. Gebhart slapped his knee angrily.

"Damn you," he said. "Must you gloat this early in the morning? I made a mistake, that's all. My information was incorrect. You know quite well, I admitted

my mistake. I didn't solve the Murdock case at all."

"You're much too modest, Inspector," said Allhoff, an odd lilt in his voice. "You *did* solve it."

Gebhart's womenfolk looked at Allhoff, then back at Gebhart. Splayton, the punk, still cringed in his chair, apparently paying no attention to the conversation. I kept my eyes on Raleigh. He was always a dangerous man and at that moment he looked more dangerous than usual.

Nevertheless my ears were all for Allhoff. In our several years association, I had heard him say some crazy things. This, however, was a new high in illogic. The idea of Gebhart actually solving the Murdock murder, a feat which would have given him a splendid opportunity to crow over Allhoff, and then denying it, was utterly incredible.

Gebhart's mother voiced my thought. "Are you crazy?" she asked. "Why would my boy deny such a praiseworthy thing as that?"

"Ah," said Allhoff ministerially, "who can fathom the motives of a human heart?"

Danny Raleigh stood up. "Look here," he said briskly, "I ain't been formally arrested. Unlike Gebhart, I ain't here on the commissioner's orders. I was brought here strong-arm and it ain't right. See? I ain't going to stay."

Allhoff lifted his eyes to the door where Battersly's bulky frame still stood.

"You were brought here strong-arm," he said, "and you'll stay here strong-arm. Sit down." For an instant his air of phoney affability had left him but he turned it on again a moment later. "Of course," he went on, "I realize we're all a little out of sorts since we haven't had our breakfasts. A nice cup of coffee will fix us all up."

Now he was talking like Uncle Don and the effect was like Boris Karloff telling a bedtime story. He opened the bottom drawer of his desk. He withdrew a brown paper-wrapped parcel, tied with white string. He opened it and placed the coffee can it contained upon his desk.

"Lucky," he said, "I have enough coffee for you all. I saved this can the other day. Always like to have some in reserve in case of guests."

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That, of course, was an outrageous lie. He never had any coffee in reserve. He never had any guests, either, for that matter.

He ladled coffee into the percolator with a lavish hand, never considering that his guests' taste might incline to a weaker brew than his own. He turned the electric plate on full, then turned, beaming, back to his audience. I followed his gaze in time to intercept a swift glance between Raleigh and Inspector Gebhart. Ailhoff's roving eye fell upon young Splayton.

"Well, well," he said with heavy affability, "that's a nice suit you're wearing, son. Where'd you get it?"

I braced myself and wondered if my ears were playing tricks on me. Allhoff's sartorial interests were those of a nudist. Moreover, he was not in the habit of engaging guys like Splayton in polite conversation. Splayton shifted uneasily in his chair and regarded Allhoff with suspicion.

"Yes, sir," said Allhoff, like an insurance salesman. "It certainly looks good on you. I don't know whether I admire the cut or the fabric more. Come over here, let me feel the material."

SPLAYTON stood up and approached Allhoff like a child who, when promised candy, expects to be struck. Allhoff swung his chair around facing him. He stretched forth his fingers and examined the cloth of Splayton's suit. He nodded his head in approval. Gebhart's sister watched him for a moment, then blew up.

"This is a ridiculous outrage," she snapped. "Personally, Inspector, I think you're insane. You bring us here before breakfast, then force us to listen while you admire a badly-made, cheap suit. Now, tell us what you want us for immediately, or I shall leave. Coppers or no coppers."

Allhoff looked at her with a jaundiced eye. Yet his voice retained its blandness as he spoke.

"Very well," he said, feeling the side of the coffee pot to see how it was heating. "I apologize for wasting your time. I shall proceed to the point at once. It begins almost a year ago in a federal court."

He paused and drew a deep breath. I

(Continued on page 102)

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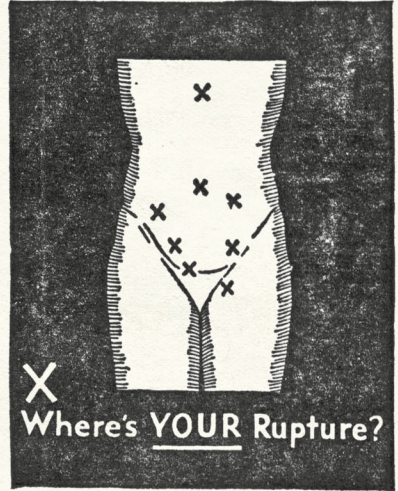
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Dime Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 100)

observed Raleigh and Gebhart staring at the opened coffee can on Allhoff's desk. I regarded it questioningly myself. Never since I had known him had I seen him save a can of coffee. This one certainly hadn't been bought this morning.

"Yes," went on Allhoff, "Raleigh, here, was in a little trouble with the federal boys. They claimed he'd bought a lot of counterfeit dough from someone. They claimed further that he and his henchmen were passing it at a great rate. Moreover, it wasn't very good money. It was so badly printed that even a Brooklyn delicatessen clerk would have little trouble in realizing its phoniness."

"If you're anything at all," said Raleigh, "you're a city cop. I don't see how a federal rap interests you. Besides, just for the record, I beat that rap. The jury acquitted me."

"Indeed they did," said Allhoff almost cheerfully. "They also left you with a vast number of counterfeit dollars on your hands—dollars for which you'd paid good hard cash, perhaps twenty per cent of their full face amount. That left you with the problem of cutting your losses. The stuff was so bad you didn't dare try to pass any more of it. It was too dangerous. Then you thought of an angle."

The percolator gurgled as the first spurt of coffee hit against its top. Gebhart started in his chair.

"It wasn't a direct angle," continued Allhoff. "But it was something. Instead of that counterfeit dough being a total loss you managed to devise a scheme to use it. After your flyer in the queer you went back to your usual operations of larceny, and murder, adding a crime which the records imply was novel for you."

Raleigh looked from Allhoff to the coffee pot and back again.

"What crime?"

"Arson. That, too, like your use of the phoney money was an indirect crime, though. It—"

"Inspector Allhoff," said Mrs. Gebhart, "I am an old woman. Yet no one has ever accused me of senility. But I don't understand what you're talking about."

"Right," said Gebhart standing up.

(Continued on page 104)

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(Continued from page 102)

"I've heard enough of this, Allhoff. You're a crazy old man. We're staying here no longer. Come along, all of you.

Gebhart's womenfolk stood up, relief showing on their faces. Allhoff's gaze traveled to Battersly, at the door.

"Battersly," said Allhoff, "you will draw your gun."

Battersly did so with all the enthusiasm of the Italian Army charging.

"You will permit no one to leave the room. That's an order. Gebhart, sit down."

Gebhart glared at Allhoff. His women watched him uncertainly. Then slowly he sat down. The distaff side of the family followed suit.

"I was speaking to you, Raleigh, of the Murdock and Weldon killings," Allhoff resumed conversationally. "I was about to explain the tie-up between them, arson and counterfeit money."

The percolator was bubbling merrily now. Allhoff glanced at it once, then transferred his caustic gaze to Raleigh again.

"As I said," he went on, "you, Raleigh, returned to simple murder for a living. Somehow, through your spy system, your stool-pigeons, you found out when certain citizens were about to take large sums of cash home with them for one reason or another. Whereupon you cased the house, entered, murdered them and stole the money."

There was a moment's silence. Then Raleigh said: "It's too pat, Inspector. You may as well accuse me of being a fifth columnist. You can do it as glibly and with just as much reason."

"Now," said Allhoff, ignoring the comment, "you murder Murdock and Weldon, you steal their money. You also remove all suspicion from yourself by a judicious use of arson and your counterfeit bills."

FOR the first time since he had begun to talk a slow light dawned in my brain, "You mean," I asked, "that Raleigh planted his phoney money, permitted someone to see it, then returned to the house and set it on fire? In that way he would destroy the counterfeit money so

Coffee for a Killer

that no one would suspect it wasn't genuine. And he would also make the murder look as if it had a personal motivation."

"Precisely," said Allhoff. "Naturally when the police learned that the actual cash was not stolen they would never go looking for a professional crook such as Raleigh. On the contrary, they'd search for someone with personal motivation. As for instance that poor guy they've got in the can now for the Weldon murder. What's his name? Smith."

I thought it over for a moment and decided it sounded logical.

"Of course," said Allhoff, "Raleigh intended to commit these murders anyway. The phoney money, the arson was incidental. However, since he had the queer on hand, it was a good time to use it. In theory it was supposed to keep suspicion away from him. Actually, it pinned the whole thing right on his dapper shirt front."

"How?" said Raleigh in an expressionless tone.

"Because," said Allhoff, "it was the burnt money that set my brain cells to functioning. The second fire, under precisely the same circumstances as the first seemed something more than coincidental. If the fires were deliberate it seemed odd to me that any man would burn good money. The next thought was whether or not it *was* good money. There it lay in my mind until Splayton here attacked Battersly. Splayton was known as your man, Raleigh. You, in turn, were known to have a load of counterfeits on hand. With that tie-up, I figured it out."


Now Allhoff was going too fast for me again. True, what he had said sounded plausible. Yet, apparently he had no proof at all. Further, there was a bomb to be explained and why Battersly had been attacked at all. Danny Raleigh drew a deep breath.

"All right, Inspector," he said. "Since you know all this, since you have me dead to rights, since your evidence is—"

Gebhart swung around in his chair. His face was gray.

"Raleigh," he said, "shut up. He knows nothing. He's guessing. He can't prove anything."

Raleigh met his eyes for a long un-



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6.25-17	2.45	1.16
28x5.25-18	2.45	1.16
28x5.25-19	2.45	1.16
30x5.25-20	2.60	1.16
31x5.25-21	2.70	1.16
6.50-17	2.75	1.16
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comfortable moment. Gebhart flushed. Raleigh said: "I thought he could prove everything. I thought he knew from—" "He knows nothing," said Gebhart. "Nothing. Keep your mouth shut and you're clean."

"I thought—" said Raleigh again, and there was flaming rage in his eyes.

"We all make mistakes," said Allhoff and there was a suspicious oiliness in his voice.

He picked the percolator off its base and proceeded to fill all the cups in front of him.

"What we all need is a good hot cup of coffee," he said amiably. "You'll excuse me. I've already had mine."

Young Splayton stared at Allhoff, wide-eyed. Gebhart bit his lip and Danny Raleigh looked around the room as if hoping reinforcements would come through the walls. No one made a move to reach for his coffee.

"Come, come," said Allhoff. "Coffee, Miss Whalen?"

The Whalen girl who hadn't spoken since she had come into the room, shook her head dully. Gebhart's sister said icily: "I pick my company." Gebhart's mother shrugged her ample shoulders.

"Thank you, Inspector," she said. "Since I've had no breakfast, I'll take it."

CHAPTER FOUR

Good to the Last Drop

ALLHOFF handed her the thick cup with ceremony. Danny Raleigh lit a cigarette and I remarked the shaking of his fingers. Splayton had now taken his gaze from Allhoff and was regarding Mrs. Gebhart with a glazed and horrified stare.

Mrs. Gebhart lifted the cup to her lips and I heard Splayton inhale sharply. Then Gebhart was on his feet. His right hand lashed out and slapped hard against the thick cup. Coffee splattered his mother's dress and the wall. The cup rolled to the floor.

Mrs. Gebhart stared at her son in inarticulate astonishment. Gebhart breathed hard like a man who has just run a hundred yards. Splayton slumped down in his chair. Allhoff bowed satanically.

"Thank you, Gebhart," he said mockingly. "That tells me all that I wanted to know."

Gebhart stood glaring at him. It dawned on me that I seemed to know less about what was going on than anyone else in the room. I said so, loudly. I added: "What was all you wanted to know, Allhoff?"

"Who was trying to kill me. Who sent me a bomb and a pound of poisoned coffee?"

"Well, who did?"

Allhoff grinned. Now all the simulated affability had gone from his face. There was sand, not oil, in his voice as he answered me.

"Pause, Sergeant," he said. "Pause and reflect. Battersly goes out for a tin of coffee. On the way *into* the store he passes a mob of hoodlums, captained by young Splayton here. They do not molest him. On the way *out* he gets jumped on and slugged."

"All of which indicates you're about to be poisoned," I said ironically.

"Exactly," said Allhoff. "When Battersly returns here, bruised and bearing the wrapped coffee can, I observe, as you should have, that it is wrapped with white string. As far back as I can remember, that corner store has been using black string to wrap parcels with. A small thing, perhaps. But coupled with the odd circumstance of Battersly's beating, worth investigating."

"So you investigated," I said. "With what result?"

"The laboratory informed me that the coffee had been removed from the can, soaked in a cyanide solution and replaced. The attack on Battersly was to create a diversion, knock the package out of his hand and plant the other one, the poisoned one, in the street."

"Who would want to poison you?" I asked. "And why?"

"I asked myself that three days ago," said Allhoff. "Splayton might want to poison me, but he doesn't possess the nerve. Splayton ties up with Raleigh. Raleigh, who kills for money, wouldn't be murdering me free of charge, merely for the practice, would you, Danny?"

Raleigh didn't answer. He was staring

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at Gebhart and the expression on his face wasn't pretty.

"Gebhart," I said suddenly. "Gebhart wanted to kill you. You mean he hired Danny? You mean he—"

"No," said Allhoff. "He didn't hire Danny. I doubt that Danny would have tried it for money. He frightened Danny into it."

Raleigh wasn't the sort of guy who frightened easily and I said so.

"He's afraid of the chair," said Allhoff. "Did you ever see one of them who wasn't?"

I sighed. "Can you tell it in monosyllables?"

"Sure," said Allhoff. "You remember Gebhart came in here with his woman to sneer at me because he'd solved the Murdock case? You'll also remember that a day later it developed he'd made a mistake. To quote him 'his information was faulty.'"

"So?"

"He lied the second time. Not the first. Somehow, probably through his farflung stool-pigeon system, he learned the truth of the Murdock killing. For all I know, he had evidence to prove it, too. But after the humiliating half-hour he spent up here, he decided my death was vastly more important to him than a murder solution."

"So," I said, "he told Raleigh what he had, promised to forget it if Raleigh got you."

ALLHOFF sighed heavily. "Simmonds," he said, "you'd make as bad a crook as you are a copper. Gebhart wouldn't tell Raleigh that. If Raleigh thought Gebhart was the sole man who knew of his guilt, Raleigh'd kill Gebhart, not me. No, Gebhart told Raleigh that I had broken the case, that I was waiting a few hours to clinch it. So Raleigh planned to kill me. He may have planned to kill Gebhart later. I don't know. When Raleigh's coffee didn't work he descended to the crudity of mailing a bomb."

Raleigh was standing up now. His face was turned in Gebhart's direction.

"You louse," he said. "Why don't you do your own killing? Why don't you—"

"Wait a minute," said Gebhart, gray-faced. "Wait, Danny. Don't you see it's

Coffee for a Killer

all conjecture? He hasn't got a square inch of evidence. He can't prove a thing. If we stick together we'll beat it. There's not one single item he can present to a Grand Jury."

There was a hollow silence in the room, broken only by the sound of Mrs. Gebhart's weeping. His sister sat staring stonily ahead, while the blond Whalen girl linked her arm through Gebhart's. Raleigh, eyelids narrowed, tapped his fingers thoughtfully on the back of his chair.


"I'll get you for this, Gebhart," he said. "I'll get you sooner or later. In the meantime, though, we'll stick together. You're right, he hasn't any evidence at all."


Allhoff grinned like a storm trooper in the Dachau camp.

"Don't bet on it," he said. "You women may go. Battersly, take Raleigh and Gebhart across the street. Book them for murder, attempted murder and anything else the desk sergeant may suggest."

"Wait a minute," said Gebhart, "you can't do this. You've no proof. We'll be sprung in an hour."

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Dime Detective Magazine

"I'll have the proof in less than that," said Allhoff. "Battersly, take 'em away."

Raleigh shrugged. "All right," he said. "Why stand there and argue? Since he has nothing, my lawyer'll have us out before lunch. We'll go quietly."

The women filed from the room. Battersly, escorting Gebhart and Raleigh, followed. Young Splayton stood up, relief on his face, and headed for the door.

"You!" said Allhoff. "Sit down."

Splayton turned around anxiously.

"You ain't finished with me yet?"

"Hell," said Allhoff. "I haven't started with you. Do you think I'm going to let you smack my assistant around and get away with it? Come here."

Splayton approached Allhoff's desk like a sparrow charging a rattlesnake. Allhoff turned over the typewritten sheet of paper before him.

"Now," he said, "this is a written draft of all the things I have just said. It explains everything. The Murdock and Weldon killings, the poisoned coffee, the bomb, and Gebhart's hand in this matter. Since you are as well informed of these things as I am, I must ask you to sign it."

Splayton blinked.

"You mean a confession? You mean you want me to turn rat on the boss?"

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Coffee for a Killer

tendencies," said Allhoff. "I want you to sign this paper. It'll make you a state's witness and you won't take the rap you quite well deserve."

Splayton shook his head doggedly. "No, sir," he said emphatically. "I ain't no rat and I ain't no dope. Why, the boss just said you ain't got no proof. If I don't sign that you can't do nothing to me."

"No?" said Allhoff and he conveyed an awful lot of threat in the single word.

Splayton shuddered. "Go ahead," he said. "Beat me up. I still won't sign it. I ain't as yellow as you think. I been beat up before and I ain't talked. I can stand a beating for five, six hours, I can."

"Yes," said Allhoff slowly. "And can you take a beating for fifty years?"

"Fifty years? You can't hold me more than forty-eight hours. I know the law."

"Do you?" said Allhoff. "Do you know, then, what happens to a guy who's already carrying two convictions on a dope rap? Do you know what happens to him the third time? He never gets out, except in a hearse."

SPLAYTON shook his head violently. "I'm clean on that. I'm taking no chances. I ain't touched any stuff since my second conviction."

Allhoff shrugged and turned to me. He said: "Arrest him, Simmonds."

I took a step forward. "For what?"

"Possession of narcotics."

"I tell you I ain't got any dope," yelled Splayton. "I ain't handled dope since—"

"Search him, Simmonds."

Something was beginning to filter into my brain. I put my hand in Splayton's right-hand coat pocket first—I found what I expected to find. I held it out to Allhoff.

"An interesting little package," he said. "What do you think's in it, Splayton?"

Splayton stared at him. His face was ashen. He knew damned well what was in the paper package.

"It's a frame," he cried. "You planted that on me when you was feeling the material of my suit. They'll send me away for life."

Allhoff picked up a fountain pen. "Not if you sign this," he said. "We'll forget what we found in your pocket."

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Splayton’s indecision lasted less than twenty seconds. He grabbed the pen as if it were a life preserver. He scrawled his name across the bottom of the paper.

“Can I go now?” he pleaded.

Allhoff shook his head. “You’re much too valuable,” he purred. “You go to the can as a material witness. And don’t change your mind in the Grand Jury room. I’ll just keep this junk, in case.”

Battersly came back into the room as I asked Allhoff a final question.

“Why the women?” I said. “Why was it necessary to bring Gebhart’s mother, sister and mistress down here. Just to see him squirm a little more?”

Allhoff smiled happily. “In part. The most important thing was that I had to have someone Gebhart really cared for, consent to have a cup of coffee. It’s quite possible that they might have refused. The more people I had here, the more chance that someone would try to drink the poison. When Gebhart knocked the cup from his mother’s hand, I knew that once again I was right.”

His smugness, as usual, was annoying, but there was nothing to do about it.

“Take this mug over to the D. A.,” he said to Battersly. “On the way back, get me a can of coffee.”

Battersly said, “Yes, sir,” and stood expectantly at the side of the desk.

“Well,” snarled Allhoff, “what the devil are you waiting for? A written memo?”

“No, sir. You usually give me the money first. Of course, I don’t mind laying it out, though. I—”

Allhoff’s fist hit the desk like Thor’s hammer.

“You don’t mind laying it out! By God, you’ll pay for it yourself. Look what you brought me last time. Poison! You expect me to pay for my own poison. Get out of here and use your own money. This is the second time you’ve tried to murder me! You lousy yellow, low—”

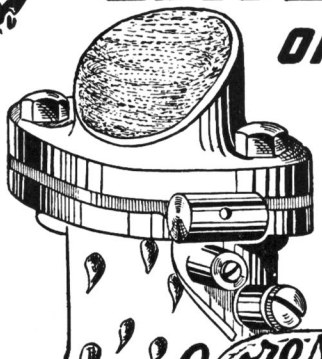
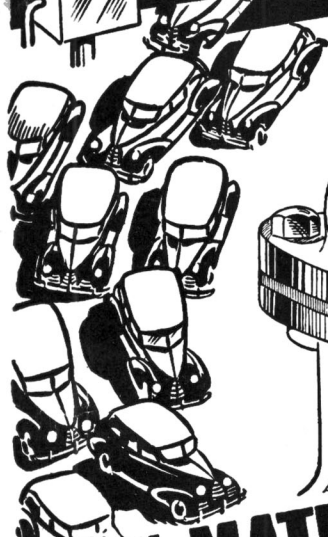
Battersly scurried from the room, dragging Splayton with him. A torrent of adjectives flowed down the stairway behind him. I went back to my desk and stared grimly out the window.

Some day, I thought, some one *will* kill him. I wondered quite seriously if it would be I.



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